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Book aims to clear great-grandfather of sinking Titanic

[Surrey Mirror](#) [Follow](#) Friday, September 23, 2011

THE great-granddaughter of the man who was at the helm of the Titanic when it sank has written a book she hopes will clear his name.

Quartermaster Robert Hichens has gone down in history as the man who sank the "unsinkable" ship.



AUTHOR: Sally Nilsson

He was at the wheel of the Titanic as she went to her doom and famously gave the "hard-a-starboard" command in a desperate attempt to steer away from the iceberg that would lead to the death of 1,500 people on April 15, 1912.

Now, as the centenary of that fateful accident approaches, Sally Nilsson, of Nutley Lane, Reigate, thinks it is high time the truth about her great-grandfather came out, because history - and Hollywood - has judged him harshly.

She said: "His situation has been very misunderstood - there are films, there's been a Broadway musical, and he's been portrayed as the villain and the coward.

"I really believe I've been able to tell the truth in this book. I only have one person to answer to, and that's Robert Hichens.

"So much was written about him afterwards - calling him a terrified coward shivering in a heap - and he wasn't. He had a huge responsibility, he was in command of the lifeboat, and he did that job.

"People are going to be absolutely shocked by what they read - it blows the story out of the water completely. I'm clearing his name.

"I believe the crew were not where they should have been and doing their duty. If they had, they would have seen the massive ice field they were heading towards.

"A lot of people say there was one solitary iceberg that was kind of black in really weird conditions and the lookouts didn't see it.

"From what I researched they were heading towards an enormous ice-field with icebergs all over the place. A lot of the witness statements from the first rescue ship back this up."

She said Mr Hichens, who died in 1940, had been relieved of his post and ordered to the lifeboats, and then into lifeboat six where he was ordered to row towards a light believed to be a steamboat that could have raised the alarm and assist.

He has been accused of refusing to turn the lifeboat back to allow people in the water to cling onto its sides but Mrs Nilsson, 46, said: "He was terrified of getting caught up in the suction as the Titanic sank, and would have been at risk of getting the lifeboat swamped had he headed back towards the doomed ship.

"If I had found out Robert Hichens was a coward and a bully I would still have written the book and said it. I'm not scared of that. But I didn't find that out at all."

The Man Who Sank The Titanic will be published by The History Press next month, priced £12.99.

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