

Plans for a Tuesday arrival in New York – An exchange of letters between Ismay and Franklin examined

Whether the *Titanic* could have reached New York on Tuesday 16 April 1912 is still being debated by experts. Would it have made sense at all? Would it have been possible to attract extra publicity with an early arrival? Was it Joseph Bruce Ismay who pressed Captain Smith to neglect safe navigation procedures just for the advantage of an arrival ahead of schedule? There has been much speculation on the subject. But a look at the previous experiences and orders for the *Olympic* and evidence in the form of an exchange of letters between the offices in Liverpool and New York in 1911 show that, since *Olympic's* fourth roundtrip, a Tuesday arrival was not out of the ordinary. Neither was is what Ismay wanted.

Before examining the matter in more detail, it is useful to gain some background knowledge by studying the White Star Line's normal scheduled services at the time. Until 1907, White Star's main service from Europe to New York was based in Liverpool. In 1907 it was moved to Southampton. In the early 20th century, four ships were used for the Wednesday sailings thus a weekly service could be offered. Until the summer months of 1907, additional sailings from Liverpool on Fridays every fortnight were also scheduled. This led to the following schedule for a whole year's service (based on records from 1905):

Ship/Day	1.	8.	15.	22.	29.
Majestic	Dep. Liverpool	Arr. New York	Dep. New York	Arr. Liverpool	Dep. Liverpool
Baltic	Arr. New York	Dep. New York	Arr. Liverpool	Dep. Liverpool	Arr. New York
Teutonic	Dep. New York	Arr. Liverpool	Dep. Liverpool	Arr. New York	Dep. New York
Oceanic	Arr. Liverpool	Dep. Liverpool	Arr. New York	Dep. New York	Arr. Liverpool

The schedule from 1907 was basically the same. Simply replace "Liverpool" on the grid with "Southampton" and the ship *Baltic* with the *Adriatic*. Having four ships in service meant employing four masters, 28 officers (4 x 7 officers), four surgeons, four pursers, four chief engineers etc. But with the continuing development of shipbuilding, the steamers continued to become bigger – and faster. So it was a rather logical move to reduce not only the passage time but also time spent in port in order to maintain a weekly service with just three ships running. That would reduce the staffing costs (e. g. only three masters and just 21 nautical officers were needed to man three ships) but also the fees payable for the berths in port. Ships, ofcourse, only earn money when they are at sea.

When the *Olympic* entered service in 1911, there was a clear intention to have only three ships instead of four maintaining the weekly Southampton – New York – Southampton route. This was probably done in anticipation of having the three *Olympic* class vessels in service.

When the *Olympic* arrived, the *Teutonic* was transferred within the IMM. The first two roundtrips of the *Olympic* were done in a four week rotation with *Majestic*, *Oceanic*, and *Adriatic*. However, *Adriatic's* departure on 26 July 1911 from Southampton saw her returning

from New York to Liverpool. The Liverpool – New York – Liverpool service still saw four ships sailing, but the arrival of the *Adriatic* on that route brought together the so-called Big Four. It is tempting to assume that they were now maintaining the service for which they were originally built but had not operated up until this point. Now, the Liverpool – New York service offered sailings on ships which matched each other closely. This was just as had been the case previously on the Australian service with the *Medic*, *Afric*, *Persic*, *Runic* and *Suevic*, and just as it would be from Southampton to New York when all three ships of the *Olympic* class had entered service.

Once the *Adriatic* had left the Southampton – New York service, the remaining three ships *Olympic*, *Majestic* and *Oceanic* had to work in a three ship rotation, with the *Majestic* due to leave when the *Titanic* entered service:

Ship/Day	1. (Wed)	4. (Sat)	8. (Wed)	11. (Sat)	15. (Wed)	18. (Sat)	22. (Wed)
Olympic	Dep. So'ton	at sea	Arr. New York	Dep. New York	at sea	Arr. So'ton	Dep. So'ton
Majestic	at sea	Arr. So'ton	Dep. So'ton	at sea	Arr. New York	Dep. New York	at sea
Oceanic	Arr. New York	Dep. New York	at sea	Arr. So'ton	Dep. So'ton	at sea	Arr. New York

To maintain this schedule, it is obvious that time spent in port was drastically cut down to a bare minimum. For the crew it meant doing the same (or due to the increased size of the ship even more) work in much less time. The passengers' luggage had to be unloaded followed by the general cargo and the ship had to take on provisions and coal. Coaling was an especially filthy job as the coal dust got everywhere on the ship. The whole vessel had to be cleaned properly when coaling was finished. Then the new cargo and new passengers' luggage had to be taken on board. Every minute extra that the crew had to spend on their routine jobs counted.

It seems that this was exactly the point P. A. S. Franklin was trying to make in his letter of 7 July 1911. In it, Franklin asked Ismay not to overlook the possibility that a steamer should arrive in New York on a Tuesday during one of the early voyages. Franklin even pointed out that, although it was not a necessity, an arrival on a Tuesday would be a big help now that only three ships maintained the weekly service. In a letter dated 17 July 1911, Ismay acknowledged that the suggestion would be kept in mind.

In a letter dated 19 July 1911 Franklin pressed his case by giving a detailed report on the work carried out after *Olympic's* arrival in the morning. He followed this up with an even stronger hint that the *Olympic* could easily have reached port by Tuesday. Furthermore, Franklin pointed out the following advantages of a Tuesday arrival:

- Advertising the ship would be easier
- There would be more time for turning the steamer round
- The passengers would certainly be pleased

The very next day, Franklin added in another letter:

- The passengers had been satisfied and there had been no complaints despite the very warm weather
- The steamer could have docked easily by early Tuesday evening. Therefore Franklin requested that Ismay would allow the steamer to dock on Tuesday in future provided that the weather permitted it. Franklin continued: "[...] in addition to the excellent publicity, and cost savings in working her, particularly on the short schedule, we believe the passengers will be more satisfied if they do not feel that they are on a steamer which is being deliberately held back."

In his reply of 27 July 1911 Ismay promised Franklin that the latter's strong recommendation would be considered. However, Ismay pointed out that he could not see whether Franklin was actually suggesting that the *Olympic* should always arrive on a Tuesday. Ismay admitted that a Tuesday arrival would ease the preparations for the return leg of the round trip and would please the passengers. On the other hand, Ismay listed the following counter arguments:

- The passengers would prefer to know their arrival time before their departure rather than spend the whole crossing wondering about it.
- Anybody who had ever experienced a night arrival in New York was usually not too keen on repeating the experience

In his letter of 31 July 1911, Ismay seems to have become a little impatient with Franklin:

"I am afraid, if you keep on writing me much more in regard to the "Olympic" docking in New York on Tuesday evening, I shall have to reply to you in the same manner as you did to Mr. Curry when he kept on finding fault with the stamp of firemen you are supplying to the American Line steamers at New York."

However, Ismay promised to discuss the matter with Lord Pirrie, Captain Smith and Mr. Bell (*Olympic's* chief engineer) and if the men agreed with Franklin, Ismay *"will not allow my individual feelings to stand in the way."*

The meeting between Ismay and Lord Pirrie took place on 4 August 1911. On the same day, one "F.T" (possibly Frederick Toppin) wrote from New York making it clear that Franklin's suggestion did not only relate to *Olympic's* next arrival in New York but to all future arrivals.

At least two of the three mentioned (Pirrie, Smith and Bell) must have agreed with Franklin, because on 11 August 1911 the Liverpool office informed the New York office that the captain of the *Olympic* had received permission to travel at full speed on the short summer track in both directions. A chart was included showing the "excellent" arrival times of the *Olympic* in Plymouth and Cherbourg provided she reached an average speed of 22.5 knots on her eastbound voyage on the short summer track:

Departure New York		Arrival Plymouth		Arrival Cherbourg		Arrival Southampton	
Day	Time	Day	Time	Day	Time	Day	Time
9 Sep	noon	15 Sep.	5 am	15 Sep	noon	15 Sep	6 pm
30 Sep	noon	6 Oct.	5 am	6 Oct	noon	6 Oct	6 pm
21 Oct	11 am	27 Oct	4 am	27 Oct	11 am	27 Oct.	5 pm
11 Nov	noon	17 Nov	5 am	17 Nov	noon	17 Nov	6 pm
2 Dec	2 pm	8 Dec.	7 am	8 Dec	2 pm	8 Dec	8 pm
23 Dec	noon	29 Dec.	5 am	29 Dec	noon	29 Dec	6 pm

Also on 11 August 1911, a letter was sent to the *Olympic* via the *Mauretania* which confirmed in writing the oral instructions Captain Smith had received in Southampton the previous week. In this letter it was pointed out that the final decision about whether to go at full speed rested with the captain. This instruction was valid for westbound and eastbound voyages. It would be interesting to speculate which of the attendees at the meeting, from Pirrie, Smith or Bell, had taken Franklin's side or whether all of them had agreed.

A letter by Frederick Toppin on 18 August 1911 shows that they were happy with the decision in New York. It was accepted that the *Olympic* would dock in New York on Tuesday evening from now on. This would not only increase her popularity in America but also enable the crew to finish the turn around in good time. Toppin stated that the present voyage had clearly illustrated that it was impossible to finish the coaling on Friday and enable the staff to clean the ship before embarkation when coaling had only started on Wednesday afternoon. Ismay replied in a letter dated 4 September 1911 expressing his hope that the *Olympic* would arrive in New York on Tuesday afternoon.

On 19 August 1911 Franklin wrote to Ismay and reported that unfortunately the *Olympic* had not docked on Tuesday. However, the bookings for the eastbound voyage were satisfying.

Ismay replied 5 September 1911 and stated his belief that on this crossing the *Olympic* should manage to dock on Tuesday. This was seemingly based on calculations made by the White Star office in Liverpool using reported positions from the ship. Part of the letter reveals how Ismay had been bruised by his defeat over the question of *Olympic's* arrival time in New York as he commented sarcastically:

"I presume she will get up to the dock at about 10 o'clock, which will make an extremely comfortable (!!!) landing for passengers, and I am sure they will much prefer this to dawdling away time and landing on Wednesday morning, to say nothing of their having had the pleasant uncertainty, from the time they left here, as to whether they would land on Tuesday evening or not."

In a letter dated 7 September 1911 Franklin wrote to Ismay once more and expressed his satisfaction that everything had gone well despite a higher tide than expected and that all the passengers had left the ship long before 11.30 pm. Everybody had been very satisfied and there had been no complaints.

Olympic's next round trip ended shortly after it had begun, with the collision with the *Hawke*. It was not until the end of November 1911 that she resumed service. January and February 1912 saw two four-week-round trips. The second of these featured *Olympic* losing a propeller blade which required another repair stay in Belfast. Due to poor wind conditions, *Olympic* was not able to leave Belfast until 7 March 1912 which caused the scheduled departure for 6 March 1912 to be cancelled. However, on 13 March 1912 the *Olympic* went back into service.

At the end of March 1912, the White Star Line ordered Captains Smith (*Olympic*) and Haddock (*Titanic*) to reduce the top speeds of their ships to 20 knots due to the coal strike. Smith and Haddock changed ships at the beginning of April. History shows that, at least for the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*, the speed restriction was removed by 11 April 1912 but accessible sources do not indicate who made this decision. The much repeated story that Ismay pressed Captain Smith to reach New York by Tuesday does not concur with the

documents relating to *Olympic's* New York arrival. These clearly show Ismay's resistance to a Tuesday arrival. Of course there is the story of First Class passenger Mrs Lines who famously claimed to have overheard Ismay telling Smith that the *Titanic* would beat the *Olympic* and arrive in New York on Tuesday. However, the letter to Franklin, quoted above, suggests that the words of Ismay, overheard by Mrs Lines, were full of irony, coming as they did after his defeat in the discussions about the proposed arrival times in New York for the *Olympic*

It is also interesting to note that at the inquiries following the *Titanic* disaster, Ismay stated that he had a discussion either before reaching or when at Queenstown with Captain Smith (American Inquiry) and Chief Engineer Bell (British Inquiry). These were two of the three men Ismay had asked for advice in the discussion about *Olympic's* arrival in New York less than a year earlier. Far more interesting was Ismay's statement at the British inquiry that he had commented to Bell that there was no need for the *Titanic* to arrive in New York on a Tuesday. This mirrors the point of view expressed by Ismay in his letters to Franklin (and Toppin) relating to *Olympic's* arrival in New York.

The documents show that it was Franklin, or White Star's New York office, who wanted the *Olympic* to arrive in New York on a Tuesday. The aim was to reduce the crossing time to make the speed of the ship an advertising feature and also to give the crew more time to prepare the ship for the return leg. The *Titanic* arriving on a Tuesday would not have been a sensational appearance, but it would have made life for the crew easier. It can not ever be truly confirmed whether the *Titanic* would actually have arrived on Tuesday, regardless of her speed and known positions. But it remains fact that in 1911 the *Olympic* had arrived in New York on Tuesday and also had to reduce speed in order to deliberately NOT to arrive in New York on Tuesday. There is no evidence available that contradicts the assumption that the White Star Line, without the loss of the *Titanic*, planned to have the *Olympic* and *Titanic* docking on Tuesday when on the short summer track. History dictated that these plans were abandoned and ironically it was Bruce Ismay, in 1911 a strong opponent to a Tuesday arrival, who was heavily criticised and accused of being the one responsible for *Titanic's* speed to ensure an earlier arrival in 1912.

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Sources:

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