

The Application of Titanic's Name to Her Hull

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Introduction

New students to the subject of Titanic's construction often bring up questions about how Titanic's name was applied to her hull. Some have erroneously thought that the name was made up of separate plates which were applied to the hull. This article will describe in detail the methods which were used to apply the name to the hull shell plating.

Specification of Names

The specification of the size of letters and placement is found on Titanic's Rigging Plan. Figure 1 is the notation on the Rigging Plan for the letters on port and starboard sides of the hull. The bow name had letters which were 18 inches high. Figure 2 is the notation on the Rigging Plan for the letters on the stern of the hull for the ship name with 18 inch letters and port of registry with 12 inch letters



Figure 1

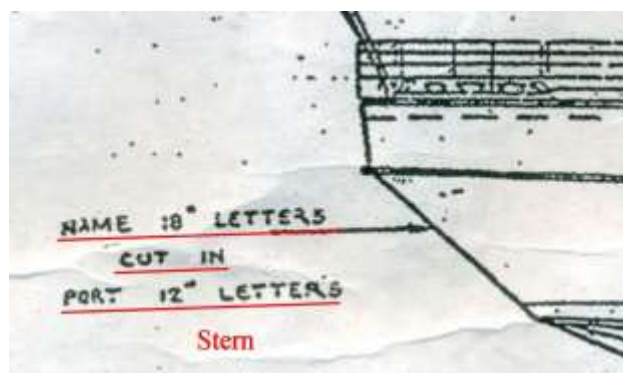


Figure 2

One part of the specification on the rigging plan is the notation “cut in”. There has been much debate about the meaning of the term “cut in”. Some have thought that this meant that the letters were cut into the plate. Another interpretation is that “cut in” is a painter’s term where paint is applied up to a barrier to create a sharp paint separation line. We will see in the next section that the true answer isn’t an either/or proposition. Figure 3 shows the actual appearance of the bow name and Figure 4 shows the actual appearance of the stern names.

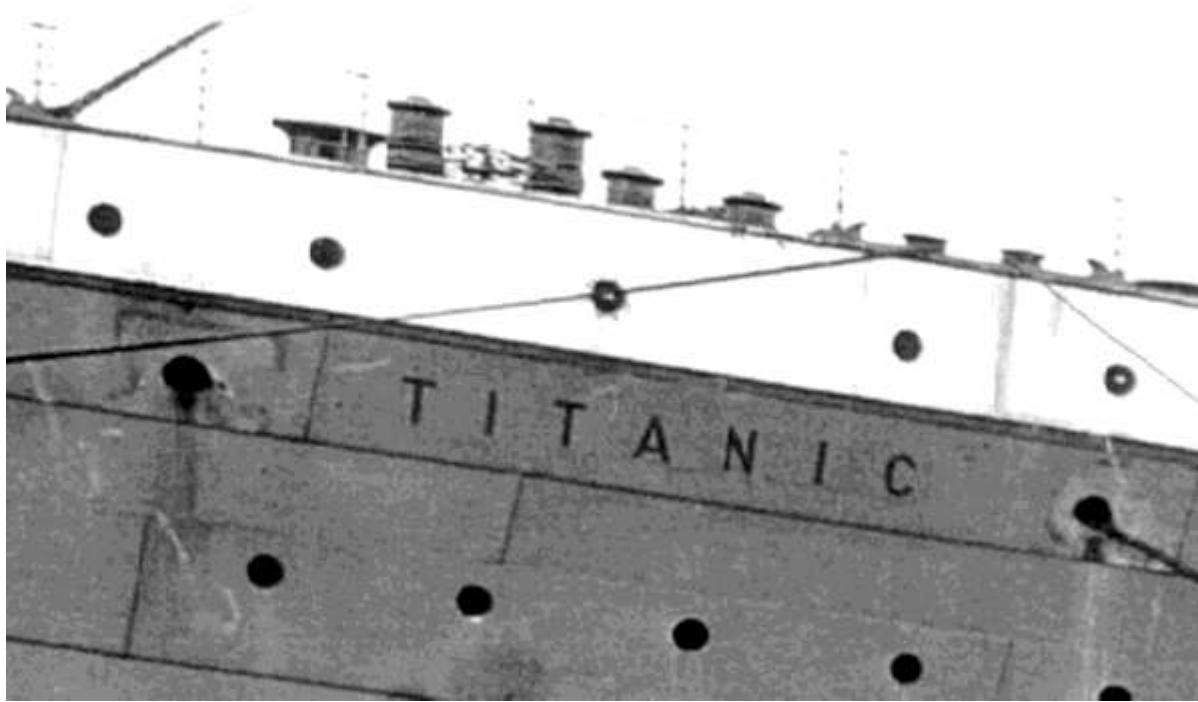


Figure 3



Figure 4

In Figure 3 the hull colors are not their final colors. The hull in this photo is a gray color and the letters appear to be some dark color, possibly black. Figure 4 shows the name and hull in their actual service colors. The letters in Figure 4 are not very distinct because the color of the letters is "yellow". This is not a lemon yellow but rather a golden yellow. In the blue sensitive film of the day, the letters appear darker than they were in real life.

Application of Names

In the early 2000's much discussion was going on in numerous Titanic forums on almost every aspect of Titanic's construction. The discussion of how Titanic's names were applied occupied much space in several of the forums. The problem was that we didn't have much concrete evidence other than photos of how the names were applied. Fortunately for us one gentleman who posted on one of the forums had actually worked in the Harland and Wolff shipyard as a plater in the 1960's. Some raised objections about extrapolating his description of the method of applying the name to the hull plates in the 1960's to the methods used in 1911 while Titanic was being constructed. This would be a reasonable objection if the method he described used advanced methods and tools. The opposite is true. There was nothing about the method he described that couldn't have easily been done during the time of Titanic's construction. In terms of shipbuilding technology and methods, those used in 1960 were more similar to those used in 1910 than they are to methods and materials used today.

What follows is the post in one of the Titanic forums of this Harland and Wolff plater describing how the letters of the names were applied. Some of the terms he uses may not be familiar so I will follow with an explanation of his post.

I would have to say that the shell squad plater (iron shipwright in those days) would have marked the name from a detailed drawing. His helper would then centre dab (pop) every inch round this outline. Then using a slab of fire hardened chalk, they would highlight the letters. The plates are then left in the hands of the caulking department. Because there were no air driven hammers then, several caulkers would follow these dab marks with a 2lb hammer & "diamond" or "gouge" chisel to the required depth.

To more easily understand what this plater is describing, it is outlined in the following steps.

1. The letters of the names were applied after with the shell plates in place. They were not applied to a plate before the plate was riveted to the other shell plates.
2. The iron shipwright would bring a template produced by the drawing office which showed the name full size. The template had reference marks which he would use to position the template in the proper position.
3. The iron shipwright's helper would then use a center punch and make punches at one inch intervals around the perimeter of each letter. The small punches could be difficult to see so using a special kind of chalk, the assistant would highlight the letters so that the next procedure could be accomplished.

4. Members of another team known as the “caulking department” would use a 2 lb. hammer and cold chisels to “connect the dots” of the center punches around the outline of each letter making an incised outline of each letter to a required depth.
5. Only an outline of each letter was created. The letters were not fully engraved into the shell plates.

One of the points of contention before we had this detailed explanation was whether the entire letter was engraved into the plates or whether the letters were merely outlined to provide a limiting line up to which the painters could paint. The matter was settled with the discovery of photos of S.S. Nomadic. Nomadic served as a tender for Titanic and was built at Harland and Wolff at the same time as Olympic and Titanic. Figure 5 shows the port name “Cherbourg” in the upper image painted over with white paint where it becomes almost invisible. The name “Cherbourg” is located just below the name “Nomadic”. The lower image shows a close-up of the letters “H” and “E” of “Cherbourg” showing that only the outline of each letter is incised into the plate.

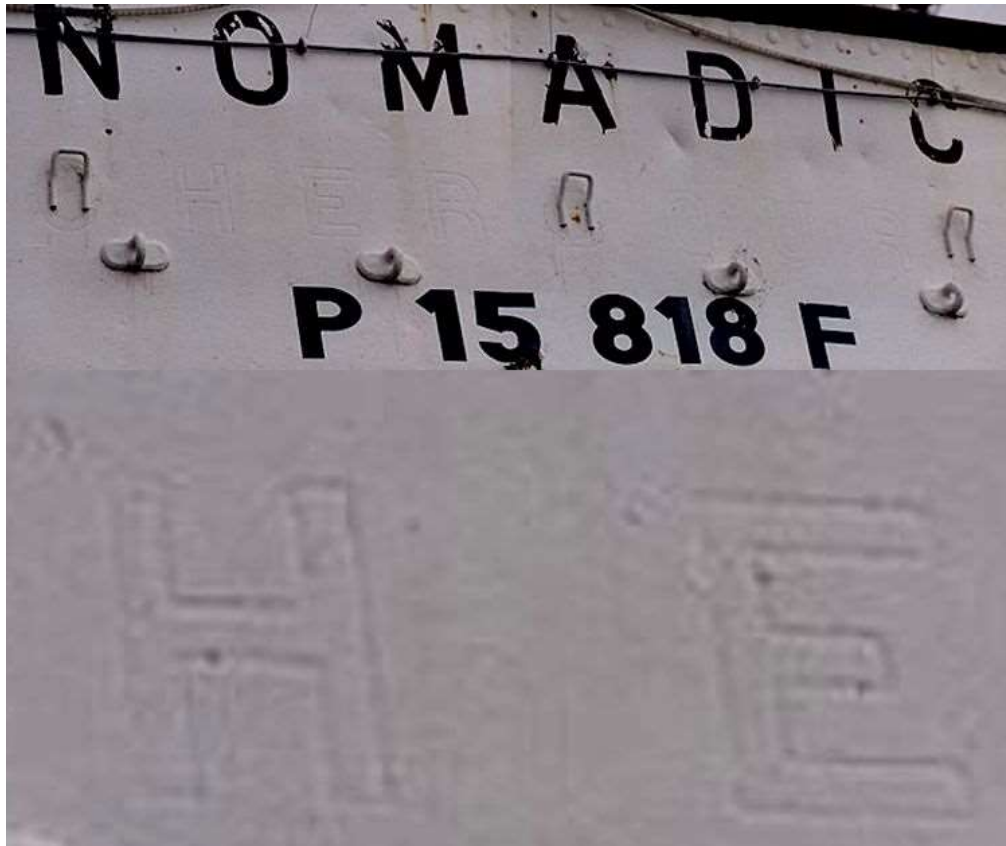


Figure 5

Orientation of Letters

A few words need to be said about the orientation of the letters which make up the names applied to Titanic's shell plates. The bow names have letters which follow the slope (sheer) of the plates onto which they are applied. Additionally the individual letters were tilted forward to compensate for the rise in sheer. If they were perpendicular to the sheer, they would appear to be tilting aft. The tops of letters like "T" followed the sheer of the shell plate.

The aft hull names had letters which were oriented to the radius curve of the stern. This curve of the stern was large enough in comparison to the letters that the letters were barely tilted at all. Figure 6 show the orientation of the letters in the bow name while Figure 7 shows the orientation of the letters in the stern names.

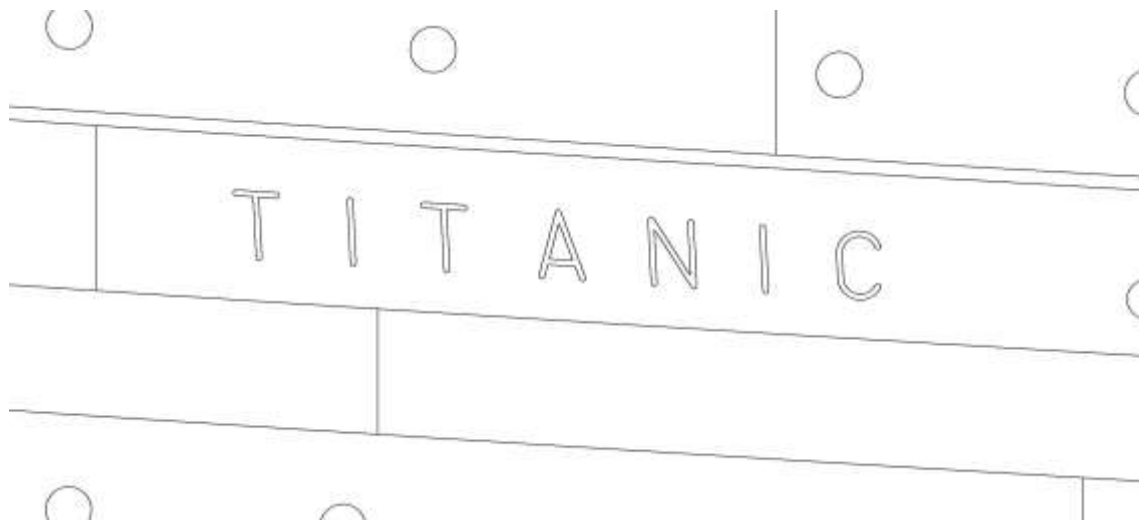


Figure 6

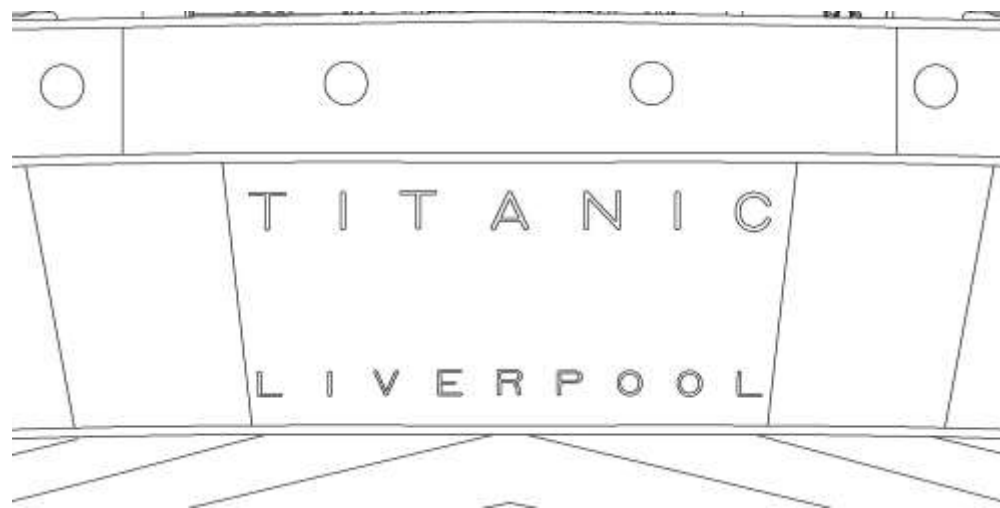


Figure 7

Conclusion

This article has described the procedures used to apply names to Titanic's shell plates. Additionally the colors and orientation of the letters have been described.