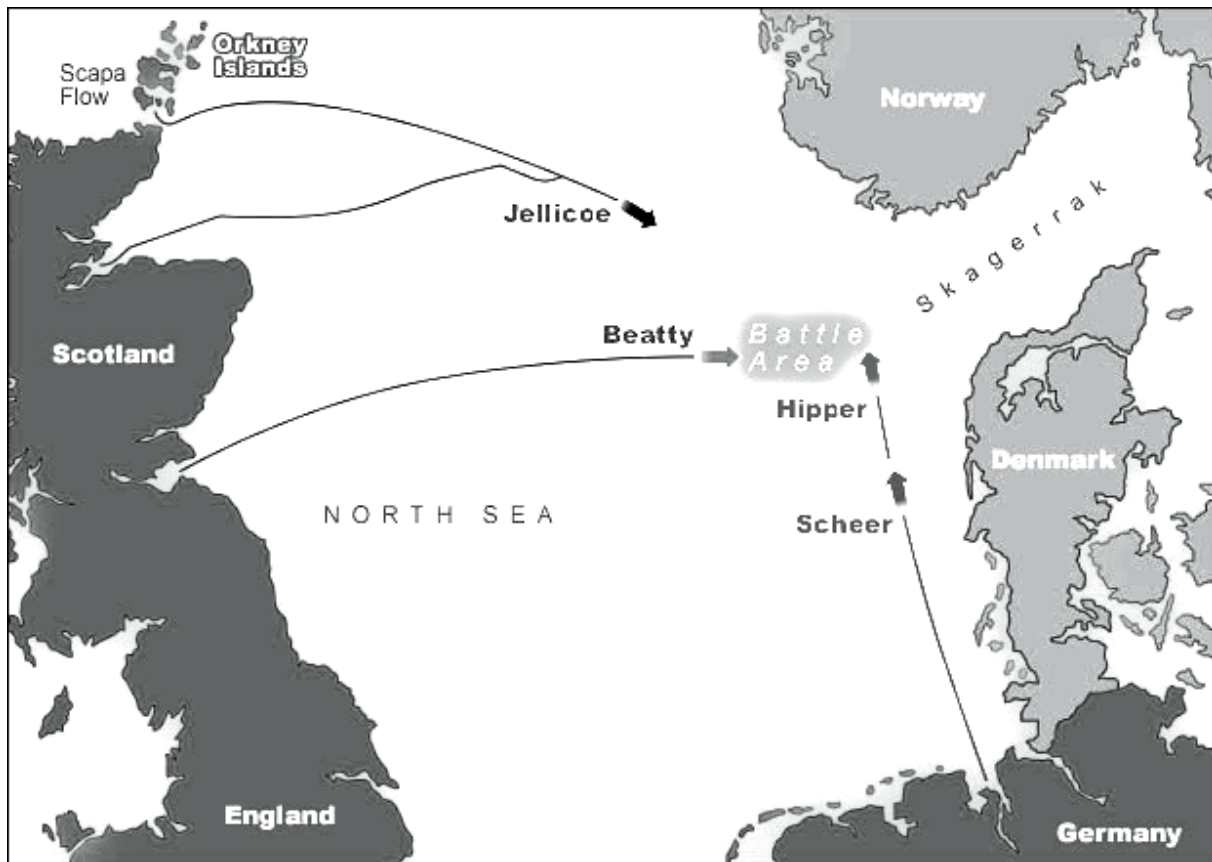


# Jutland – the Men of Emsworth

## by Philip Robinson



Earlier in 2017 I made a presentation on behalf of the Museum to commemorate the central naval battle of World War One, The Battle of Jutland, Wednesday 31st May 1916. The story of the battle was told through what happened to 12 men, the names of 11 of whom appear on the War Memorial in Horndean Road. The exception was Fleet Surgeon Herbert Lyne Geoghegan who is commemorated on the War Memorial at Rowlands Castle. There wasn't time in the lecture to give details of the 12 and in what follows this is provided; remembering the loss of the four ships in which the men of Emsworth lost their lives, *HMS Queen Mary*, *Invincible*, *Tipperary* and *Black Prince*; listed in the order in which the ships sank.

As Acting Leading Stoker, **William Kennett** was possibly in charge of one of the seven boiler rooms in *Queen Mary*. He would have been aware of impending action, off

the Danish peninsula of Jutland, as his ship surged forward at about 26 knots (30 miles per hour). Part of the German High Seas fleet had been spotted south of Admiral David Beatty's First Battle Cruiser Squadron and the Admiral had decided to attack.

William's job was to ensure that his six Yarrow boilers maintained their temperature to generate the steam to drive *Queen Mary's* turbines. The boilers were fed by coal, sprayed with oil to increase combustibility. A hard, demanding, relentless task in hot conditions as coal was organised into piles then fed into the furnaces.

William was 22, a small man at 5 foot 3 inches, who had been in the navy since June 1912. He had been posted to *Queen Mary* on the day she was commissioned,

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## *Jutland – The Men of Emsworth continued*

4th September 1913, and his diligence in challenging work resulted in his being promoted, in March 1916, to Leading Stoker. A promotion that may have given him special pleasure when his older brother, Walter, was posted to his ship just as she was about to leave Rosyth on 27th May 1916. The two brothers would have had little time to exchange family news. **Walter Kennett** was slightly smaller than William and had been a fisherman in Emsworth before joining the Royal Navy in October 1912, maybe encouraged to do so by the experiences of his younger brother.

The Kennett brothers had been born in Slipper Road, Hermitage, next door to The Great Eastern public house and had been baptised in St. John's Church, Southbourne. The same church where, on Monday 20th June 1892, a day of sharp showers and bright intervals, Joseph Kennett married Mary Starr, daughter of Isaac and Hannah Starr. Before her marriage, Mary had been a cook for the Rev Thomas Shaw in Horndean Road and Joseph was a mariner. Their first child, Walter, was born 23rd September 1892, and their second, William, on 1st March 1894. In total, Mary gave birth to ten children, six of whom survived infancy.

The Kennetts were a well-known and established family in Emsworth. Jack Kennett, a cousin to Joseph and Mary, served on Warblington District Council and was President of the Emsworth Dredgers' Co-operative Society.

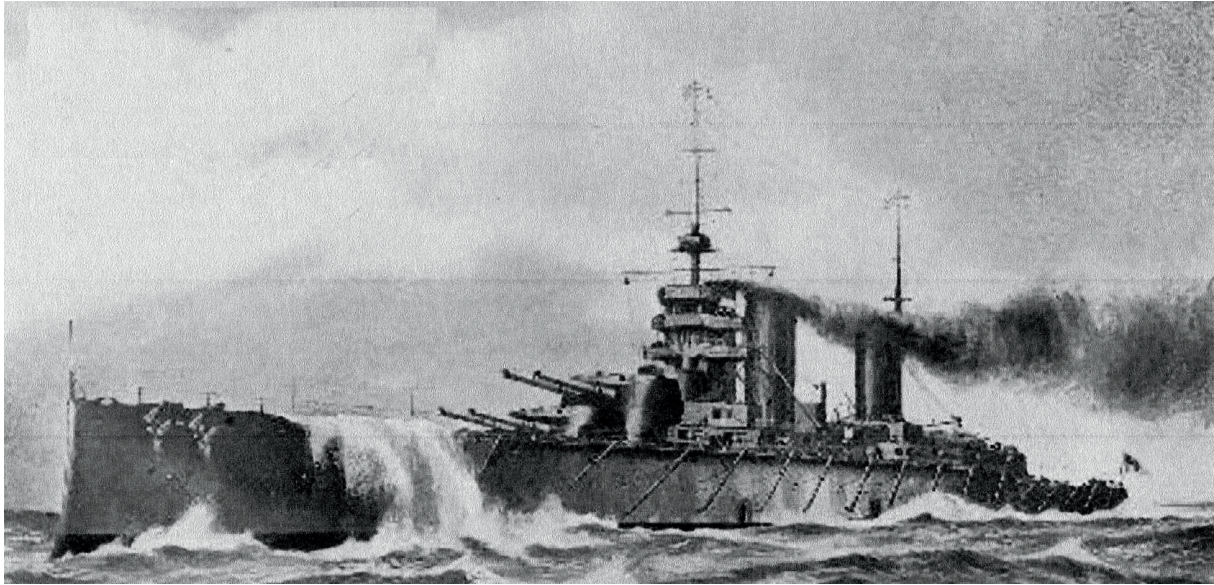
On that fateful Wednesday in 1916, William and Walter would have been oblivious to the ferocity of action, of gunfire and shells, as the British and German squadrons engaged each other. A noise of battle drowned by the roar of furnaces and the intensity of feeding rapacious boilers. Unaware that is, until 16:26, when the very floor of the boiler room would have started to move and slide as *Queen Mary* rolled to starboard. An incoming shell had effected an explosion in one of her gun turrets, an explosion of such ferocity that

it ripped a large hole in the side of the ship and she sank within a few terrifying minutes. 1,266 officers and men lost their lives.

Alongside William and Walter were other Emsworth men: Albert Couvell, John Jelley and Arthur Rubick. **Albert Couvell**, also a stoker, had enlisted in March 1907, just after his eighteenth birthday. He had been born in Bosham, the third child of James and Louisa Couvell. Albert was 5 foot 5 inches tall, of fresh complexion and had been a gardener. He had served on *Queen Mary* since November 1915. His recently widowed mother lived at Sea View (bottom of South Street) and three months after receiving the news of the death of Albert she lost another son, Francis. Francis had fought on the Somme with the 8th Battalion East Surrey Regiment, had been wounded and died in hospital in Boulogne on 8th October 1916.

**John Jelley** would have been very much engaged with the action as an Able Seaman. He had been born in Redhill, Surrey and joined the Royal Navy on his eighteenth birthday, 22nd May 1905. In June 1914, he passed the examinations necessary for him to become a petty officer and had served on *Queen Mary* from August 1915. His mother, a widow, moved from Redhill to Shanklin on the Isle of Wight and at the time of John's death was living at Southdown Cottage, Hermitage.

**Arthur Rubick** was born in Emsworth in April 1880, the second child and eldest son of George and Mary Ann Rubick. His father had moved from Chichester and was a bootmaker at 19, Queen Street, a business continued by his second son, Albert, who in 1911 was in business at 43, North Street. Arthur had enlisted in the Royal Marines in 1898 and served for 12 years. On his discharge, he became a crane-driver in London Docks, got married and lived at 54, Albany Place, Camberwell. He was recalled to the Royal Fleet Reserve when war was declared and was among the troops at Ostend in August 1914 in the vain attempt to protect Belgium ports from the Germans. In September 1914, as a Royal Marine, he



*HMS Queen Mary*

was posted to *Queen Mary*, and at the Battle of Jutland could well have been part of the crews operating one of her eight 13.5 inch main guns.

The explosion on *Queen Mary* was catastrophic; essentially through poor practice in handling the explosives necessary to fire the 13.5 inch shells. To expedite the speed of loading, bags of cordite were stacked in the tower leading to the gun turret and thus vulnerable to ignition and explosion if the turret was hit by an aggressive shell. This is what had happened on *Queen Mary* and this is what happened to *HMS Invincible*. She was a battle cruiser that had inflicted extensive damage on the German *Lützow* but at 18:34 she suffered the same calamitous explosion as *Queen Mary*, having been hit by a German shell. Amongst the 1,020 men killed was James Cribb.

**James Cribb** was born in Emsworth in 1887, the fourth child of William and Emily Cribb née Newell, from Wincanton. The family lived at 5, Orange Row and William was a bargeman. James enlisted in the Royal Navy just before his twentieth birthday. He appears to have been a boisterous sailor. His service record assesses him to be of good or very good character though punctuated by two periods in the cells, one of four days and one of three. When war broke out in August

1914 he was posted to *Invincible* and, like William Kennett, reached the post of Acting Leading Stoker, and like William was probably unaware of the acrid intensity of the Naval engagements until the fatal explosion.

Night descended, confusing and confounding the chaos of battle. The 4th Destroyer Flotilla, led by *HMS Tipperary*, commanded by Captain Charles Wintour, had lost contact with the core of the British Grand Fleet. At about 23:30 an outline of ships was detected to starboard, following a similar course to *Tipperary*, and Wintour sent out a recognition signal. The ships were German and in the glare of the searchlights they had switched on, *Westfalen* at about 1,000 yards was able to deploy accurate and devastating gunfire that sank *Tipperary* with a loss of 184 of its complement of 197, amongst whom was **Arthur Parham**.

Arthur's parents, George and Ruth Parham, lived in Lumley Lane in the 1881 Census; they had five children, the youngest William was just six months old. Arthur was not born until 10th April 1884, by which time his mother, Ruth, was a widow, her husband having died during the later stages of her pregnancy. Arthur joined the Royal Navy in 1904 and his service record shows him to be on *Hecla*

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### *Jutland – The Men of Emsworth continued*

in May 1916. *Hecla* was a base ship moored at Chatham and used for training purposes. That may have been his intended next posting but on 31st May, he drowned with *Tipperary* in the North Sea.

The night-time confusion that resulted in the loss of *Tipperary* was to affect *HMS Black Prince*, which had also become detached from the British Grand Fleet. Just after midnight she detected some nearby ships and in the darkness sent out a recognition signal. *Black Prince* was immediately illuminated by the spotlights of *Thüringen*, *Ostfriesland* and *Friedrich der Grosse* and became a target for the High Seas Fleet. Fires broke out along the decks of the *Black Prince* and then at 00:20 on 1st June her magazines exploded and she sank with all her crew of 857. Five men from Emsworth died that evening including the most senior officer of the local men who drowned that night, **Fleet Surgeon Herbert Geoghegan**.

Dr Geoghegan was born in Malta in 1872 and educated at Neuwied in Germany and Trinity College Dublin from where he graduated as a medical doctor. He had worked for the Pacific Steam Navigation Company before joining the Royal Navy. In September 1909 he married Isabella Anne, née Pickthorn, at St. Mary's Church, Fulham. His widow subsequently married Mr Downs and lived at Arun House, Climping, Littlehampton. A Stuart Downs was a witness of the wedding of Herbert and Isabella in 1909. Dr and Mrs Geoghegan lived at "Lyndenhurst", Rowlands Castle.

**Leigh Buick** was born in Station Road, Emsworth on 27th April 1888. His father, James, came from Rothesay, Isle of Bute, Scotland and was a carpenter for a wheelwright. His mother, Maria, was born in Paris. Leigh was their first child and on his eighteenth birthday he joined the Royal Navy for 12 years, becoming a Leading Seaman and in July 1915 passed the examination for promotion to Petty Officer. In the same

summer he married Bessie Salisbury in Portsmouth. He had served on *Black Prince* from 21st April 1914.

Petty Officer **Victor Whiting** joined *Black Prince* on the same day. Victor was nine years older than Leigh and had originally enlisted in the Royal Navy in October 1897, like Leigh, on his eighteenth birthday. He was the fourth child and fourth son of Henry and Sarah Whiting who kept a shop in The Square, Emsworth. At the 1911 Census his father is listed as the Landlord of The Anchor Public House in South Street. (now 36 On the Quay). Victor married Ethel Bradnum in the early spring of 1910 and they had one child. In the Portsmouth Evening News of Thursday 8th June 1916 is this simple but heartfelt message, "In loving memory of my dear husband, Victor John Whiting, who lost his life on *HMS Black Prince* – From his sorrowing wife and little son, Victor, 18, Thorney Road, Emsworth".

The remaining two men from Emsworth who lost their lives at Jutland are **George Pearce** and **Harold Gilbert**. George was the second child and son of William and Agnes Pearce. William was a fisherman and the family lived at 3, Hampshire Terrace, Queen Street. George was born on 1st November 1896 and joined the Royal Navy just after his eighteenth birthday and in July 1915 was posted to *Black Prince* as Stoker First Class. Harold Gilbert had first joined the Royal Navy as a boy sailor just after his fifteenth birthday and on his eighteenth birthday, 5th December 1915, enlisted as an Able Seaman for 12 years. He would have been very familiar with *Black Prince* having joined her on 21st April 1914, the same day as Leigh Buick and Victor Whiting.

Harold was the fifth child of Charles and Hannah Gilbert. His father was a shepherd in Up Marden but died in 1909 and at the time of the 1911 Census Hannah was living at Locksash, West Marden with her three sons, Charles, George and Harold and her youngest daughter, Gladys.

For the people of Emsworth, the first reports of the battle appeared in The Portsmouth Evening News on Saturday 3rd June, informing its readers of the loss of *HMS Queen Mary*, *Invincible*, *Tipperary* and *Black Prince* amongst ten ships listed with six still unaccounted for, as the newspaper's leader phrased it "in hundreds of homes there is weeping for those who will return no more".



*One Emsworth man who did return was Royal Marine Bill Yalden, seen here second from right, middle row. HMS Monarch (below) fired 53 13.5 inch shells during the Battle of Jutland. Photos: B Gudge*

