

Equipment for Boat-Handling on HMHS *Britannic's* Shade Deck

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Introduction

There has been confusion about the boat-handling equipment on HMHS *Britannic's* Shade Deck. The confusion has been understandable because there are very few good photos of the ship as a whole and even fewer which show this area clearly. This article will analyze what evidence exists and will use evidence from other White Star ships to try and construct a reasonable picture of the boat-handling equipment on HMHS *Britannic's* Shade Deck.

Location of Shade Deck

HMHS *Britannic* had an extra aft deck that her sisters *Olympic* and *Titanic* did not have. This deck was originally constructed to be where two large gantry davits would sit. This Shade Deck was located one deck above the Poop Deck area. What we would call the Poop Deck on *Olympic* and *Titanic* was not a separate area on HMHS *Britannic*. It was a continuation of "B" deck. The Shade Deck on HMHS *Britannic* was a separated deck area which was not connected to "A" deck forward of it. Figure 1 shows the extent of the Shade Deck on HMHS *Britannic*.

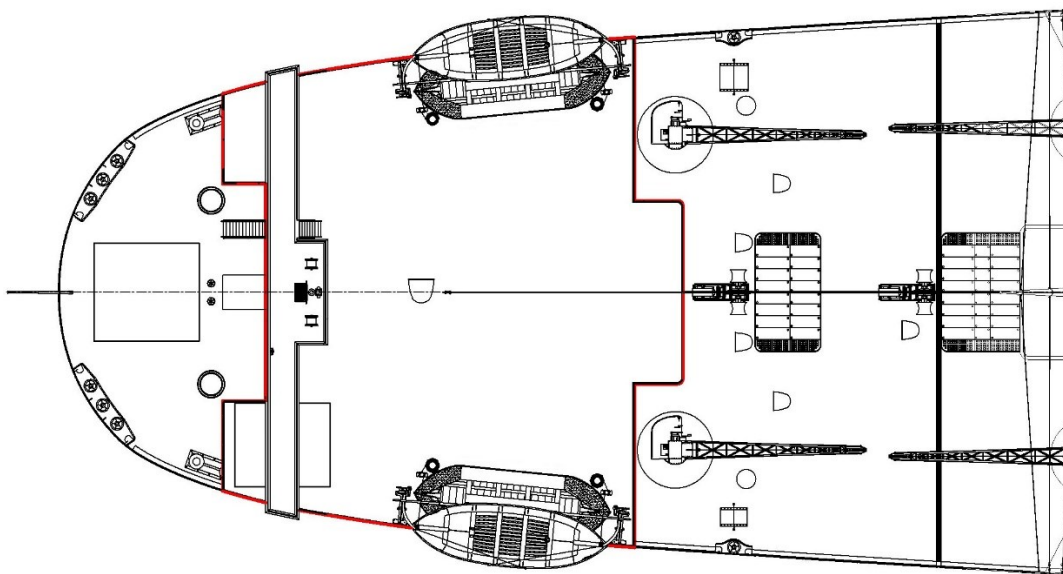


Figure 1

HMHS *Britannic* Shade Deck outlined in red

Purpose of HMHS *Britannic's* Shade Deck

Some have thought that since the shade deck was not used for the gantry davits and nested boats on HMHS *Britannic* that it was used for a promenade or lounging area. I don't believe that the evidence supports this notion. If we examine this area in photos, there are always very few persons visible on this deck. We can't identify any deck benches anywhere on this deck.

What *is* seen on the shade deck are a 30 ft. wooden emergency boat (P & S) and a 30 ft. McLean collapsible boat (P & S) under Welin single acting davits. A single-acting davit could only service boats placed directly between the davit frames. It was not capable of reaching inboard to lift a second row of boats like the double-acting davits on *Olympic* and *Titanic* could.

The Set-up of Emergency Boats on the Shade Deck

The first question which must be answered is why are the wooden boats on the shade deck considered "emergency boats"? The biggest clue that these are emergency boats is how they are secured in the davits. The boats are kept suspended in the davits like emergency boats. The second clue is that a "stabilizing spar" is lashed to the davits so that the outboard gripes can be tightened against the boat to bring it into contact with the stabilizing spar to keep the emergency boat from swinging. Figure 2 shows a stabilizing spar rigged on the radial davits of an emergency boat on RMS *Oceanic*.

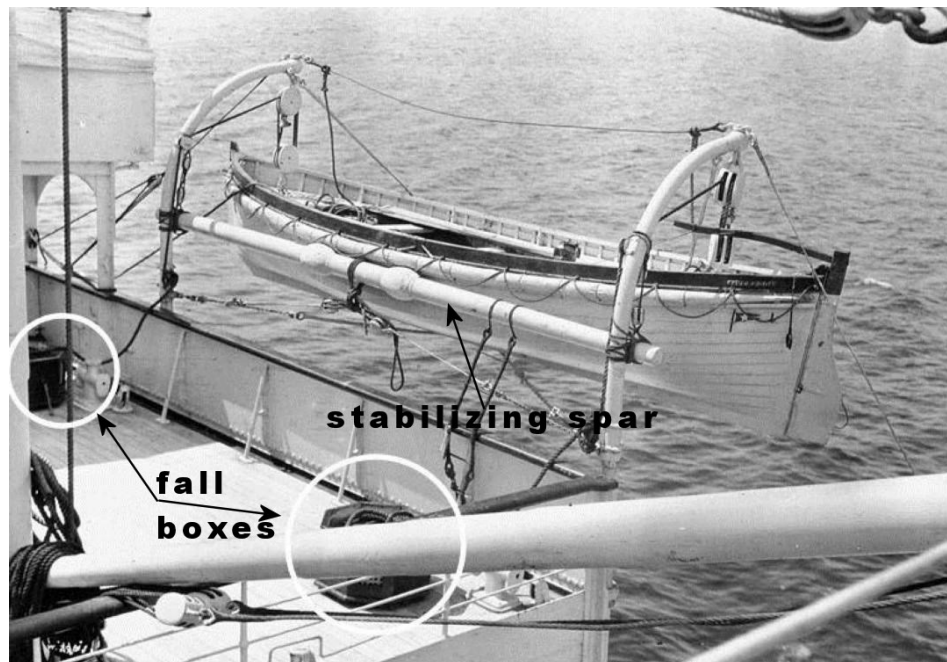


Figure 2

Stabilizing spar and fall boxes for RMS *Oceanic's* emergency boat



Figure 3

Stabilizing spar on HMHS *Britannic's* starboard emergency boat on Shade Deck

Launch of an Emergency Boat on HMHS *Britannic*

To launch one of HMHS *Britannic's* emergency boats the procedure would be straightforward much like the launch of the emergency boats on *Titanic*.

1. The outboard gripes are cast off.
2. Crew would man the boat.
3. The davits would be rotated outboard.
4. Deck crew would man the free end of the falls at the boat bitts.
5. Emergency boat is lowered at boat bitts according to boat captain's orders.
6. When waterborne, the disengaging gear in the boat disengages from lower fall blocks.
7. Boat is free to navigate.

Figure 4 shows emergency boat ready to be lowered (without boat crew onboard).

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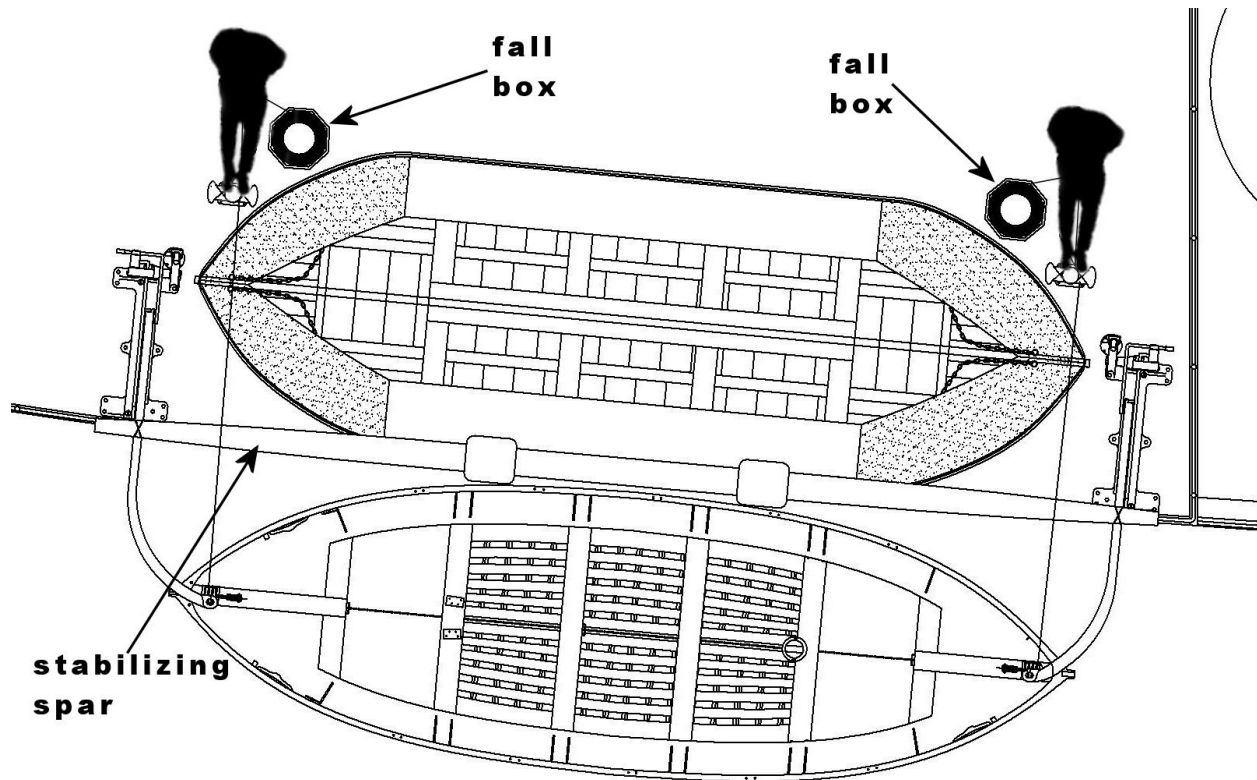


Figure 4

Emergency boat ready for launching

Recovery of Emergency Boats

On plans and in photos, there is no indication of any boat winches on the shade deck. Since boat winches were expensive items of equipment, I don't believe there were any boat winches on the Shade Deck. I believe the cargo winch at cargo hatch #6 was also used as a boat winch for the emergency boats on the Shade Deck of HMHS *Britannic*.

The procedures to recover the emergency boats were:

1. Portable sheaves were placed in sockets on the Shade Deck.
2. The fall ropes from the fall boxes were removed and run through the permanent deck sheaves below the davit frame pully.
3. The fall ropes were run through the portable deck pulleys.
4. The fall ropes were run over the horizontal roller fairleads at the forward end of the Shade Deck.
5. The fall ropes were wound around the warping drums of the winch for cargo hatch #6.

6. The fall blocks near the water which were previously disengaged are re-engaged with the boat's disengaging gear.
7. The boat is then raised by activating the winch to haul on the free end of the fall ropes.
8. Once the boat has been raised and unloaded, the gripes are rigged and the boat is drawn against the stabilizing spar.
9. The inboard ends of the falls are belayed to the boat bits.
10. The free ends of the falls are coiled in the fall boxes.
11. Portable deck sheaves are stowed.

I believe the fall boxes for these emergency boats were like those seen aboard RMS *Oceanic* in Figure 2. Figure 5 shows the emergency boat ready to be raised by the cargo winch at cargo hatch #6.

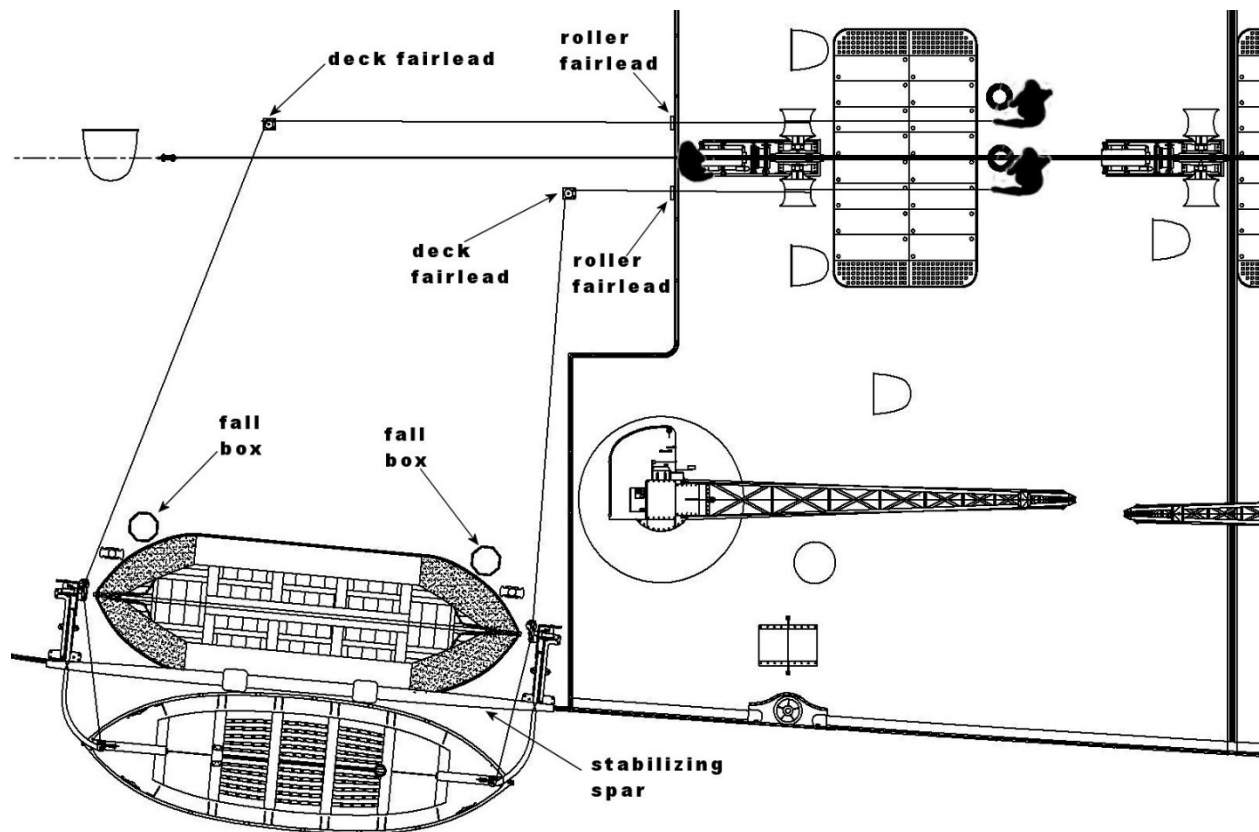


Figure 5

Emergency boat ready to be raised

The roller fairlead at the forward end of the shade deck would be like the those used on *Titanic* as shown in Figure 6 except that they would be mounted horizontally.

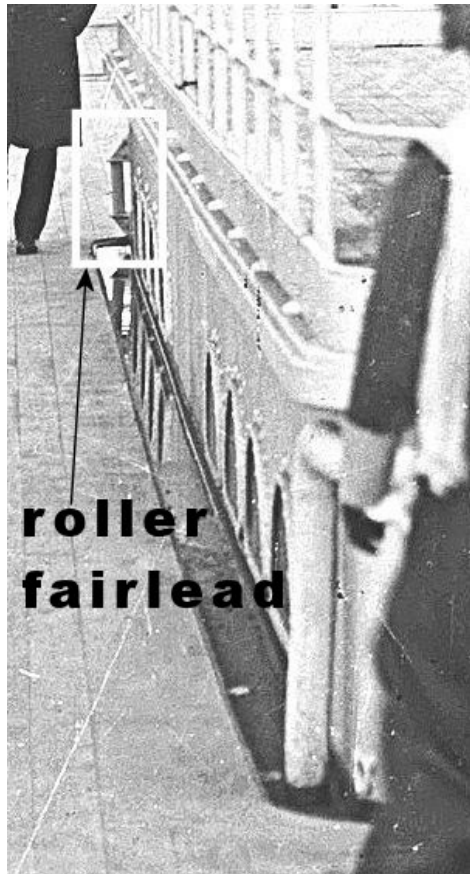


Figure 6

Vertically mounted roller fairlead for boat retrieval on *Titanic*

The emergency boats are shown in their stowed at-the-ready position in Figure 1. Figure 7 is a plan view showing the layout of fairleads and fall paths to the cargo winch at cargo hatch #6 on "B" deck.

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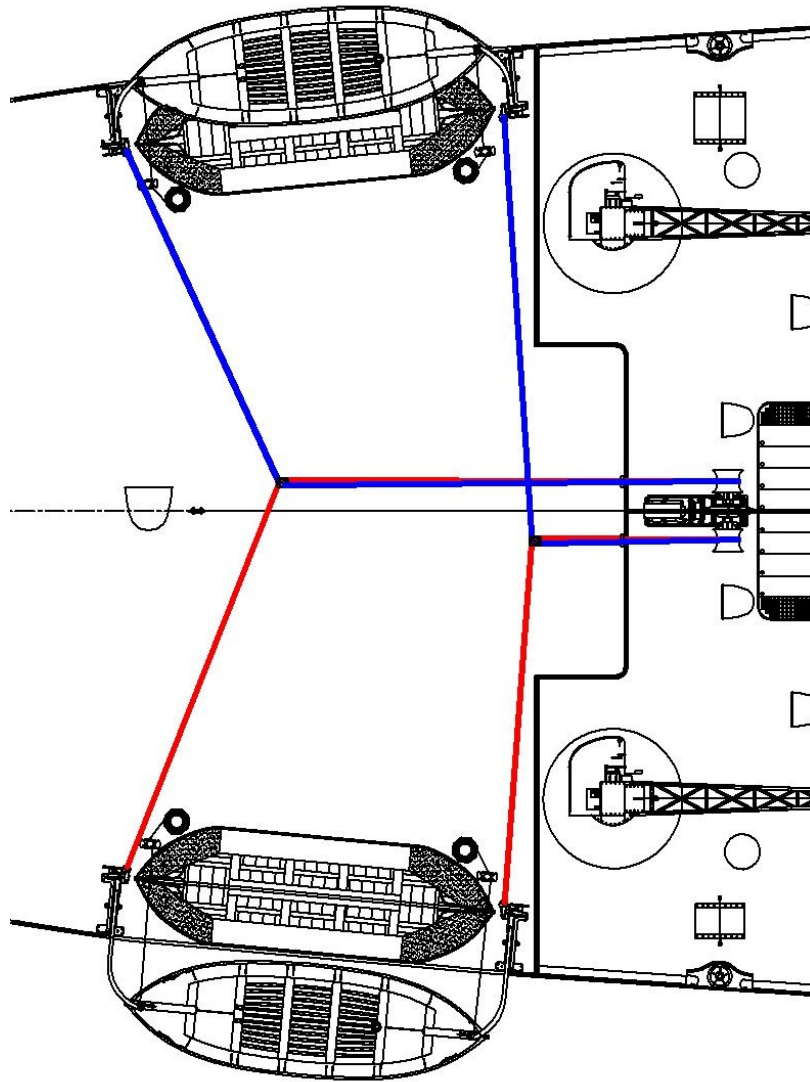


Figure 7

Layout of fall paths through fairleads to the cargo winch at cargo hatch #6

Conclusion

It is my belief that the description of boat-handling on HMHS *Britannic's* Shade deck is close to the reality that actually existed. I believe this was a "crew only" area dedicated to the readiness of the emergency boats.