

Chapter 11. “...nothing overlooked, swept under the rug, or ignored as though it didn't exist.”

1992 - present

Of course, now that the results of the re-appraisal had been released to the press, it was prudent for authors to include this new information in their books. One of these was Leslie Harrison, who re-released “*A Titanic Myth*” as a self-published, or 'vanity' edition. This was unveiled to the world at a press conference at the Merseyside Maritime Museum on Harrison's 80th birthday, July 31st 1992.

Harrison must have felt betrayed. He had showered Barnett with information and anecdotes ... Barnett and his wife had the temerity to be cordial to Captain Lord's son ... and now Barnett had produced an adverse finding! At the press conference, Harrison stated that Barnett's report was so bad, it had to be rewritten by de Coverley, but even he had “made fundamental errors too.” But during his diatribe to the press, Harrison never once mentioned “rockets”, only “detonators”. He only used the word “rocket” in informal conversation afterwards, when he decried how the 1958 film '*A Night To Remember*' had used 'rockets on a stick' rather than the more accurate cylindrical socket signal. This is a subject he would return to, first of all in “*A Titanic Myth part 2*” (a damage limitation in the aftermath of Leslie Reade's impending book), and then, in his last literary effort, “*Captain Lord's Plight To Remember*”.

Another member of the press conference entourage was Harrison's niece, who in private conversation to the press, said that the *Californian* was her uncle's “life work” and that “both his [late] wife and children had, at one point, felt that he was going too far with it, that it was an obsession of his and that it annoyed, upset and bothered them.”²⁵⁰

In the epilogue to his re-released book, Harrison sympathised with the “unfortunate Captain de Coverley on being diverted from his already heavy workload ... to try to transform Captain Barnett's findings into something more acceptable to Captain Marriott. In such circumstances it is not surprising that some of his conclusions conflict with the acknowledged facts of the case.” The examples offered by Harrison include his reference to the ship stopped near the *Californian*, which he asserts came from the westward, to stop on reaching clear water on the eastern side²⁵¹.

“A further and most regrettable omission from Captain de Coverley's report is any supporting evidence for [de Coverley's] assertion that some arguments on Captain Lord's behalf have been 'absurd and scurrilous'...as the one who since 1958 has borne primary responsibility for the presentation of Captain Lord's case, I must emphatically deny that any of the arguments I have put forward could possibly justify such a grossly offensive description, nor do I know of any who share my views on Captain Lord's case whose conduct merits such an attack.” The only source of scurrilous material in the internal M.A.I.B. files came from Reade's “*Those Inescapable Rockets*.”

Great credence is given to Boxhall's evidence, to the exclusion of all else: “[Boxhall] went to the bridge to start firing distress signals in an unsuccessful attempt to summon help from an approaching ship; he abandoned this action when she turned and steamed away.” This is untrue: Boxhall only stopped firing when the Captain ordered him to take command of lifeboat 2.

Harrison concludes, “How do matters now rest? Are we to take the M.A.I.B. Report as the

250 Private Information

251 One can only wonder why a ship would then steam back into an icefield, at night, firing rockets.

final – if inconclusive – official word on the question of Captain Lord's guilt or innocence, or is the report open to amendment in the light of reasoned criticism? The Department of Transport has been presented with a unique opportunity to close a controversial chapter in Britain's maritime history. It would be an unforgivable act for it to be cast aside.”

The report was *not* “open to amendment,” but Harrison's campaign was far from over. He was interviewed by the *Westcountry Morning News*, and it was published on August 24th that year.

‘Why does Harrison bother so many years? “It has become a moral obligation,”’ Harrison told the reporter, “The stigma still lies on Lord's name. I promised him I would not let the matter drop.”

‘Harrison maintains that nobody was lying at the Inquiry.’ ‘They all told the truth as they saw it’ he says’. The reader is reminded of the wide berth between Stewart and Evan's evidence as to why a wireless call was made on 15th April; to establish what the yellow funnelled steamer was to the south, or to find out about a rocket firing ship during the night? And then there is the chasm between Groves' statements and Lord's.

“...Unless the minister acts to absolve Lord, a new book will be published in December based on the papers of an author whose book we managed to kill before it came out,” Harrison added, “...the first crack since 1912 in the Establishment's refusal to do anything has appeared. Whitehall must do something – there is still a two foot file on the Minister's desk from people complaining they were unfair to Lord.”

The “book we managed to kill” would finally see the light of day the following year. Finally, it was clear; his “moral obligation” had sought to destroy a contrary opinion, not because of copyright infringements, but to protect Captain Lord and his reputation; the last book to do so was “*The Night Lives On*”, and despite his best efforts, Harrison could do nothing about it.

Leslie Reade would at last have his day, 4 years after his death.

“*The Ship That Stood Still*” had been taken up again by Patrick Stephens Limited, the publishers who had originally been approached c.1975, but it was now under the control of Haynes, better known for their car maintenance manuals. The OK to proceed was given in an internal memorandum dated 14th September 1989, with the following background story: “[the manuscript] had many legal problems, chiefly concerning the author's hatred of Leslie Harrison ... there was also the handicap of an exceptionally difficult and dogmatic author, who flatly refused to shorten the book.” One member of the committee who agreed the go ahead for the book suggested that the title was slightly inappropriate and that “*The Titanic and the Ship That Stood Still*” perhaps might be more apt. Such a title with the emotive name “*Titanic*” would certainly generate more publicity and hence, sales.

Following legal discussions, the anti-Harrison tone of the original manuscript was considerably toned down²⁵². After editing by Reade's friend Edward de Groot, a release date of

252 This is also obvious in the single pre- de Groot edited chapter that has survived in the public domain: “The Norwegian Fairy Story”, dealing with the Samson story and stored with Walter Lord's material at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. This chapter was used as background material in Lord's “The Night Lives On,” which explains why it has survived. One interesting point is that in “A Titanic Myth part 2,” Harrison writes (page

December 1992 seemed likely, but other factors intervened, and a date of March/April the following year was agreed. Walter Lord wrote a glowing testimonial that appeared on the book's dust jacket, saying that "nothing had been swept under the rug [or] ignored as though it didn't exist." Readers will soon learn how accurate this view is.

The imminent publication of Reade's and de Groot's book invigorated the camps of the pro-Californian cause. Leslie Harrison wrote to Captain Lord's son a few weeks before Reade's posthumous book was released. It is telling in its tactics. "Re: forthcoming publication of de Groot's book... much is being done by supporters of your father's case to make life difficult for him! Much, of course, depends on what the book contains, but I'm pinning my hopes on aspersions on my character which may justify a solicitor's letter comparable with that which destroyed the earlier attempt to publish the book in 1975. Here's hoping!" A few weeks prior to this, he had stated that "should I be libelled in the book (as I am in Leslie Reade's original draft), at the present moment I would be inclined to ignore the fact. Breaches of copyright raise other issues."

One of these supporters was a man from Holland named Rob Kamps. Kamps, who would later inherit a pro-Lord book, had first written to Haynes towards the end of 1992. He alleged that de Groot had performed copyright infringement on a massive scale in a previous work (the Dutch book "75 jaar Titanic"); Kamps provided over 80 pages of noted indiscretions, only a couple of which may have been genuine violations. Kamps, who had been keeping an eye on de Groot since 1978 and had held a vendetta ever since, wrote that his compendium of copyright incursions "would have made ample justification to take steps against the man...de Groot should answer for his countless misdeeds and scurrilous remarks." Kamps also accused de Groot of making silent, anonymous phone calls to his home in the early hours of the morning, but refused to allow Haynes to forward his dossier to de Groot for his comments. Haynes were not impressed and thought that "some of his accusations were so bizarre they were simply not credible." With regard to de Groot, they simply noted that, "if Edward has failed to acknowledge the help he obtained from other books, then he can be accused of being an ill-mannered author, but that is all."²⁵³

Kamps sustained these innuendos for another three years, well after Reade's/de Groot's book was published²⁵⁴.

David Eno also complained to Haynes, accusing them of ignoring the M.A.I.B. "command finding" [Eno's emphasis] that the *Titanic* and the *Californian* were 17 to 20 miles distant. Again, Eno ignores the other conclusion placing them much closer. He wrote to the Managing Director that "[Haynes] sees the opportunity to ring in fresh cash from old manipulations ... [I have] reviewed the story lines...you're dreadfully lacking in credibility and that of Haynes will follow suit. In fact, Haynes will be aiding and abetting one of the grossest cases of miscarriage [sic] of justice in the 20th century." Eno remarked that he was working on his own book which would explore the "implausibilities [sic]" of the case, but such a manuscript has never materialised.

140-1), "[About 1991] I made another attempt to ensure that there were no inaccuracies in the manuscript. Through an intermediary, I made an offer to the prospective publishers to read it 'solely to point out any factual errors, and with no intention whatsoever to influence any opinions which it might advance ... my offer was rejected.'" Haynes comprehensive files on the Reade/de Groot book have no record of this offer.

253 This author, and others critical of Captain Lord have also been the target of Mr. Kamps and his smear campaigns. Indeed, Kamps was cordial to this author until he found out my sceptical stance regarding the Californian and his officers. Some of Kamp's comments have been saved and placed on this author's website at <http://www.paullee.com/Titanic/articles.html> with extra detail added by this current author. Another target of Kamps was none other than Walter Lord, who was the target of a vicious attack sent to the Titanic International Society, a copy of which was forwarded to Lord.

254 In 1992, Kamps claimed to have read a copy of de Groot's manuscript. How did he get hold of it?