

172

1912 (15 April) The historically important *Titanic* telegram sent to the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* on the day of its sinking

Manuscript on 'Post Office Telegraphs' headed paper, with date and receiving office stamp "Belfast Apr 15. 12" stating "White Star Liner Titanic wh. Reuters states is sinking in mid Atlantic as result of collision wi iceberg left Southampton last Wedy. on maiden voyage to New York. Titanic is largest vessel afloat having tonnage of 46,382 or 1004 more than Olympic. She has lgth of 882 feet wi ninety two feet breadth & was luxuriously fitted up wi especial regard to requirements of wealthy Americans".

This unique and historically important telegram was sent by the Press Association (as indicated by "P.A." in ms at top of the form) to the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* and received by journalist Robert (Bob) McComb. The date stamp bears the date of 15 April 1912, the day on which the *Titanic* sank in the North Atlantic Ocean, and the time is written as 10.39 (presumably morning, and as receipt in Belfast), about three hours after the ship had sunk) making this document the first notification of the ship's sinking and allowing the newspaper to be one of the first to break the news of the *Titanic*.

It is difficult to comprehend the disbelief and shock which must have greeted this telegram as it arrived at the offices of the Telegraph, the largest selling newspaper in *Titanic's* home city of Belfast. The news which the telegram gives reflects the fragmented and sparse nature of the initial information which filtered back to Ireland relating to the fate of the world's most famous ship. This telegram allowed the Telegraph to achieve the amazing feat of breaking the *Titanic* news on the same day as the sinking. Their dramatic headline was paraphrased from the content of the telegram and read "The Titanic Sinking". The desperation for more information would have clearly permeated throughout the offices of the newspaper and Bob McComb was gifted this important document as a reminder of one of the most shocking moments, not only in his career, but also in the history of Belfast.

McComb was one of the Telegraph's most celebrated and legendary journalists. He began working for the newspaper while it was under the management of Sir Robert Baird and was aged 41 and working as sub-editor in 1912. He served a total of 34 years on the staff of the *Telegraph* and was later described as having "covered some of the biggest news stories of his time, his resourcefulness when on an assignment was almost legendary". There would be few stories 'bigger' than that of *Titanic*.

Bob McComb died in May 1932 but his preservation of this historically important document insured its survival over the passing of 100 years, which is remarkable given its fragility. It serves as a tangible link between the events of a century ago and a city which spent three years creating the world's most famous ship, only to receive this telegram and news of its demise, with terrible loss of life, two weeks after seeing it leave.

10 x 8in. (25.40 x 20.32cm) framed, accompanied by cartoons of the journalist Robert McComb who received the telegram and wrote the story of the disaster for the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*.

€20,000-€30,000 (£16,667-£25,000 approx)

