

Last letter written aboard Titanic sells for \$200,000 at auction

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USPA News - The last known letter to be written on board the RMS Titanic before it struck an iceberg and sank in the North Atlantic Ocean sold for 119,000 pounds (\$200,000) at an auction in England on Saturday, making it the most valuable Titanic letter ever sold. The letter, written by second class passenger Esther Hart, was among hundreds of items from the ship that were auctioned by Henry Aldridge and Son in England on Saturday, nearly two weeks after the 102nd anniversary of the ship's sinking.

It was sold to an anonymous telephone bidder with the hammer price at 101,000 pounds (\$169,700), but fees and other charges brought the total to 119,000 pounds. Esther Hart, on her way to Canada with her family in the hopes of starting a new life, wrote the letter on the afternoon of April 14, 1912, about eight hours before the Titanic collided with an iceberg. The item sold at Saturday's auction was described as being in a "remarkable condition," complete with the original envelope that is embossed with the White Star Line burgee. Esther Hart was traveling on board the vessel with her husband Benjamin and her seven-year-old daughter Eva, who later told about the events in her biography. "After our very satisfying lunch, the three of us went to the library for a rest for a short time before mother left us to go to bed. She took the opportunity to write a letter to her own mother back in Chadwell Heath (in England)," Eva wrote. Eva said the letter was intended to stay with the ship and be delivered after its return journey back to England. "[The letter was] given to her husband's post," the auctioneer said on Saturday. "When the disaster happened, he gave his coat to his wife to keep her and the child warm, and when she got to New York this was found in the pocket. It is a very, very sad letter. The husband died." Writing on note paper embossed with the White Star Line flag and headed "On Board Titanic", Esther Hart made it clear that she was worried and was not enjoying the trip. "I was very bad all day yesterday, could not eat or drink and sick all the while, but today I have got over it," she wrote. The mother further wrote: "Well, the sailors say we have had a wonderful passage up to now. There has been no tempest, but God knows what it must be when there is one. This mighty expanse of water, no land in sight and the ship rolling from side to side is being wonderful. Tho they say this ship does not roll on account of its size. Any how it rolls enough for me, I shall never forget it." The crew of the Titanic was later criticized as being reckless for going at the ship's maximum speed despite the presence of ice in the area. Esther Hart noted in her letter that the ship - the largest passenger liner in service at the time - was expected to arrive early in New York: on Tuesday night instead of Wednesday morning as scheduled. "I shall be looking forward to a line from somebody to cheer me up a bit. I am always shutting my eyes and I see everything as I left it. I hope you are all quite well," the mother wrote. "Let this be an all round letter as I can't write properly to all 'till I can set my foot on shore again. We have met some nice people on board, Lucy, and so it has been nice so far. But oh the long, long days and nights. It's the longest break I have ever spent in my life." At the bottom of the letter, the mother's daughter added: "heaps of love and kisses to all from Eva." "Little did we think at the time that we would eventually bring the letter back to England ourselves," Eva wrote in her biography. "It was quite clear from the message that the journey was a terrible strain to her and she was worried all the time. There was no doubt that she needed her rest and sleep after writing it." Esther Hart and her daughter were eventually rescued by the vessel RMS Carpathia and taken to the port of New York City. "The letter she had written that Sunday afternoon on the Titanic was never posted. She found it in the pocket of my father's sheepskin lined coat after we had been rescued and for her it was to remain a constant reminder of that tragic journey and of the loss of her husband," Eva said. Esther Hart died in September 1928 while her daughter Eva died in February 1996. More than 1,500 people died in the sinking of the Titanic, which was considered to be "unsinkable." A violin that was played by bandmaster Wallace Hartley in an attempt to calm passengers as they boarded lifeboats was sold for 900,000 pounds (\$1.45 million) at an auction also in England in October 2013, making it the most valuable Titanic item ever sold.

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