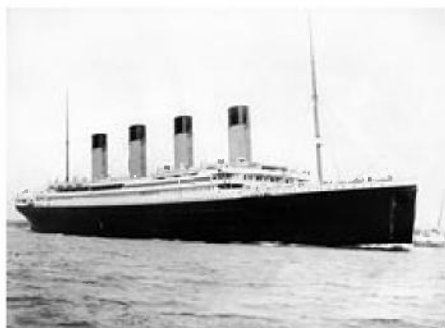


William Theodore Brailey of Walthamstow & The Titanic



It Was Sad When That Great Ship Went Down. This is the first line of the chorus of a popular song that was written after the tragic sinking of the Titanic in the early hours of the 15th April in 1912.

At 11.40pm on the night of the 14th April 1912, on her maiden voyage and en route to New York, the RMS Titanic struck an iceberg that led to her sinking three hours later. At about 2.20am the RMS Titanic disappeared below the surface of the Atlantic ocean. A disaster that resulted in the loss of 1500 lives out of the total of 2,223 people who were on board.

Ignoring the romantic images depicted in the 1997 film starring Kate Winslet and Leonardo Di Caprio that fictionalised the event, perhaps the most iconic image that we have of the tragedy, is the real fact that as the ship sank, the band played music to calm the passengers and crew as they scrambled to evacuate the stricken ship.

A Walthamstow Boy

One of the members of that band was William Theodore Ronald Brailey, a Walthamstow born young man who was only twenty four years old when he died on that fateful day.



He was born on 25 October 1887 in Walthamstow. In the 1901 Census his birth family are living at Merton Road, Walthamstow. His father, William Richard Brailey is described as a Business and Character Clairvoyant in the 1911 Census and seems to have had an interesting eclectic career. His mother, who was born Amy Jane Greenwood was the daughter of a Master Mason who lived in Clarendon Road, Walthamstow.

William Brailey junior studied piano at school and one of his first jobs was playing piano in a local hotel.

In 1902 he joined the Royal Lancashire Fusiliers regiment signing for 12 years service as a musician. He was stationed in Barbados but resigned his commission prematurely in 1907. He returned to England and lived with his birth family at 71 Lancaster Road, Ladbroke Grove, London. Sometime between 1907 and 1911 he lived in Southport where he played in the Southport Pavilion Band.

He was keen on the flying, which was still in its infancy, and made friends with Liverpool aeronautical pioneer Cecil Compton Paterson who flew from the Freshfield aerodrome. This was situated about 4 miles from Southport (on the road to Liverpool) where a young local businessman, Mr. Cecil Compton Paterson, was setting up one of England's first 'aerodromes'. It was actually just an air-strip on the firm sandy beach.

The picture below is of a biplane taking off from Freshfield aerodrome



He met and fell in love with Theresa Steinhilber. She was a Milliner and was the daughter of a naturalised German watchmaker. By now he was a very accomplished musician and in 1911, he enlisted aboard ship, playing first on the RMS *Saxonia*, prior to joining the Cunard steamer RMS *Carpathia* in 1912, where he met the French cellist Roger Marie Bricoux. He and Roger Bricoux got himself on the books of the music agents – C.W. Black and R.N. Black of Castle Street, Liverpool. This was the company that supplied musicians to play on the liners sailing from Liverpool and Southampton. Although

the pay for musicians wasn't great, while he was working on a liner he received free board and this meant he would be able to save all of his pay toward his marriage with Theresa. The music agents secured them prestigious work as one of a number of musicians under the direction of Wallace Hartley on the White Star RMS *Titanic*

The Titanic's Maiden Voyage

William Brailey boarded the *Titanic* on Wednesday 10 April 1912 in Southampton. His ticket number was 250654, the same ticket for all the members of Wallace Hartley's orchestra. His cabin was in the 2nd class quarters.

Contrary to the public image the musicians generally didn't play all together. They actually formed two separate groups that played at different times and different place. There was a quintet led by Wallace Hartley that played at teatime, after dinner concerts and Sunday services etc. There was a trio consisting of violin, cello and piano that played in the reception room outside of the A la Carte restaurant and Club Parisien. The trio were aboard the ship to add to the ambience of the Club Parisien's continental flavour and consisted of William Brailey playing piano, his cellist friend Roger Marie Bricoux and violinist George Andre Kins.

Courage And Compassion Joined Make The Hero And Man Complete

After the *Titanic* hit an iceberg and began to sink, Wallace Hartley gathered all the musicians together. This was probably the first time that they had all played together. They played music to help keep the passengers



calm as the crew loaded the lifeboats. Contrary to the fictional events in the 1997 film, they didn't play the well known hymn, 'Nearer My God To Thee' but played popular 'ragtime' music. Many of the survivors said that the band continued to play until the very end. One second class passenger said: "Many brave things were done that night, but none were more brave than those done by men playing minute after minute as the ship settled quietly lower and lower in the sea". The music they played served alike as their own immortal requiem and their right to be recalled on the scrolls of undying fame." Brailey was only 24 years old when he died and his body was never recovered.

There is a memorial plaque to these brave men at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall that was unveiled on the 4th November 1912



THIS TABLET IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
W. HARTLEY OF DEWSBURY
BANDMASTER
W. T. BRAILEY OF LONDON
R. BRICOUX OF LILLE, FRANCE
J. F. CLARKE OF LIVERPOOL
J. L. HUME OF DUMFRIES
G. KRINS OF LIEGE, BELGIUM
P. C. TAYLOR OF LONDON
J. W. WOODWARD OF HEADINGTON
MEMBERS OF THE BAND ON BOARD
THE "TITANIC"; THEY BRAVELY
CONTINUED PLAYING TO SOOTHE THE
ANGUISH OF THEIR FELLOW PASSENGERS
UNTIL THE SHIP SANK IN THE DEEP
APRIL 14TH 1912.
COURAGE AND COMPASSION JOINED
MAKE THE HERO AND THE MAN COMPLETE

'It was sad when the great ship when down'

Some references:

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<http://www.theatreintherough.com/aviators.htm>

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Bill Bayliss April 2012