

FATAL SLIP FROM A SHIPS GANGWAY

Arthur Brentley was born at Darlington, on the 22nd January, 1887 the son of Martha Parkes (née Brentley) of 2 Kitchen Street, Rise Carr, Darlington, County Durham. Without further information there is no indication as to who was the father of Arthur. On the 4th November, 1889, Martha married Elijah Parkes, aged 46 years of Brierly Hill, Staffordshire. Martha had been born at Carkin Moor, Yorkshire and was 30 years of age. Prior to her marriage she had worked as a domestic servant at the West End Workhouse, Richmond, Yorkshire. The family household members who were living at 2 Kitchen Street, in 1901 were Elijah Parkes aged 57, Martha Parkes aged 41, Alice Parkes aged 11, Elizabeth Parkes aged 5 and Arthur Brentley aged 15. Elijah and Arthur's given occupation was that of General Labourers. Elijah died in the Spring of 1909 aged 65 years.

In 1911, Martha, now widowed was aged 52 and was living at 2 Kitchen Street with her son Arthur aged 25 whose surname was recorded on the Census of that year as 'Parkes'. The previous year, on the 14th December, 1910 Arthur had enrolled into the Royal Naval Reserve, possibly at Stockton-on-Tees.

The Royal Naval Reserve can trace its origins to the 1835 Register of Seaman which was used to identify men for naval service in the event of war. During the Crimean war only 400 men volunteered in 1854 out of 250,000 on the Register. This prompted Parliament to authorise in 1858 a Royal Commission on Manning the Royal Navy which subsequently led to the Naval Reserve Act of 1859. This established the Royal Naval Reserve as a reserve of professional seaman from the British Mercantile Marine and Fishing Fleets, who could be called upon for service in the Royal Navy in times of a national emergency. Originally the Royal Naval Reserve was a reserve of seaman only. Later this was extended to recruit and train a reserve of officers. A number of drill-ships were created at the main ports around the coast of the United Kingdom for seaman to participate in gunnery training for one month every year.. As the age of sail began to be eclipsed by steam and the emergence of new technologies, men with engineering knowledge and expertise were also recruited into the Royal Naval Reserve.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Admiralty began to express concerns that the additional manning of the expanded fleet by men of the Royal Naval Reserve would be insufficient to fight a large-scale war. In 1903 an Act of Parliament enabled the Admiralty to recruit a second force – the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Whilst the Royal Naval Reserve consisted of professional civilians, the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve was open to civilians with no prior sea experience. On the outbreak of the First World War there were six Royal Naval Volunteer Divisions in

major ports around the United Kingdom. In 1914 The Royal Naval Reserve consisted of 30,000 officers and ratings.

In 1905, Admiral Sir John Fisher tried to disband the Royal Naval Reserve which ironically had the opposite effect. The large build programme for the Royal Navy and the retention of the older warships in the reserve fleets incurred a considerable strain on the manning of these vessels. The men of the Royal Naval Reserve were of prime importance in the manning of the pre-dreadnought warships which was sadly reflected in the loss of lives in the sinking's of HMS Hogue, HMS Aboukir, HMS Cressy, HMS Monmouth and HMS Good Hope in 1914.

Arthur Brentley was described on his service record as being 5ft 3½-inches in height, with grey eyes, a fresh complexion, a chest measurement of 34½-inches and a distinguishing mark in the form of a scar on his right shin. After



Grave Of Stoker Arthur Brentley R.N.R.

completing his training with the Royal Naval Reserve he was confirmed on the 1st April, 1911 as a stoker and certified medically fit. He had undergone his training at the Chatham Depot (HMS Pembroke) and on HMS Hogue and regularly fulfilled his duties as required by the Royal Naval Reserve. In the summer of 1912 he spent a month serving on HMS Cressy and on various other warships until the outbreak of the First World War. His character and ability was marked on his service record as 'Very Good'. As a civilian he was employed as a fireman and labourer in heavy industries. He worked as a Fireman and Labourer at the Rise Carr Rolling Mills, Stephenson's Locomotive Works Darlington, and a Fireman at the Cleveland Bridge Company, Darlington. As a Fireman he would have tended boilers producing steam and heat for the manufacturing of iron and steel products and equipment.

The aforementioned warships HMS Hogue and HMS Cressy were 1898 Cressy-class Armoured Cruisers of 12,000-tons displacement. On the 22nd September, 1914 these two warships and

another of the same Cressy-class, HMS Aboukir was sunk by the German submarine U-9, with a total loss of 62 officers and 1,397 ratings.

On the 2nd August, 1914 Arthur was 'Called Out By Proclamation For Service In The Royal Navy' and drafted to the Merchant Fleet Auxiliary Peshawar. She was listed as a Squadron Supply Ship and had been built as a passenger liner and cargo ship by Barclay and Curle Company in 1909 for the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company. Of 7,634-tons displacement she was 479-ft in length, with a beam of 57¼-ft, and a draught of 32½-ft. Powered by two steam triple-expansion engines, rated at a 500 NHP, which produced a speed of 14-knots. She was requisitioned by the Admiralty on the 3rd August, 1914 and commissioned into the Royal Navy until the 2nd May, 1915 when she was returned to her owners.

The S.S. Peshawur [sic Peshawar] was on passage from Sydney to the United Kingdom and had dispersed with the rest of her convoy off Tor Head, Ireland at 0440 hours on the 5th October, 1917. In company with three other vessels she was steaming close to the Irish coast on Admiralty instructions when she was torpedoed by the German submarine U 96, commanded by Kapitänleutnant Heinrich Jeß (1884-1962) seven miles south-east-east of Ballyquinton Point, County Down. Ballyquinton Point is a remote windswept remote area which forms the southern tip of the Ards Peninsula. The torpedo struck her on the port side wrecking one lifeboat and flooding the engine room. Boats were swung out and lowered and all hands stood by in case it was possible to save the ship. The captain however aware that the submarine might fire a second torpedo decided to get the boats away. Shortly afterwards a torpedo struck the starboard side forward of the bridge and the ship began to sink. Eleven of the 125 crew on board lost their lives and the survivors were rescued by the patrol yacht Albion III and taken to Belfast.

Arthur Brentley served for only eight months on the MFA Peshawar, his service career cut short by a fatal accident on the 22nd April, 1915.

Chatham Rochester & Gillingham Observer – 1st May, 1915.

A Stoker Drowned – Fall From A Gangway

A case in which a Naval Reserve man was accidentally drowned in returning to his ship after spending a few hours ashore, was inquired into by the County Coroner (Mr C.B. Harris) at the Royal Navy Hospital, Gillingham on Monday, when evidence was given concerning the death of Arthur Brentley, a stoker of the Peshawar, who fell from the gangway of his ship and was drowned. Mr E.L. Baker, solicitor, Rochester represented the Admiralty.

Cuthbert James Bullock of the Mercantile Auxiliary Ship Peshawar, identified the body as that of Arthur Brentley, a stoker who belonged to the same ship. The deceased was a single man, aged 27, his home was at Darlington. On Thursday night of last week Brentley was returning from shore leave, about 10.30 o'clock. The ship was lying in No.3 Basin – (in Chatham Dockyard). Witness and deceased had two glasses of beer ashore and went to the pictures before returning to the ship. A man named Ellis and witness went up the gangway together. There was not room for three of them together. When witness had got down from the gangway onto the ship's deck he heard the deceased gasp and heard a splash in the water. He could not say how the deceased got into the water. Efforts were made to rescue the man but he never rose.

The Coroner: "Was he quiet sober?"

Witness: "Yes, sir."

The Coroner: "You had no trouble with him?"

Witness: "None at all."

The Coroner: "Was there a light on the gangway?"

Witness: "Yes"

The Coroner: "Was there any gap at the end of the gangway?"

Witness: "No."

The Coroner: "Not likely to throw himself off the gangway?"

Witness: "No, he was quite a different man to that."

The Coroner: "No troubles of any kind that you know of?"

Witness: "No, he seemed cheerful enough."

Stanley Llewellyn Oakes, seaman, R.N.R., of the same ship, said he had known the deceased since the declaration of war. Witness was quartermaster on the day in question. The men arrived at the ship at 10.30. Witness was standing at the foot of the ladder on the deck. Witness put 1½-inch ropes from the last stanchion of the gangway to the upright and to the upright of the platform. That was on the left side. The right side had already been done. He was not positive whether the ropes were taut or a bit slack. Witness saw Ellis and Bullock come down the gangway together, followed by the deceased. When Brentley reached the top of the gangway he

suddenly reeled and fell over the rope just clear of the stanchion. He fell over the side which witness put the rope that very evening.

By the Coroner: "He could not say positively how the deceased fell, but witness saw him go right over the top of the rope. He could not say whether the deceased suffered from fits. So far as witness knew the deceased was a sober man. The cry 'Man overboard!' was raised and an effort made to rescue the deceased. A lifebuoy was thrown overboard, but to no purpose, as the deceased could not be seen. Witness could not say whether the deceased could swim."

The Coroner: "Nothing at all was seen of the deceased after he disappeared from the gangway?"

Witness: "No, sir."

George Precious, shipwright diver, employed by the Government stated that acting on instructions he made a search for the deceased on Friday morning in No.3 basin. He found the deceased lying on his back in 34-ft of water and 20-ft from the wall and about 50-ft from where the gangway has been.

Charles Gardine Baron, 2nd Officer of the Peshawar, gave evidence with regard to the plan of the gangway, and added that the deceased could easily have fallen overboard. Witness said the deceased was reported to be a steady man, and had had no serious illness.

A verdict of "Accidentally drowned" was returned.

Arthur Brentley was 28 years of age and lies buried in Gillingham (Woodlands Road) Cemetery, in Kent. Grave Location: Naval 17.865.

There is a large naval section in Gillingham (Woodlands Road) Cemetery which was reserved by the Admiralty and served the Royal Naval Hospital in Windmill Road, Gillingham. The section contains most of the war graves as well as burials of the pre-war and inter-war years. Among the First World War burials in the naval section are those from HMS Bulwark, blown up in Sheerness Harbour in November 1914, HMS Princess Irene, which suffered an internal explosion in May 1915 and HMS Glatton which suffered the same fate in Dover Harbour in September 1918 (the bodies were not recovered until March 1930). The plot also contains a number of graves resulting from an air raid on Chatham Naval Barracks on the 3rd September, 1917. In all, Gillingham (Woodlands Road) Cemetery contains 834 burials and commemorations of the First World War, 82 of the burials are unidentified and there are special memorials commemorating a number of casualties buried in other cemeteries in the area whose graves could not be maintained. Second World War burials number 385, 21 of these burials are

unidentified. Most are in the naval section. There are two Foreign National war burials and two non-war service burials.

The inscription on Arthur's headstone has the cause of his death as 'Died of Wounds' which is incorrect. The name Peshawar, maybe a corruption of Peshawur or has been misspelled.

Peshawar is the capital of the Pakistani province near the eastern end of the Khyber Pass. Its history dates back to

539 BC and is the

oldest city in Pakistan.

Peshawar may through

transcription errors and

linguistic shifts of its

Sanskrit derivation

account for the

variations of its name

and use of later native

languages. There is no

reference in the list of



ships in the Royal Navy, Grave Of Arthur Brentley ~ Gillingham (Woodlands Road) Cemetery

to a vessel named Peshawar. There is the Peshawur, which was owned by P & O and

requisitioned by the Admiralty in 1914. Various references record the name written down as

Peshawar perhaps because the pronunciation of the word 'Peshawur' sounded more like

'Peshawar' with an emphasis on the 'a' rather than on the 'u' to those who wrote it down

initially in records and replicated by others over the succeeding years.

Martha was informed of her son's death and later received his 1914-15 Star, British War Medal

1914-1920, Allied Victory Medal 1914-1919, Bronze Memorial Plaque and Scroll. She also

received his War Gratuity Payment and successfully applied for a Dependant's Pension and

received a payment of 15/- per week. She died in October 1941 aged 82 years.

+++

Sources

National Archives ~ Service Record Stoker Arthur Brentley RNR – Reference BT 377/7/76818

Ancestry Website ~ www.ancestry.com

Dependants Pension Records ~ WFA/Ancestry

Naval History Net Web-Site ~ www.naval-history.net

Dictionary of Disasters at Sea During the Age of Steam including Sailing Ships & Ships of War Lost in Action 1824-1962 by Charles Hocking FLA. First published by Lloyds Register of Shipping in 1969. Published in 1989 by The London Stamp Exchange, 5 Buckingham Street, Strand, London, WC2N 6BS. ISBN 0 948130 72 5

UK Naval Medal & Award Rolls 1793-1972 ~ Ancestry

U-boat Net Website ~ www.uboaat.net

Wikipedia Website ~ www.wikipedia.org – Royal Naval Reserve

Naval Reserves Web-Site ~ www.barnetmaritime.co

Photographs ~ ©Roger Coleman

Roger Coleman