

Titanic's Officers' Quarters Skylights

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Introduction

Recently a controversy has arisen about the two skylights atop Titanic's officer's quarters deckhouse. The skylights in question are the skylight over the officers' lavatory and the skylight over the Marconi room. The essence of the controversy is whether the opening sashes on the skylights have two panes per side or three. The purpose of this article is to examine the best available evidence and offer a conclusive answer to the question.

The Case for a Three Paned Skylight Sash

The primary evidence for officers' quarters skylights having three paned sashes apparently comes from a Harland and Wolff Britannic general arrangement plan. The pertinent segment of this plan is shown in Figure 1.

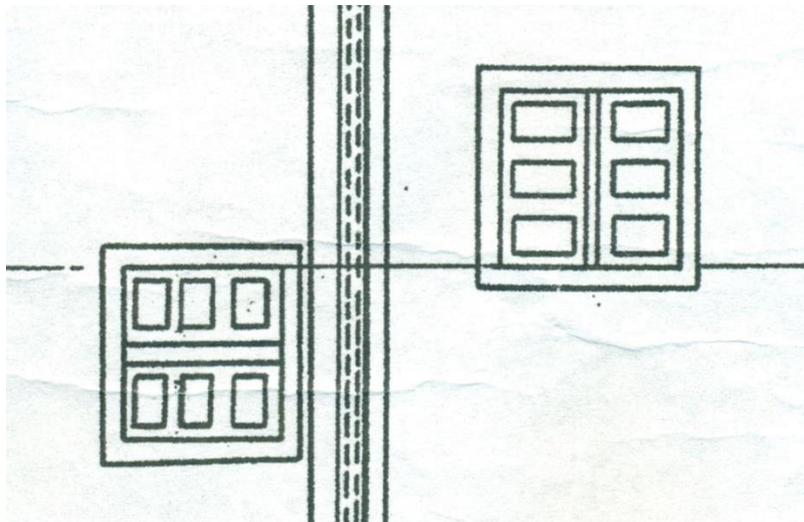


Figure 1

While many contemporary examples of three paned skylight sashes can be found on H&W built ships, none can be demonstrated on Titanic or early Olympic. Therefore the evidence from the Britannic G/A plan is of limited value.

The Case for a Two Paned Skylight Sash

The evidence for two paned officers' quarters skylight sashes consists of direct photo evidence. The direct photo evidence is provided by a Titanic fitting out photo which is seen in Figure 2.

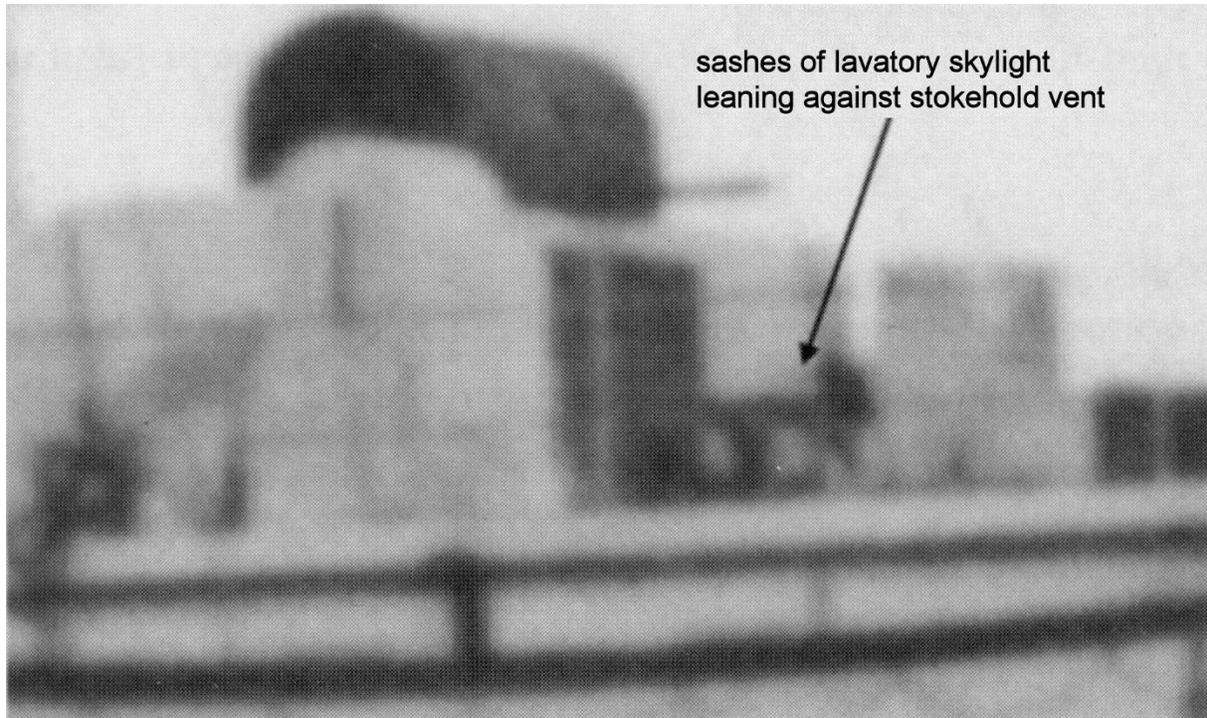


Figure 2

Some explanation of this photo is required. This photo was taken during Titanic's fitting out procedure and the skylight has not been assembled at this point. One clue that this is the case is that the angle of the skylight panes is not consistent with the orientation of the sash if the skylight had been assembled. What we are in fact seeing is one or two of the skylight sashes for the officers' lavatory leaning against the stokehold vent aft of the first funnel. In the photo we can clearly see light reflecting off of only two panes. To show a precedent that the skylights were not fully assembled before being put in place on the roof, we have Olympic fitting out evidence which is shown in Figure 3. In this photo we see both the body of the skylight and also a sash leaning against the weather cover of the dome over the first class staircase.

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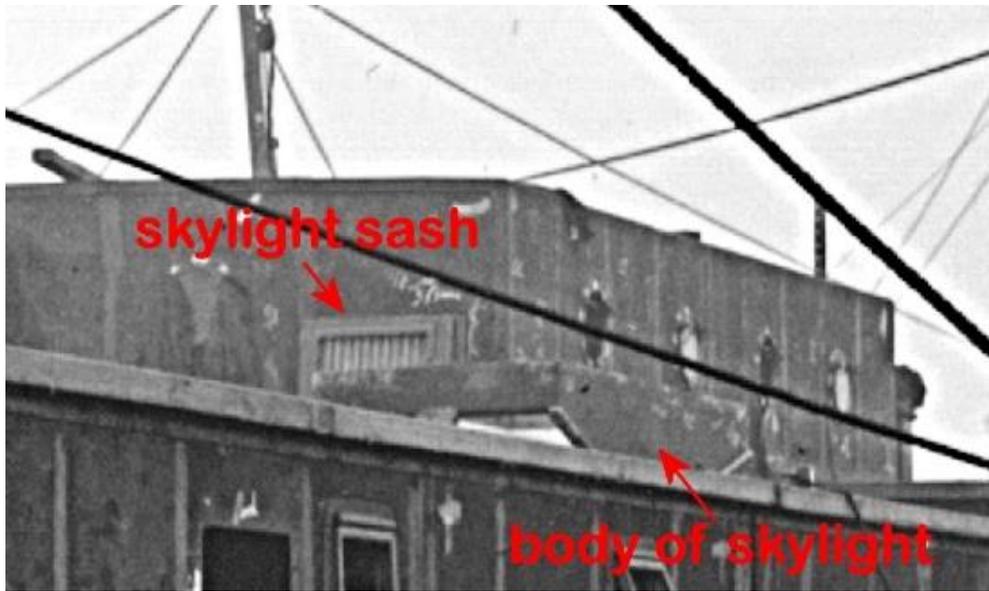


Figure 3

Figure 4 is a plan view drawing of the officers' quarters skylights as I believe the evidence demonstrates.

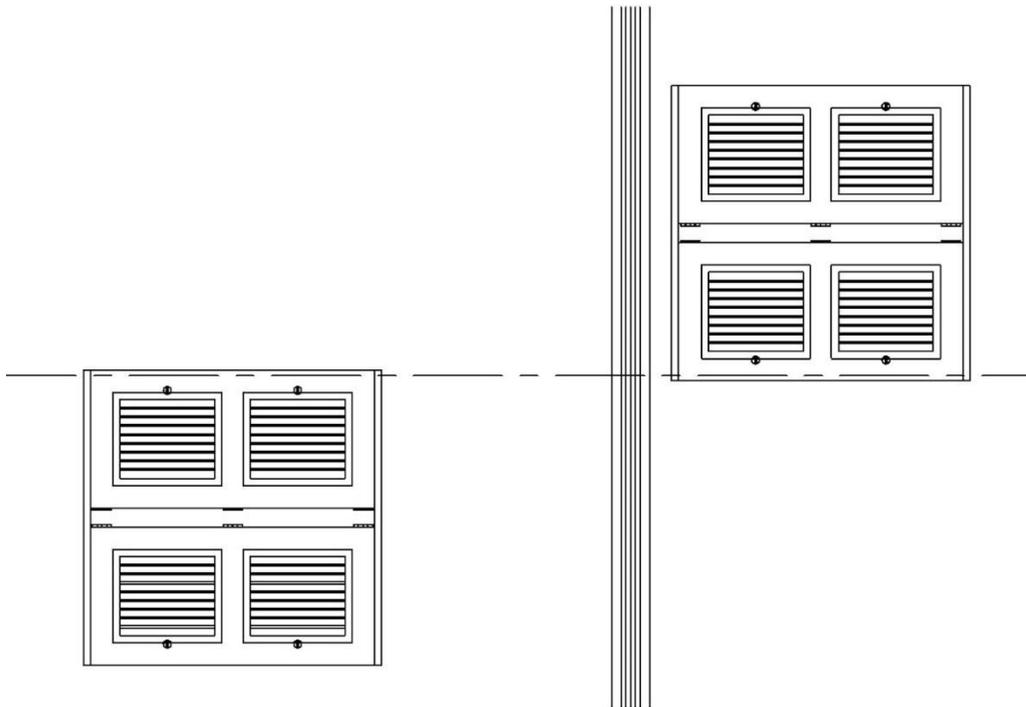


Figure 4

Figure 5 is a photo showing a two paned skylight which would be very similar to the one found aboard Titanic

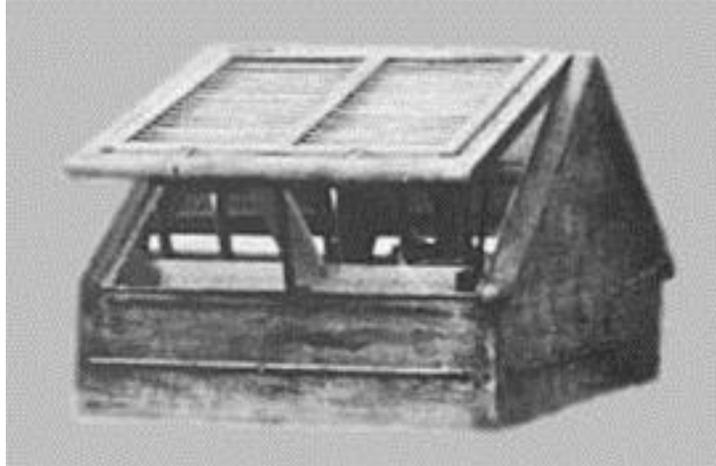


Figure 5

Orientation

There seems to also be some confusion about the orientation of Titanic's officers' quarters skylights. The officer's lavatory skylight can be seen in the Titanic wreck photo in Figure 6. It can be clearly seen that the ridge of the skylight was oriented fore and aft.



Figure 6

There are no remains of the Marconi room skylight on Titanic's wreck. In order to discover the orientation of this skylight, we must look at photos of Titanic to determine the orientation. In Figure 7 we see a comparison between Titanic and Olympic (1911). The Olympic photo is very clear in showing that the ridge of the skylight ran in a port and starboard direction because we

can see how the sashes slope from the peak of the ridge. In the Titanic photo we do not see this peak but rather a straight ridge which indicates that the officers' quarters skylight ridge on Titanic was oriented in a fore and aft direction like the officers' lavatory skylight.

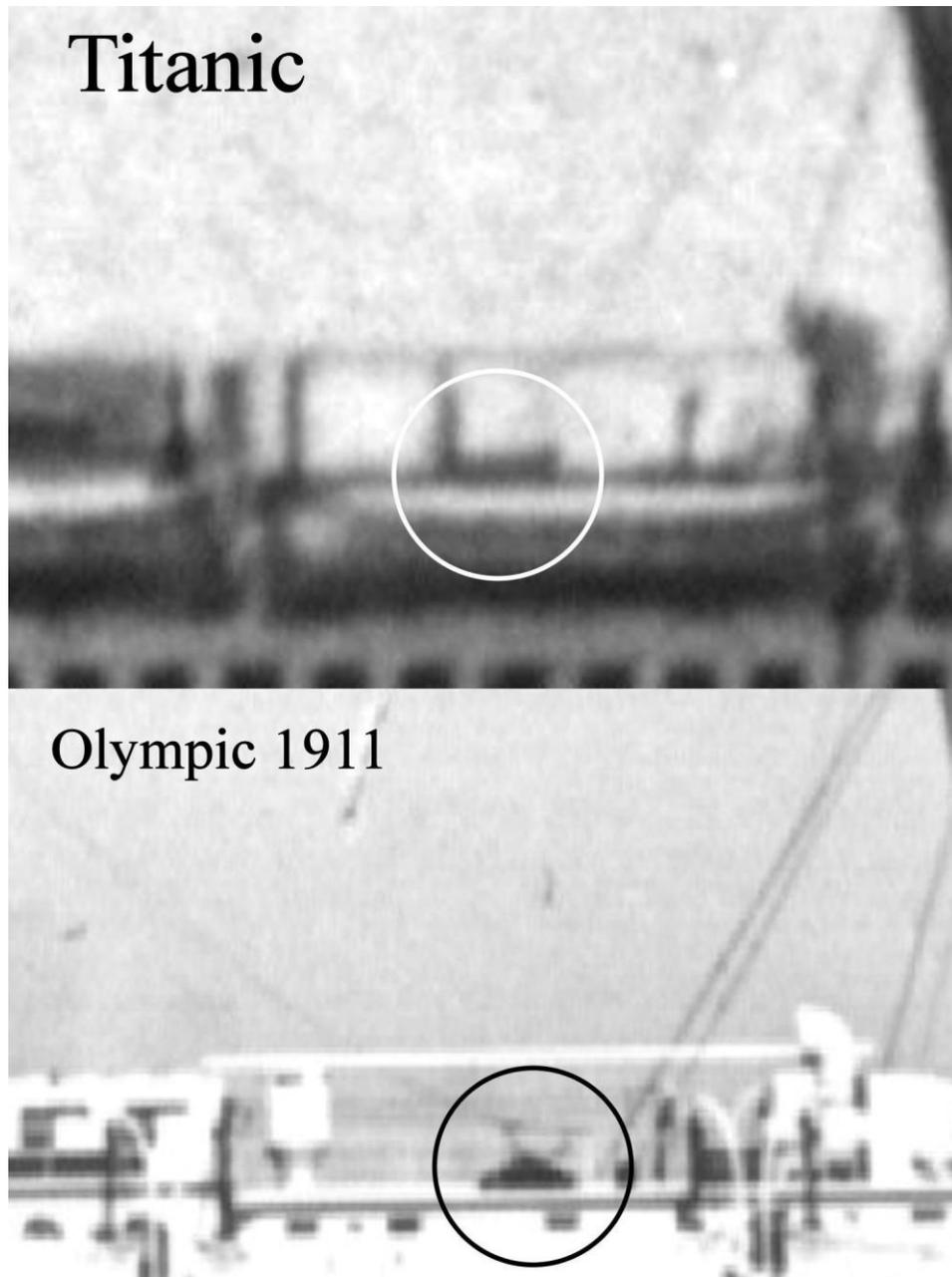


Figure 7

Conclusion

While there is circumstantial evidence from Britannic that the officers' quarters skylights of the Olympic class ships in general and Titanic in particular may have had three panes per sash, this evidence only appears on a general arrangement plan. New evidence from Britannic actually

shows that she had a different design for these skylights. Actual photo evidence from Titanic during fitting out confirms a skylight sash with two panes. While there is some Olympic evidence which suggests that later in her career at least one skylight may have had its sashes converted to a 3 pane sash, this evidence in no way invalidates photo evidence from Titanic confirming a two paned sash.

Update

Recently, Titanic researcher Ralph Currell uncovered some very interesting information about Titanic's officers' quarters' skylights. The new information is contained in a document which is a Board of Trade Surveyor's report about Titanic. This document segment (Figure 8) records the dimensions of the officers' lavatory skylight and the Marconi skylight as both being 5ft. x 5.5 ft. The skylights are described as having 6 panes (3 per sash) with dimensions of the individual glass panes as 15 in. x 24 in.

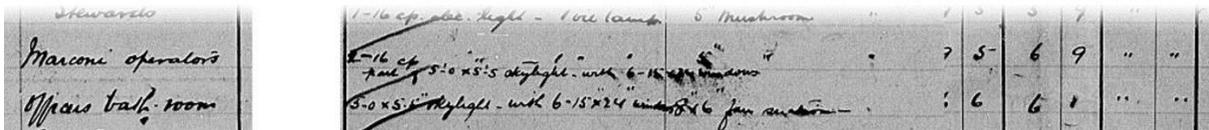


Figure 8

Since this new information directly contradicts photo evidence which we have relied on, how are we to resolve this contradiction? We will first have to discuss what value we place on the two types of evidence.

In this case we have documentary evidence and photo evidence. All things being equal, photo evidence always supersedes documentary evidence. The key here is the question "are all things equal"? By that I mean is there any obvious reason to doubt either the photo or the document?

Taking the document first, everything about it appears authentic. So there is no obvious reason to doubt its veracity. This is not to say that the document might not possibly be in error but rather there is nothing on the surface which would indicate that it is in error.

In examining the photo, there is nothing inconsistent about the size, form, or location of what is identified as a skylight sash in Figure 2. The object identified as a skylight sash appears to have two glass panes which appear to be reflecting light.

So if there is nothing to disqualify either piece of evidence, the photo evidence would have to be of greater evidentiary value. For those who might tend to want to believe the documentary evidence over the photo evidence, their burden is to prove that the photo evidence is false. There is no burden on those who support the photo evidence because it is of greater evidentiary value if it is true. So those who support the documentary evidence must prove conclusively that the object identified as Titanic's officers' lavatory skylight sash is not and could

not be Titanic's officers' lavatory skylight sash. It is not sufficient to merely cast doubt by posing hypotheticals about what else it "could" be. The same doubt could be cast on the documentary evidence.

In conclusion, unless the proponents of the documentary evidence can clearly show that the photo evidence of the item identified as Titanic's two paned officers' lavatory skylight sash is not or could not be as it is identified, then the photo evidence has to stand over the documentary evidence for the time being.