

Color Guide for the *Olympic* Class Ships

By Bob Read, D.M.D.

Introduction

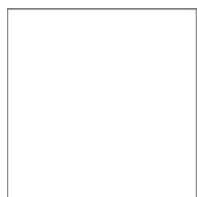
This **exterior** color guide is being produced primarily for the modeler. Although color photography existed during the time of the *Olympic* class ships, there is only one verified color photo which includes *Olympic*. It is a long-distance photo of limited value. Where there is some evidence for particular colors, links to articles discussing how we have arrived at particular colors will be provided. There is probably no other aspect of the structure of these ships which has generated more controversy. Where evidence exists, it will be provided. In cases where no evidence exists, colors which conform to the BS381C color standard. This particular standard was a collection of commonly used colors in the early part of the 20th century. Every attempt will be made not to include entirely arbitrary color choices.

Important Note: Many of the period black and white photos were taken with blue-sensitive black and white film. This type of film tended to make warm colors such as reds, yellows, and oranges appear much darker than in modern panchromatic film. Usually, the only photos taken with panchromatic film were those taken by professional photographers.

Titanic Colors



Black – Main hull, top of funnels, all cargo hatch coamings except #4 (P & S), waterways, and other structures painted black. This is a black which has faded somewhat. Therefore, it is actually a dark gray.



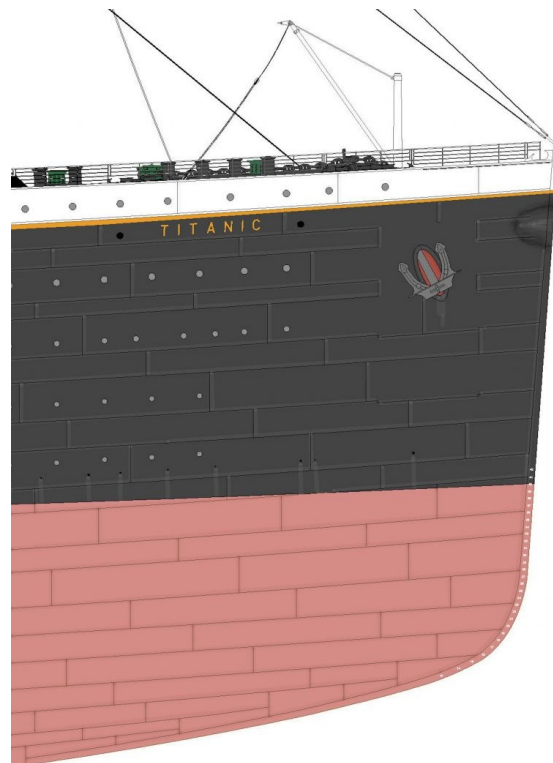
White – White painted part of ship, deckhouses, lifeboat hulls, # 4 cargo hatch coamings and other structures painted white.



Antifouling – This is the color of the lower hull, wing propeller hubs, propeller roots, fairwaters, center propeller fairwater. The investigation into this color is found here: [Titanic's Antifouling Paint \(revised\)](#) and here: [Paint Application to Titanic's Propellers](#)



Antifouling paint remnant of Titanic propeller



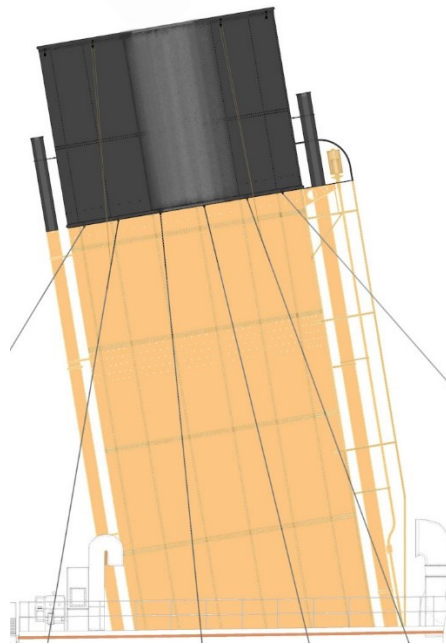
Drawing of antifouling paint on *Titanic* hull



Yellow – This color of yellow was used for the sheer line between the hull black and white. It is also used for the vessel name and port of registry on the bow and stern.



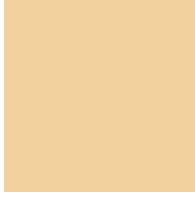
Buff – Also known as “White Star Buff” was used on the lower part of the funnels. Investigations into this color can be found here: [Narrowing the Range of White Star Buff](#) and here: [White Star Buff: The Case for More Than One Formulation of the Color](#)



Drawing showing application of “White Star Buff” to funnel



Stone – This color was applied to the interior of the lifeboats.



Wood Decks – The wood decks on *Titanic* were not painted. The color shown here is an acceptable color for a model with painted decks. The wood decks were mostly yellow pine with certain areas being either pitch pine or teak.



Examples of the types of woods used on *Titanic's* decks



Natural Canvas – Used on hatch covers where canvas was used.



White Canvas – Used on boat covers.



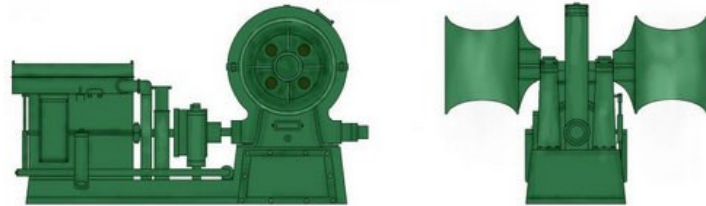
Red – Used on interior of the port navigational light enclosure and on water hydrants



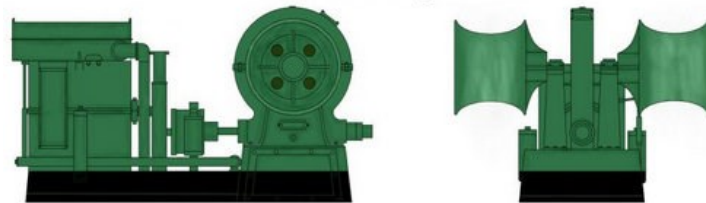
Green – Used on the interior of the starboard navigational light enclosure and as the main color used on winches, windlasses and capstans. The case for green painted equipment is presented here: [The Case for Titanic's Capstans and Windlasses Being Painted Green](#)



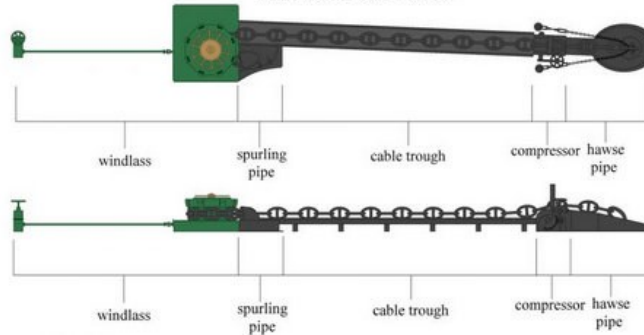
Steam Winch



Electric Cargo Winch



Electric Boat Winch



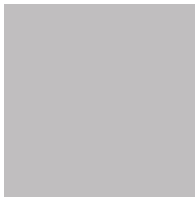
Various green-painted equipment



Medium Gray – Bridge roof, wingcab roofs, officers' mess roof, engineers' smokeroom roof, elevator gear house roof atop aft second-class boat deck entrance, roof over kennels, top of electric crane bases.



Dark Gray – Top of boiler casings (rectangular area under funnels), top of tank room, top of reciprocating engine casing.



Concrete – Concrete bases under electric fan ventilators and steam winches.



Dark Mast – Masts, well deck dadoes, lifeboat gunwales, and brass framed windows. A discussion of this color is found here: [An Examination of the Color "Dark Mast" Found on Titanic](#)



Bronze – The propellers, whistles, capstan tops, and windlass clutch wheels were bronze. A metallic bronze paint should be used if these items are painted. A more ideal solution is if these items are actually made of bronze.

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Bronze Propeller



Brass – Navigating bridge and docking bridge telegraphs. Like bronze, a metallic paint should be used but a more ideal solution is for these items to actually be made from brass.



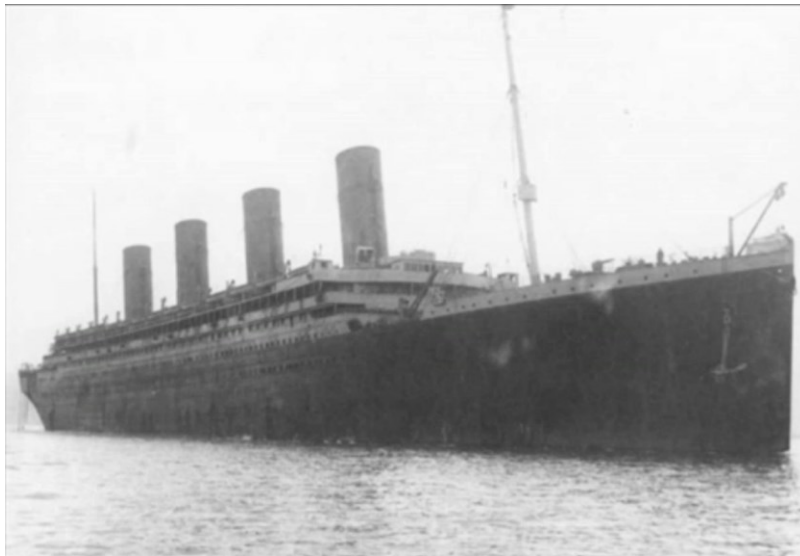
Brass Telegraph

Olympic Colors

Since Olympic had a long career, she displayed different paint schemes depending upon the period.

1911 – 1914 – Identical to *Titanic* colors. The only exceptions might be the waterproofed roof on the navigating bridge and the wingcabs. As she entered service, the roof of the navigating bridge was painted white. They may have changed to the *Titanic* gray colors before 1914.

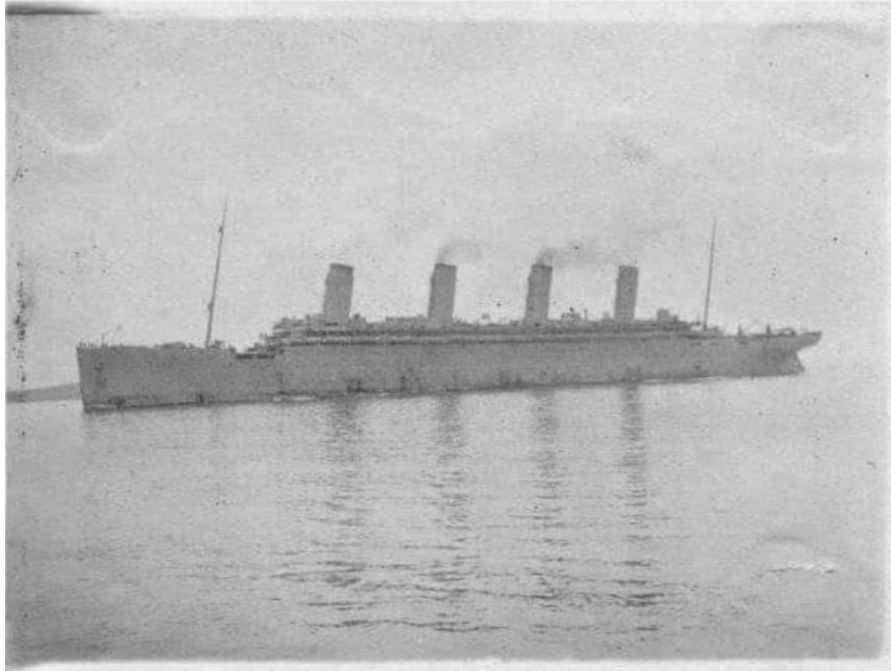
1914 – 1917 - During her service during WWI the Admiralty specified a number of paint schemes may be termed “camouflage”. The first camouflage scheme was that *Olympic* was painted in varying shades of gray. All of the former white painted structures were now painted light gray. The masts were painted light gray. The funnels were painted uniformly a medium gray. These are the only areas we can see in photos but other formerly color painted areas are likely painted some shade of gray.



Olympic 1914 - 1917

Early to Mid-1917 – The dates here are imprecise but we have evidence that after *Olympic's* first camouflage scheme and before here “dazzle” camouflage schemes that she was painted a uniform light gray.

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Olympic early to mid-1917

Mid-1917 to Armistice – Dazzle camouflage period

During the period mid-1917 to the Armistice of WWI His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* had two schemes of camouflage known as "dazzle". These were camouflage schemes with colors and shapes meant not to hide ships but to make their identification, range, and direction of travel difficult to determine. I have analyzed all the material I could regarding *Olympic's* two camouflage schemes during this period. Her earliest dazzle camouflage scheme was designated 19A (modified). It was applied some time in 1917 and remained until sometime in 1918. Her second dazzle camouflage scheme designated 19Ax was applied sometime in 1918 and remained through the Armistice. I found it impossible to determine definitive patterns and colors for these two schemes. It was possible to determine a close approximation of both schemes but the obstacles were:

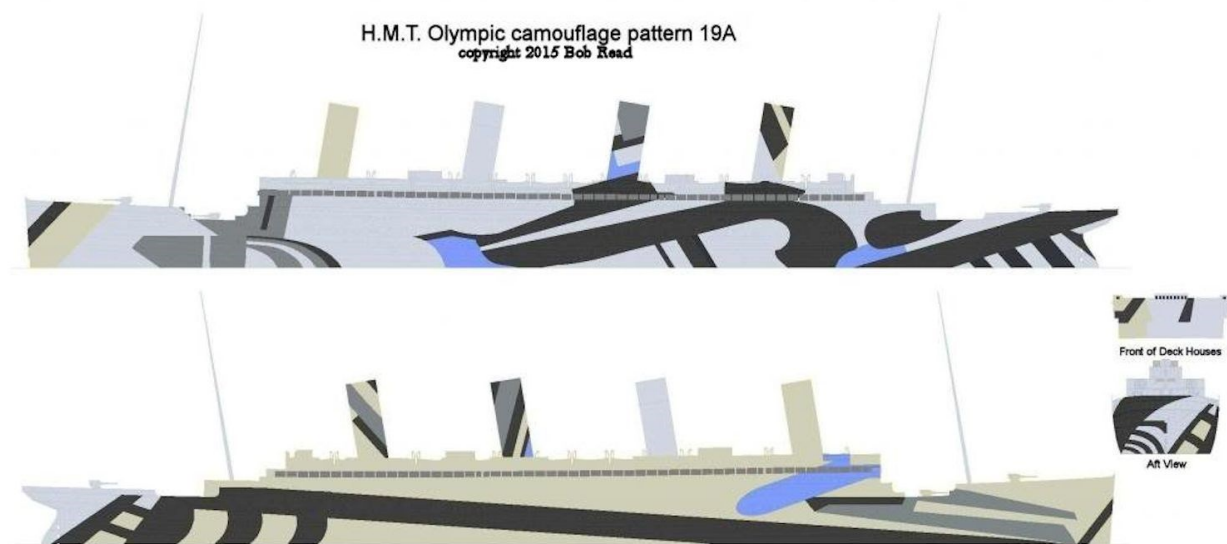
1. Drawn patterns did not completely agree with each other.
2. Photos of the patterns did not completely agree with each other.
3. Drawn patterns and photos did not agree with each other.

4. Colors found in some drawn patterns did not agree with colors in others.

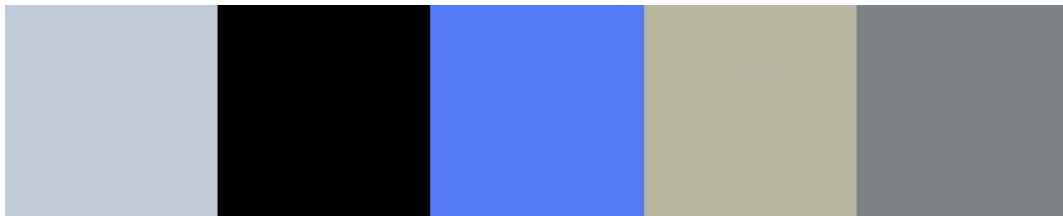
The pattern discrepancies were not major. But they were just enough so that no single definitive pattern could be identified. Colors varied because of many factors having to do with staining or fading of original documents. From photos it was clear that some colors faded and wore more quickly than others. Since there were no color photos with which to compare drawn color schemes to, shade and brightness were not possible to be determined definitively.

The colors found in each scheme below would be their “as painted” and freshest appearance. Also painting guides were general and many were not ship specific. Exact locations of pattern boundaries are difficult to determine and had to be done by photo analysis. There were many areas of the deck houses where no photo evidence exists. For these areas I would suggest painting a light blue or light gray from the color palette for that camouflage scheme. The modeler wishing to model HMT Olympic in one of these schemes should look at photos of H.M.T. Olympic and see how these patterns and colors weathered. All colors represented here would be quite faded in their weathered appearance.

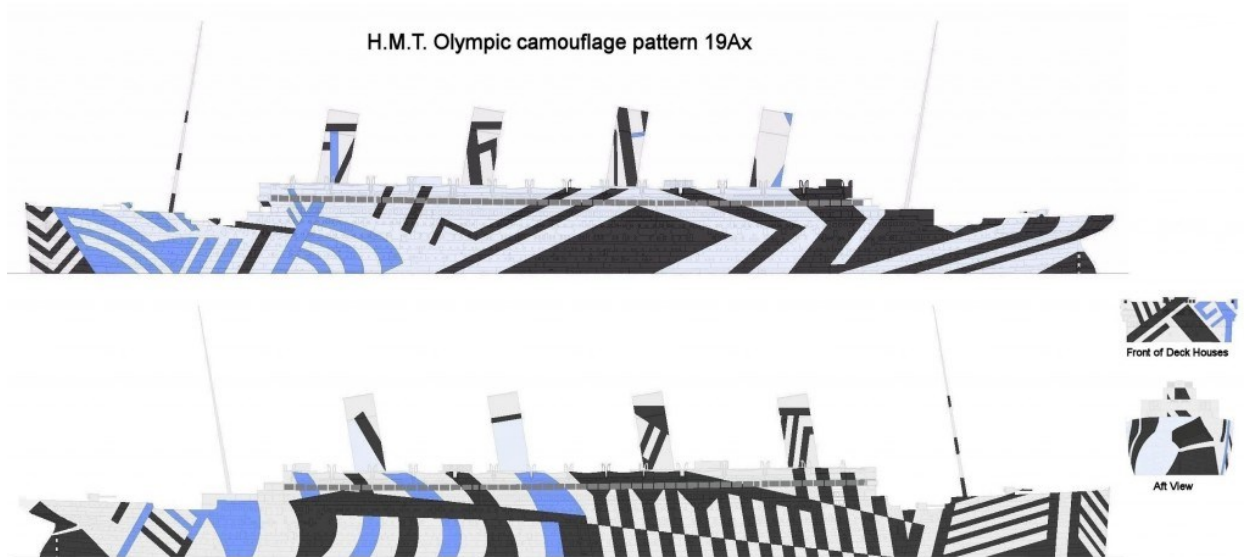
Note: Below the waterline she was painted antifouling red as shown above for the other ships.



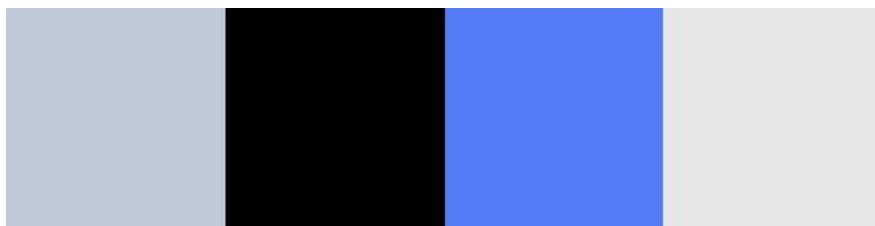
Camouflage scheme 19A



Color palette camouflage scheme 19A



Camouflage scheme 19AX



Color palette camouflage scheme 19AX

Post-WWI to end of career – There were a number of changes made to *Olympic's* White Star paint livery post-WWI. The most notable may have been a change to the funnel color. While not certain, I made a circumstantial case for this change in this article: [White Star Buff: The Case for More Than One Formulation of the Color](#). Some time during this period we see the aft cargo cranes appear to be painted black. The sheer line was lowered during this period and did not proceed completely around the stern. The style of the vessel name on the bows was also altered.

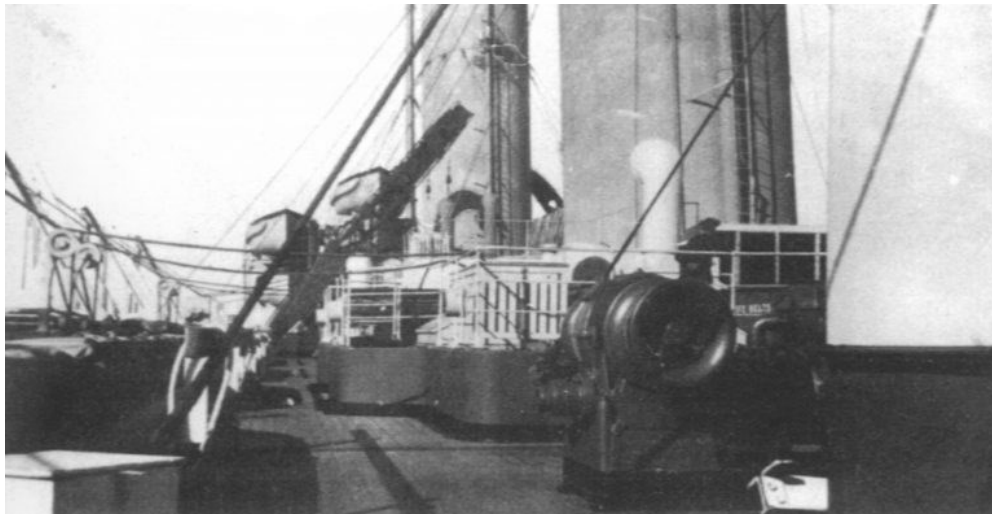
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H.M.H.S. Britannic Colors

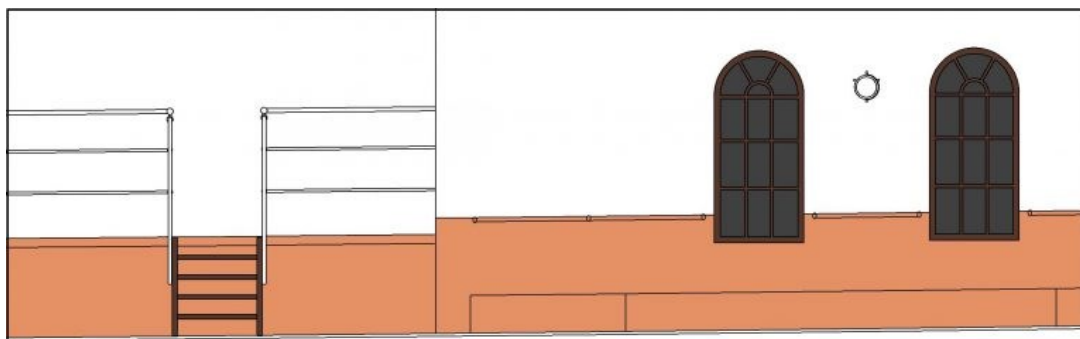
Since R.M.S. Britannic never saw service, only colors for HMHS Britannic will be given.



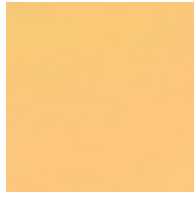
Dark Mast - In her later career, HMHS Britannic had the Boat Deck deckhouses from the handrails to the deck, the sides of the raised roofs and the gantry davits painted this color. Boat gunwales were this color. The following photos show how the boat deck areas were painted.



Deck photo of later HMHS Britannic



Drawing of Dark Mast application



Yellow (light) - Entire funnel, masts, ventilators atop Boat Deck deckhouses. Gantry davits early in her career. No sheer stripe on Britannic.



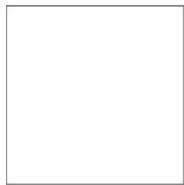
Yellow (dark) – Vessel name on bows and stern. Port of Registry



Green - Broad hull band and the hull band on the 34 ft. motor lifeboats.



Red - The red crosses on the hull and on the 34 ft. motor lifeboats.



White – The base color for the hull and superstructure was white.



Antifouling – Lower hull

