

# The Configurations of *Titanic's* Fidley Vent Covers

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## Introduction

Since the discovery of *Titanic's* wreck, many attempts have been made to describe the configurations of the covers over the openings of *Titanic's* fidley vents. The problems encountered in these efforts have been due to the lack of evidence. There are no original photos showing these covers. There are no surviving plans which show the covers. Wreck photos show some evidence but much of it is incomplete. This article will identify where there is actual evidence and where it is incomplete or non-existent.

The convention used to identify the fidley covers is shown in Figures 1-3. Each cover will be identified by one number and two letters. The number indicates which funnel. The first letter indicates whether the fidley cover is forward or aft of the funnel. The second letter indicates whether the fidley cover is port or starboard of the funnel. These are noted in red in the drawings.

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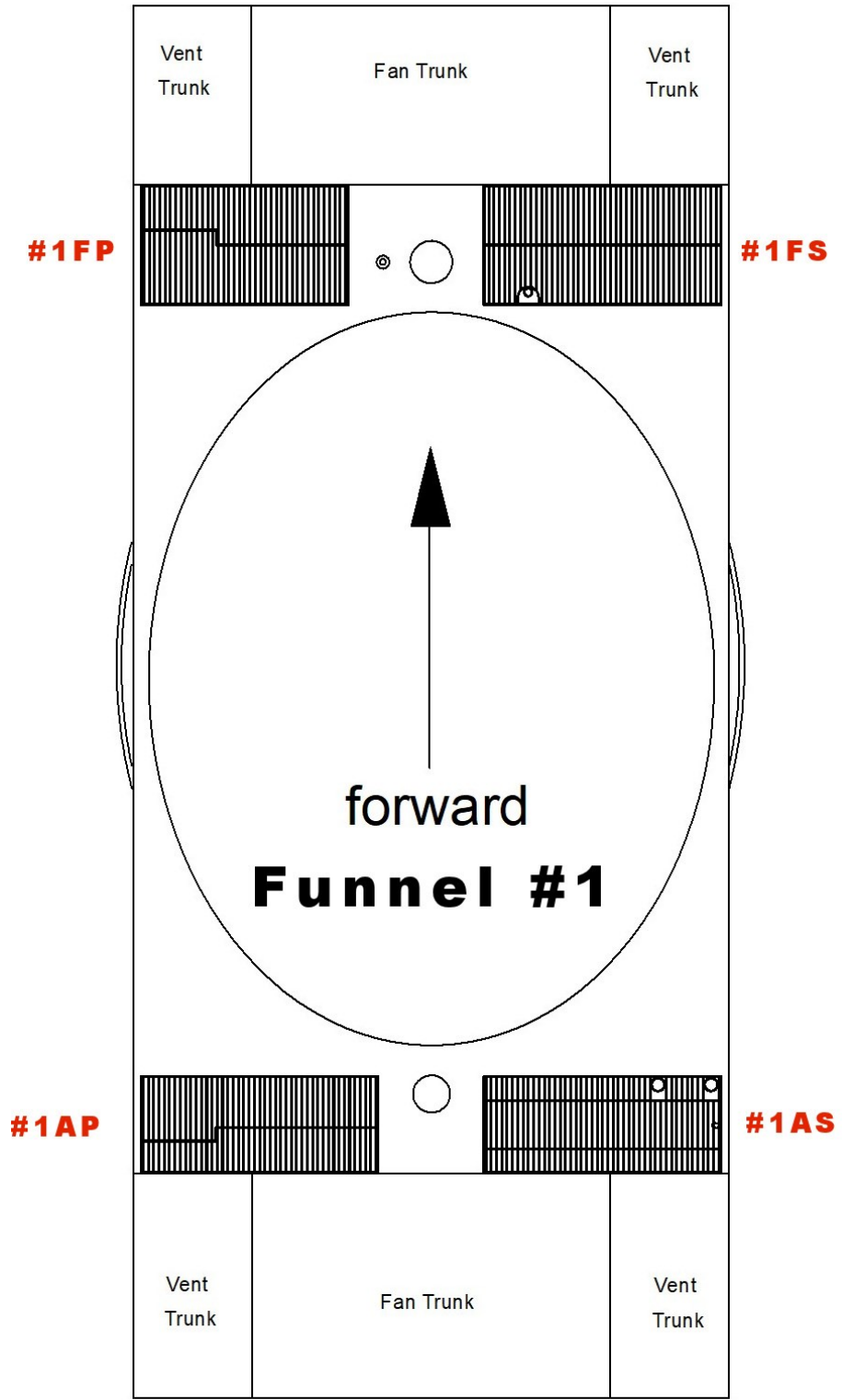


Figure 1

Fidley vent covers of funnel #1

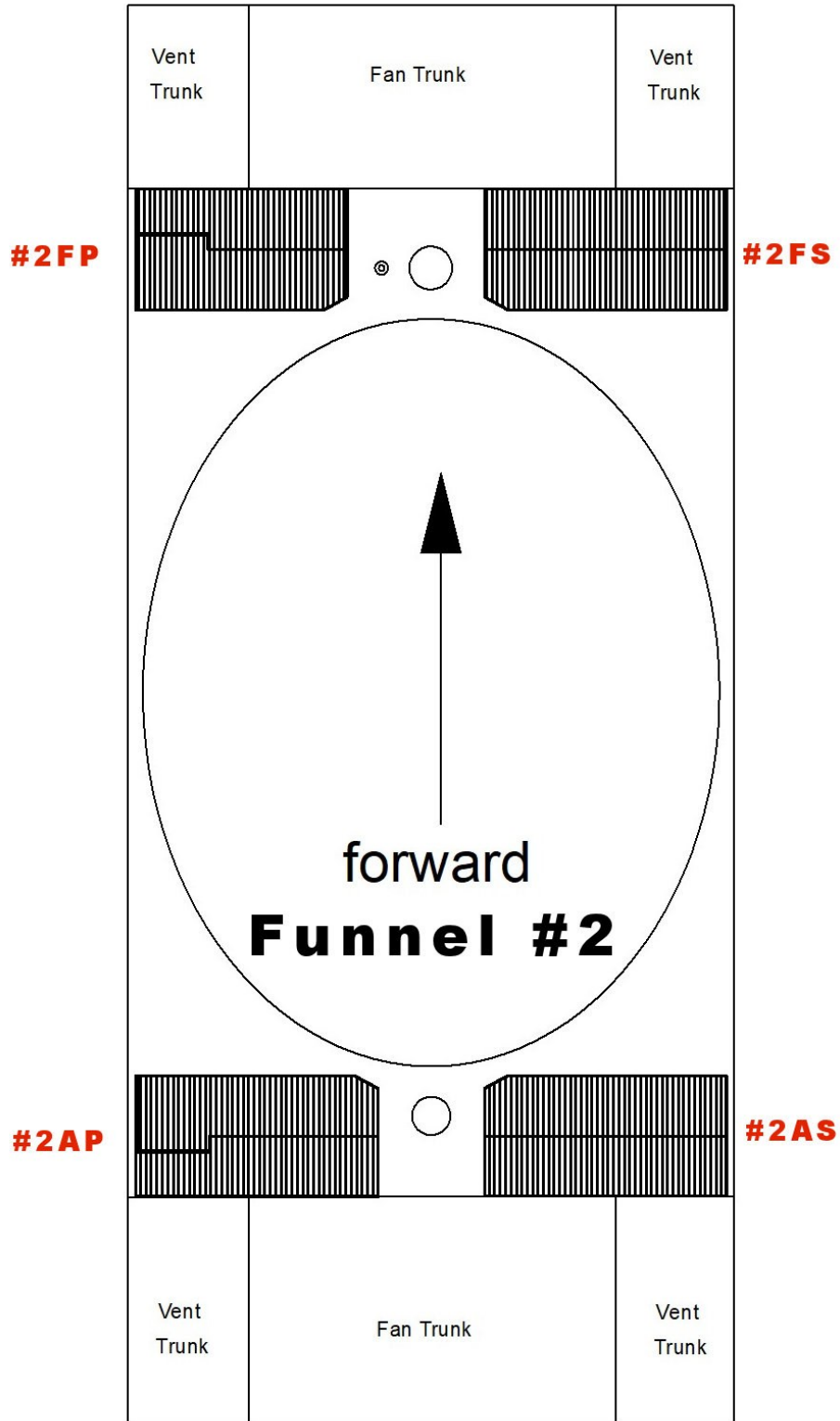


Figure 2

Fidley vent covers of funnel #2

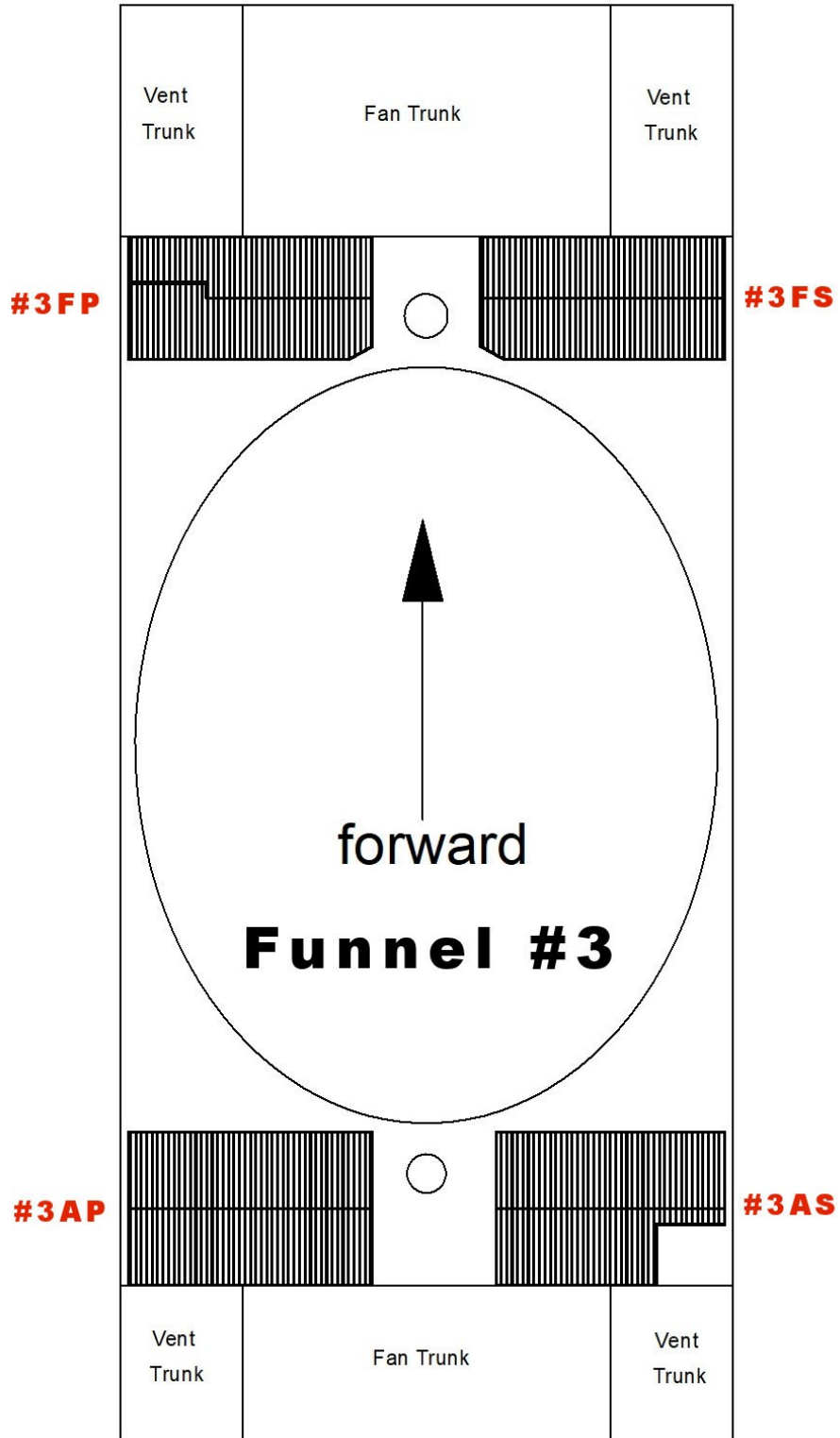


Figure 3

Fidley vent covers of funnel #3

## Covers or Gratings?

The difference between covers and gratings is one of function. The main similarity is that both allow air to pass through them. The difference is that a grating is strong enough to support foot traffic. A cover in the case of *Titanic's* fidley covers appears not to be made to support foot traffic. Rather than being made up of heavier iron bars like the catwalks in the engine room, the diameter of the bars was such that they were closer to being screens. Figure 4 shows how the bars in one of the covers on *Titanic's* wreck have bent. This would suggest that the fidley covers were not suitable for regular foot traffic.



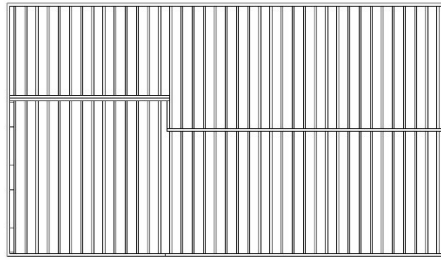
Figure 4

Bent bars of one of *Titanic's* fidley covers

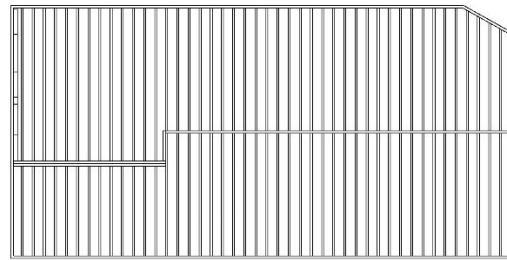
### Types of fidley vent covers

The fidley vents aboard *Titanic* had two main shapes. Figure 5 shows the two types of shapes.

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**Rectangular fidley cover**

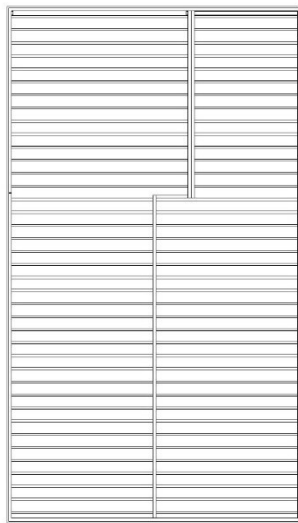


**Fidley cover with beveled corner**

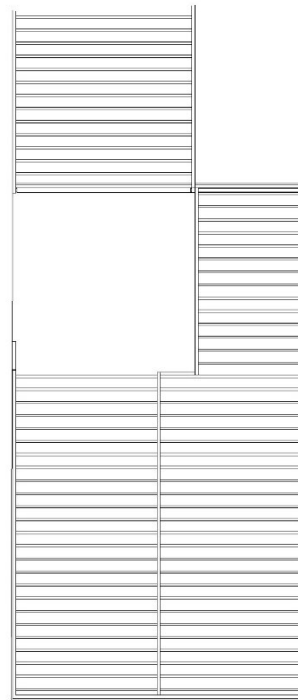
Figure 5

### Two shapes of fidley covers

In addition to the two types of shapes, some of the fidley covers had hinged hatches built into them. There were ladders from the boiler rooms whereby these hatches could be opened to allow access to and from the fidley vent space. Figure 6 shows these opening hatches



**hatch closed**



**hatch open**

Figure 6

### Fidley hatches closed and open

## Survey by Funnel

In this section the fidley cover pairs will be analyzed according to their respective funnels.

### Funnel #1

#### Forward fidley covers

The two fidley covers #1FP and #1FS are shown in Figure 1. These two covers have four right angle corners. As shown in Figure 7. Cover #1FP has a hatch on its aft port side.

Reliability: Completely reliable. With photos showing the port cover in its entirety, the starboard cover is identical except for the absence of a hatch.



Figure 7

Fidley cover #1FP and #1FS

### **Aft fidley covers**

The two fidley covers aft of funnel #1 are shown in Figure 8. These two fidley covers #1AP and #1AS are obscured by a water tank on the starboard side and debris on the port side.

Reliability: Mostly unreliable. Not enough of the fidley covers are visible enough to show whether they are completely rectangular or whether they have beveled corners on their forward inboard sides. There is a high-resolution photo showing the outboard end of the port fidley which shows a hatch on the ouboard forward side. I am not at liberty to share this particular photo.



Figure 8

Fidley covers #1AP and #1AS mostly obstructed

## Funnel #2

### **Forward fidley covers**

The forward port fidley cover, #2FP is shown in Figure 9. It can be seen that it has a beveled inboard aft corner. It also has an outboard aft hatch. The #2FS fidley cover would also have a beveled inboard aft corner but no hatch since they were only installed on the port side fidleys.

Reliability: Completely reliable. The quality of detail of the photo of #2FP fidley allows us to extrapolate the configuration of #2FS fidley.

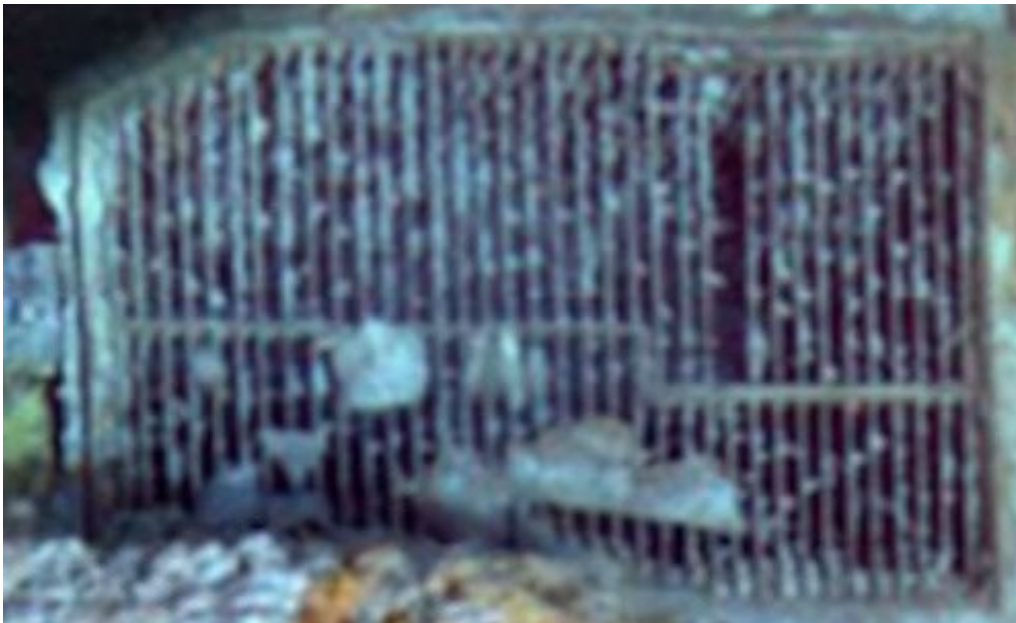


Figure 9

Fidley cover #2FP

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### Aft fidley covers

Fidley cover #2AP is partially visible in Figure 10 but the cover #2AS is missing.



Figure 10

Fidley #2AP (obscured) and #2AS (missing)

There is however, a high-quality photo which shows the outline of the #2AS missing cover. This appears to show a beveled forward inboard corner. Because of damage, the bevel appears to be curved but the intact forward covers of funnel #2 which have beveled corners are not curved.

Reliability: Fairly high. The damage to the open fidley duct precludes absolute certainty but it appears more likely than not that the inboard forward corner of the missing cover would be beveled.

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Figure 11

Opening for missing cover #2AS with what appears to be a beveled corner (circled in red). Photo courtesy of Cyril Codus which was posted in a Facebook Titanic forum.

### Funnel #3

The entire deckhouse which once contained the fidley covers has been destroyed on *Titanic's* wreck.

Reliability: Completely speculative due to the lack of evidence.

### Summary of Evidence

Of the six pairs of fidley covers which were located around *Titanic's* first three funnels, only three provided enough evidence to identify the configurations of those fidley covers. Figure 12 shows the fidley cover pairs for which we have sufficient evidence which are highlighted in green.

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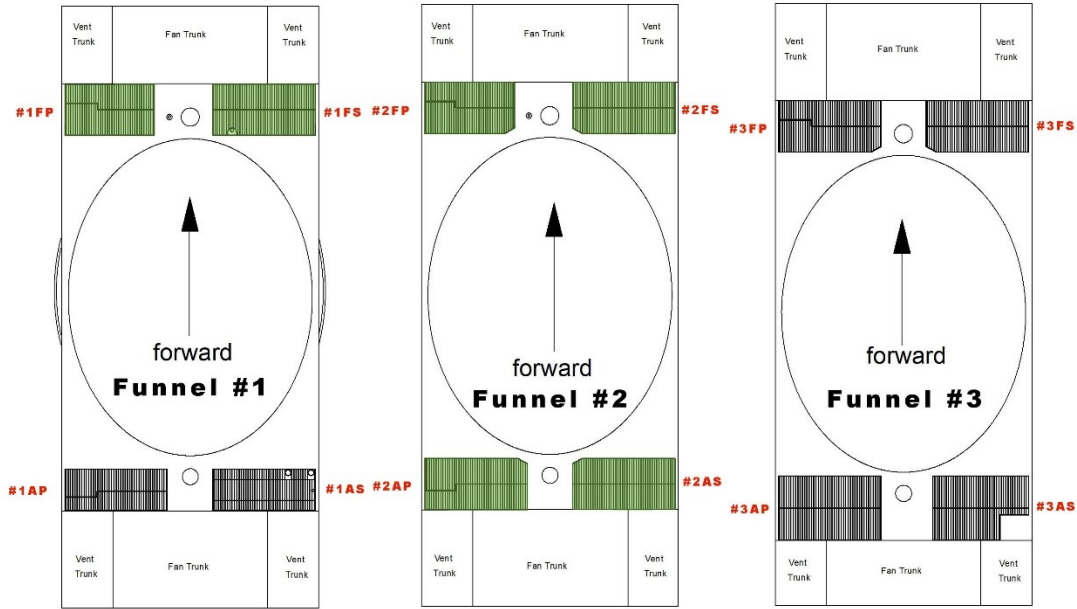


Figure 12

*Titanic* fidley covers for which there is sufficient evidence to identify their configurations (in green)

If this were merely an academic exercise, this article could end here. However, modelers and artists must make a decision about how to represent the fidley covers which have insufficient evidence.

### Alternative Sources of Evidence

In order to form educated speculation about the pairs of *Titanic's* fidley covers with insufficient evidence, we can look at three sources. These sources of alternative evidence are *Olympic* evidence, *Britannic* evidence, and general evidence.

### Olympic Evidence

One would think that with 24 years in service that there would be an abundance of evidence from *Olympic*. Unfortunately, that is not the case. There are early photos of the area of the fidley covers but they were all taken while in port with solid covers in place of the type we see on *Titanic*. Some have interpreted the presence of these solid covers as early *Olympic's* fidley trunks being plated over. I have addressed this particular controversy here: [Early Olympic fidley article](#).

The only other photo which shows the area around any of the fidley covers is one of the aft aspect of funnel #3. The evidence from this photo is far from clear. This photo is shown in Figure 13.

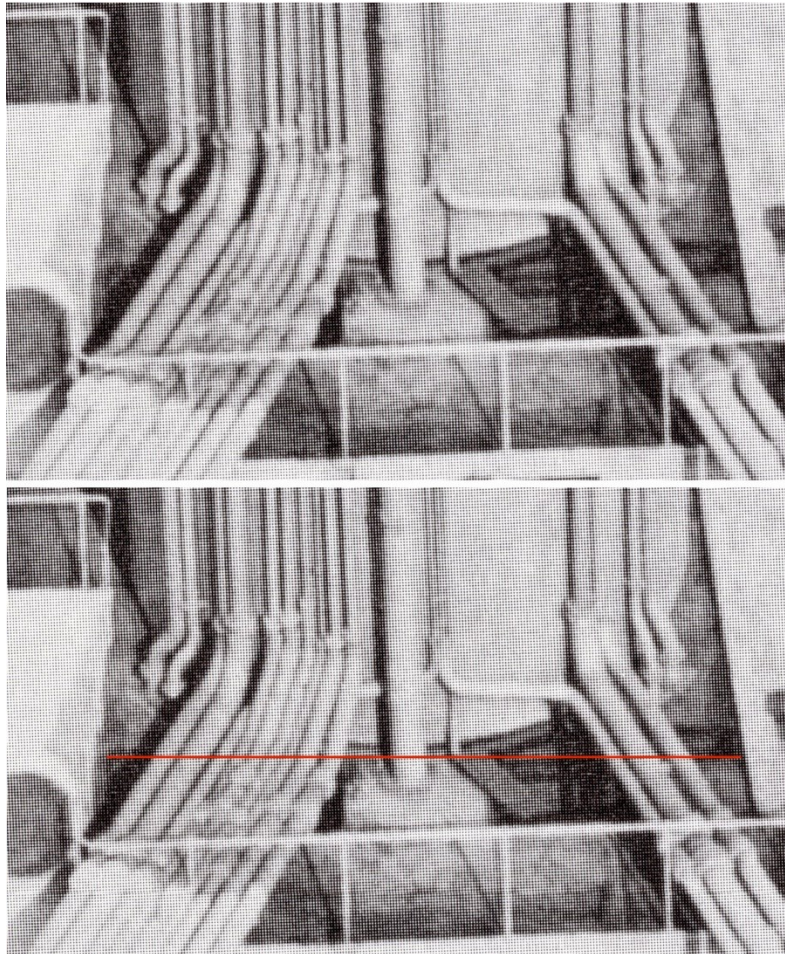


Figure 13

### Area aft of *Olympic's* third funnel

It has been interpreted as showing fidley cover #3AS as having a bevel on its inboard forward corner. I believe this is a misinterpretation. It appears that there are boards placed around this fidley cover which give the impression of a cover with a beveled corner. In the photo I have indicated in red where the forward part of the fidley cover could be. This is the boundary between that aft extent of the boiler casing and the forward extent of the fidley vent trunk. However, the corner where a bevel would be is covered by one of these boards. Thus, I believe that this photo provides no answer either way about the shape of the fidley covers aft of *Olympic's* funnel #3.

## Britannic Evidence

We have no definitive wreck evidence about the configurations of the fidley covers of *Britannic*. The only evidence is a general arrangement plan of the boat deck deckhouse roofs which shows the outlines of the fidley covers. The plan is shown in Figure 14.

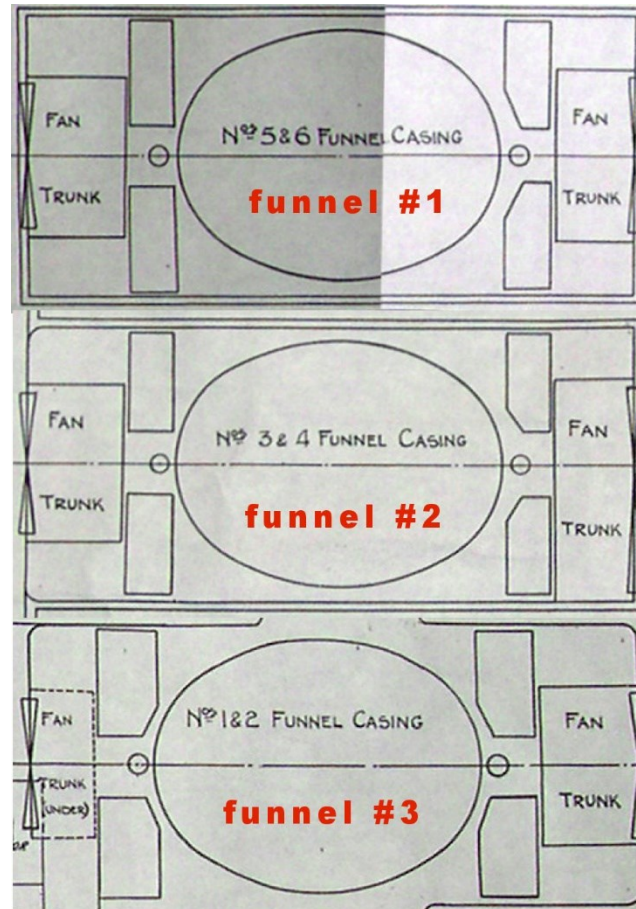


Figure 14

### G/A plan of *Britannic* boat deck deckhouse roofs

The question is whether these G/A plans represent the fidley covers as the ship was actually built. The other question is whether it correlates with *Titanic's* configuration. As can be seen the fidley cover configuration aft of funnel #2 doesn't correlate with that of *Titanic*. If *Britannic* evidence fails to correlate with *Titanic's* at any point, there can be little confidence in using *Britannic's* G/A plan evidence to substitute for *Titanic* evidence.

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## General Sources of Evidence

One question which we might ask is what is the reason that the inboard corners on the side nears the funnels were beveled? Earlier it was shown that these covers might not stand up to foot traffic. About the only reason that comes to mind for these beveled corners is that they created a foot path with steel plating under foot so that crew could walk athwartship around a funnel. It is difficult to find a general rule for the use of these fidley covers with beveled corners. It seems that if there was any significant obstruction to a path around the funnel, such as a water pipe that intersected the path, that beveled fidley covers would not be used because they wouldn't want crew to step on water pipes to walk around a funnel. Where there was no obstruction, it appears that they created a footpath by the use of beveled fidley covers. So how does this theory hold up?

Forward of the first funnel there are pipes which obstruct a clear path around the funnel so rectangular fidley covers are used as we see. Aft of the first funnel a footpath is obstructed by a water tank so we would predict that rectangular fidley covers would be used.

Forward of the second funnel there are no obstructions so we find beveled fidley covers. Aft of the second funnel there are no obstructions so there are beveled fidley covers as the evidence suggests.

Forward of the third funnel there are no obstructions so we would predict beveled fidley covers. Aft of the funnel there are multiple pipe obstructions so we would expect rectangular fidley covers. This rule seems to hold for titanic fidley covers as seen in Figures 1-3.

The fidley hatches appear to follow the pattern of 2 hatches (one forward and one aft) on the port side of the funnel. I believe the aft port fidley cover (#3AP) of funnel #3 did not have a hatch in the fidley cover. The pipes are arranged such that a hatch in the fidley cover could not open. It also appears that to accommodate this lack of a fidley hatch on the aft port side that they added a crew stairway aft of the #3 funnel deckhouse.

In order to reach the boat deck from boiler rooms 1 and 2, one simple way would be to climb the ladder in the fidley space up to E deck. At E deck on the port side, one would exit a door and enter the next door aft of it to gain access to the crew stairway. This crew stairway could then be taken up to the boat deck. Figure 15 shows the path on E deck from the fidley ladder to the crew stairway then up to the boat deck.

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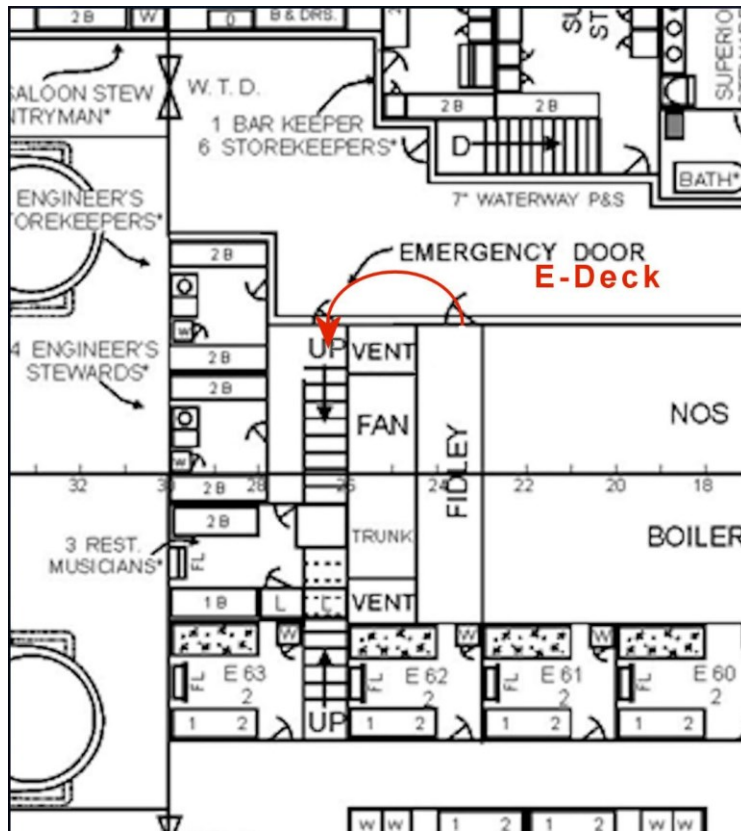


Figure 15

*Titanic's* E deck path from the fidley space to the crew stairway up to the boat deck

### Conclusion

There is considerable missing evidence in the investigation of the configuration of *Titanic's* fidley vent covers. The configurations of only 50% of the covers can be identified with certainty. In order to fill in the blanks in the evidence, a rule has been proposed whereby beveled fidley covers would be used where there was no other obstruction to foot traffic such as water pipes or water tanks. The rectangular fidley covers would be used where there were obstructions present. Figures 1-3 represent what I believe is a reasonable representation of the configurations of *Titanic's* fidley covers.