

Pictures: BRIAN MOODY/Scope

**Millvina Dean was nine weeks old when her family boarded the doomed liner. TRICIA WELCH meets the tragedy's only living survivor**

**W**HEN RMS Titanic hit an iceberg at 11.40pm on Sunday, April 14, 1912 the ship was just four days into its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York. She sank within two-and-a-half hours, only 705 of the 2,228 passengers and crew surviving. At nine weeks old, Millvina Dean was the youngest person aboard and the events of that night have guaranteed her a place in history.

Millvina's father Bertram was woken by the crash of the iceberg piercing the hull and it was thanks to his quick thinking that she, her brother Vere, who was nearly two, and their mother Ettie made their escape. It was a long way up to the deck from the family's steerage quarters but Bertram led them to safety.

Years later, Millvina learned that she had made this journey bundled into a sack, her mother clutching on tightly but that Vere had toddled off into the gathering crowd. His father plunged into the throng to fetch him and was never seen again.

Those in the lifeboats watched as the Titanic sank. Ettie and her companions heard screams followed by a dreadful silence after the lights had gone out and the ship, creaking and juddering, disappeared beneath the water.

The seafaring rules of the day were "women and children first" so many, including Ettie, knew their husbands had gone down with the ship but in the final tally it was discovered that, shamefully, more first-class men than third-class children were saved: 52 out of the 79 children in third class drowned.

Vere had been placed in another lifeboat by a kindly passenger so mother and son were reunited when, four hours after receiving the Titanic's calls, the Cunard liner Carpathia picked up the survivors.

Baby Millvina became the pet of survivors aboard the liner Adriatic heading back to Britain. So keen was the rivalry between the women to cuddle her that an officer decreed that first and second-class passengers must take turns to hold her for a maximum of 10 minutes each.

"I would have liked the third-class passengers to have held me, too," she says indignantly.

At 96, Millvina is wheelchair bound but still full of life. Until she broke her hip in an accident two years ago she lived alone in Bartley, a picturesque village in the New Forest, home to several generations of her family.

Millvina's mother Ettie grew up on Bartley Farm, owned by her father, George. Some time after her 21st birthday she moved to London to work as a nursery nurse and it was here that she met Bertram Frank Dean. They married in 1910 and a year later Vere was born, followed by Millvina a year after that.

While awaiting her birth, Bertram and Ettie decided to emigrate to America, planning to open a tobacconist's in Kansas. Premises were found,

# How Titanic's youngest passenger lost the father she never knew



**GOING STRONG:** Millvina Dean at home in the New Forest



**SAFE:** Millvina with her mother

a downpayment made and the young couple's savings used to buy third-class tickets to the New World.

Millvina says things nearly turned out very differently. "We were booked on another ship, the Philadelphia, but there was a coal strike and when the White Star Line contacted my father to ask if he'd mind going on the Titanic instead he jumped at the chance."

The "unsinkable" liner that everyone was so excited about set off from Southampton in brilliant sunshine but then sailed into the history books for all the wrong reasons.

**M**ILLVINA believes the disaster was the captain's fault: "He was warned about icebergs but didn't take it seriously and wasn't watching. It's believed he was trying to break the speed record for a maiden voyage."

Millvina was completely unaware of the Titanic and what had happened until she was eight years old. "My father was very, very handsome and my mother was brokenhearted when he died and refused to speak of what happened."

With her husband gone, Ettie returned to Bartley Farm with her two children. Nevertheless, Millvina and Vere had an idyllic childhood. "I loved the animals. My favourite time was hay

making. To this day, I've never smelt anything to match the smell of freshly cut hay."

When her mother remarried in 1920 they moved to her new husband's house in Southampton. He was a vet and Millvina left school at 16 to help out with the animals the family boarded.

During the war Millvina was drafted into the ordnance survey office. Afterwards, she returned to a quiet life in Southampton, working in a tobacconist's and then an engineering firm, before finally retiring to her beloved New Forest,

where she lived in obscurity until 1985, when the wreck of the Titanic was discovered.

In the years that followed, interest in the liner reached fever pitch all over the world and Millvina was tracked down by those curious to see what had happened to the miraculous baby.

"At the age of 73 I was suddenly in the spotlight again," she says, and she has made the most of it since. However, Millvina did not attend a private screening of James Cameron's 1997 film because she thought it would be too emotional. "Although I didn't know my father, I have an imagination," she says. "I would have hated to have seen that brought to life."

As to the future, Millvina is looking forward to the Titanic centenary in four years' time. She will be 100, too, and insists: "My name is already down to do something."

● To order *Titanic: The Last Survivor - The Life Of Millvina Dean* by Anthony Cunningham and Sheila Jemima, published September 20 (Waterfront Publications, £14.95), send a cheque/PO payable to the Express Bookshop to: Titanic Offer, PO Box 200, Falmouth TR11 4WJ, or phone 0871 521 1302 with credit/debit card details (calls cost 10p per minute from a BT landline), or order online at [www.expressbookshop.com](http://www.expressbookshop.com). UK delivery is free.