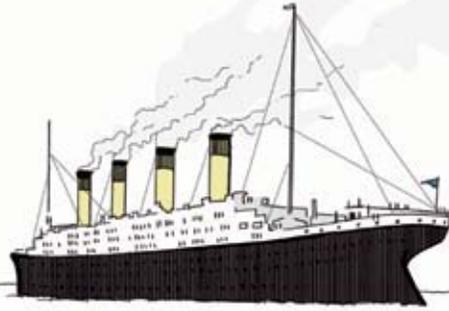


12:00 noon April 10 1912 *Titanic* launched from Southampton, England on its maiden voyage. After stopping in Cherbourg, France, it arrives at Queenstown, Ireland at 11:30am the next day. Two hours later it leaves for New York.



TITANIC CALLING

The poignant news of the tragedy as it was first heard
was relayed by Marconi wireless operators

BY MICHAEL HUGHES, SENIOR ARCHIVIST
AT THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

"I was in the boat and the boat was upside down and I was under it. And I remember realizing ... that whatever happened I must not breathe, for I was under water" (*The New York Times*, April 19 1912).

Just minutes after arriving in New York, this was how Harold Bride, junior wireless operator on *RMS Titanic*, recalled the moment he was washed from the deck of the sinking ship into the upturned lifeboat which was to save his life. Eventually managing to drag himself on top of the lifeboat, Bride and around 30 other men struggled to keep it afloat in the increasingly rough water until they were finally picked up by the *RMS Carpathia* at dawn. This was not the end of his ordeal. Despite having temporarily lost the use of both legs from exposure, Bride was carried to the *Carpathia* wireless room to assist its only operator, Harold Cottam. Together, they worked without rest, sending vital communications including lists of survivors and messages to friends and relatives of *Titanic*'s passengers, until the *Carpathia* docked in New York on the evening of April 18.

Bride, 22, was one of two operators assigned to the *Titanic* for its maiden voyage. His senior, Jack Phillips, 25, was on his way to bed at around midnight on April 14 when Captain Edward Smith entered the Marconi cabin and instructed the operators to call for assistance. For the next two hours, Phillips sent distress calls continuously to all ships within range of the powerful wireless transmitter, refusing to leave his post even when released by the Captain. Phillips and Bride were among the last to leave the stricken ship, rushing from the wireless room as water was already washing over the decks. Phillips also made it to the upturned lifeboat but perished before he could be rescued.

Almost 100 years on, the *Titanic* disaster continues to inspire interest and study, but the fascinating story of wireless communication has often been overlooked. Nearly all passenger ships were fitted with wireless technology in 1912 and trained operators sent and received

hundreds of messages each day. The distress calls from the *Titanic* and messages from the survivors are deeply poignant, the more so as a result of their brevity. "*Titanic struck berg wants assistance immediately ship sinking passengers in boats his position lat 41.46 long 50.14*" (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Marconi 263, fol. 63). Chargeable by the word and needing to be sent rapidly by Morse code, their short and abbreviated style is surprisingly familiar to a modern audience, accustomed as we are to the staccato nature of Twitter.

The Marconi Archives were donated by the company to Oxford University's Bodleian Library in 2004, along with a sizable collection of historic wireless equipment. Owing to the significant costs of cataloging and conserving large archival collections, and the lack of funding available for this important work, fascinating discoveries are still being made in the collection and material relating to the *Titanic* forms a section of particular interest within the archives. Comprising material gathered by the Marconi Company to be submitted to a UK Inquiry into the disaster in 1912, it contains log books kept by wireless operators on ships and at shore stations as well as an extensive collection of individual messages sent to, from, and about the *Titanic* both before and after the sinking. To mark the centenary of the disaster the Bodleian Library and Bernard Quaritch Ltd have collaborated on a publication, *Titanic Calling*, which draws upon this compelling resource to tell the story of the *Titanic* as it was first heard.

Michael Hughes is Senior Archivist at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, where he has cataloged the Marconi Archives. He is the author of *Titanic Calling*, to be published in 2012.

Katherine Bosworth works at Bernard Quaritch Ltd, specializing in archives. She co-edited *Titanic Calling* and contributed to this story.

9:20pm (ship's time) April 14
The Titanic's Captain Edward Smith retires to his room.

10:30pm April 14 The Californian stops at the edge of the ice field for the night. The wireless operator turns off his equipment and goes to bed.

11:40pm April 14, four-and-a-half days out from England The Titanic strikes the iceberg, 37 seconds after it is sighted. Latitude 41° 46' N, longitude 50° 14' W.

MARCONI

The Marconi International Marine Communication Company provided its services to many shipping lines (including both White Star Line, owner of the *Titanic*, and Cunard, owner of the *Carpathia*), supplying equipment and Marconi-employed operators. Marconi protocols and signals, including the "CQD" distress signal, were well known by all wireless operators in 1912.

CALLSIGNS

Every wireless station, both ship and shore stations, was identified by a three-letter callsign, used in all communications. Each Marconi station callsign began with the letter "M"; the *Titanic's* callsign was MGY, the *Carpathia's* MPA.

CQD NOT SOS

The standard Marconi distress signal, recognized by all ships, was "CQD," from "CQ," a call to all ships, and "D" for "distress." "SOS" had been introduced in 1908 but was not widely used until after the *Titanic* disaster. The *Titanic* sent both signals repeatedly on the night of April 14, a final broken "CQ ..." being picked up by the *Virginian*, one of several ships rushing toward the *Titanic's* position, just a few minutes before it foundered.

No. 1a.

1 MARCONI WIRELESS TELEGRAPH COMPANY OF CANADA, Limited
MONTREAL

No. 5 **2 Camperdown** STATION **3** April 17 19 12

Prefix _____ Code _____ **4** Words 18

5 Office of Origin MPA **7** SD. Time Rec'd 7:44 By whom Rec'd W.

Service Instructions: **6** via M&C. **8** Stations sent to 7 Time Sent 8:55 By whom sent MB.

via C.P.R.

9 To Islefrank New York

<u>Deeply</u>	<u>regret</u>	<u>advise</u>	<u>you</u>	<u>titanic</u>
<u>sank</u>	<u>this</u>	<u>morning</u>	<u>after</u>	<u>collision</u>
<u>iceberg</u>	<u>resulting</u>	<u>serious</u>	<u>loss</u>	<u>life</u>
<u>further</u>	<u>particulars</u>	<u>later</u>		
		10 <u>Bruce</u>	<u>Ismay</u>	

MESSAGE TO WHITE STAR LINE, NOTIFYING IT OF THE SINKING

1. Marconi ... Montreal The subsidiary company which handled messages sent and received in Canada.

2. Camperdown Shore station in Nova Scotia which received and recorded the message.

3. April 17 Ismay insisted he wrote this message on the morning of April 15 but it did not reach Franklin until the evening of April 17, an unexplained delay only partially attributable to delays in relaying messages between ships.

4. Words – 18 Commercial messages were charged by the word. Although certain official messages were sent without charge, most continued to use this tweet-like shorthand.

5. Office of origin MPA was the callsign of the *Carpathia*.

6. Via MEA, via CPR The *Carpathia's* wireless transmitter had a very short range, so messages had to be relayed via other ships and shore stations. This message was passed on by the *Franconia* (MEA) and the *Princess Royal* (CPR) before reaching Sable Island (MSD) where it was forwarded to Camperdown.

7. Station received from The Camperdown operator's notes of the sender (in this case Sable Island, Nova Scotia, relaying the message).

8. Station sent to The notes of the Camperdown operator sending on the message – it is not clear who this was forwarded to (presumably

New York) but it was not sent on until 13 hours after it was received.

9. To Islefrank New York The codename for Philip Franklin, head of White Star Line's parent company in New York.

10. Bruce Ismay The Managing Director of White Star Line, was on board. He was rescued by the *Carpathia*, having left the *Titanic* in one of the last lifeboats lowered from the ship. He faced criticism for this and according to the *Titanic's* second officer C.H. Lightoller, spent the whole journey on the *Carpathia* confined to his cabin in a state of despair, tormented with guilt at having survived when so many women and children had died.

2:20am April 15 The Titanic sinks.

4:10am April 15 The Carpathia picks up the first survivors.

8:30am April 15 The Carpathia rescues the last few survivors.



HAROLD BRIDE, 1890-1956
JUNIOR WIRELESS OPERATOR

Harold Bride, from London, joined the Marconi Company in 1911 and was just 22 years old when sent to Belfast to join the *Titanic* as junior operator. He assisted his senior colleague Jack Phillips throughout the journey and remained with him in the wireless cabin on the night of the sinking until the power to the transmitter failed and both men fled the ship. He was washed overboard, clinging to an upturned lifeboat, the same boat on which Phillips died. Bride managed to climb on to the boat and was picked up by the *Carpathia* the following morning. On board the *Carpathia* he willingly assisted the ship's exhausted operator, Harold Cottam, despite having temporarily lost the use of both legs from exposure. He continued to work for the Marconi Company until 1917.

THE SAKS MESSAGES

CAMPERDOWN APRIL 17TH 1912
OFFICE OF ORIGIN: MPA [CARPATHIA] TO: SAKS NEW YORK

LEILA SAFE AND WELL CARED FOR EDGAR MISSING.

A message from Leila Meyer (née Saks) to her family (via their business, the New York clothing firm Saks & Co) informing them that she was safe but her husband, Edgar, a successful engineer and businessman, had not survived.

SEAGATE APRIL 18TH 1912
OFFICE OF ORIGIN: MPA CARPATHIA TO: SAKS AND CO. NY

36 MENS MEDIUM FLANNEL SHIRTS
12 MENS DITTO DRAWERS 12 PAIRS SOCKS DELIVER IMMEDIATELY
AT PIER 54 TO OFFICER C.H. LIGHTOLLER.

The second message, sent from the *Carpathia* after it docked in New York, is also from Leila Meyer, showing remarkable poise and selflessness. She requests clothes from Saks for the surviving officers and a few of the crew of the *Titanic* who were required to appear the following day before a hastily convened inquiry into the sinking. They would of course have arrived in New York with just the clothes they were wearing when the ship went down.

THE BADENOCH MESSAGE

SIASCONSET APRIL 18TH 1912
OFFICE OF ORIGIN: CARPATHIA TO: PERCY STRAUS L.H.
MACY AND CO.
HERALD SQUARE NYK

EVERY BOAT WATCHED FATHER MOTHER NOT ON CARPATHIA HOPE STILL.
BADENOCH

A message to Percy Straus of Macy & Co., to inform him that his parents, Isidor and Ida Straus, were not on board the *Carpathia*. Possibly sent by Ida Straus's maid, Ellen Bird, who was the only one of the Straus party to survive the sinking.

9:00pm April 18 1912, eight days from England The Carpathia arrives in New York. 711 Titanic passengers and crew survived from a total of 2,201.



JACK PHILLIPS, 1887-1912
SENIOR WIRELESS OPERATOR

Jack Phillips, from Farncombe, Surrey, was already an experienced operator, having worked on ships for five years, when he was appointed senior operator on the *Titanic*. He celebrated his 25th birthday aboard the ship on April 11. Following the collision with the iceberg, he stayed at his post, calling for assistance until just minutes before the ship sank, even after having been released from duty by the Captain. Although he managed to swim to an upturned lifeboat, he died from exposure.

Titanic Calling: Wireless Communications during the Great Disaster will be published in April 2012 by Bodleian Library Publishing in association with Bernard Quaritch Ltd.

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THE CALIFORNIAN

SS *Californian* (callsign MWL) is believed to have been within sight of the *Titanic* on the night of the sinking but failed to recognize the signs of distress. Officers reported seeing flares sent up by a nearby ship but communication was attempted only with Morse lamps, which had a very limited range, rather than with wireless. The ship's only wireless operator was not woken until several hours after the *Titanic* had sunk.



MARCONI MESSAGE ROOM ON THE TITANIC

The only photograph of the *Titanic's* Marconi room was taken by Father Frank Browne, a Jesuit priest who traveled from Southampton to Queenstown, Ireland, disembarking before the *Titanic* sailed for New York. The double-exposed image shows Harold Bride sitting at the wireless key (on which he tapped out Morse messages), wearing headphones through which he heard incoming messages. The equipment on the *Titanic* was the most advanced and powerful technology available, able to transmit up to 400 miles during the day and 2,000 miles at night. There is an ionised layer in the atmosphere which bends electromagnetic waves and is altered by the sun's rays. This accounts for the huge differences in range between day and night. The ionised layer and bending of waves is why long-distance wireless communication is possible; the waves would normally travel in straight lines, leaving the atmosphere, rather than following the curvature of the earth.

The Bodleian Library

Oxford's libraries are among the most celebrated in the world for their collections of books and manuscripts. Among them is the Bodleian (or Bodley), established by Sir Thomas Bodley (1545-1613), a Fellow of Merton College who had travelled extensively in Europe and who carried out diplomatic missions for Queen Elizabeth I. He married a rich widow whose first husband had made his fortune trading in pilchards, and upon retirement from public life set up a library for the use of students, which opened in 1602. Its collections have attracted scholars from around the

world, irrespective of whether they are members of the University of Oxford, a tradition which the Bodleian still maintains (undergraduates, on the other hand, were rarely admitted until quite recent times). Another tradition, still zealously guarded, is that no books are lent to readers; even King Charles I was refused permission in 1645. The Bodleian Libraries (almost 40 affiliated libraries serving the University) care for more than 11m printed items, and the Bodley itself is the second largest library in the UK, behind the British Library. www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

Message room photograph: Irish Picture Library/Father F.M. Browne S.J. Collection