

Titanic's Aft B Deck Mystery Object

By Bob Read, D.M.D.

Introduction

Most students of the physical structure of *Titanic* are very familiar with the so-called B deck "mystery object" located on the starboard side of the forward bulwark of the forward B deck promenade. It has been the subject of much analysis, discussion, and debate. This article will examine a lesser known object that had been identified in Olympic photos but was only discovered in Titanic wreck photos a few years ago. Numerous theories have been advanced but no definitive function for this object has been discovered. This article will attempt to take the available evidence and propose a function.

Identification of Object

Photo evidence of this object is rather sparse. Most of our better photos are from *RMS Olympic*. Figure 1 show *RMS Olympic*. The object in question is aft of the port #4 hatch up against the deckhouse.

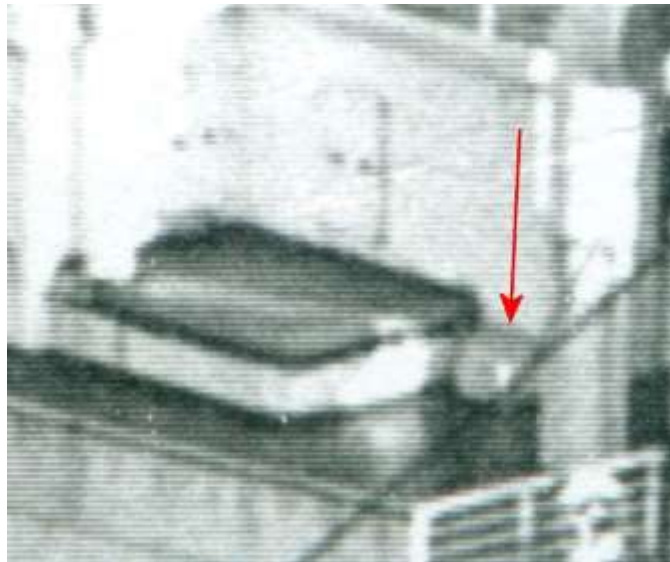


Figure 1

Figure 2 was taken aboard *HMT Olympic* during WW1. About the only aspect of the object which can be seen in this photo is the flange which is riveted to the deckhouse bulkhead.



Figure 2

Figure 3 was taken aboard *RMS Olympic* in May 1912. Again it is an incomplete photo but it shows more of the object than Figure 2.



Figure 3

Figure 4 is the only photo we have of this object on Titanic. It is a wreck photo.

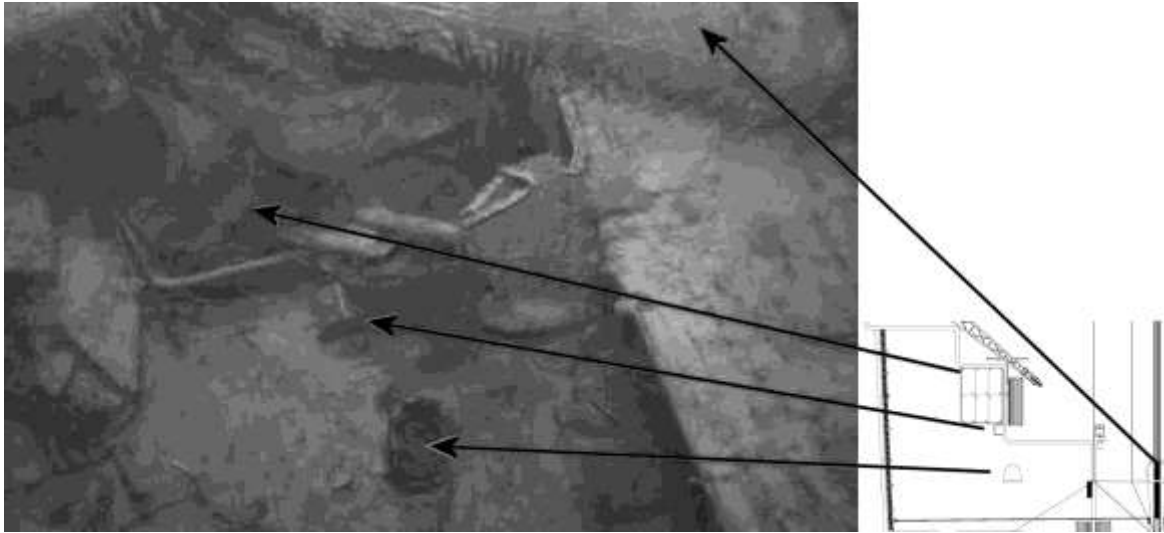


Figure 4

Not every photo we have of this object is included in this article. From an analysis of all the photos a multi-view drawing of the object is shown in Figure 5.

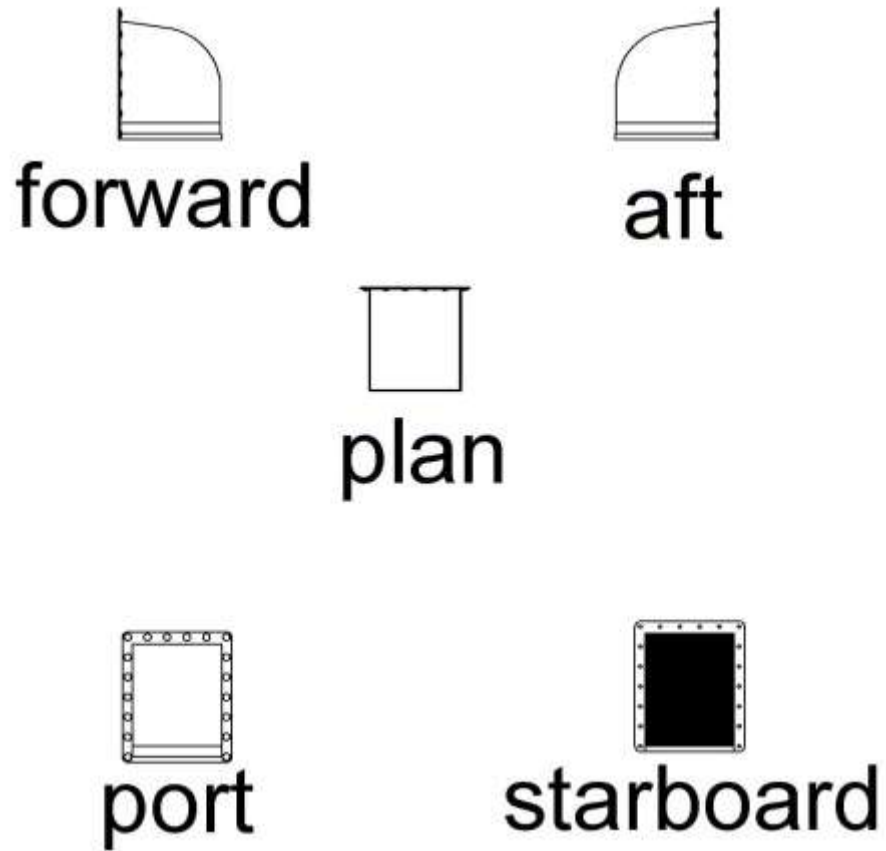


Figure 5

Theories about Function

There are a number of theories which have been proposed about what this mystery object is and what function it serves. I will first discuss the theories I believe are wrong. The rejection of many of the theories is because of the issue of symmetry. If a function is proposed which doesn't explain why an object which performs the same function is not found in another area of the ship where the same function is required then the theory about the function is probably wrong. Some of the theories seek to relate the function to nearby structures. This is a valid relationship to look for in explaining the function. The function in such cases must have a clear relationship.

The Ventilator Theory

This theory proposes that this is a duct related to the 30 inch hot air sirocco fan directly beneath the mystery object on C deck. This particular fan is found in the inventory of electric fans found in the so-called Andrews Notebook. The description given for this fan is:

No. 44 – 30 in. dia. Sirocco Fan – Hot Air-. Aft of second class library port “C” deck (shelter). Delivers to 2nd class accommodation port on D, E, F, & G decks. Motor 6 BHP controlled in locker aft of 2nd class saloon D deck.

Problem:

This description effectively rules out the mystery object as related to this fan because the fan delivers hot air to decks *below* C deck on which it is located. It is also not an intake duct because there is no opening in the object through which air would be drawn.

The Cargo Span Theory

This theory proposes that the mystery object is a reel on which cargo spans for the aft cargo areas are stored.

Problem:

If this theory were true, we would expect to see a similar structure around the forward cargo areas which we don't.

The Arc Lamp Electrical Extension Cord Theory

This is a similar theory to the cargo span theory. It proposes that the mystery object is a reel to store the electrical extension cords for the arc lamps used over the cargo areas.

Problem:

The problem with theory is the same as the cargo span theory. We would expect to see the same type of structure in the forward cargo area and we don't.

The Sand Filter Theory

This theory proposes that this is a sand filter to provide filtered water to the 2nd class smoke room bar directly inboard of the object on the other side of the deckhouse bulkhead.

Problem:

This object appears to be much too small to filter water when compared to other sand filters.

A Theory of the Function of the Mystery Object

After evaluating and rejecting a number of theories about the function of the mystery object some of the same methods will be used to try to determine the function of the object. Directly inboard of the object in the 2nd class smoke room bar is a wine cooler. Figure 6 shows the 2nd class smoke room bar. Directly outboard is the port #4 hatch. The mystery object is located just outboard of the wine cooler.

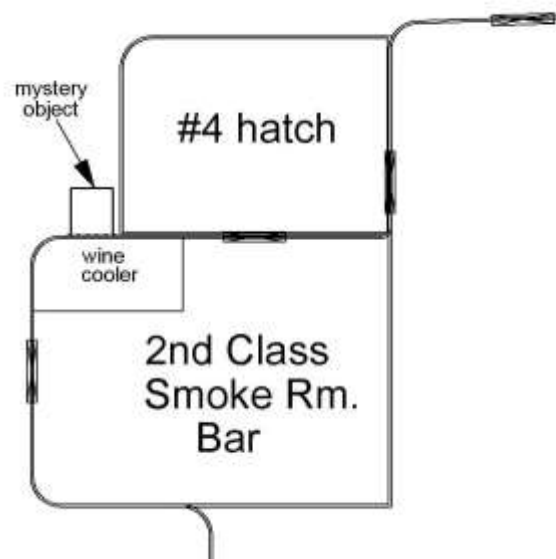


Figure 6

The theory that is proposed is that the mystery object is a protective shroud over cold brine pipes used in the wine cooler. We don't have specific information about the wine cooler in the 2nd class smoke room bar. In earlier days cooling would have been provided by blocks of ice in a chest. The problem with this method is that the ice melted so the water had to be drained and the ice had to be replenished. By the advent of Titanic, refrigeration was becoming well established. Titanic had a carbon dioxide refrigeration installation on the port side of the reciprocating engine room. Rather than passing air over the evaporation coils and ducting it to various areas of the ship, the evaporation coils were used to cool a tank of calcium chloride brine. This cold brine was then pumped to the areas where refrigeration rooms were located.

from the source below and the other pipe would be a return pipe so that cold brine would be continuously circulated through the wine cooler. Therefore the only function of this mystery object would be to protect the pipes. The pipes probably already had lagging applied to them for insulation.

Regarding symmetry, one might ask whether there was a mystery object like this on the starboard side. If there was then the theory proposed here would be invalidated. Figure 8 shows a photo of the starboard side aft of #4 hatch. One can see the deckhouse next to the aft inboard aspect of the hatch and there is not object there.



Figure 8

Summary

This article has proposed an identification of the function of the “mystery object” located aft of the port #4 hatch. It is proposed that this object function as a protective shroud over cold brine pipes which entered the 2nd class smoke room bar to connect with a wine cooler there. Other theories have been discussed and the reasoning for the identification of the function of the object has been outlined.

