

Titanic's B Deck Mystery Object

By Bob Read

There are many mysteries of the structure of Titanic. One of these has been identified since the discovery of the wreck in 1985. It is an object which is seen in Figures 1&2 which is attached to the

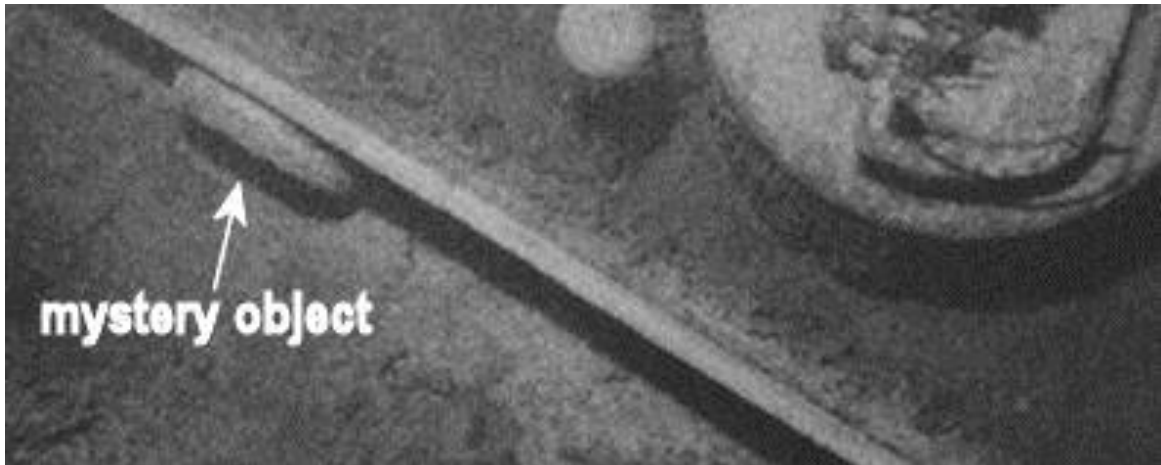


Figure 1



Figure 2

inboard side of the forward promenade bulwark of B deck on the starboard side. The upper visible portion of the object is rounded on its upper inboard and outboard edges. It has the appearance of some sort of cover over something under it. A number of theories have been advanced which attempt to explain the function of the structure and more specifically, what is under it. Because we can't see under this object, the definitive answer as to the function of either the object or what is beneath it has remained unresolved. The purpose of this paper is to examine the various theories to determine which might better fit the facts as we know them. Individual aspects of the theories will be tested to see how strong the evidence is which supports them.

The "fire hose theory"

I have given the "fire hose" name to this theory to describe a number of theories which have a number of aspects in common. The central component of this theory is that the object seen in wreck photos is a circular cover over a fire hose reel or basket. Aspects of these theories will be examined individually.

1. The cover is circular

Problem: It is not. Because in early photos taken from directly above, it was assumed that this object was circular. In James Cameron's 2001 dive to Titanic, special attention was given to this object. As can be seen in Figure 2, the object is rectangular with rounded upper corners, not circular.

2. A fire hose reel with a fire hose wound around the reel is beneath the cover

Problem #1: We don't have any direct photo evidence of what is beneath the cover.

Problem #2: We have no evidence of hose reels mounted to bulwarks on Olympic class ships.

Problem #3: If the cover protects a hose basket, it is much larger than the hose baskets on other bulwarks. See figure 3.



Figure 3



Figure 4

From these various problems we can see that any variant of the “fire hose theory” has many difficulties as a cohesive integrated theory.

The “Vent Theory”

This theory is that the mystery object is a passive (non-motor driven) ventilation device.

Problem #1: No known ventilator on any Olympic class vessel has a ventilator which looks like this.

Problem #2: Various plans of this area and the decks below do not show a ventilator here or a ventilation trunk below this area.

This theory basically has no evidence to support it.

The “Shore to Ship Theory”

This theory proposes that under this cover was some sort of a receptacle for connection of either electrical power or water supply from the shore to the ship during a period when the ship was not producing power on its own. Alternatively it is proposed that this is a connection for transfer of water from shore to ship.

Problem: The problem with this theory is that there never has been any evidence offered to support it.

The “Bulwark Protection Theory”

This theory is that the object somehow protects the bulwark from impact with the well deck crane forward of it.

Problem #1: It has never been demonstrated how this object would accomplish this protection of the bulwark.

Problem #2: If this was the function of this object, it has never been explained how the bulwark on the port side would be protected.

Problem #3: At its operational jib elevation, the crane jib could not contact the bulwark at this location.

Accommodation Ladder Winch Theory

This theory proposes that under the object was a hand operated winch which was cranked with a hand crank. It proposes that it was to raise and support an accommodation ladder to the starboard E deck gangway door at frame 85F.

Problem #1: No accommodation ladder has ever appeared at this location on the Titanic Rigging Plan.

Problem #2: No accommodation ladder has ever appeared at this location in any photos.

Problem #3: If there was to be such a winch for an accommodation ladder at this location, the inboard location of the mystery object doesn't make much sense. From this position it would have to have sheaves to redirect the line from it to the point outboard where it would lift the end of an accommodation ladder. The logical location would be on the outboard bulwark.

The Stairway Opening Theory

This particular theory is one which I proposed in an earlier version of this article. The theory was that since the mystery object is equidistant from the midline as the port ladder to the well deck that this box covered the structural elements to convert the solid bulwark to an alternative opening for a starboard ladder to the well deck. I have recently rejected my theory because of evidence from an Olympic general arrangement plan. A section of this plan is shown in Figure 6. This plan shows the outlines of teak margin planking on weather decks. In Figure 6 I have indicated the margin planking in red. What can be seen is that in the location of the mystery object there is teak margin planking around it. If the same margin planking was found around the opening in the bulwark for the ladder to the well deck then I would have still supported my theory. However there is no teak margin planking indicated around the opening on the port side.

Go to next page

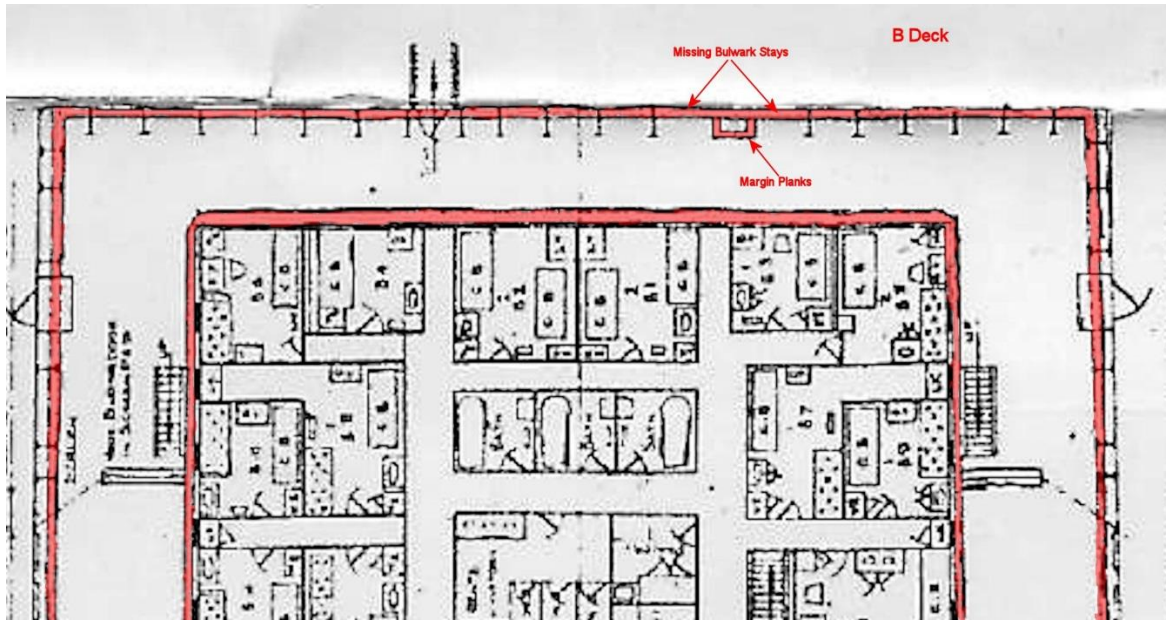


Figure 6

Evidence

For future reference I will now list the actual evidence that we have for this object. Any future theory will have to harmonize all aspects of the evidence.

* The physical shape of the mystery object is rectangular with rounded upper corners. There is an opening on the upper starboard radius corner of the object from which a lug protrudes according to observations made by James Cameron during a dive to the wreck. This can be seen in Figure 7.



Figure 7

On the aft face of the object in the lower right quadrant there appears to be another protrusion which is obscured by rusticles. This is shown in figure 8.



Figure 8

- * The mystery object is metal.
- * The bulwark stays flanking the object are missing as can be seen in Figure 6
- * There is teak margin planking around the object as can be seen in Figure 6.
- * The object is centered 12 ft. to starboard of the midline.
- * On plans of the ventilation systems and water systems there is nothing indicated in this area.
- * It is not known if there is any electrical service to this area because we don't have detailed plans of the electrical distribution aboard.
- * *Olympic* had this same object in the same location on her maiden voyage. The object was later removed but we are unable to establish a precise date. We do know that it was not present by sometime in the 1920s.
- * *HMHS Britannic* didn't have this object installed.

Analysis

The so called "mystery object" found on the forward promenade of B deck on Titanic has resisted attempts to identify it. Many theories have been advanced to attempt to identify it

and its function. All theories so far have apparently failed because they all failed to be able take into account all the evidence which pertains to the mystery object. The primary problem is that the object is a cover over whatever equipment lies beneath it. If we are not able to see what is under the cover it is doubtful that the object will be identified. Various approaches have been taken to try to identify the object. The location of the object suggests very little. No photos of the object with the cover removed have surfaced. There are no other structures like this aboard Titanic. The removal from Olympic suggests a function that was eliminated or transferred to a different location. All of these known and unknown factors set the parameters for the search for the identity of this object. Perhaps one day the term “mystery” can be removed from this object.

Bibliography

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