

Picket Boat Tragedy ~ Chatham Man Drowned

Shipwright 2nd Class Albert Edward Killian ~ Royal Navy

Albert Edward Killian was born on the 13th November, 1888 the son of Edward and Emma Killian at Brompton, Chatham, Kent. A daughter, Hilda was born at Woolwich. Albert was baptised in the Wesleyan-Methodist Chapel, Brompton on the 23rd January, 1889, when the family were living at 26 Fox Street, Brompton. The 1891 Census return completed on the night of Sunday, April 5th 1891 records that the family were living in the prison staff quarters at the Gillingham (Kent) District H.M. Convict Prison. The towns of Gillingham and Chatham are adjacent to each other and their closeness particularly in the 19th century probably led in some cases to the blurring together of areas and locations of institutions. This could be slightly misleading for those not familiar with either town as to where the actual location referred to were either in Chatham or Gillingham.

The naval dockyard at Chatham was situated on the River Medway where in the 19th century a number of prison hulks were moored and the location of St Marys (Island) Prison – within the boundaries of the dockyard. These prisons were closed towards the end of the 19th century and the prisoners were moved into shore based establishments. One of these was H.M. Prison Rochester, formerly known as Borstal Prison, founded in 1870 which was a large convict prison. The town of Chatham leads into Rochester and all three of these Medway towns are very close together. On the 1st April, 1988 Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham, Strood and outlying villages were formed into the Medway Unitary Authority, now known as Medway Council.

At the time of the 1891 Census, Edward was most probably working in the St Mary's (Island) Prison and later at the H.M. Prison Rochester where he lived with his family in the prison staffs accommodation quarters. Edward's occupation was recorded as a 'Nurse' at the Convict Department Chatham Division. He was 32 years old and had served as a Private in the Army Hospital Corps. His wife Emma (née McCracken) was 28 years old and had been born in Woolwich in 1863. They were married there in 1881. The Census recorded that they had two children, Hilda, aged 7 years and Albert Edward, aged 2 years. Sadly, Emma died two years later.

Three years later in 1896, Edward married Laura (née Lewis) aged 19 years who had been born at Faversham. Kent. The family by the time of the 1901 Census were still living in the prison quarters at Rochester, the household members being Edward aged 42 years, a prison warder, Laura, a nurse, aged 24 years, Alice aged 14, Albert aged 13 years, Laura aged 4 years, Amelia aged 2 years and a visitor Amelia Lewis a school teacher. Edward died in 1907, leaving Laura

his widow to bring up the children. Their daughter Alice is not included with the family under the heading 'Return of all the persons who slept or abode in this institution on the night of Sunday, April 5th, 1891 – the Census taken at the Gillingham District HM Convict Prison. She had been born on the 16th December, 1886 was baptised in the Wesleyan-Methodist Chapel in Manor Street, Gillingham, on the 9th March, 1887. The family at that time were living in the Prison Quarters, St Marys Vale – referring to the St Mary's (Island) Prison, where Edward worked. By 1911, the Census recorded that Laura aged 34 years a sick nurse, son Jack aged 9 years, daughters Jenny and Ethel aged 6 and 4 years respectively were living at 12 Albert Road, Rochester. All their children had been born at Borstal.

Before his father's death, Albert Edward Killian, joined the Royal Navy at Chatham on the 13th November, 1906 for a 12 year engagement. Later on the 13th November, 1918 he re-engaged to complete his service for pension. Albert was described on his service record as being 4-ft 7-inches in height on entry at the age of 18 years – in July 1908 he had grown to 5-ft 3½-inches and on re-engagement in November 1918 was 5ft 6-inches in height, had light brown hair, blue-grey eyes, fresh/fair complexion and he had a scar of a burn on his lower lip and cheeks. His occupation is unclear and given as 'school' (unoccupied) (No.41). He entered the Royal Navy at Chatham as a Boy Shipwright and served a five year apprenticeship before qualifying as a Shipwright. His record of service was as follows:-

<u>Ship</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Period of Service</u>		<u>Remarks</u>
		<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	
Chatham Yard	Boy Shipwright	3 Jul 1903	2 Jul 1908	
Pembroke II	Shipwright	3 Jul 1908	5 Aug 1908	
Blake	Shipwright	6 Aug 1908	9 Dec 1910	
Pembroke II	Shipwright	10 Dec 1910	20 Feb 1911	
Edgar	Shipwright	21 Feb 1911	2 May 1911	
Penguin	Shipwright	3 May 1911		
Penguin	Shipwright II	1 Dec 1912	25 Mar 1913	
Pembroke II	Shipwright II	26 Mar 1913	28 May 1914	
Pyramus	Shipwright II	29 May 1914		

Pyramus	Shipwright I	3 Nov 1914	25 Aug 1916	
Pembroke II	Shipwright I	26 Aug 1916	28 Mar 1917	
Centaur	Shipwright I	29 Mar 1917	1 Apr 1918	
Pembroke II	Shipwright I	2 Apr 1918	1 May 1918	
Gibraltar	Shipwright II	2 May 1918	13 Jun 1919	Discharged Dead

Albert's character and ability was marked as being 'Very Good'/'Superior' and he had been awarded two Good Conduct Badges, the first on the 3rd July, 1911 and the second on the 1st July, 1916. The dates on his record are unclear but it appears he was deprived of one badge, which was later restored. On the 3rd September, 1917 he passed and qualified as a Chief Shipwright. It may be noted that the last entry for his rank is Shipwright II Class. There is no indication as to why he had been reduced in rank from I Class to II Class Shipwright when drafted to HMS Gibraltar.

The following are brief details about the shore establishment and warships on which Albert served during his naval career:-

HMS Pembroke

HMS Pembroke was the name given to the shore barracks at Chatham, where Albert underwent his training for a shipwright.

Originally a wooden hulled ship commissioned in 1878, the facility was moved and based ashore in 1903 and was finally paid off in 1983. The buildings designed by Sir Henry Pilkington and now house the Universities at Medway, a tri-partite collaboration of the Universities of Greenwich, Kent and Canterbury Christ Church, on a single campus.

HMS Blake

A Blake-class steam powered protected armoured cruiser of 9,150-tons laid down at Chatham in July 1888, launched on the 23rd November, 1889 but was not completed until the 2nd February,



Grave Of Shipwright 2nd Class A.E. Killian R.N.

1892. She served as flagship on the North America and West Indies Squadron from 1892 to 1895 and later transferred to the Channel Fleet. Paid off in July 1901, she was later converted to a destroyer depot ship in 1907 and served in that role to the 11th Destroyer Flotilla of the Grand Fleet during the First World War and scrapped in 1922.

HMS Edgar

A steam powered Edgar-class armoured protected cruiser of 7,350-tons laid down at Devonport on the 3rd June, 1889, launched on the 24th November, 1889 and completed and commissioned the following year. She served on the China Station, participated in the 1902 Coronation review and returned to China. Deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean during the First World War she participated in the Dardanelles Campaign. In April 1918 HMS Edgar was damaged by an Austro-Hungarian submarine and scrapped in 1923.

HMS Penguin

An Osprey-class screw composite sloop, of 1,130-tons built, by Robert Napier of Govan. Laid down on the 14th July, 1874, launched on the 25th March, 1876 she was commissioned on the 23 August, 1877. Powered by a single steam engine driven propeller she also had three masts which were barque rigged. After two periods of service with the Royal Navy 1877 to 1881 and 1886 to 1889 she was converted to a survey vessel in 1890. Demasted in 1908 she was transferred to the Australian Commonwealth Naval Forces for use as a depot ship in Sydney Harbour. Commissioned as a sloop, in the Royal Australian Navy in 1913 HMAS Penguin remained in naval service until 1924. Sold off and converted to a floating crane, the vessel survived until 1960 when she was broken up.

HMS Pyramus

A steam powered Pelorus-class armoured armoured cruiser, of 2,135-tons built by Palmers Shipbuilding and Iron Company of Jarrow. Laid down in May 1896, launched on the 15th May, 1897 she was completed in 1900. This class of warship was mainly used for patrolling duties with overseas fleets and not with the main battle fleets. She escorted the New Zealand Force in 1914 which occupied German Samoa and in 1915 was present at the Rufiji river when the monitors HMS Seven and HMS Mersey destroyed the SMS Königsberg. After the end of the war she was scrapped in 1920.

HMS Centaur

One of two C-class light cruisers built by Vickers Limited was laid down on the 24th January, 1915, launched on the 6th January, 1916 and completed and commissioned in August of that year. Displacing 3,750-tons, her eight oil fired Yarrow boilers supplied steam to two Parsons Turbines driving four propeller shafts, achieving on sea trials a speed of 28·5-knots. HMS Centaur was assigned to the 5th Light Cruiser Squadron, part of the Harwich Force in the North Sea to defend the eastern approaches to the Straits of Dover and the English Channel. In June 1918 she was taken out of service to repair damage caused by a mine. At the end of the First World War she was sent to the Baltic for operations against Bolshevik forces in the Russian Civil War. On return to the United Kingdom she was deployed with the 3rd Light Cruiser Squadron in the Mediterranean from 1920 to 1922. Decommissioned in 1923 she was transferred to the Reserve Fleet. On re-commissioning she served as the flagship of Commodore (D) – Destroyers – with the Atlantic Fleet. Decommissioned again in 1932 she was scrapped two years later.

HMS Gibraltar

One of six 1891-93 'Old British Cruisers' of the Edgar-class. She was built in 1892 and her hull was sheathed in copper. Her technical details were as follows:-

Builder ~ Messer's Robert Napier Of Glasgow;

Dimensions ~ Overall Length 387½-ft; Beam 60-ft; Draught 24-ft;

Displacement ~ 7,700-tons;

Machinery ~ 2 x Steam Reciprocating Engines; 4 x Double Ended Boilers; 2 x Propellers;

Designed H.P. ~ 12,000 = 19·5-knots;

Range ~ 10,000-nautical miles @ 10-knots;

Armament ~ 2 x 9·2-inch, 30 Calibre Guns; 10 x 6-inch, Mark VII Guns (Four housed in 6-inch Main Deck Casemates, others had shields); 12 x 6-pounder Guns; 5 x 3-pounder Guns; 2 x 18-inch Torpedoes (Submerged);

Armour ~ 5-inch to 3-inch (Deck);

Fuel ~ Coal – Maximum Capacity 1,250-tons;

Complement ~ 544 Officers & Ratings;

These cruisers were noted for their excellent steaming capabilities.

HMS Gibraltar served in her early years on various foreign stations. After a refit in 1899 she was commissioned in March 1901 as flagship of the Commander-in-Chief of the South African Cape Station, and arrived at Durban in September. Despite her age she served in the First World War with the 10th Cruiser Squadron on the Northern Patrol and from 1915 as a depot ship based in the Shetland Islands. Later she was used as an anti-submarine training school based at Portland and then as destroyer depot ship before being scrapped in 1923.

Shipwright II Class Albert Killian was drafted to HMS Gibraltar on the 2nd May, 1918. After completing fifteen years' service in the Royal Navy he fell overboard from a picket boat returning to his ship on the 13th June, 1919 in Portland Harbour and was tragically drowned. He was 30 years of age.

Southern Times ~ Saturday, 21st June 1919.

Shipwright Drowned In The Harbour

Whilst a number of naval ratings were returning from shore leave on Friday night to H.M.S. Gibraltar a petty officer and a shipwright named A.E. Killian fell overboard. The petty officer was picked up, but despite every effort to rescue Killian he was drowned.

Southern Times ~ Saturday, 28th June, 1919.

Shipwright Drowned

At the R.N. Hospital on Monday evening the South Dorset Coroner (Mr G.P. Symes) held an inquest on the body of Albert Edward Killian, a shipwright on H.M.S. Gibraltar, who was drowned on the night of the 13th inst., whilst a picket boat was taking men back to the ship. The body was washed up in the harbour on Monday.

The deceased is 30 years of age, and a native of Rochester, Kent. Chas. Henry Walburn, 27, Clements Lane, Portland, spoke to recovering the body. Sidney Hatherington, H.M.S. Gibraltar, identified the deceased, who was a single man. On the night of June 13th, about 10.50 p.m., he was with the deceased on the picket boat going back to the ship. There were about 30 in the boat; deceased was sitting aft leaning against the canopy; he was sober. Witness saw him suddenly fall overboard and the boat was stopped. He did not see the man swimming; no one went in after him. The sea was quite calm.

Bertie Pearce, 1st Class P.O., H.M.S. Gibraltar, said he was in charge of the picket boat on the night in question, and they left shore at 10:40 with 23 men on board. The boat would carry 50. He did not see the man fall out, but heard the cry “Man Overboard,” and he stopped the engine and gave instructions for the lifebuoy to be thrown. They waited for 20 minutes, but did not see the man again. He considered it was too dangerous for anyone to go after him. Deceased was sober. William Henry Richardson said he sat next to the deceased. He could not say why he went overboard. There was no larking. Deceased was quite sober. A verdict of accidental death was returned.

Chatham, Rochester & Gillingham News ~ Saturday, 28th June, 1919.

Rochester Man Drowned – Witness Unable To Explain The Cause Of Accident

An inquest was held at Portland on Tuesday, on Albert Edward Killian, 30, shipwright, H.M.S. Gibraltar, whose home address was at Rochester. The evidence showed that on June 13th, deceased and twenty-three other men, whose leave had expired, left Portland in a picket boat, capable of accommodating 60 men. Deceased was sober, and he was seen leaning against the canopy. The night was calm, and there was no skylarking among the men. Suddenly Killian fell overboard. The engines of the picket boat were stopped, and a lifebuoy was thrown in the direction of the deceased.



Grave Of Shipwright 2nd Class A.E. Killian R.N.

The boat cruised around the spot for twenty minutes, but no sign was seen of the deceased. Witnesses stated that no one jumped into the water after the deceased, the P.O. in charge of the boat stating that he considered it would have been too dangerous. William Henry Richardson, who sat next to the deceased, was unable to account for Killian falling overboard.

The Coroner recorded a verdict of “Accidental Death.”

Births, Marriages & Deaths Column

KILLIAN – On June 13th, 1919, accidentally drowned at Portland, Albert Edward Killian, Shipwright, R.N., of H.M.S. Gibraltar, aged 30 years. Funeral on Saturday, June 28th at Chatham Cemetery, leaving 27, Wellington Street, Chatham, at 3.30 p.m.

After the inquest Albert Killian's body was claimed by his family and taken from the hospital mortuary to Chatham, for burial in the Maidstone Road Cemetery, Grave Reference FF.1245. Chatham was the location of the Royal Dockyard, the Royal Marine Barracks and was the depot of the Royal Engineers. Chatham (Maidstone Road) Cemetery contains 73 burials of the First World War and 30 from the Second World War, all scattered throughout the cemetery.

Albert's step-mother, Laura Killian, who was living at 61 Holcombe Road, Rochester, subsequently made a claim for a dependent's pension. However, the claim was ruled to be 'ineligible'. Although not clearly specified Albert may have nominated his sister Hilda, as his next-of-kin as she received his 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-1920, Allied Victory Medal 1914-1919, Bronze Memorial Plaque and Scroll. She may have also may have been the recipient of his war gratuity payment.

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Sources

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