

FATAL ACCIDENT AT FERRY BRIDGE
ENGINEER SUB-LIEUTENANT NORMAN McLEOD RATTRAY
ROYAL NAVAL RESERVE – H.M.S. RESEARCH

Norman McLeod Rattray was born c.1887 in Dundee, Forfarshire, Scotland, the third son of Henry and Catherine Rattray. The household members living at 33 North Wellington Street, Dundee in 1891 were Catherine (mother) aged 35, sons David aged 11, Henry aged 9, Norman aged 4 and daughters Catherine and Isabella aged 8 and 6 years respectively.

Their father Henry, who was born in Dundee in 1857, was a Master Mariner. He had gained his Certificate of Competency as a Second Mate on the 20th August, 1886, his Certificate for First Mate on the 24th February, 1888 and his Master's Certificate on the 21st June, 1889. Catherine his wife had been born at Monifieth, Forfar, in 1858 and had married Henry c.1877. Monifieth is a town situated on the north bank of the Firth of Tay on the east coast of Scotland. Today,

Monifieth is a commuter town and suburb of its closest city Dundee. By 1901, the Rattray family had increased in size by the addition of two daughters, Flora aged 6 and Margaret aged 2, and they were living at 169 Albert Street, Dundee.

By the time of the 1911 Census, Catherine and three of her children had moved south and took up



Portland Royal Naval Cemetery

residence in London. Catherine was living at 117 Claremont Road, Forest Gate East, with Norman aged 24, Flora aged 16 and Margaret aged 12. Her husband Henry was not recorded with his family in the Census for 1891, 1901 and 1911 most probably because of his seagoing duties. All the children of the family had been educated locally in Dundee, and Flora and Margaret continued with their education in London after they left Scotland. Norman at the age of 24 was employed as a Marine Engineer Fitter and Turner.

Without precise information as to when or why, it is possible that Norman had decided to follow his father's profession and joined the mercantile marine as an engineer. Either before or after the outbreak of the First World War he joined the Royal Naval Reserve as a Temporary Engineer Sub-Lieutenant. His record of service has no personal details about him, and its contents are briefly notated in six lines. The UK Navy Lists 1888-1970 for Royal Naval Reserve Temporary Engineer Sub-Lieutenants give Norman's date for seniority as the 26th January 1916 when he

was serving on the S.S. Changuinola, a refrigerated cargo and passenger ship. She had been built in 1912 at Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson Limited Shipyard at Wallsend, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The ship had been designed for the Hamburg, West Indies & South America trade routes for the Hamburg-Amerika Line. Originally, she was launched as the S.S. Columbia on the 30th July 1912 and completed in October. Displacing 6,011-tons, twin screw, powered by two triple three-cylinder expansion steam engines the ship capable of achieving a speed of 16-knots. She had First Class accommodation for 70 – 80 passengers.

In 1913 she was renamed Carl Schurz and taken over by Elder & Fyffes Limited who renamed her the following year the S.S. Changuinola. On the 21st November 1914 she was requisitioned by the Admiralty as an Armed Merchant Cruiser and fitted with 6 x Single 6-inch guns and 2 x Single 2-pounder guns. In January 1920 she was returned to her owners.

Engineer Sub-Lieutenant Norman Rattray was admitted to hospital on the 15th February 1917 for an unspecified reason for four days and then resumed his duties on the S.S. Changuinola. In April he was serving on the S.S. Amsterdam, a merchant vessel built in 1894 by the Earle Shipbuilding Company at Hull. Displacing 1,754-tons, powered by two vertical triple expansion steam engines she was able to achieve a speed of 17-knots. In 1914 the Admiralty requisitioned the S.S. Amsterdam as an Armed Boarding Steamer. The Admiralty initially requisitioned twelve such vessels that were able to carry enough coal for five days, have wireless, boats suitable for boarding parties, a speed of 12 to 14-knots and were armed with 2 x 3-pounder guns.

Norman was admitted on the 5th October 1917 to Haslar Royal Naval Hospital and diagnosed with neurasthenia. The latter is explained as resulting from exhaustion of the central nervous system's energy reserves and can include a number of various physical symptoms. He remained in hospital until the end of November. A medical board had pronounced him unfit for seagoing duties for three weeks but fit for service ashore. At a follow up medical examination he was declared fit and, on the 29th January 1918, he was posted to HMS Research for duties in connection with Yachts, Trawlers and Drifters at Portland.

HMS Research was built at Chatham, launched on the 4th December 1888 and commissioned on the 24th April 1889. She displaced 520-tons, was 155-ft in length, had beam of 24-ft, powered by a 450 HP steam engine driving paddles and was armed with a 6-pounder gun. Between 1889 and 1912 she was deployed on surveying the coastal waters around the United Kingdom. Her surveying activity was undertaken during the months April to October and laid up between November and March at Portsmouth. In 1915 HMS Research was stationed at Portland until

1919 as a depot ship for armed trawlers. Paid off in August of that year she was sold and scrapped in July 1920.

On the 5th July 1918 Norman was admitted to Portland Naval Hospital for three days, suffering from catarrh. The latter is a build-up of mucus in an airway or cavity of the body usually with reference to the throat and paranasal sinuses. Just over a fortnight later, he was dead having been fatally injured in a motorcycle accident, near ferry bridge on the Portland Road. The accident occurred on Saturday, 20th July, and he died in the early hours of Sunday morning, aged 31 years.

Southern Times ~ Saturday, 27th July 1918.

Naval Officer Killed – Shocking Motorcycle Accident At Ferry Bridge

When riding a motorcycle on the Portland Road near Ferry Bridge on Saturday evening, Engineer Sub-Lieutenant Norman McLeod



Grave of Eng-Sub. Lt. N.M. Rattray RNR

Rattray, R.N.R., was thrown off his machine and picked up unconscious. Suffering from a fractured skull, he was taken to the R.N. Hospital, but the case was hopeless, and he died the same evening.

Eyewitnesses of the accident who were on a train going to Weymouth gave evidence at the inquest held by the South Dorset Coroner at the hospital on Monday afternoon. Evidence of identification was given by Engineer-Lieut. Donald Eadie, R.N. Deceased was 31 years of age, and his home address was at Crouch End, London.

Alfred Whitfield, fireman, L.S.W.R., 83 Walpole Street, Weymouth, stated that he was on the train, which left Portland at 8.25 the previous Saturday evening. He saw a motor cyclist on the Ferry Bridge road, going towards Weymouth. The machine was going at a rapid pace. The cycle stopped suddenly and the rider fell off. Witness informed the driver of the train, which stopped. Two sailors and a soldier went from the train to the deceased's assistance.

A motor lorry came along and the train resumed its journey. There was no one in the road to interfere with the cyclist. Answering a member of the jury, witness said the speed of the

deceased was twice as fast as that of the train. Bernard Walter Lee, signalman, saw the deceased stop 200 yards from the signal box and do something to the machine. He mounted and went on. Lawrence Arthur Sweeney, a corporal, R.A.F., who was a passenger on the 8.25 train to Weymouth, said the train pulled up and witness saw a naval officer lying on the ground, lying by the side of a motor cycle. Witness went to him. Deceased was unconscious and bleeding from the head. One of the R.A.F. cars, which was passing was stopped and deceased was taken to the R.N. hospital.

A screwdriver and a set of spanners were found 200 yards from the machine. The spot where the accident occurred was in the middle of a patch of where stones had recently been laid up. The track of the cycle could be traced among the stones, and it appeared that the cycle had pursued a zigzag course. Mr Jarratt, member of the jury stated that the spindle of the front wheel of the machine was broken. Had deceased been travelling at a slow speed he could have got off, but if the cyclist had been going at a terrific pace he would have been thrown.

J. Thomas Simpson, driver, R.A.F., stated that he saw the deceased riding through the square at Fortune's-well at 8.25 on Saturday evening. Witness's car arrived on the scene just after the train had been stopped. Witness was of the opinion that Lieut. Rattray looked around to see where he dropped his tools and then, getting on the track of new stones, he lost control of the machine.

Dr Gould, surgeon, R.N., said deceased had a severe fracture of the skull when admitted to the hospital. It was a hopeless case from the first. Death took place at 12.10 a.m. on Sunday. Mr H. Tyson, surveyor to the Portland U.D.C., stated that there was no necessity for the officer to have ridden on the rough stones, there was 3ft of good road at the spot.

A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned, the jury commending the driver of the train, Barrett, for his action in stopping the train.

Engineer Sub-Lieutenant Norman McLeod Rattray was buried in Portland Royal Naval Cemetery a few days later with full military honours. Grave Location: Plot 582.

Portland Royal Naval Cemetery

Portland Harbour is a manmade harbour attached to the north of Portland. Originally, it was a natural anchorage known as Portland Roads, protected by Portland to the south, Chesil Beach to the west and mainland Dorset to the north. Portland Roads was transformed into a naval base following the building of two break water arms in the mid-19th century. The Cemetery was established by the War Office in 1876 for the burial of soldiers garrisoned at Verne Citadel (part

of the harbour defence fortifications) and Royal Navy sailors based at Portland. In 1907 the site was transferred to the Admiralty, who went on to extend the site to the west in 1914. Throughout the First World War, Portland Harbour was used regularly for training exercises and patrols for German U-boats. There are 67 burials from the First World War, 50 of which are unidentified. In addition, there is a Special Memorial to a casualty buried in Portland (St George) Churchyard. After the War maintenance of the Cemetery was passed to the Imperial War Graves Commission and in November 1926, the Cross of Sacrifice was unveiled in the presence of detachments from ships stationed at Portland and the local garrison. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Portland continued hosting training exercises. However, after Germany's successful invasion of France, the naval base quickly became the target of air attacks. On the 4th July 1940 HMS Foylebank was attacked while at Portland Harbour, which resulted in her sinking on the 5th. Over 70 crew members lost their lives, some of whom are buried at Portland Royal Naval Cemetery, the rest are

commemorated on memorials to the missing. By May 1944, both Portland Harbour and Weymouth Harbour were used as part of the D-Day preparations. They were major embarkation points for American troops, particularly the US 1st Division who embarked for 'Omaha Beach' in June 1944.



Grave Of Engineer Sub-Lieutenant N.M. Rattray RNR

There are 103 burials (including 1 Norwegian Merchant Navy seaman and 12 German airmen) 10 of which are unidentified, from the Second World War, the majority of which are in the Church of England section, near the Cross of Sacrifice. The cemetery was extended eastwards in the mid-20th century, where many post-Second World War burials are found. In 1996 the Naval Base at Portland was closed.

Norman's Allied Victory Medal 1914-1919, British War Medal 1914-1920 and presumably his Bronze Memorial Plaque and Scroll were forwarded to his legal representative who retained them until they could be given to his father, as next-of-kin. When probate was granted Norman left an estate valued at £147 8s to his father. At the time of his death Norman was living at 19 Rokesby Avenue, Crouch End, Middlesex. Henry Rattray died on the 28th January 1921 at Trieste, Italy aged 64. His body was returned to Scotland and he was buried in Dundee Eastern Cemetery. When probate was granted he left an estate valued at £2182 1s 11d. Catherine his

wife had returned to Scotland and was living at 42 Strathmartin Road, Dundee when her son died. She died on the 16th November 1931 aged 73 and was buried in Dundee Eastern Cemetery. Probate was granted on the 19th February 1932 in London and revealed that she was living at 12 King Street, Dundee. Other than confirming the details of her solicitor, the contents of the probate were 'Sealed'.

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