

Birkenhead Stewardess Miss Stap's Graphic Account of the Titanic Disaster

Birkenhead News

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THE EXPERIENCES OF A BIRKENHEAD STEWARDESS MISS STAP'S GRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE DISASTER

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MISS STAP'S GRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE DISASTER.

There arrived in Birkenhead on Wednesday evening, Miss Sarah Stap of 41 Bidstan avenue, Cloughton, one of the survivors of the ill-fated Titanic. Miss Stap held the responsible position of senior stewardess on board the vessel and had been transferred from the sister ship, Olympic.our representative visited Miss Stap yesterday morning at her residence in Bidston avenue and to him she imparted a most thrilling and vivid narrative of the wreck of the vessel. She did not betray the least excitement, or nervousness, but her pale wan face indicated at once the terrible suffering she had passed through. "how do you feel after your experiences?" enquired our representative."not at all well." replied Miss Stap, "although I am very much better than I have been. I am really not my old self yet. It has been a dreadful time, and seems to have been all a most horrible nightmare. I cannot yet realise that the beautiful ship has gone for ever, for she was a magnificent ship. We (I mean the crew) were all so radiantly happy together when we left Southampton on Wednesday, the 10th April. There was no ceremony whatever when we moved off from the pier, and that is what I think makes the disaster all the more sad, it seems almost as if we were too happy. "Everything went well until the fatal night of the 14th." Here Miss Stap paused a while as if the terrible spectacle was once more being enacted."where were you, miss Stap, when the accident occurred?" "I was in bed and was awakened by a slight bump. It would then have been about a quarter to twelve at night. I did not take very much heed of the noise at first, because I had been used to a ship's bumping before. In fact I thought that something or other had gone wrong in the engine room." "Did you get up from your bed?" "No, presently I heard the night watchman pass my door and I called out to him, "What's the matter?" He replied, "Oh, we have only touched a bit of ice. I think it is alright, I don't think it is anything." "It was three quarters of an hour after I felt the ship bump that I got up and when I reached the deck the lifeboats had been ordered out.""What did you feel like?" "I was not in the least frightened. I was simply stunned. Perfect order prevailed and

everybody seemed calm and collected. The passengers would not believe that we had struck an iceberg, but I myself knew what had happened. The officers and crew behaved magnificently, as did also the dear old captain." "Did you see Mr. Ismay at all?" "Oh yes, he was on deck in his pyjamas and a coat, vainly endeavouring to get the passengers into the boats. They (the crew) had the utmost difficulty in trying to persuade the people to get into the boats. I think it is most unfair the stories that have been circulated about Mr. Ismay. He worked might and main all the time, and I did not think he actually realised that the ship was sinking. It is my own impression that more lives would have been saved if only the people could have been persuaded to enter the boats more quickly, I was helped into the last boat but one and had charge of a baby, whose father and mother were lost. There were no less than 72 or 77 persons in our boat and I nursed the little mite for several hours. Although the night was starry, it was bitterly cold and everyone was nearly starved." "How long were you in the boat?" "About six hours. I shall never forget it until my dying day. There we were all huddled up together. It was awful, we could see the lights of the ship slowly disappearing beneath the waves, one by one, until there alone remained the masthead light. Then suddenly the great ship gave a lurch and disappeared gracefully out of sight. All this time the people on board were shrieking in their death agonies, and the passengers were under the impression that it was the other people in the boats cheering. Only the members of the crew knew what it was and we dared not say. "After the ship had gone an explosion rent the air. The shrieks of the dying were positively awful. During the time we were in the lifeboat we passed about six or seven icebergs, we could hear the music of the band all the time. They were heroes if you like. I must say that everything that has been said about them is perfectly true. They were not asked to play, but did it absolutely on their own initiative. In fact from the highest to the lowest member of the crew everyone of them deserves the highest praise. I would also like to praise the lifebelts. Many people were saved by these. They were not the old fashioned ones, that fastened on the shoulder, but ones to be slipped over the head and tied round the waist." "What happened eventually?" asked our representative. "We were at length picked up by the Carpathia, and taken to New York. the people on board were ever so kind to us. When we reached New York we were given clothes and every attention, and were then transferred to the Lapland and arrived at Plymouth last Sunday morning. All the officers and officials of the White Star Company were extremely kind to us all the time. I had no time to gather up my belongings, and so lost everything. But what I valued most was the loss of dear kind friends who went down with the ship. I shall never forget the experience, never." "I suppose you have never experienced anything like it before?" "No, although I was on board the Olympic when she collided with the Hawke." "How long have you been travelling abroad?" "For about twelve years. I was on board the Baltic when she made her maiden voyage, and also on board the Adriatic when she made her first trip. My father, Captain Stap, was in the employ of the White Star Company, but has now retired." Asked whether she would be required to attend the inquiry in London, Miss Stap said she had not heard so far from the officials. It is of interest to add that Miss Stap was responsible for Mrs. Astor and Lady Gordon Duff Grant, both of whom escaped.

Birkenhead man's story

The saver saved.

Mr. W.J. Napier of Woodchurch road, Birkenhead, a member of the staff of the White Star

Lines, S.S. Celtic, writes from New York. The all absorbing topic at present is the disaster to the Titanic. It is certainly very appalling to us on the Celtic, who knew a great many of the Titanic crew. We were a little more than a day's steaming behind the ill fated ship and received the news by wireless on Monday. It was kept very quiet and only a few were in the secret. The captain was afraid of a panic amongst our passengers. We were also in the ice region. We made all possible speed to the scene of the disaster. Hoping to pick up any boats that had not already been taken, but there was no sign of anything, not even wreckage, though we passed right over where the Titanic had sunk. We too had a very anxious time, as we encountered a lot of ice and fog. The captain hardly left the bridge, night or day, till we were out of the danger zone.

On Tuesday we passed a field of ice, supposed to be one hundred miles long, but I think this is greatly exaggerated. Quite a number of men left the ship to sail with the Titanic on her maiden voyage, but only two of them were saved. One of these lives near me in Birkenhead and I was more than glad to see him in New York when we arrived on Saturday. The other man was telling us that when the ship started to sink, he and a friend dived into the sea and were swimming about in the icy water for two hours. At last his friend said he was getting tired and sank before his eyes. Almost immediately afterwards the other man got hold of a deck chair and kept afloat, until he was picked up and dragged quite unconscious into a boat. The strange thing about it was that before he left the ship, he had helped a lady to put on her lifebelt and showed her the way to the boat. She thanked him and shook hands, saying what she thought was a last good-bye. He was pulled into the same boat as her, quite unconscious.

Acknowledgements

Mike Scott-Williams, South Africa

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