

# AP Exclusive: Titanic artifacts linked to officer

By PETER PRENGAMAN, Associated Press – 16 minutes ago

ATLANTA (AP) — From the pitch-black depths 2½ miles beneath the North Atlantic, salvagers of the Titanic made a notable discovery when they located the personal effects of William Murdoch, the bridge officer who tried in vain to keep the doomed ship from colliding with an iceberg.

The artifacts — including a shoe brush, straight razor and pipe — are the first to be specifically linked to Murdoch, who gained added notoriety after James Cameron's polemical portrayal of him in the 1997 blockbuster movie "Titanic."

In the film, Murdoch accepts bribes, kills two people trying to get on lifeboats and shoots himself in desperation as the ship sinks. Historical accounts, however, say Murdoch gave the order to try to avoid a collision and acted selflessly to get passengers on lifeboats.

"This will bring Murdoch back front and center to the tragedy," said Bill Sauder, who manages Titanic research for RMS Titanic Inc. The company oversees the artifacts and gave The Associated Press an exclusive look at a new exhibit that opens Friday at Premier Exhibitions in Atlanta. RMST is a subsidiary of Premier Exhibitions.

The movie created a furor when it came out. Murdoch's extended family and people from his hometown of Dalbeattie, Scotland, were angered. They asked that movie credits be amended when the video version of the Oscar-winning film was released.

The studio, 20th Century Fox, refused. Executives said the movie was never intended to be a reflection of real events, and that Murdoch was portrayed as a hero because he saved many lives before taking his own. Eventually, the studio issued a personal apology and made a contribution to an annual Murdoch memorial prize that Dalbeattie High School had given out since 1912, the year the Titanic sank.

Attempts to find Murdoch's extended family of Murdoch by contacting community members who had had contact with a now-deceased nephew of Murdoch were unsuccessful.

"There was no controversy about Murdoch shooting himself until the movie came out," said Lee W. Merideth, a Titanic expert and author of "1912 Facts About Titanic." "Cameron took a lot of liberties, and that's why historians don't like the movie."

Controversy aside, Merideth said the artifacts are a significant find and will help viewers make a personal connection to an important historical figure.

"If that is his pipe, that means he smoked it at one time," said Merideth. "All this stuff belonged to somebody."

Recovering artifacts from the depths of the North Atlantic is painstaking work. Teams are only allowed to gather material from what is known as the "debris field," an area outside the actual ship; by court order, artifacts can't be taken from inside the vessel, which broke into two pieces when it sank.

The Murdoch items are part of some 5,500 artifacts that are being auctioned as one lot and include: clothing, fine china, gold coins, silverware and "The Big Piece" — a 17-ton section of the Titanic's hull. Many of the artifacts are part of a handful of exhibits around the United States and one in Singapore.

The winning bid will be announced April 11. The collection was appraised in 2007 at \$189 million, and the public company decided to auction the collection in response to shareholders' wishes.

Connecting items to owners is often impossible. Researchers have only been able to link a handful of passengers or crew members directly to artifacts, usually with items like suitcases, trunks or wallets. The Murdoch artifacts were found in 2000, but just recently linked to the former officer.

The central clue came with the initials "W.M." embossed on a toiletry kit, said Alexandra Klingelhofer, Premier's vice president of collections.

Some of the items inside the toiletry kit, like a button, the razor and long-johns, would seem to belong to Murdoch. Officers were given uniforms, but had to buy their own buttons, making easily-accessible spares necessary, said Klingelhofer. And while early in his life Murdoch wore a beard, he began shaving it after marrying, she said.

Officers and crew members often had several pairs of long-johns, necessary for frigid overnight watch shifts.

The items "bring you face to face with things that belonged to a man so integral to the story," said Klingelhofer.

The items are displayed together on a table under glass. While the long-johns and toilet kit are faded and have holes, the button sparkles, and the pipe and brush appear in good enough condition to be used today, extraordinary considering they spent 88 years in the ocean.

Behind the case is a portrait of Murdoch, along with blurbs about his upbringing and attempts to skirt the iceberg.

"He did what an officer should do," said Klingelhofer. "He followed orders and got people into the lifeboats, and I think that tells you something about the man himself."

*Associated Press writer Ben McConville contributed to this report from Edinburgh, Scotland.*

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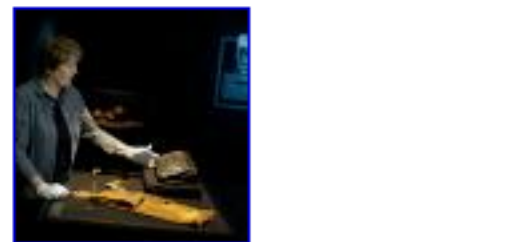
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Workers place a casing over the personal effects of William Murdoch, the bridge officer aboard the Titanic, before an exhibition opens to the public Tuesday, April 3, 2012, in Atlanta. From the pitch-black depths 2½ miles beneath the North Atlantic, salvagers of the Titanic made a notable discovery when they located the personal effects of Murdoch, the bridge officer who tried in vain to keep the doomed ship from colliding with an iceberg. The artifacts, including a shoe brush, straight razor and pipe, are the first to be specifically to Murdoch, a central figure in the disaster who gained added notoriety after James Cameron's polemical portrayal of him in the 1997 blockbuster movie "Titanic." (AP Photo/David Goldman)



## Map

