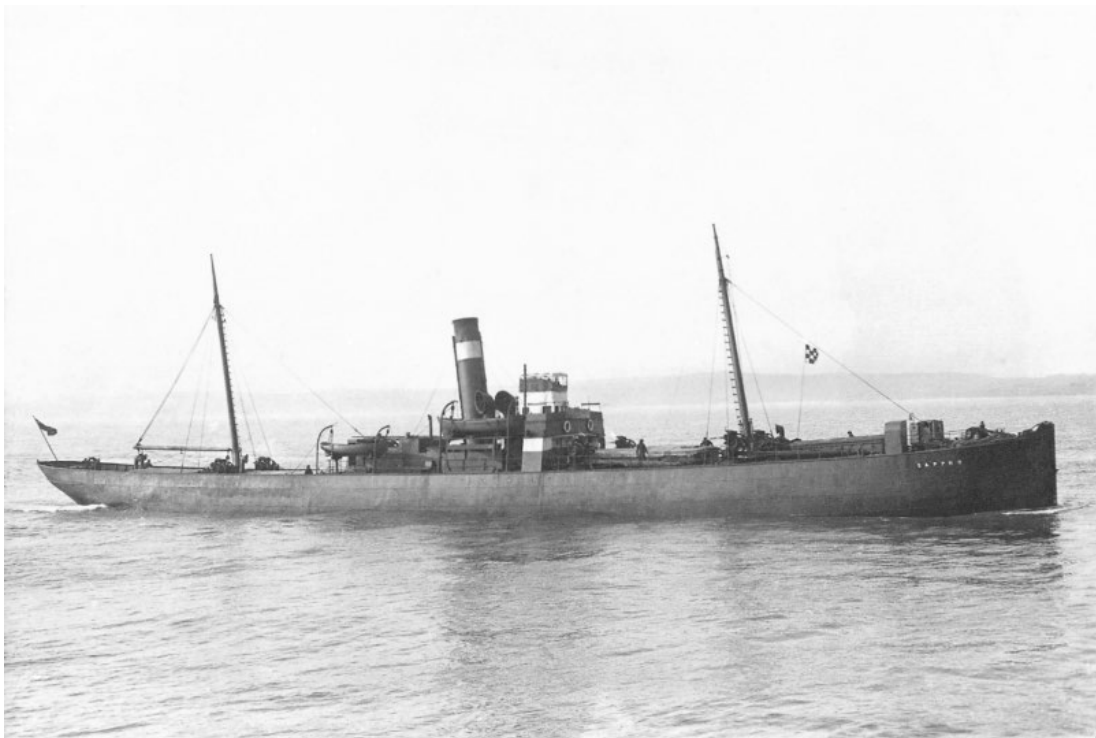


Sappho & her Sisters

*Steamships and Mariners of the Bristol Channel
Ports in the age of steam.*

D. P. Lindegaard



ss. Sappho

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D.P. Lindegaard was born in Bristol and is a life-long local and family history enthusiast. She has a long-suffering husband, three adult children and four grandchildren. Her personal association with the sea is limited to a youthful membership of the Girls' Nautical Training Corps (GNTC) now amalgamated with the Sea Cadet Corps, at Charles Hill's old dockyard, and her late father-in-law who served in the Danish Merchant Navy.

This account is the result of the chance discovery of the Bristol Channel seamen of the ss. *Sappho*, belonging to the Bristol Steam Navigation Company, who were interned in Germany during the Great War, 1914-18. Due to the law of unintended consequences the work expanded to include Bristol POWs from other ships, plus a few tourists, who were similarly detained. Additionally in the second half are tales of Bristol seamen who sailed on *Sappho*'s sister ships and several others, from Victorian times until World War Two and beyond. The Epilogue contains reminiscences of "old mariners" who sailed on the last *Sappho* and her sisters during the 1950s and 1960s, a way of life now almost forgotten. The company ceased trading in 1980.

This author hopes that this short record may prompt other former mariners (not only those of the BSNC) who sailed in and out of the ports of Bristol and Gloucestershire to contact her.

In memory of my friend

Harold James Baldwin, 1936-1966

&

my father-in-law

Norman Rindom Lindegaard, 1910-1970

mariners

Contents:

Prologue: You never know where you are going until you get there.....: Page 5

Part 1

"Bottled Up" in Hamburg: Page 7

ss. *Sappho* – the Early Years: Page 8

The Wreck of the ss. *Cato*, 1899: Page 9

Return to ss. *Sappho*: Page 26

Part 2

The Prisoners at Ruhleben: Page 29

"Cabbage Soup again!" : Page 34

"Home is the Sailor.....": Page 48

Part 3

More Bristol POWs: seamen and tourists: Page 56

Part 4

Sappho's sisters: Page 77

Homeward Bound: Page 83

The loss of ss. *Echo*, 1923: Page 84; *Sappho* again: Page 84

The loss of ss. *Teane*, 1928: Page 91; Captain Gregory of the 'new' *Cato*: Page 92

The loss of the ss. *Alecto*, 1936: Page 95; The loss of the ss. *Ino*, 1936: Page 98

The loss of the ss. *Cato*, 1940: Page 100

Epilogue

Old Mariners talking: Page 103; Harry Mowat's Story: Page 105; Joe Earl's Story: Page 112; The final word: Page 119.

Glossary, page 121; Notes, Abbreviations & Sources: Page 122; Acknowledgements: Page 123.

*Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack,
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.*

"Cargoes", John Masefield

Prologue:

You never know where you are going until you get there.....

As any family historian will confirm, the research road has many turnings and it is all but impossible not to be diverted along the way. I was at St Anne's church looking at the Memorials to Brislington men who died during the Great War when I saw that a young soldier, Sidney Aitken who was killed in action in 1917 was commemorated twice, on the main tablet with its sad alphabetical list of names and also on a separate plaque which stated that he was "the grandson of the late Captain W. Aitken of New Passage." Captain Aitken was evidently a person of such note that he needed no further explanation to those in the know, but he was a mystery to me. I was intrigued and decided to find out more.

Sidney Aitken, who lost his life during the tank battle at Cambrai, was the son of William and Mary Elizabeth Aitken (nee Parker) who were married in 1885. William Adam Aitken, his father, was born about 1864 in Tidenham, Gloucestershire. In 1871, aged seven, he was living at New Passage Road, Redwick with his father, John Aitken, aged 45, a master mariner, of the ship *Christopher Thomas*, his mother, Eliza, 46, and his older sister and brother, Agnes, 15, and twelve year old John.

It would seem that the father of the family, (Sidney's supposed grandfather) was called John not the "W" of the plaque. Though this was an unsatisfactory conclusion, I suspended disbelief and entered the name AITKEN into a newspaper finding aid. A man of this name was part of a list, of a significant date, recording a timely event. The Western Daily Press had received an inventory of

"officers and seamen taken prisoner from British Merchant ships....."

who had been confined in Germany as Prisoners of War. The newspaper had extracted the names of the local seafarers from returns supplied by the enemy and published them in three tranches, as a "Roll of Honour" on 8, 11, & 16 October 1917:

J. Adams, 2nd Engineer, Bristol. "*City of Berlin*"

J. Aitken, Chief Engineer, Bristol. "*Sappho*"

Marwood Bailey, Ilminster. "*Victorian Transport*" (released Jan. 1917)

F. Bolerwin,¹ seaman, Bristol. "*City of Munich*" (released 22 Dec. 1915)

T. Briggs, Bristol. "*May Scott*"

William Bryant, seaman/carpenter, Bristol. "*Rossall*" (released Dec. 1915)

W.F. Butterworth, 2nd Officer, Fishponds. "*Sappho*"

¹ A mis-spelling – of course! Explanation later in the text.

A.V. Carey, 1st Mate, Bristol. *"Trevidor"*

L. Cosgrove, greaser, Bristol. *"Nicoya"*

E. Daniels, 2nd Officer, Stonehouse, Glos. *"Sappho"*

W. Davies, cook, Bristol. *"Dartwen"*

Charles Dugay, fireman, Bristol. *"Victorian Transport"*

E. Griffin, AB, Stonehouse. *"Sappho"*

A. James, cook, Bristol. *"City of Cadiz"*,

D. James, fireman, Bristol. *"City of Berlin"*

E. Jones, seaman, Bristol. *"Sinnainn"* (released Dec. 12, 1915)

J. Lawrence, AB, Stonehouse, Glos. *"Sappho"*

S. Makepeace, Chief Officer, Bristol. *"Nicoya"*

G. Meadows, quartermaster, Stonehouse. *"Sappho"*

D. Neil, Bristol, Master. *"Dartwen"*

E.G. Pendelton, 2nd Engineer, Exeter. *"Inkula"*

C. Petersen, quartermaster, Gloucester. *"Sappho"* (released Jan.7, 1916)

C.M. Pow, Chief Officer, Bristol. *"Sangara"*

G. Richards, fireman, Bristol. *"City of Cadiz"*

Walter Rutland, seaman, Gloucester. *"Rossall"*

E.W. Shambrook, purser, Exeter. *"Oron"*

C.B. Short, apprentice, Bristol. *"Treglisson"*

A. Steward, fireman, Gloucester. *"Sappho"* (released Dec. 12, 1915)

H. Vale, fireman, Bristol. *"City of Berlin"*

O. Watts, AB. Stonehouse. *"Sappho"*

G. Wiggins, fireman, Gloucester. *"Sappho"* (released Feb. 7, 1916)

H. Williams, fireman, Bristol. *"City of Belfast"*

These reports were published in October 1917 when the war was more than three years old. I had not heard of civilian POW camps in Germany before but having chanced upon a subject I knew nothing about I could not resist probing further, especially as the contribution of Merchant Seamen to the war effort is often forgotten.

It was not hard to spot that ten men, Aitken, Butterworth, Daniels, Griffin, Lawrence, Meadows, Petersen, Steward, Watts and Wiggins were from one vessel, a cargo ship called *Sappho*, which routinely sailed between Gloucester, Bristol and Antwerp or Hamburg. Unlike the rest of those named, the crew of *Sappho* formed a discernible group and over the next few months they would become familiar old friends.

Part 1. Bottled Up in Hamburg!

Bristol Steam Navigation Company's *Sappho* was one of the many small cargo ships whose weekly comings and goings to and from the ports of Bristol and Gloucester were relayed to the public through the "Shipping News" column in the local press. On 9th July 1914, *Sappho* had arrived in Avonmouth, from Hamburg, "Homeward Bound" for her base at Sharpness; within a few days she was back in Europe and on 23rd July had left Rotterdam for Swansea. On 31st July she was off again, and on 3rd August the Western Daily Press stated that "*Sappho*, for Rotterdam [had] passed Dungeness" two days before. Though putting to sea, any more than going down a coalmine, can ever be classed as 'risk free' this was the regular existence of the sixteen members of *Sappho*'s crew, on the face of it, hardly the stuff of high adventure. Having been divested of her cargo of sugar beet, *Sappho* had already steamed out of Rotterdam for Hamburg by the time the news of her outgoing voyage had appeared in the paper. In these days of instant communication it is difficult to perceive that just over a century ago this was the way it was. Those waiting at home would have carried on as normal, expecting their men back within a few days give or take the usual hazards of the job, despite the current critical international situation. *Sappho*'s crew were in Hamburg loading "general cargo" for the return journey on 4th August 1914 when Great Britain and the Empire declared war on Germany. The world was plunged into the catastrophe which became known as The Great War.

The next day, 5th August, the German dock police told *Sappho*'s master, Captain Jenkins, that his ship, along with fifty four other vessels in the port, was under detention. *Sappho* was stranded. At home, the shipping news, briefly relayed by the Gloucester Journal of 8th August, (at least for the Company's ships), was on the whole better than expected, except in one instance:

"We understand that the Bristol Steam Navigation Company's boats are all on this side of the North Sea with the exception of 'Sappho' which is 'bottled up' in Hamburg."

On the same date, the *Franz Fischer*, a steamer of 592 tons, under the German flag, carrying 400 planks of deal, arrived at Sharpness and found itself in the same position on our side of

the Channel. The enemy ship was likewise placed under arrest and her crew presumably spent the war in an internment camp on the Isle of Man.

ss. Sappho: The Early Years

The steamship *Sappho*, the second ship of the Bristol Steam Navigation Co.'s fleet to bear the name, was one of a number of vessels called after classical personalities all ending with the letter "O": *Echo, Apollo, Cato, Hero, Dido, Ino, Hero, Pluto, Juno*, small steamers which would have been well known to the people of the Bristol Channel ports. *Sappho* was an ancient Greek poetess whose naughty oeuvre enjoyed a certain vogue in the early 20th century; half a dozen ships were named after her, including a warship and a contender for the America's Cup, along with several lesser vessels; there was an eponymous opera composed by Gounod and even a few racehorses endowed with variations of the name. Scholars mulled over the fragments of the poet's erotic verse, deliciously scandalised by the content. Whether the seamen of *Sappho* also sniggered is unknown.

Sappho II, a steel single screw vessel, 1,275 tons gross, 806 net, 230 feet long with a 33 feet beam, 15 foot draft and triple expansion engines was built in Scotland by Ramage & Ferguson of Leith. She sailed out of the Scottish port on her maiden voyage, 3rd March 1900, with a cargo of coal and a ship's company of fifteen, under Captain Young, described as "a tried and trusted servant of the Company." She was steaming at 10 knots about ten miles from shore, opposite the Inchcraig Lighthouse when she ran on to a submerged reef known as the South Craig Wall.

"No-one had any idea we were near the rocks," said Able Seaman Walter Gerrish, "we hoped it would be possible to tow *Sappho* back to port; she was perfectly appointed. I could not have wished to be aboard a better vessel."²

After the bump, Captain Young, who was at the wheel, ordered all hands on deck. A jolly boat was immediately lowered and two men rowed back to Leith with an urgent call for a tug. The remaining crew manned the "donkey", a small pumping engine, but could not keep up with the rapid flow and in no time "for'ard" was submerged under 15 feet of water. With the situation dire, the rank and file were taken back to Leith aboard the tug and were accommodated overnight in the Sailors' Home. The officers remained on board until the following day when they too left the ship. Fortunately there were no injuries to anyone and the garrulous Gerrish was pleased to report that none of the crew had lost any possessions. A sailor's kit would have comprised a pair of sea boots, an oil skin coat and trousers, a knitted woollen Guernsey, a cap, a belt, with a sheath and knife, with other odds and ends such as a 'housewife' and a few toiletries at a minimum replacement value of £10. All the crew arrived safely back in Bristol within a few days.

² BMe 9.3.1900

It appeared that *Sappho* was a total wreck; as Gerrish looked back she was “fast breaking into two halves, with only three feet of her flag showing above the water.” However his pessimism was unjustified. Operations to salvage the ship’s fittings immediately commenced and in a difficult operation, she was re-floated by means of a cofferdam, a watertight enclosure pumped dry to permit construction work below the waterline.³

At the Board of Trade enquiry three months later judgement was given that *Sappho* had not been navigated with proper seamanlike care and that serious damage to the vessel was caused by the negligence of the Master, John Young, whose certificate was suspended for twelve months (though he would be allowed to hold a chief officer’s document during the suspension.) The First and Second Officers, unnamed, were exonerated without fault.⁴

On 31st March 1901, the night the census was taken, Walter Gerrish, aged 26, a merchant seaman, was ashore at 23 Bartlett Terrace, Bedminster, with his wife Kate and daughter Ida aged 4 months. He later became a lighterman at Bristol Docks.

For two other survivors, Harry Lockett, the donkeyman, and Able Seaman Thomas Rodda, the ordeal would have brought back terrifying memories, for less than a year before the two men had survived an appalling disaster, the wreck of the ss. *Cato* in which seven men lost their lives.

The wreck of the ss. Cato, 1899

In the spring of 1899, the *Cato*, a cargo steamer, of 726 tons nett register had been in the possession of the Bristol Steam Navigation Co. for only a few weeks. She was regarded by the owners as a valuable new addition to the fleet, but she was still on trial. The Chief Engineer, who was on board as a “Guarantee Man” was a 30 year old Scotsman, Daniel Drummond, a son of the deputy Harbour Master at Greenock. Like all officers aboard a merchant ship he was called “Mr”. An hour before *Cato* was due to leave Gloucester, the Second Mate, Mr Lucas, was brought news that his father had died. Understandably he elected to stand down. A major event for the bereaved Lucas family, but a nuisance for the young Master, 29 year old Bristol-born Captain Walter George Whyatt, which he solved by upgrading an experienced seaman, Fred West, to Second Mate in place of Lucas. On arrival at Cardiff docks, on 5th April, 1899, where he was due to take on a cargo of coal for Hamburg, he decided he needed a replacement AB, and engaged a Swede, August Lundgren, who was hanging about the dock looking for a berth. There was one other slightly unusual event. Captain Whyatt was to be accompanied on the voyage by his wife, Ann Eliza. Though Whyatt had passed his certificate of competency to take charge of an ocean going ship some years before, and had been mate/master of several other BSN owned ships, this was his first permanent command, which may explain the presence of Mrs

³ ibid

⁴ Ibid 29.3.1900

Whyatt, perhaps as a treat, in celebration, but without their two young daughters, aged five and four.

The ship's manifest lists the full complement of the ship, the Master, a crew of sixteen and one passenger, the Master's wife:

Captain W.G. Whyatt, (certificate of competency no. 034098) & Mrs Whyatt of 80 Kennington Avenue, Bishopston, Bristol

Mr John Frederick Plomer Francis, 24, the Mate, of Frenchay Villa, Stapleton Road.

Mr Frederick West, 40, 2nd Mate, of "The Observatory", Clifton Down.

Mr Daniel Drummond, 30, Chief Engineer, of Greenock

Mr William Moore, 33, 2nd Engineer, originally from London

Edwin Lockett, 20, steward, of Hotwells Road

Harry Lockett, 31, donkeyman, the brother of Edwin

Oscar Elfstrom, 38, acting Quarter Master, originally from Gothenburg, Sweden, but of 3 Pembroke Place, Bristol

Albert Travell, 21, AB, of Wheatenhurst, Gloucestershire

Thomas Rodda, 48, AB (either from Bristol or Cornwall)

Henry James Fitzpatrick, 23, AB, born in Liverpool

Alfred Cole(s), 62, AB, of 61 Richmond Street, Barton Hill

August Lundgren, 35, AB, "supposed Swedish"

Henry Stephens, 44, fireman

William Gunney, 43, fireman, of 4 Crosby Road, Hotwells

Richard Fisher, 29, fireman (who had previously served aboard ss. *Juno* in 1896)

Cato left Cardiff at 2 o'clock the same afternoon, 5th April, a fine spring day with a light south-west wind. At about 5 p.m. the wind freshened to a moderate gale. The Master tried to get under Lundy Roads for shelter, but by 6 o'clock when this manoeuvre failed, he "bore up to Barry Roads" and arrived there at 1 a.m. The weather modified during the night. The next morning dawned with a smooth sea and the voyage proceeded at 6.30 a.m., 6th April. At noon, the weather changed again, and with visibility hazy, the wind freshened, changing from south west to north. At about 7 p.m. as they rounded Trevose Head in Cornwall, the wind suddenly increased to gale force. The Captain then hove to, with *Cato* heading to

north-west, her engines working as necessary to keep the ship to the wind. There was by now a very heavy sea and the vessel appeared to strain but did not take on much water at this time. Before long the wind increased again and the ship plunged a good deal. The bad weather continued through the night and the vessel then shipped a large quantity of water. At about 5 o'clock on the morning of the 7th April the starboard coal bunker was washed away. During the course of the morning Acting Quartermaster Oscar Elfstrom attempted to grab hold of the hatchway but was knocked down by a mighty sea, which broke both his legs. Whyatt ordered him carried to the chart house, took down the medical kit, and having been trained for such an emergency, set the man's fractured legs as best he could, the vessel all the while wildly plunging up and down in a huge swell. At noon the ship's wells were sounded but no leak was discovered though at about the same time, Harry Lockett, the donkeyman, who by then had been on duty for 15 hours saw that the tarpaulin of no. 3 hatch had come loose. Captain Whyatt sent the mate and four ABs to try to tie it down but they failed to do so and it was blown away. By the afternoon the forepart of the hatch was missing altogether, the water was coming in and nothing could stop it. It was hard to say whether anything had sprung but the vessel was soon full of water. Lockett said they put the doors down in the tunnel. These doors were supposed to be water-tight but they leaked very badly. At about 3 p.m. they tried to put on "the donkey" but although they tried in three separate places they could not get it to work. James Fitzpatrick reported the matter to Whyatt who said he was "most surprised" and sent for Drummond, the Engineer. Whyatt stated he ordered the main pumps put on at this time, but it was not clear whether or not the order was relayed. Lockett would give testimony somewhat ambiguously, that they "commenced pumping as soon as they received orders to do so." Fitzpatrick said he knew the pumps were working at about 6 p.m. as he saw dirty water coming out of the discharge pipe at this time.

With the situation desperate Whyatt ordered the lifeboats to be provisioned and got ready for launching. He sent the Engineer to tell the men below that he had ordered the boats out and to make haste to abandon ship. At 6.30 p.m. *Cato* took on board another heavy sea and Whyatt ordered the port lifeboat to be lowered at once. This was safely done and Lockett, his young brother Edwin, three Able Seamen, and Mrs Whyatt managed to get into the boat. Whilst the drama of the port lifeboat was in progress, those still on board *Cato* attempted to launch the starboard lifeboat. In the struggle Captain Whyatt was blown overboard and pitched into the heaving sea. Meanwhile the port lifeboat capsized and the people in it were also thrown into the sea. According to one newspaper account Mrs Whyatt swam back to the lifeboat, with one crew member clinging to her long skirts. Harry Lockett, seeing that his young brother was farther out than the rest swam to him and brought him back to the boat which righted itself and they all managed to clamber back into it. When Whyatt, who was wearing a life jacket came up for air he also managed to get to the lifeboat and was pulled aboard by the others. He saw *Cato* founder and she commenced to go down by the stern. He was unable to do anything to help those left on board the stricken ship.

They spent many hours tossed about in the storm, wet through and in deadly danger of capsizing again due to the severity of the gale. Accounts vary as to the length of time they spent in the darkness in their precarious position but in the early hours of 8th April the lifeboat was spotted off Longships by Captain William Thomas, of the steam trawler *Sea Swallow*.



Longships Lighthouse, ca1900

An arduous operation to get everybody safely off the lifeboat and on to the trawler was managed successfully by 11 a.m. Captain Whyatt, interviewed for a Bristol paper said "Thank God we were picked up by Captain Thomas, I never saw anything smarter in my life. The *Sea Swallow* was coming along in a tremendous sea. I was snatched out of the waterlogged lifeboat by my collar. It was a brave piece of work."

They were offered hot tea and brandy, but sadly, the youngest member, Edwin Lockett, who was in a bad way, scarcely conscious, could only manage to drink a little. He was carried below to a cabin and wrapped up warmly but failed to revive. This was the last time Harry Lockett saw his brother alive and he died sometime during the evening. The remaining eight, along with Edwin's remains, were landed at Milford Haven where the living were looked after by the Shipwrecked Mariners' and Fishermen's Society with the dead man's body taken elsewhere to await an inquest.

Following his brief encounter with the Bristol Mercury's reporter, Captain Whyatt, in shock, was said to be "unconscious". The next edition of the newspaper, 14th April, with an account of Edwin's death, gave lists of the survivors and the missing:

Survived:

Captain & Mrs Whyatt, Bristol

G. Rodda, AB, Bristol, married

J. Fitzpatrick, AB, Bristol, single

----- Travell, AB, Gloucester

H. Stephens, fireman, Bristol, married

H. Lockett, fireman, Bristol married

R. Fisher, fireman, Bristol, single

Missing:

Mr Francis, chief mate, Bristol, single

Mr F. West, 2nd mate, Bristol, married

Mr Drummond, chief engineer, Scotland

Mr Moore, engineer, Bristol, married

O. Elfstrom, AB, Bristol, married

----- Lundgren (misprinted in the paper as "Lunga") AB, Cardiff

W. Gunney, fireman, Bristol, single

A. Coles, AB, Bristol

News of the disaster quickly spread and distressed relatives and friends began to call at the *Mercury* office anxious for news. Among them "was a young Bristol lady who was engaged to one of the officers"; her fiancé must have been the mate, John Francis.

A brief history of the Lockett family followed which confirmed the dangers of a life at sea. Edwin who had died of exhaustion aboard the *Sea Swallow* had helped to support a widowed mother, Elizabeth Jane; his father Alfred, aged 48, a stoker, had died in November 1890 from a fractured skull when working at Avonmouth on board the *Bayonne*, when the lid of an oil tank fell on his head. As to Harry Lockett, it was the second time he had been rescued from a sinking ship. In January 1888 he had been on board the *Constance*, another of BSNC's vessels which had gone down near Plymouth with the loss of three lives.

"A. Coles" who was listed among the missing was still very much alive and to catch up with him, we return to *Cato* at 7 o'clock, on 7th April when Captain Whyatt had just been swept overboard in the gale.

Able Seaman Alfred Coles, a sturdy healthy-looking man whose agility belied his sixty two years, was attempting, single-handedly to lower the starboard lifeboat. He was grappling to unhook the tackles when he was caught by a huge wave and hurled into the sea. Fortunately the lifeboat detached itself at the same time and Coles found himself underneath it. He managed to cling on. He could swim and was wearing a life jacket. To his amazement he saw that Engineer Drummond was inside the lifeboat, but Coles had no idea how he could have got there. Drummond helped him into the boat and they looked about for the rest of the crew. The *Cato* had sunk with astonishing rapidity and they assumed others had been washed overboard into the raging sea and true enough some distance away they espied Moore, the Second Engineer, and another crewman, both being kept afloat by their belts. They tried to get nearer to the two men, but by this time Drummond was so exhausted he could do very little to help. Coles tried to paddle towards the men in the water, at the same time fighting to keep the boat upright, when another great sea broke over them. The lifeboat was almost overwhelmed and the swimmers disappeared. Coles saw neither of them again. These were the only two members of the crew he saw. Nothing else was sighted but broken wreckage. He and Drummond, now sitting waist deep in water, drifted, using up all their energy trying to keep afloat. At about 9 o'clock, they sighted a vessel which they hailed by blowing the warning whistle. The vessel stopped. Though she "dodged about" for some time seemingly looking for them the night became too dark and the sea too boisterous and the look outs failed to see the small boat writhing in the waves or to hear the frantic calls of the men inside it. After some time the ship abandoned the search and went off. Coles concluded those on board must have believed that "whoever blew the whistle had afterwards drowned." Drummond, who was in a poor state, lost hope after this incident.

Coles said *"He gave up heart; I knew he was dying. He told me he could not stand it. I begged him to stretch his legs, to try to move them."*

He said *"I can't, I can't."*

At two o'clock in the morning Drummond died. Coles somehow managed to keep up his strength and spirits. Several vessels passed but they were too far away to be hailed. Then at half past three a.m. a vessel which proved to be the ss. *Elton* came close enough for him to make himself heard.

The Captain replied to his call *"What is it?"*

Coles replied *"For God's save me. It is a boat."*

The Captain sang out *"All right. I will stand by."*

Captain Ramsay could not see the small boat in the darkness of the night and at times the larger vessel steamed out of Coles' sight too. But Ramsay kept his word and remained in the vicinity until daybreak, and at last at 7.30 a.m., four hours after the *Elton* first heard his cry for help, Coles was instructed to leave the lifeboat and again brave the raging sea. Ropes were lowered and he was hauled aboard with considerable difficulty. It was impossible to hoist the dead man, Drummond, on board too, and the small boat was set adrift with his body in it. As soon as he knew he was safe Coles collapsed in a faint, though declared "*I wasn't out long.*"

So Captain Ramsay of the *Elton* proceeded towards his destination, Madeira, with Coles on board. He was evidently still unconscious - his name unknown – when at 9 a.m. on 8th April, "bearing true east, 8 miles Longships" Ramsay signalled a passing ship, the Glasgow bound *Clan Graham* which passed on the laconic message "*spoke Elton; Cato foundered, rescued one sailor.*"

The *Polymitis* from Genoa, 8th April, 18 miles from Cape Cornwall, also wired; she had passed a waterlogged lifeboat, belonging to *Cato*. Subsequently a telegram was received that the same whale-built boat with ss. *Cato* painted on the side had been washed ashore at Sennen Cove, Land's End, with one dead body of a sailor inside. It was quickly established that this was the missing boat which the crew had been trying to launch at the time of the sinking as described by Captain Whyatt. The body was that of Drummond; his brother had already left Greenock to make arrangements for the funeral.

At Milford Haven, 14th April, the coroner was summoned for an inquest concerning the death of Edwin Lockett. Harry Lockett identified the deceased as his twenty year old brother, the steward aboard the *Cato*. The donkeyman described the circumstances of the storm leading up to the wreck as he would do again several times in future days and weeks. He told how his brother was put into the boat with the rest of the survivors; at that time the young man seemed all right. Harry got into the boat himself, wearing a life jacket but was dressed only in a shirt and trousers. They were thrown out of the boat and he saw his brother in the water, though farther away than the rest and swam back to help him. The people managed to right the boat and they all clambered in again, numbering nine persons, sitting appropriately to balance the boat, otherwise they would have capsized. When they were picked up by the trawler Edwin was given tea and brandy but he never revived. He was taken to the cabin, and when Harry next saw him, he was dead. Further evidence was given by Able Seaman James Fitzpatrick, another of the survivors, Arthur Parsons, the Chief Engineer of *Sea Swallow*, and a Dr Griffiths though their words were not reported. Captain Whyatt was not present at the proceedings which Mr Harold Evans, a lawyer acting on behalf of the owners, said was on the Company's instructions as "he would only be required at the Board of Trade Enquiry". The Coroner testily disagreed and said "Captain Whyatt was very foolish in leaving the town knowing the inquest had been ordered." The verdict was

that the deceased died from exposure consequent of the foundering of the *Cato*. Edwin's death was registered at Haverfordwest.

Bristol Steam Navigation Company expressed their gratitude to Mr T. Oswald, the owner of *Sea Swallow*, along with Captain Thomas, and the officers and crew of that ship for their admirable assistance in the rescue and the kindness and comfort shown to the survivors; also to Mr Kelway of the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society. A letter from Harry Lockett on behalf of *Cato's* crew also gave heartfelt thanks to all on board the trawler, also mentioning Mr Kelway and Mr Prickett who gave them brandy and supplied money for telegrams home. The Foreman of the Jury commended the splendid work done by the *Sea Swallow* and hoped that some official recognition might be made. In due course Captain Thomas was awarded "a binocular glass" by the Board of Trade in recognition of his humanity.

Edwin's funeral took place at Trinity Church, Hotwells on the 16th April. Some hundreds of people lined the route and there was a large crowd at Arno's Vale Cemetery where the interment took place.

The body of Fred West which was washed ashore at Penryn Port, Cornwall, was brought to his home address, Clifton Observatory. He was buried at Ridgeway Cemetery on 18th April. The principal mourners were Mrs West, his widow and Master Edwy (or Edway) West, his eldest son. Edwy was a child, only eight years old, a surprising attendant at such a solemn event in the days when children were expected "to be seen and not heard". Other mourners were "Mr & Mrs Hiatt, senior" and "Mr & Mrs Hiatt, junior" and a Miss Noble. They were presumably relatives of the dead man but the annoying habit of the press at that time in omitting first names, (as also in the case of "Mrs West" herself) makes them difficult to locate. A quartet of male friends was likewise only identified by surnames: Messrs Crook, Nicholas, Varcoe and Lamb. The bearers were Mr A. Jackson, "a Master Rigger", and four (un-named) seamen from the BSN Co.'s steamer *Argo*. Wreaths were sent by several officials of the Seamen's Union, including Mr Jarman. At the graveside were four survivors from *Cato*, Captain Whyatt, Harry Lockett, Tom Rodda and Harry Stephens, along with Mrs Fitzpatrick who represented her son James, "now at sea in the *Niger*".

Mrs Alfred Coles at home in Richmond Street, Barton Hill did not give up hope that the "one rescued man" un-named by the *Clan Graham* was her husband, although others believed he must be dead, and accordingly "Some of the neighbours had put up the shutters."⁵ Coles duly landed in Madeira, where he was looked after at the Sailors' Rest. A message was relayed to the BSN Co. and the news passed on to his patient wife that Coles was indeed the lucky man. He was full of gratitude to Captain Ramsay who with the rest of the crew had

"treated me with such kindness after going to the great trouble of rescuing me."

⁵ This custom was still observed when I was young. I remember curtains were drawn when a death occurred as a sign of respect at least up to the late 1950s.

By the 24th April he was back home in Barton Hill where the Bristol Mercury, which relished “a good human interest story” sent a reporter to interview him. Not only did the hack get his first name wrong but the opening line, given the tragedy, is curiously flippant:

“A pleasant trip to Madeira and back was an enjoyable sequel to a fearful experience by Albert Cole, AB.....”

An added bonus for Coles was that he shared the voyage home with Lord Hawke’s victorious England team, fresh from two Test Matches in South Africa. On the same date, the Western Daily Press more soberly reported that Mr C. Jarman of the Seaman’s Union believed that all hope for the rest of *Cato*’s crew must now be abandoned.

The seven crew men of the *Cato* are named in the Death Registers of those lost at sea:

John Frederick Plomer Francis, born in Bristol in 1875, died Longships 7th April 1899. He was the mate, or First Officer, one of two sons and three daughters of a commercial traveller, William Francis & his wife Annie Rebecca of Frenchay Villas, Berwick Place, Stapleton Road. He had been at sea since he was fifteen. He was engaged to be married to the anonymous “Bristol lady” who called at the Mercury office seeking news soon after the tragedy. By 1911, the Francis family had moved to 143 Cromwell Road, the parents and their remaining four adult children. None were married, two of the three girls were schoolmistresses.

Frederick West, born in Bristol in 1859, died 7th April 1899. Frederick came from a well-known family being descended from William West, an artist, born in Dartford, Kent, who made Bristol his home in 1828 when he rented an old mill in Clifton as his studio. William, who had an additional interest in optics and engineering transformed the building with the installation of a large telescope and a camera obscura. It became Bristol Observatory. William was also a member of the Bristol School of Artists. In 1851, described “landscape artist” he lived at the Observatory with his wife Henrietta, their three sons, (two artists and an engineer) and his widowed mother, Elizabeth, aged 81. His son Edwin, born in 1825, a “photographic artist”, was resident at the Observatory ten years later with his wife Fanny.

When Frederick West signed on as second mate aboard the *Cato* in 1899, he gave “Bristol Observatory” as his address. By 1901, Fanny West, then widowed, who had inherited the building and the title “Proprietress, Bristol Observatory” ran the place with the assistance of her daughter Catherine. Fred’s sons, Edwy aged nine (who had attended his father’s funeral), and David, aged 6, Fanny’s nephews by marriage, were living there with her.



The Avon Gorge from the Summit of the Observatory. William West ca1834

Press reports at the time of the tragedy had stated that Fred was the father of four children. So far it has proved impossible to find the other two or the first name of their mother, Fred's wife. Aunt Fanny died in 1904 and by 1911, Edwy was living in Norwich.

Daniel Drummond, the Chief Engineer, born in 1869, who died in the starboard boat, 7/8th April 1899 was the younger son of Daniel, the deputy harbour master at Greenock and Helen Drummond who had two other children, Agnes and William; the latter had the sad task of travelling to Cornwall to make arrangements for his brother's funeral.

William Gunney, born in Bristol 1856, died Longships, 7th April 1899, started his sea-going career aged fifteen as "a boy" aboard the *Royal Albert* which was in Bristol docks on census night 1871. He is recorded again in the same census as being at home, 14 Avon Crescent, with his father, William Gunney, senior, aged 43, a sailor, born at Watchet, mother Hannah, 42, brother Henry and sister Caroline. Ten years later, still a single man, he was at home "between ships" with his parents and sister at 18 Avon Crescent. Hannah died in 1882.

A William Gunney who died aged 82 in Bristol in 1910 is presumably the "one aged father" nominated in a request for donations to a fund which had been started for the bereaved relatives who also included "three widows, ten children, and one widowed mother, all destitute and entirely unprovided for" but none of whom were named, though they must have been Mrs Elfstrom, Mrs West and Mrs Moore. Elfstrom had three children, West four, so the other three must belong to the otherwise unknown Moore. The "aged father" was certainly the ancient mariner, William Gunney, senior, and the widowed mother, Mrs Elizabeth Lockett, the mother of Edwin.

The Bristol Mayor, Mr Ashman, set the ball rolling with a donation of 10 guineas. Thereafter the names of those who donated plus each individual amount, generous and “widow’s mite”, appeared from time to time in the local press. Among charity events held for the fund, the “St Michael’s Gleemen” organised an evening where various artists performed songs such as “The Storm” and “Still the Night” which raised £6.13s.0d. A “Sacred Concert” which took place at the Empire Theatre in Old Market Street included soloists plus “limelight views of shipwrecks and lifeboat work”, with admission by programme for 3d to 1s.6d with limited reserved seats at two shillings. By 21st June the fund stood at over £600. It possibly closed soon after, but I have found nothing reported about any distribution of the monies collected.

Oscar Elfstrom, born 1861, died 7th April 1899; his death was also registered with the Swedish consul. Oscar Theodore Elfstrom married Alice Searle in Bristol in 1886. In 1891 with her husband away at sea, Alice made her living as a fruiterer and greengrocer at Thunderbolt Street, Broad Quay where she lived with their sons Albert (Theodore) aged 3 and Henry (Oscar) aged one. They had a third son, Johann, in 1897.

The image shows a handwritten ship's manifest for the vessel "Geraldine" in 1890. The document is a multi-column table with handwritten entries. The title "PARTICULARS OF PASSENGERS" is visible at the top. The entries include names, ages, and other details of passengers. Oscar Elfstrom is listed as a passenger.

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Rank	Profession	Place of Birth	Remarks
1	William White	29	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
2	Henry Smith	20	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
3	Oscar Elfstrom	28	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
4	Edward Brown	25	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
5	John Black	22	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
6	Edward Radney	21	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
7	Henry Fiddler	19	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
8	George Brown	18	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
9	John Brown	17	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
10	John Brown	16	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
11	John Brown	15	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
12	John Brown	14	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
13	John Brown	13	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
14	John Brown	12	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
15	John Brown	11	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
16	John Brown	10	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
17	John Brown	9	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
18	John Brown	8	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
19	John Brown	7	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	
20	John Brown	6	M	Deck	Deck	Swedish	

Oscar Elfstrom, shown in the ship's manifest of one of his previous voyages aboard the "Geraldine" in 1890

Alice must have been grateful to the Fund for the *Cato* dependants and was sympathetic when a similar appeal was raised for the wives and children of the 36 men, (many from Bristol) of the *Merrimac*, which had not been heard from since the 25th October 1899, when “homeward bound”, Quebec to Belfast and was presumed lost with all hands.⁶ On 28th May 1900, “Mrs Elfstrom” donated £1. 10s 0d.

⁶ BsMe 28.5.1900

In 1901, she was “a coat hand” living at 3 Upper Maudlin Street, with her youngest son. The two older boys are missing from the census. It is possible they were packed off to Canada, the fate of many orphaned Bristol children at that time, otherwise their whereabouts are unknown. After 1901, Alice and Johann also disappear from the records.

Very little is known about William Moore, born in London, ca1866, a married man, father of three children. He was last seen by Alfred Coles struggling in the sea as the *Cato* went down. Even less is known for the other seaman, the unlucky replacement, August Lundgren, a Swedish national, who was approximately thirty five years old.

A Board of Trade Enquiry into the sinking of the *Cato* in the English Channel with the loss of eight lives was convened on 16th May 1900 at Westminster Town Hall.

Cato was a new ship, built by the Campbeltown Shipping Company, classed A1 at Lloyds, bought by Bristol Steam Navigation Co. for £20,500. This was her second voyage. She left Cardiff for Hamburg with a crew of sixteen plus the Master’s wife, carrying 1,562 tons of coal, 60 tons of general cargo and an additional bunker full of fuel. The Enquiry heard that there was no question that she was overladen but “she had certainly met with exceptional weather”. Wilfred Lambert, traffic manager for Bristol Steam Navigation confirmed that the company had full confidence in the Master having put him in command of a new ship.

Captain Whyatt said *“I have held a certificate of competency since 1894. The ship had a freeboard of 8 feet 4 inches. All the holds were full except no. 1, which was three parts full. She made good weather and did not ship more sea than another vessel would do in the circumstances. The hatches were well secured with wedges and an iron bar. Mr Broom, of the builders, stated they were held down by chains, but I did not see any chains. After leaving Cardiff on April 5th a gale sprang up from the WSW and I put into Barry Roads for shelter. The weather moderated and I proceeded again to sea at 6.30 a.m. on April 6th. She passed Trevoise Head about 7 p.m. the same day and the wind which had rapidly been increasing was by then blowing a gale with a nasty sea. At 10 p.m. it suddenly shifted from SW to NW and blew hurricane force, the sea getting worse every minute. The vessel was kept dead to wind with the engines eased as required. She shipped very heavy sea fore and aft and strained considerably. At 11 a.m. two or three of the wedges securing the hatches came loose but they were put all right, though in the operation, an AB had his legs broken in three places. I had him carried to the chart room where I set his legs as best I could. At 3 p.m. the 7th April the tarpaulin on no. 3 hatch was torn off by heavy seas and it was impossible to put it back on. The wedges securing the hatches did not come loose. At 3 p.m. I gave the Chief Engineer the order to put pumps on in no. 3 hold. I cannot say whether the order was obeyed. At about 5.30 p.m. the vessel was settling down when the Engineer told me there was water in the tunnel. The well deck was also full of water. I gave the order to lower the boats and sent word down to the engine room. About half an hour before the vessel foundered a heavy sea struck the wheel and I saw it go. The vessel never recovered after that. The port lifeboat was then lowered and I saw my wife into it. I was going into the chart*

room to see to the injured man when I was washed overboard. When I came to the surface I saw the lifeboat had capsized. They succeeded in righting it and seven sailors, my wife and myself got in. Cato foundered directly after I came to the surface. She went down stern first. I and the others were in the boat five hours before we were picked up by the Swallow. One of the members in the boat, the steward, died shortly after we were rescued."

To further questions: *"The ship foundered about 16 miles from Longships. It was only a short time before she foundered that the well deck became choked with water. No appreciable quantity of water could have got into the ship from no. 3 hatch. What caused the ship to sink? I think she opened up aft near the propeller."*

"I joined the ship when she was launched. She was a good sea boat. I had a great opportunity of judging her. There were three tarpaulins for each hatch. The hatches had to be battened down with a crowbar. They could not have moved."

The surviving crew members also gave their evidence. Henry James Fitzpatrick AB said he noticed at 2 p.m. that the tarpaulins over no. 3 hatch had been torn and some carried away. The hatches were very tight. He, with the mate and four ABs, tried to put another tarpaulin over no. 3 hatch but failed because of the quantity of water on the deck. He saw the pumps working for no. 3 hold at about 6 p.m. He knew they were working because he saw dirty water coming out of the discharge pipe. The vessel had settled down a little at this time, but not much. Mr Hill intervened: *"At 3 p.m. witness reported to the Captain that the donkey pump on no. 3 hold was not working?"* Fitzpatrick said *"The Captain said he was most surprised and sent for the Engineer."*

Albert Edward Travell, another AB, said he was among those who tried put the new tarpaulin over no. 3 hatch at about 4.30 p.m. It was about 11.30 a.m. that the man had his legs broken. Witness had been off duty but could not sleep because there was too much water in the forecastle.

Thomas Rodda AB said *"There was a constant wash of water like a mill stream over the hatches from 8 a.m. until the ship foundered."*

Mr Radcliffe: *"What caused the ship to sink?"*

Witness: *"The water."* (Laughter)

"How did it get in?"

"Through the Hatchway."

Rodda: *"I have been at sea forty years. I have seen worse weather off Cape Horn but never such heavy weather in the Channel as we had at that time."*

Alfred Coles AB stated that after the tarpaulins were washed off no. 3 hatchway the hatches remained fast. Just before the vessel went down a heavy sea went across the engine room

skylight and down into the stoke hold. He saw the steam come up. When the vessel was going down he clung to the starboard lifeboat. Coles' own words for what happened next are not recorded. It seems he was overcome by emotion. "The Court" interjected sympathetically: *"If he had attempted to save the man whose legs were broken he would have lost his own life. The last request of the injured man was that Coles should call and see his wife."*

Mr Marshman: *"You never left hold of the boat?"*

Coles: *"No fear. It was the only chance I had. I tell you gentlemen I had a very narrow escape."*

"What is your idea of the cause of the foundering?"

"I think the stress of the weather caused her to spring a leak. I have seen worse weather but never such a cross sea."

Harry Lockett, the donkeyman, said the small pump was on in no. 3 hold at about 3 p.m. but it would not fetch. He closed the watertight door but the water got through all the same. The fires were kept going to the last and they left the ship with the engine going at full speed with plenty of steam on. One of the hatches on no. 3 hold was lifted and he thought that in time would have shipped enough water to founder the ship.

Richard Fisher and William Henry Stephens, firemen, also gave evidence (not reported).

Mr Bateson (acting for Captain Whyatt) said that the Court must be satisfied whether the Master did something or omitted to do something which caused the accident. And secondly, whatever was the cause, whether the Master contributed to it. He submitted that a Master was entitled to rely on his officers and engineers (all of whom died in the tragedy) and therefore if the Master gave the proper orders and satisfied himself in a reasonable way that these orders were carried out, he could not then be held responsible if they were not properly executed. Experience showed that the foundering might be due to one of three causes: over-loading, breaking of hatches in heavy seas, or springing a leak. He had never heard of a ship going down because tarpaulins were washed off hatches and there was no evidence of water in no. 3 hold. The only place water was found was in the tunnel. It seemed to him that the most probable cause of the failing was due to the water in the tunnel. He drew attention to the good character given to the Master by the owners and asked the Court to note that he was on the bridge the whole time.

The Enquiry established that the vessel was in excellent trim. There was nothing wrong with the loading and the hatches were properly secured. William Broom, a partner in the Campbeltown Company had told the court the cargo hatches were specially secured by chains and it "would not matter much" if the tarpaulin was washed off; but the coal hatches

were not specially secured and when the ship began to roll, the wedges might slip off the cleats; then if the tarpaulin was washed off, the water might get in.

The verdict of the Enquiry was that the ship foundered because of the large quantity of water which filled the quarter deck and got into the tunnel. The Master, having seen one lifeboat leave the ship with his wife and seven members of the crew proceeded to help the others left on board with a view of placing Elstrom, the injured man, in the boat with the rest of the crew when he was washed overboard. The same wave carried away the boat and the others on board. This (in the Opinion of the Court) was a proper arrangement as it was not anticipated that the vessel would founder so soon. The vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care but there was some remissness on the part of the Master in not paying sufficient attention to the security of the hatches and their covers. The loss of the vessel and the consequent loss of life were not caused by any wrongful act or default on the part of the Master.

On the 13th April the Mercury had reported “that a lifebuoy had been washed ashore. It was bloodstained and the surmise is that it had been put round Elfstrom who was in the chart room, his legs broken, and washed off when the steamer sank.” I cannot help but hope that this was the case. The idea of Elfstrom, alone and abandoned, unable to move, and going down inside the ship does not bear thinking about. It is unknown whether Coles went to see Mrs Elfstrom when he got back. If so, it must have been a very testing and emotional meeting. Quite clearly his departure from the sinking ship was not something the usually ebullient Coles had felt able to talk about in court.

The lives of the survivors:

Harry Lockett was born in Cardiff in 1868. On census night 1881 he was at home, 10 Avon Square, Barton Regis, with his widowed mother Elizabeth Jane, his elder brother Walter, younger sisters Emma, Mary and Rose, and young brother Edwin, then aged two. He was a fireman aboard the *Bivouac*, January - July 1886 and as stated elsewhere had been saved when BSNC's ship *Constance*, ran aground in January 1888 when three men drowned. He was a fireman aboard *Echo* in 1896. After the 1899 disaster he was a fireman on the then new *Sappho*, in January 1901. A character reference dated 16th May 1903 survives for his term aboard *Argo*. “I have pleasure to certify the bearer Henry Lockett have (sic) been with me 8 months during which time I have found him very attentive to his duties. He is leaving of his own account. (signed) F. Church, Engineer. ⁷

Harry was at sea again by 1906, a fireman aboard the *Tasso*. From about 1908 he was engaged for a decade as the following note signed by E.J. Roach, Superintendent, dated 19th April 1918 attests:

⁷ BRO 41812/1/7

“Mr H. Lockett has served in this employ for 10 consecutive years as a donkeyman and second engineer under my supervision. During the whole of this period he has fulfilled his duties to my entire satisfaction, being at all times a most sober, industrious, attentive and efficient man. He left this employment at his own request to work ashore.”⁸

Harry's next job took him to London Docks where in 1911 he was “a donkeyman, ashore” living at Poplar with his wife Mary Ellen and a family of four, 3 boys and a baby girl. Four more children were later added to the tally and in 1939, “a labourer, retired” the family was back at 118 Hotwells Road, Bristol, with six of the children still at home, the youngest being Desmond aged 21. Harry received the Merchant Navy Medal for service abroad in the Great War, 1914-1918; he died in Bristol in 1948.

Albert Travell married Harriet Greenway in his home village of Wheatenhurst in 1898. Sadly, his wife died aged only twenty two giving birth to their daughter, Annie Kate, shortly after he returned home following the *Cato* disaster. In 1901 he was “a widower” living next door to his father who was also a mariner, at Wheatenhurst. He married his second wife Elsie Hazell in 1902 and over the next nine years they had six children, four sons, Joseph, Charles, William and Leslie, though another son and a baby died in infancy. By 1911, Albert, having retired from the sea had tried his hand as a ship builder, an enterprise evidently short-lived. It was deleted on the census form in favour of his current dual occupation as a “store-keeper and beer retailer” at the New Inn, Frampton-on-Severn, where he lived with Elsie, Kate and their four boys. He died in 1922 aged 45.

Henry James Fitzpatrick, usually known as James (or more probably Jim) was born in Liverpool. He had returned to sea within a few weeks of the *Cato* disaster, and was away when his mother represented him at the funeral of Fred West. He was ashore at the time of the Enquiry in May 1900, where he gave evidence. His father was a mariner, possibly an Irishman, who was dead by 1901, when his mother, Bristol-born Julia, a shirtmaker, aged 47, was living at 4 Boot Lane, Bedminster, with her daughter Beatrice aged 21, born in Liverpool and other children, George, a merchant seaman, 18, John, 14 and Kathleen, 10, who were all born in Bristol. Afterwards there is no trace of them.

Richard Fisher may be the “general labourer”, born in Devon, who was living at 10 Stanhope Street, Bristol in 1901, son of Stephen, otherwise there is no information about him.

William Henry Stephens, born at Clifton in 1856 was a ship's stoker in 1891, living at 3-4 Chapel Row, Clifton with his wife Frances, five sons, and a daughter. In 1901 he was at the same address with his wife and nine children. His eldest son, Robert, aged 24, was a seaman. The 1911 census for 270 Hotwell Road shows that William and Frances had been married thirty four years and had ten children, all of whom were still living. Of the five then at home, Sidney William aged 22, was, like his father, a ship's fireman.

⁸ BRO 41812/1/11

Thomas Rodda born ca 1840, was of Cornish descent. In 1886, he was an AB, aboard *Llandaff City*; in 1891, Boatswain on *Gloucester City*. In 1901, aged 60, of no occupation, he was living in Bristol with his mother, 87 year old Jane Rodda. Jane died later the same year. Thomas himself died, possibly, in 1912.

On 30 May 1899, the Bristol Mercury printed a plea on behalf of Alfred James Coles, asking if someone could give the Taunton-born ancient mariner a job “in which he hoped to find a living without having to face the perils of the sea again, having been wrecked four times.”

As Coles cannot be found in the census of 1901, one assumes that no charitable offer was forthcoming, and he may have been forced back to sea. However, he was almost indestructible. In 1911, aged 73, he was a “ship’s watchman” living with his wife Eliza, 72, at 67 Goodhind Street. He died in 1915.

Walter George Whyatt who was baptised at St Philip & St Jacob, Bristol, 11th July 1869, was the eldest son of Joseph, an engineering clerk, and Lavinia Emily. He had a brother, Clifford, three years his junior. In 1891, the family of four, plus a maid, lived at Wolseley Road, Horfield. Walter, aged 21, who was at home on the night of the census was “a mariner, qualified ship’s mate”. In August 1892 he married Ann Eliza Hitchcock at St Michael & All Angels. He was “Mate & Master” aboard *Juno*, in January, 1896, and “Master” on *Hero* later the same year, both ships belonging to the Bristol Steam Navigation Company’s fleet.

After the *Cato* enquiry, when he had been exonerated from blame, though mildly admonished by the court, I expected to find him in command of another ship once the furore had died down, but there was nothing. Had he been dismissed? I turned to the census for 1901, and found Mrs Ann Eliza Whyatt, their two girls, Marion and Kathleen, and to my surprise, a new baby, Walter Leslie, aged 5 months, which showed the child had been born in November the previous year. A greater shock awaited: Ann Eliza was a widow. As the baby must have been conceived in March 1900, this meant that Walter died sometime between then and the census of March 1901. This was an ominous sign but young people died all the time. Surely a newspaper obituary notice would provide the answer, entered by those bereaved by the loss of a loving husband and father? Again there was nothing. I found the reference to Whyatt’s death in the national indexes for the first quarter of 1901, “aged 31”. Just over a year before the Master of the *Cato* had been all over the papers. How come his death at such a youthful age had not been considered worthy of even a small paragraph? The lack of an obituary made me suspicious that the matter had been deliberately hushed up. I suspected suicide with its attendant stigma so sent for the death certificate. He did not die by his own hand, but from a cause which in those days was equally shameful.

Walter George Whyatt, aged 31, a Master Mariner, of Nevil Road, Bristol died on 31st January 1901 at Bristol Lunatic Asylum. The registrar’s informant was Joseph Whyatt, his father of 9 Nottingham Road, Bristol.

The cause of his death baffled the doctor, who used the catch-all term “General Paralysis” on the certificate. I imagine poor Wyatt unable to move, staring into space, with the “thousand yard stare”, a phrase coined in World War Two to describe the blank, unfocused gaze of soldiers who have become emotionally detached from the horrors they have endured. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was not, of course, recognised in 1901. In 1911 Ann Eliza, a widow aged 41, was still at 15 Nevil Road with her daughter Kathleen, 17, a mother’s help, and son Walter Leslie, 10, a schoolboy. (Daughter Marion was staying with her Wyatt grandparents.) Thereafter the family seems to have left Bristol. The tragedy of the *Cato* is complete.

Return to ss. Sappho

From 17th November 1900, having recovered from the mishap near Leith, *Sappho* began her routine service, steaming to northern Europe and back under a new skipper, Captain Thomas Mauley of Pill, with her comings and goings from then on reported faithfully every week in the “Shipping News” columns of the local papers. Unfortunately, in December, returning from Antwerp she had another, though much less serious, prang when she became stranded at flood tide on rocks in the Severn, near Beachley when water entered the bulkhead, at a speed of about an inch per hour. She was quickly re-floated and proceeded to the dock at Sharpness. The rub came when Mr A.J. Smith, owner of the two screw steamers which had rendered assistance, namely *Tel-El-Kebir* and *John*, went to court for compensation, saying he had saved the company upwards of £34,000; he was awarded £1,800 with additional payments to the masters and crews of the two rescue vessels.⁹

Whether this latest misadventure had any bearing on the matter, from then on *Sappho*’s regular skipper was Captain Babb, with relief from others named Bennett, Williams, Smith, Baker and Weir. In July 1901, an unnamed seaman working in the hold had an accident which resulted in internal injuries and cracked ribs.¹⁰ After this, the ship seems to have kept out of trouble until April 1905, when she collided with three longboats laden with salt at Sharpness which of course dissolved and one of the boats sank. Damages were set at the precise sum of £307 17s 10d.¹¹

Many ships’ manifests which list the entire crews of Bristol ships survive up to 1913.¹² The crew changed every voyage when men signed on and were paid off. Though most were English or Scots, there were often Scandinavians aboard, and a smattering of men from elsewhere, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Greece, Australia and even one Moharren Mahomed, aged 26, a trimmer, from Constantinople. There was no cook aboard for these short cross-Channel trips and members of the crew were apparently expected to provide their own provisions. Presumably they brought sandwiches for the outward voyage and

⁹ GChr. 29.12.1900, GJ. 23.2.1901

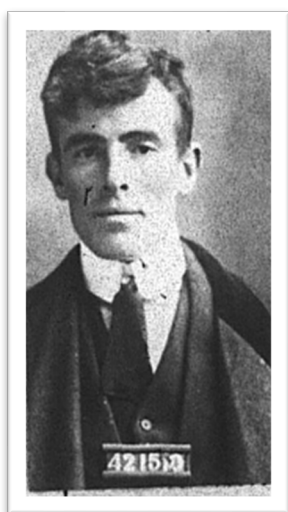
¹⁰ Clifton & Redland Free Press, 19.7.1901

¹¹ GChr. 8.4.1905, 24.2.1906

¹² At Bristol Archives Office

bought extra food abroad for the return. They must have heated water for brew-ups of tea on the fires and the steward must have provided a few home comforts for the skipper.

In the majority of cases the Master listed the names, addresses, previous ships and wages of the crew on the manifest and signed the people off without commenting on additional foibles. However, Captain D.H. Atherton, in command 1907-8, was unusually explicit. On 10 October 1907, Albert Sims the Quartermaster, died at Hamburg of heart failure. "His effects remain on board and the balance of his wages will be paid on arrival in UK. A proper entry has been made in the log." (Sims, born at Frampton-on-Severn, was 40 years old and had previously been an AB aboard *Pluto*.) In April 1908, Thomas Evans came aboard at Gloucester "in a drunken condition". He was discharged and a substitute engaged. On being ordered to leave the ship he declined to sign off, and demanded payment for one day's work which he said was due to him. He was unlucky as his wage was "forfeited in lieu of the substitution." In August, R. Davies, a trimmer, "drunk and disorderly aboard ship", was instantly dismissed for bad conduct. The same month, two crew members, the 2nd Mate, Mr Albert Fuggle, 35, formerly of *Milo* and *Pluto*, and the cabin boy, S. Witchell aged 14, deserted, in Cardiff, but whether separately or together is not divulged. Atherton also had trouble with an Able Seaman, A. Paskey, aged 20, previously a deck boy on *Port Antonio*



who called himself AB when he signed on to *Sappho* at Cardiff. He was soon rumbled and the Captain demoted him to Ordinary Seaman for incompetence: "*Paskey does not know how to steer; if he is told to port the helm then he starboards. When told to place the Ship, say, from East to E. by North, Paskey will, from sheer ignorance, swing round to S.E. and more South, if unchecked. (He cannot) make a strop with a short splice. His wages were dropped from £1.10s 4d per week to £1. He made no reply when this was read out to him 'before witnesses': (signed) E. W. Chidgey, mate and Henry Parker, AB, at the River Elbe in Germany on 30 August 1906.*"

(Arthur Paskey, left, remained a merchant seaman. He served in the RNR in the Great War and was back in the merchant service in 1920.)

In February 1913 *Sappho* reported a leak when returning Hamburg – Gloucester and made an unscheduled stop at Dover for emergency repairs. Life aboard was certainly not uneventful.

On 25th September 1913, the latest manifest available, most of the crew signed on at Gloucester. Those starred would become prisoners at Ruhleben the following year.

The master, Captain W. A. Owens, aged 46, of 192 Cheltenham Road, Bristol had been in command at least since 1910 for which he was paid £4. 10s. 0d per week.

*Mr C.W. Aldridge, 26, birthplace Purton, Gloucestershire, the mate, previous ship *Tasso*, 1912, wages £2. 5s 6d p.w.

*Mr E. Daniels, 39, Frampton on Severn, 2nd mate, previous ship *Sappho* £2. 5s. 6d p.w.

*Mr. J. Aitken, 53, Bristol, Chief Engineer, £3.15s.0d p.w.

Mr R. Scotland, 58, Dunbarton, 2nd Engineer, £2.12s 6d p.w.

*R. Bowditch, 50, born at Bristol, donkeyman, £1.17s 6d p.w.

F. Webb, 25, Gloucestershire, donkeyman, £1.17s 6d p.w.

G. Williams, 20, born Gloucestershire, trimmer, £1.12s 8d p.w.

*J. Wiggins, 47, Gloucestershire, trimmer, £1.15s 0d p.w.

*Alex Stewart, 60, Leith, trimmer, £1.15s 0d p.w.

*O. Pedersen, 58, Denmark, senior AB, £1.17s 6d pw.

S. Boyce, 27, Gloucestershire, senior AB, £1.17. 6d p.w.

*E. Watts, 28, Minsterworth, AB, £1.15s 0d p.w.

E. Wayman, 20, Broadoak, AB, £1.15s.0d p.w

Willie Eilertsen, 25, Norway, AB, £1.15s. 0d p.w.

*G. Meadows, 44, Epney, AB, £1.15s 0d. p.w

*D. Mackenzie, 36, Campbeltown, Scotland, AB, £1.15s 0d p.w.

A. Webb, 17, Rutford, boy, 18s.0d. p.w.

There is no explanation as to what was afoot on 17th October 1913 in Swansea, when Captain Owens (apparently suddenly) left the ship, along with Daniels, Eilertsen and Boyce. Scotland reported sick and left on the 21st, "ill". Back in Swansea, Stewart left on 7th November and Webb on the 24th.

Captain John Gregory¹³, 43, an Irishman, born in Arklow, but currently living at St Jude's, Bristol, previously master of ss. *Ashton* took temporary command and the routine cross-Channel voyages resumed on 17th October with Gregory in charge. This situation prevailed until June 1914 when a permanent skipper was appointed; such is fate, this was Captain William Jenkins, a 52 year old Welshman.

¹³ Captain Gregory would later be master of the new *Cato*, Bristol-Dublin.



The Ship's Company of ss. Sappho at Ruhleben, all looking incredibly dapper, three years in, 1914, 1915-1916

Part 2. The Prisoners at Ruhleben

Captain William Jenkins was born and married at St Dogmaels, a small village on the estuary of the River Teifi, a mile downstream from the town of Cardigan. He was bred to the sea, named after his father, who was also a mariner, one of seven children, (among whom were his two sisters, Matilda and Beatrice), born to William and Ann Jenkins. William junior grew up used to the frequent absences of his father but rather than being put off by such a difficult and dangerous life, was determined to go to sea himself; his appearance on 3rd April 1881, as a fourteen year old scholar is the only time he was ever recorded by a census, from that time on being away every ten years on the precise evening when the record was taken. He was only twenty one on his wedding day, 5th July 1887. His wife, Elizabeth Rees, was a year younger, herself the daughter of a master mariner.

By 1891, in William's absence, Elizabeth was at home at Greenfield Terrace, St Dogmaels, (also his home address at the time of his detention in Germany) with their three children, David Albert, 4, Maggie Annie, 3, and William Morgan, aged 10 days. William's sisters, Matilda and Beatrice had by this time left St Dogmaels for Cardiff where they still lived with

their parents, the father, aged 54, quaintly described “a sailor of the seas”, and two other siblings. The sisters’ necessary inclusion in this story will eventually be revealed.

At the baptism of his daughter Sybil May Elizabeth, at St Dogmaels on 8th July 1900, William, then 33, was styled “Master Mariner”, revealing he had obtained his “Master’s ticket”, a certificate of competency to command an ocean-going vessel; at sea he would henceforth be known as “Captain Jenkins”. On the night of the census, 31st March 1901, with her husband away as usual, Elizabeth was sharing her home with her widowed father, William Rees, who was between voyages. By this time she had five children, though following William’s shore leave, there would soon be another on the way: a daughter, Lizzie Gwyneth who was christened at St Dogmaels’ church on 10th March 1902. The next census, taken on 2nd April 1911, is the first to record the number of children born; Elizabeth had given birth to eleven babies in all, ten of whom were still living: the latest, Myfanwy, was four months old. It occurred to me that a husband’s absence for a few years might in some cases be a blessing rather than a curse.

Wives and mothers of seamen were well used to homecomings being delayed and usually held to the maxim “No news is good news” but one can only imagine the women’s alarm when the fragment which contained the news of their men’s detention was conveyed to them. Many years later William Wathan of Saul recalled this anxious time and the message from the master of *Sappho*’s sister ship *Hero*, homeward-bound on 2nd August, which had escaped Germany in the nick of time.¹⁴ By the first week of September in addition to their natural anxiety for the men’s safety the women had a pressing worry: “how shall I feed the children?” Some families were in desperate financial straits. A meeting of Gloucester Council referring to “distress in the City” highlights a case, “that of a wife and children of a man taken prisoner on the steamship *Sappho*,”¹⁵ and later reference was made to two more cases of want.

In the first place, the crewmen themselves were presumably optimistic that their plight would only be temporary and that soon they would be allowed to depart for home. They had nothing with which to compare their situation, for there had been no war which had engulfed the whole of Europe since Waterloo, a century before, and indeed Captain Jenkins was initially told by the German Harbourmaster that their detention was simply “a matter of paper work”. This official was presumably equally baffled about how to proceed with this unprecedented situation, though nevertheless placed a police guard on board the ship. Despite this deterrent, one crew member at least, Able Seaman Edward Griffin seems to have been “out and about” in the port; records imply that he was not “arrested” until 15th August. The situation in the interim had rapidly deteriorated and on that day all the men were removed from *Sappho* to a prison hulk in the harbour. Their ship was requisitioned by the enemy and spent the rest of the war used by the Germans as a collier.

¹⁴ WDP 3.8.1914 & GCit 17.2.1950

¹⁵ WDP 3.9.1914

The *Sappho* men and those from other British and Allied ships were kept aboard the hulks for three months where conditions were dire. According to remarks by a Grimsby fisherman, John William Green, “coloured men and Poles” were singled out for especially cruel treatment by their captors. “The things we heard and saw in those hulks made the blood swell in our veins,” Green said.¹⁶ Among those designated “coloureds” were firemen from Sierra Leone, who served aboard the ss. *Sangara*, whose First Mate was a Bristol man, Charles M. Pow of Bishopston.

From October 1914, German nationals living in Britain were interned, partly in response to the anti-foreigner phobia which swept the country. The German government retaliated with an ultimatum that unless their people were released by 5th November all British men in Germany would be likewise arrested and interned. When this was ignored, on 6th November *Sappho*’s crewmen with the other British seamen and fishermen, numbering about 1,500 men, were taken from the hulks, put aboard special trains and taken across Germany¹⁷ to Ruhleben, a former race course situated between Berlin and Spandau which had been hastily appropriated as a civilian prison camp. The officers and crew of the *Sappho* who were confined together were fortunate in being quartered in the stables and supplied with beds and mattresses, at first filled with straw and afterwards with wood shavings. They were better off than later arrivals, who were assigned to haylofts which lacked no such facilities. Though most of the internees were British, many crew members from British ships were nationals of other countries. As well as seamen, the prisoners were businessmen, students and tourists who just happened to be in Germany when war broke out. “Captains” who occupied the first barracks immediately began to organise and take charge of utilities. By 13th November there was a library with 83 books supplied by the US Ambassador and a shoemaker had opened for business! On the 15th of the month Protestant church services were held and the next day, (inevitably!) a football match kicked off between a Public School XI and a Tottenham (Scratch) XI. Whether Edward Griffin of Frampton-on-Severn, who was in Barrack 4, played for the Tottenham casuals on this occasion is not known, but he was a keen footballer and is recorded as such in the Handbook of the Ruhleben Football Association which has survived for Season 1915. Oscar Watts, another of the *Sappho* men played in goal. According to the “The Ruhleben Story”, where many of the inmates have been identified, Edward Griffin was born at Blakeney, (confirmed by his census record), but the date given, 1894, is incorrect. His birth was registered in 1895 at Westbury-on-Severn, as “Cyril Edward Griffin”. He was the son of John Griffin, born at St James, Bristol, ca1869. The only time the family can be positively located is in 1911 when his father was the proprietor of a fish shop, at Ovills Villa, Blakeney; he had been married “less than one year” to his wife Elizabeth of Stonehouse, who was three years his senior. Though I cannot find a record of this marriage, it must have been John’s second venture into matrimony, as the census form records seven living children, though the information was deleted by the

¹⁶ Recounted by his great-granddaughter, Margaret Burgess.(on-line)

¹⁷ Dundee Courier, 9.11.1914

official examiner as they were not Elizabeth's offspring! Only four of them are named, Doris, born at Blakeney in 1894, Edward, ditto in 1896 (*sic*), with Elsie and Ruby, born 1900 and 1902 respectively at Chadwell Heath, Essex. The two girls were registered at Romford but the family is not recorded there in 1901. The Griffins give an impression of being "fly-by-night" and the advent of a stepmother may have precipitated young Edward into a life on the ocean wave. In 1912 "Eddy" Griffin, was an ordinary seaman aboard a sailing ship, the *Two Brothers*, registered at Bridgwater, master: James Herbert of Frampton-on-Severn.¹⁸ Eddy was still only eighteen when taken prisoner, one of the younger members of *Sappho's* crew, but by then he was an experienced seaman, reckoned A.B.



A team in the "Ruhleben Football League".

Oscar Watts is the goalie, middle row, 3rd from right. Eddy Griffin is probably there too.

The Germans being notably keen on physical exercise and outdoor pursuits, football was not discouraged in the camp, as long as the noise was kept down. As we shall see later, for some, life at Ruhleben was bearable, certainly active, and even at times almost enjoyable, as opined by a Bristol student Ralph Steadman (*qv*). Even those who did not play organised games were kept mobile: the prisoners were forced to march round the race track every day, despite the fact that winter had set in early, and snow had begun to fall.

In November, one of the *Sappho* men became ill, and already weakened by the privations suffered in the hulks, quickly deteriorated. This was Robert Bowditch, the donkeyman, who, at about fifty seven years of age, was one of the older members of the ship's company. His

¹⁸ SRO Box 66

Merchant Navy Records show that he was born in Bristol between 1859 and 1864. As with most mariners he is difficult to pin down. Bowditch had been at sea at least from September 1886 when he was a fireman aboard a steamship called *Dorset*. In 1890 he was among crew members who refused to put to sea from Swansea in the *Jersey City*, a vessel belonging to Charles Hill & Sons of Bristol, in a dispute over the employment of non-Union labour. As one of the firemen, he was docked two days' pay and fined three pounds six shillings plus costs. He was married early in the year 1891, in Bristol, to Jane, the daughter of Irish-born, Robert Flaherty. By March that year he was a fireman on the *Gloucester City*, and was away on census night in April when his bride was living at Holmes Court, Cock and Bottle Lane with her widowed father and brother Thomas Flaherty, both dock workers. In July Robert was aboard *Hero*, one of *Sappho's* sister ships. He is next recorded in January 1901 as a winchman aboard *Pluto* but was again away when the census was taken. Jane, still at the same address, had four children by then: Elsie, 8, William, 6, and three year old twins, George and Frank. In July 1901 Robert was a winchman on *Pluto*. In November 1902, along with the rest of those on board he had a lucky escape when their ship, the ss. *Silvio*, (of Bristol Steam Navigation Co.) sank following a collision with a much larger vessel, the *Glen Menzies*, shortly after leaving Antwerp. The ship's master, Captain T. Morley of Pill, said his ship "looked like a long boat when contrasted with the huge hull of the *Glen Menzies*."¹⁹ The crew of seventeen, among whom were John Aitken, the 2nd Engineer, and George Meadows, (both of whom would be aboard *Sappho* in 1914), lost all their property, but were picked up and admitted to a sailors' home at Antwerp where they received kindly attention.

There is another gap in Robert's career until July 1906 when for the first time he appears aboard *Sappho* as a donkeyman. He was on board again in July 1907 and in January 1911. Once again he was at sea in April that year when Mrs Bowditch, is recorded at Holmes Court, Castle Street with their five surviving children, (two others having died in infancy), Elsie, 18, William, 16, George and Frank, the twins aged 13 and the youngest, Albert, aged seven.

On 22nd November 1914, Robert died at Ruhleben, of "inflammation of the lungs", the first inmate in the Camp to die in captivity.

The story of his suffering is told by a fellow internee, Frederick Sefton Delmer²⁰, who before the war had been a lecturer at Berlin University. His article for the periodical "Nineteenth Century"²¹ includes this graphic account.

One of the most pitiful cases was that of John (sic) Bowditch of Bristol, a stoker, whose hard treatment on the hulks at Hamburg had brought on pneumonia. He was just, when I saw him, able to give his wife's name and address and ask me to write to her. His food, a little

¹⁹ GJ 15.11.1902

²⁰ Delmer was released in 1917 when he told his story. He was the father of Denis Sefton Delmer, a well-known broadcaster and British Government propagandist during WW2 who was named in the Nazi's Black Book of those who would be executed immediately following the invasion of Britain. It didn't happen of course.

²¹ Reproduced GChr 8.9.1917

black bread of the coarsest description and a cup of black coffee lay untouched beside him. He had no attendance save that of the other sick men in the ward, to whom, especially in the night, he was a great trial. The poor fellow evidently was doomed though good nursing could perhaps have saved him. On my way back to camp after one of my daily visits I met the Herr Oberstabsarzt, Doctor Reich. I accosted him and begged him to have Bowditch removed to a proper hospital if necessary at the expense of the British Government.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded with a scowl. I told him.

"We have no hospital beds and no ambulances to spare for such cases and what's more, in future I'll thank you to mind your own business."

I took some milk and biscuits and such light food as I could procure to Bowditch and managed to smuggle a card to my wife at Berlin asking her to draw the attention of the American Embassy to the case, that there were no medicaments and proper care or nourishment at the so-called lazarett. A Miss G., an Anglo-American woman in charge of the British Relief Department advised that it was extremely dangerous to mention such things and would cause trouble not only to her but to the camp. It was not till afterwards that the American Embassy learned of the conditions at the lazarett. Three days later Bowditch died. When I went across that morning I found his Crimcan (?) shirt lying in the snow on the ground waiting to be burnt. One of the patients pointed to the clusters of lice with which it was covered. I shuddered to think that the poor fellow had never had a change of shirt from the day he was taken prisoner in August until the day he died. I suppose he had been too weak to say anything to me about it. As this was the first death in the camp, the Germans, who like the Kaiser love theatricality and philanthropic posing, decided to have an impressive funeral, at the expense of the British Government of course. On the morning of the interment, light snow had fallen. The 1,500 men in the camp were lined up in columns of four in front of their barracks. The German officers and soldiers had donned parade uniforms and poor John Bowditch's body in a coffin of polished oak on a bier drawn by two black horses was driven into the camp. Beside the Commandant and Officers stood the Doctor who had murdered this Englishman. All of them raised their heels together in salute as the hearse passed. Then in long lines, the prisoners were filed up with bared heads. No-one in the camp guessed the pity of it, for none had heard the name of this British fireman, neglected and allowed to die and of the lice slotted shirt that had been burnt in front of the lazarett.²²

Robert was buried on 24th November at Spandau Cemetery. His shipmate, Oscar Pedersen, one of those released early on grounds of age, stated that "the captain and six shipmates were allowed to attend the funeral which was a very decent one."

Ruhleben: "Cabbage Soup – Again!"

On 22nd December 1914, a postcard addressed to the Mayor of Gloucester containing "Season's Greetings" was signed by C. W. Aldridge, T. Davis, E. Daniels, G. Meadows, O.T. Pedersen, W. Rutland, J. Wiggins, J. Lawrence, E. Griffin and O. Watts. His Worship was

²² A lazaretto was a military hospital

asked to pass on the news to their families and friends that they were “all well and in good spirits”.²³

All the men came from *Sappho* except one, Walter Rutland, aged 51, of 88 Lysons Avenue, Gloucester who currently belonged to the *Rossall*, one of the Bristol ships detained. He had previously served aboard *Sappho* and thus was well-known to the *Sappho* men.

C.W. Aldridge, otherwise Charles William Aldridge, the Mate or Chief Officer, was born in 1887. In 1891, aged four, he was living at Purton with his widowed father, Ambrose Aldridge of Saul, a Bristol Channel Pilot. In 1901, he was at Newtown with his father, step-mother Constance and several sisters. Charles may have been aboard the St Austell-registered steamship *Tasso* in January 1911 which, returning from Antwerp to Swansea, was involved in a collision in the North Sea with another ship, the *President Lincoln*, which was on a passage from New York to Hamburg. It was decided both ships were equally to blame for the incident, the larger vessel for not keeping a sufficient look out and the *Tasso* for having a faulty light.²⁴ Charles was aboard *Tasso* by census night, 2nd April 1911, where he is recorded, as 2nd Mate, “aged 24, single, born at Purton”. The master, George T. Watkins, was born at Pill and most of the crew were from Pill or Bristol.²⁵ By July 1911, Aldridge had signed on to another ship, the *Echo* and had been promoted to First Mate.²⁶

In midsummer 1911, his marriage was registered at Thornbury to Sophia Cameron, who was presumably Scottish. In the Camp he gave his home address as 82 West Scotland Street, Glasgow from which it may be deduced that the couple had lately settled in Scotland. Aldridge was detained at Ruhleben up to and including 1918.

John Burford Aitken, the Chief Engineer did not sign the Gloucester card as he was not a native of that City, but his name appears on the similar card sent to the Lord Mayor of Bristol. Like his boss, Captain Jenkins, Aitken was “bred to the sea”, born in 1859 to John and Elizabeth Aitken at Tidenham, Gloucestershire. The elder John had passed the Local Marine Board examination as “a master in the home trade” in 1865. (He first went to sea as “a boy” in 1842, “aged 16, five feet three inches tall, with light hair, grey eyes, and a fair complexion; when unemployed lives at Chichester.”) John junior first appears in 1871 aged twelve, at 12 New Passage Road, with his parents, sister Agnes, 15, and younger brother William Adam, aged seven. John Aitken senior at that time stated proudly that he was “the Master of the *Christopher Thomas*”, a command which is confirmed by his Merchant Navy records for January and July that year. This ship, named after the doyen of the Bristol firm of soap makers, Christopher Thomas & Brothers, became popular following its adaption from a cargo ship to a Bristol Channel pleasure boat. In the summer of 1864, a party of ladies and gentlemen, including the directors of the South Wales Union Railway Company hosted by

²³ GJ 9.1.1915

²⁴ WDP 10./22.7.1911

²⁵ One of the crew, Brislington born Percy Stedeford was also aboard *Sappho* in 1912. He would die when his ship the *Royal Edward* was torpedoed in 1915

²⁶ MN crew lists, BRO

Mr John Bland, boarded at Portskewett Pier, New Passage at the head of the Bristol Channel, and sailed to Aberthaw where they enjoyed a “sumptuous luncheon” at Sully Island, and were entertained by a band with dancing on the return journey. There may have been a blip in July 1881, with the *Christopher Thomas* temporarily out of service, as John was then recorded as the Master of the *Chepstow*, but by January 1886 he was again Master of the *Christopher Thomas*. Captain Aitken, became a well-known personality in Bristol, and as we have seen, is noted on the memorial plaque to his grandson Sidney at St Anne’s Church, Brislington. The Captain died, “deeply regretted” aged 62 on 13th November 1888 at his residence, at New Passage.²⁷

John junior was by then married to Hannah of Cardiff, the ceremony having taken place at St Paul’s Portland Square, Bristol on 6th December 1881. The younger man’s career is also documented within the Merchant Navy files, all agreeing that he was born at Tidenham about 1857; he was Second Engineer on the *Iron Acton* from November 1885 until at least July 1886. He was undoubtedly at sea in 1891 when his wife Hannah, at Badminton Road Downend, headed the household consisting of three daughters and her sister, Alice Stitfall. In 1901, aged 42, described “a marine engineer” John was at 28 Franklin Street, Bristol, at home with his wife, six daughters and one son, John, junior, aged four. This must have been during a brief few days leave during the turnaround of his ship *Bivouac* on which he was Engineer during the two six-month periods January and July. In November 1902, he was the 2nd Engineer aboard the ss. *Silvio* which sank after a collision at sea, the nerve racking experience he shared with later *Sappho* shipmates Robert Bowditch and George Meadows already mentioned. After a short stint aboard the *Tasso* as an AB in 1906, he was promoted Chief Engineer aboard the *Juno*, December 1906 and in January 1911, on the *Sappho*, though he was once again at home on census night, 2nd April 1911, with his wife and their seven children aged between 21 and seven years old at 13 Davey Street. In July 1911 he was again recorded as Chief Engineer of the *Sappho* and was also with the ship in 1913 as previously shown. Aitken’s records confirm the uncertain nature of seafaring work with the man obliged to sign off the ship at the end of each voyage and then hope that he would be required for the next. At Ruhleben where his quarters, *pro tem*, were in Barrack 9, John gave 13 Davey Street as his home address. He would remain in the camp until 1918.

The Second Engineer, William Frank Butterworth, is also absent from the Gloucester card, as like Aitken he was a Bristol man, born at Bedminster on 3rd January 1876, the son of Henry and Anne Butterworth. Unlike the majority of the *Sappho* crew, he was not from a sea-going family: his father, a commercial traveller at one of Bedminster’s collieries, died in 1888, aged only fifty two leaving a widow and four children. In 1891, William Frank, the youngest child, a scholar, aged fifteen, was resident at Upper Penny Hill, Bedminster, with his mother Anne, and siblings. He presumably went to sea before his mother died aged 63 in 1899 and he was away for the census of 1901. He married Elsie Grace White at Bedminster on 5th

²⁷ BMe 19.11.1888

December 1904. In 1911 he was 3rd Engineer aboard the *Apollo*²⁸, and was away for the census of April that year when Elsie was at 3 College Avenue, Fishponds with their son, Frank, aged five. He was probably the replacement for Mr R. Scotland, who left *Sappho* in 1913. By 1914, when he was recorded at Ruhleben, his home address was 23 Victoria Park, Fishponds.

Identifying “T. Davis” proved challenging, and the explanation is convoluted, but after many false starts and persons rejected, I believe him to be Thomas Andrew Davis, who in 1918 was a Merchant Navy fireman, born in Gloucester on 19th October 1883.²⁹ He was baptised Thomas Andrew at St Aldate’s in the City on 2nd November that year, the son of Charlotte Davis, a single woman. Charlotte married James Rose in 1884, but it is unknown whether Rose was Thomas Davis’ father. Neither the married couple nor the son can be found in 1891, but in 1901, Thomas Davis, aged 18, working as a blacksmith’s striker, was living at 11 Exhibition Street, Gloucester with his aunt, Charlotte’s sister Mary, her husband Edwin Charles Cousins, a dock worker and their four children, Mary, 16, Walter, 8, Florence, 7, and Albert Cousins, aged one. They ran no. 11 as a lodging house with an eclectic mix of guests who included one George Harewell, born in the USA, a mother and child from Birmingham and a canal bargeman, William Holm, and his wife Martha.

In 1904 a Thomas Davis was married at Gloucester and in 1907 a man of the same name was a “trimmer” aboard ss. *Palace Kingston*.³⁰ I have no evidence of the former and the latter man says his birthplace was Bristol which may rule him out altogether. In 1911, the Cousins family were still at Exhibition Road, though Edwin now called himself Edward Charles Cousins, aged 51, a core labourer. Mary his wife was aged forty nine and five children were then living with them, named in order thus: Charles, aged 27, (previously unknown) born at Swindon, with the rest, Walter, 18, Florence, 17, Rose, 20, (another newcomer, who may have been with foster parents at Minchinhampton in 1891) and Albert Sidney aged eleven, all born in Gloucester. I believe these were the produce of two separate marriages. The census of 1911 required a wife to state the length of her marriage, and the number of children born of the marriage, whether currently living or dead. This often caused confusion with deletions occurring especially when a second marriage was involved. Although Mary stated she had been married 30 years, the rest is left blank. By this time there were only two lodgers in the household, Benjamin Taylor, 77, a shipwright and a fifty year old labourer, John Cook,³¹ but there was another nephew, a youth of sixteen called John Rose: there seems little doubt that this was Thomas Davis’ half-brother, though John had evaded the previous count in 1901 which seems to be a habit with this rackety family. Thomas himself was absent, and can be assumed to be at sea, but evidently 11 Exhibition Street, was still his home, as this is the address he gave to the officials at Ruhleben in 1914, when he was

²⁸ MN crew lists, BRO

²⁹ NA/BT350 1918-21

³⁰ MN records, OA1565/69 Merseyside Maritime Museum

³¹ There was still much coming and going at the address. The death of Ambrose William Webb, 21, is reported in GJ 27.6.1914. John Cook met with an accident, GChr 7.9.1912 & Wm C. Aston, GChr 13.6.1914 was involved in a minor court case, all of 11 Exhibition Street

recorded as “T. Davis of *Sappho*, fireman”. Another member of *Sappho*’s crew, James Wiggins, was a sometime resident nearby at 8/9 Exhibition Street; Wiggins’ wife Louisa Davis was Mary Cousins’ younger sister and therefore theoretically another of Tom Davis’s aunts.

The next man on the Gloucester card, “E. Daniels” was Ernest Daniels, the 2nd Mate, who was born in 1874 at Frampton-on-Severn, a son of Thomas Daniels, wonderfully described as an “assistant overseer and inspector of nuisance” and his wife Julia. Ernest first went to sea as a very young man, “before the mast” in sailing ships before turning to steam.³² His bride to be was Edith Laura, the daughter of Henry Hillman, a master mariner, who like many another had the unfortunate tendency to be away at sea when records were taken; in 1866 he was the Master of the *Robin Hood*, under sail; he died on 29th August 1888, with the briefest of obituaries, “Henry Hillman, aged 44 of Framilode Passage”. Ernest and Edith were married on 13th September 1897 at Wheatenhurst. Ernest was at sea shortly after the wedding aboard the *Hero*, and from 4th March to 11th April 1899 an AB of the *Merrimac*, one of fifty crew members.

By 1901, Ernest and Edith had three children. He was inevitably at sea for the census when Edith, their two-year old twin girls, Emma Laurina and Lilian Dorothea and baby son John William Hillman Daniels, resided with her widowed mother at Passage Road, Fretherne-with-Saul and a 14 year old teenage skivvy, Ethel Wilkins. In July 1901 Ernest was an AB aboard *Silvio*; in January and July 1906 he was the Master of *Lighter no.8* under sail but shortly afterwards went back to steam in the *Ino*.³³

In 1911, with Ernest away once again, this time aboard *Sappho* on two half-yearly contracts, January and July, Edith was a patient in Gloucester Hospital with the children split between relations: Emma and Lilian, (by then twelve year old schoolgirls), Thomas, aged 2, and new baby Oliver, aged two months, with their grandmother Laurina Hillman, whilst eleven year old John was at Avonmouth with his uncle and aunt, Charles and Margaret Hyett.³⁴

By 1914 when Ernest was detained at Ruhleben, he gave his address as Springfield, Saul, Stonehouse.

“G. Meadows” otherwise George David Meadows, *Sappho*’s quartermaster, was five years old in 1871 living at Epney Road, Moreton Valence with his mother Mary Ann, 27, a “waterman’s wife; man away” and baby sister Sally Ann, aged one. Ten years later, on census night 3rd April 1881, aged 15, he was a cook, aboard the *Fanny*, at anchor, when boats still came right up to the Centre of Bristol, and is therefore part of the parish of St Stephen’s, which from time immemorial was known as “the mariners’ church”. Two others were aboard, both from Longney, the mate Andrew Brasington and an able seaman Charles

³² Glos Gaz. 13.10.1939

³³ MN crew lists, BRO

³⁴ “Mr & Mrs Hiatt, sen.& jun.” attended Fred West’s funeral in 1899

Appleby. George's father Alfred, also a mariner, was ashore in Epney, along with his family, Mary Ann, his wife, and George's three sisters. In 1882-3 George was an Ordinary Seaman aboard the sailing ship *Victoria* of Bridgwater, owned by Richard Hillman of Epney.³⁵ He served in the *Victoria* in 1886 was again under sail, 1st January 1891 and by 30th June 1891 in the 76 tons *Beatrice Hannah* of Gloucester, Master Fred Rowles, of Saul.³⁶

In 1897 George married Emily Lydia Gough who was ten years his junior. In 1901, with his 24 year old wife alone at Epney, he had joined the crew of the steamer *Silvio* as an AB. The vessel sank in November the next year, a narrow escape he shared with shipmates John Aitken and Robert Bowditch, who would be among the *Sappho* crew at Ruhleben. He was again AB aboard *Pluto* in January 1906. In 1911 he was away again when Emily, then 34, "married 13 years, no children, husband, a mariner" was at Epney, living with an eleven year old nephew, Frederick Henry Bennett who was blind. George may have been aboard *Sappho* at this time; he was recorded as serving on the ship in July that year.³⁷

"J. Wiggins",³⁸ was James Wiggins, one of *Sappho*'s firemen, of 3 Bath Buildings, Gloucester. He was born on 26th May 1862, the son of Jemima Wiggins who married Edward Townsend in Gloucester in 1863. In 1871 he was shown as "stepson" when resident with Edward and Jemima and several half-siblings at Columbia Street, Gloucester. Between 1st July and January 1880 he was an apprentice aboard the *Lady Tredegar*, owned by G.O. Innes of Newport, (Master G. Hodge), and in July 1881 was aboard the same vessel, with a different Master, Thomas Whiteway.³⁹

James next appeared in 1891 when he and Louisa Davis, maternal aunt of Thomas Davis (*qv*) were married at Gloucester. Perhaps Louisa put her foot down over the frequent departures and arrivals she could expect as a seaman's wife and James was working as a "general labourer" when the couple set up their first home at Milne Street in the City. Ten years later he had moved his family (Louisa and their four children, William, Ernest, Lucy and George) to Risca, in Monmouthshire, where he became a colliery labourer for the duration but by 1911, Louisa, then aged 38, and her children were back at Gloucester, 8 Exhibition Street, with James absent having presumably gone back to sea. The twenty one years of their marriage had brought thirteen children of whom only seven were then living: the aforesaid William, Ernest, Lucy, and George, with new arrivals Gwendoline, 7, Harold, 6 and Florence, aged nine months. Two more of the children were soon to die: Florence Rose⁴⁰ aged 17 months, in January 1912 and Lucy Kate⁴¹, in January 1914, aged fifteen years, a sad story of hardship and bereavement.

³⁵ Somerset Archives, box 37

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ MN crew list, BRO

³⁸ Incorrectly recorded by BFMS as "G. Wiggins"

³⁹ NA BT99/1323

⁴⁰ GChr 6.1.1912

⁴¹ *ibid* 13.1.1914

On 20th December 1914, the Gloucester Chronicle informed the public of the birth of the couple's new arrivals, twin boys, respectively christened with patriotic fervour, James Kitchener Wiggins and Jellicoe French Wiggins, the proud father, "of 3 Bath Buildings, being imprisoned in Germany with other members of *Sappho's* crew."

On 28th February 1915, the same paper published a report that

"Two lads from the Bristol Road district were charged with breaking into a warehouse of the Stroud Branch of the Gloucester Co-operative Society and stealing butter, bacon, sugar, candles and matches, value 15 shillings. They scaled the wall by standing one upon the shoulders of the other. The father of one of the boys is interned in Germany with the crew of the Sappho. He had previously been twice birched and now ordered to receive a further six strokes. The other boy awarded three strokes."

As Oscar Pedersen's unruly boys (*qv*, *below*) were grown up by this time, regrettably the unnamed lad whose father was one of *Sappho's* crew may be one of James Wiggins' sons.

"J. Lawrence" known by his second name John, was William John Roan Lawrence AB, of Frampton, Stonehouse, born on 29th October 1888, the eldest of eight children of Samuel Lawrence, a mariner in the Severn River trade, and his wife Mary Ann. In 1901 with his father away, John was at home with his mother and siblings, Margaret, (known as "Cissy"), aged ten, Agnes, 4 and Harry, 1, at Barn Court, Framilode. In 1911, Samuel Lawrence was at home at Barn Court, by which time three more sons had been born, Oakley, Philip and Arthur. Meanwhile, John, then 22, was the mate aboard the *Magnet* which on census night was anchored at Redcliffe Backs in Bristol. His youngest sister Agnes died aged seventeen on 31st October 1913 and was buried at St Peter's, Framilode. A great many relatives and friends at the funeral included her brother John. According to custom, curtains were drawn in all the houses in the village as a sign of respect.⁴²

"O. Watts", was **Oscar Hubert Watts**, AB, of "Frampton, Stonehouse". He was born in 1886 at Minsterworth, son of Hubert and Annie Watts. In 1901 he was a labourer in a timber yard living with his parents and sister Lilian at Frampton-on-Severn. He had gone to sea by the year 1906 when he is recorded aboard the *Ino*.⁴³ His marriage to Ethel Minnie Lodge, took place at Christchurch, Gloucester on 17th June 1909. On census night 1911, Oscar, aged 25, was the mate aboard the vessel *Welcome Home* of Gloucester, anchored at South Yarmouth Roads, Isle of Wight, whilst Minnie remained in Frampton with her aunt.

For the men at Ruhleben changes were afoot. In 1915, the German Government which had agreed to repatriate ships' boys under the age of seventeen extended the concession to seamen over the age of fifty five.

⁴² Ibid. 8.11.1913

⁴³ MN crew lists, BRO

On 6th July 1915, **Theodore Oscar Pedersen**⁴⁴, usually known as Oscar, was the first of *Sappho*'s crew to be repatriated. His story is told under the headline "A Bristol Seaman's Story" in the WDP of 28th July 1915 which begins:

"Mr Oscar Pedessen (sic) of 12 Oakland Place, Gloucester called at these offices yesterday with Mr Charles Jarman, Secretary of the Bristol Branch of the Seamen and Firemen's Union. Mr Pedessen who was quartermaster aboard ss. Sappho was imprisoned at Ruhleben until July 6 this year when he was released on account of his age (67) and ill health under a scheme of exchange of prisoners."

"O. Pedersen", the final signatory on the Gloucester greetings card, has been mis-transcribed on the BFMS index as "C. Petersen". It is not difficult to see how the initial "O" could be mis-read as "C", but the index also records the date of his release incorrectly as 7th January 1916 and his rank as "quartermaster", a description which the index also applies to Samuel Meadows, though it seems unlikely that a small ship like *Sappho* would have needed two.

Oscar who was born in Koge, Denmark, circa 1848-9, the son of Peter Jensen Pedersen, was a naturalised British Subject. He married his wife, Dublin-born Elizabeth Walker in Gloucester in 1874. In 1891, as "Theodore Oscar", he was a cellarman, living at Bristol Road with Elizabeth and their seven children aged between 13 and one year old, plus his mother-in-law and a lodger. (Their eldest son, also named Theodore Oscar had died aged 10 in 1885.⁴⁵) Because of a series of misdemeanours, some more serious than others, committed by his young sons, which were recorded in the local papers, it has been possible to give a more detailed picture of this seaman's family than is the case of the other *Sappho* men.

In 1893, Oscar's son Yens Peder, aged 12, of 3 Victoria Terrace, Bristol Road, was accused of breaking open his father's seaman's chest and "taking therefrom four sovereigns, two half sovereigns, a half-crown, a lion shilling, a Jubilee sixpence and three pence in coppers".⁴⁶ In court, the father said the lad had run away from home several times and had caused him and his wife a great deal of trouble. Yens, who said he did not know why he did such a thing, was sentenced to fourteen days in prison, followed by four years at a Reformatory School.⁴⁷

On 31st March 1901, Oscar, working as a dock labourer was still ashore at the same address, with Elizabeth and five of their children, but by July he had returned to sea as a fireman aboard the *Ino*. During that year two more of his sons, Fred and his older brother Ernest were several times before the court; in the spring for scrumping pears (it is extraordinary to find such trivia reported) and again in September. With Oscar away, Elizabeth had to attend court for the second or third time. Evidently at her wits' end, she asked for Fred to be

⁴⁴ BFMS gives his name as "C. Petersen" and the date of his release incorrectly as 7.1.1916

⁴⁵ GCit 20.6.1885

⁴⁶ £5.4s 3d. (about £5.21p. The newspaper spells his name "Jens".

⁴⁷ GChr 18.2.1893.

birched as he was “a bad boy who played truant from school.” This was a society where children were routinely thrashed. “Spare the rod and spoil the child!” was the mantra. However, the Bench did not comply, when the lad promised to reform.⁴⁸

Elizabeth, the lads’ mother died the next year aged 52 probably worn out, and according to family information, Oscar then returned to the sea for good, leaving the younger children at 63 Bristol Road in charge of his eldest daughter, twenty four year old Elizabeth Mary. Clearly, like her mother before her, she found the boys a handful. In January 1903, Fred, then aged 14, and his younger brother Percy, aged twelve, were in trouble. Fred appeared first for throwing stones in the street, for which he was fined 5 shillings, or 5 days in default but instead of being asked to stand down at the end of the proceedings he was further detained in court, and joined by Percy. The boys were charged with stealing a cash box containing £1.17s in money and two books, value together £2, from George E. Jennings, a ships’ chandler, of 51 Southgate Street. Jennings was eating his tea at about half past four in the afternoon of January 18th when he heard a suspicious noise. He went to investigate and discovered the cash box and contents were missing. After they were arrested, the elder boy said nothing. The younger, Percy said

“I did not go into the shop. It was my brother Fred. He had the cash box and hid it at a timber yard at the Docks. He took the money out of the box and put it into a glove and under a door in Wibby’s Road.”

He read the statement over to his brother, who agreed: *“That is true.”* Percy was then taken to the timber yard where he pointed out the hidden cash box and the glove which contained £1.7s 3d. The prisoners pleaded guilty. Mr D.C.C. Harrison, an attorney, told the court the boys’ mother was dead and the father away at sea. The eldest sister had informed him that

“Percy was a good boy, but the older lad, was a bad one who lounged about the street instead of going to work.”

Mr Harrison had no doubt that the missing money, some 10 shillings, had been brought home and passed off by Frederick Pedersen as money he had earned working at the Brickyard. Percy was ordered to receive six strokes of the birch and Fred was sent to the Reformatory School for three years.⁴⁹ When Oscar arrived home from sea in July 1903, the Local Authority took a dim view of his parenting, and he was handed a summons for not sending his younger children to school.

At least three of the Pedersen children were married by 1903 or 1904. The youngest child, May, was informally adopted by George and Ellen New who had a large family of their own; in 1911, aged sixteen, she was living with them at 12 Lyson’s Avenue. As she is described “domestic help” there may have been a little more to the arrangement.

⁴⁸ GCit 21.9.1901

⁴⁹ ibid 19.1.1903

In 1905, Percy attempted to join the army, saying he was seventeen. He seems to have been rumbled but tried again and enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment on 27th February 1906, still only fifteen. He served during the Great War until wounded in action and was invalided out on 28th September 1916.

Meanwhile Theodore Oscar Pedersen had resumed his life at sea and was aboard *Sappho*, July 1906, July 1907 and January 1911.⁵⁰

Yens Peder, Oscar's son, having survived his sojourn in the Reformatory had returned to Gloucester by 1903 when he married Alice Mary Pullin. Tragedy followed. In June 1910, whilst at work as a waterman aboard a lighter being towed in the Bristol Channel from Sharpness, he was attempting to adjust a rope round the cargo when he fell overboard. He could not swim and was drowned. He was aged twenty nine, and left a wife and three children. His brother Thomas, a donkeyman, gave evidence of identification at the inquest.⁵¹

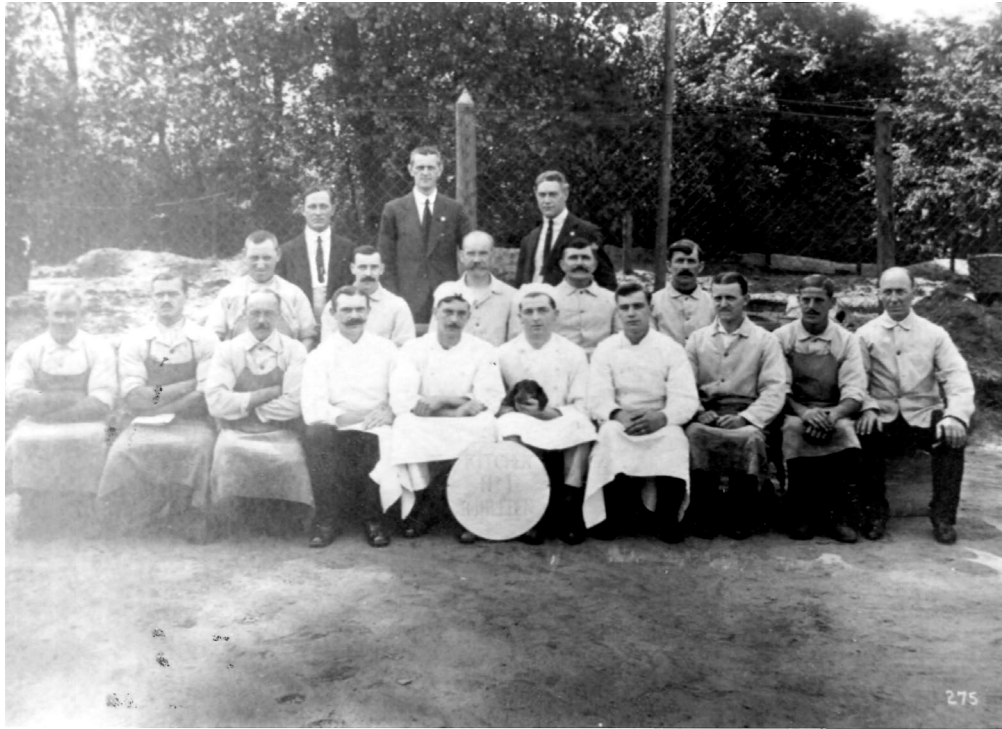
Yens' funeral, attended by a large number of mourners, included his widow, Alice Mary, his brothers, Thomas and Fred, and sisters, Lizzie, Alice and May. Wreaths were sent by his father, evidently away at sea, and brother Ernest, perhaps likewise. Yens had formerly been to sea too – for another wreath was from “his old shipmates of the ss. *Sappho*”, the very ship that would be impounded in 1914.

The employers paid compensation of £226. 4s. 0d into court of which £10 was allocated to his widow for funeral expenses, the residue to be invested and 7 shillings and sixpence paid weekly to her and 2s.6d for each of the three children, aged 4, 3, and 3 months. The baby, called Enid, sadly died before her first birthday and in 1911, Alice and her children George and Winifred were living in Gloucester with her mother.

During the course of the war, the original merchantmen who had been seized at Hamburg in August 1914 were joined by many others from different ports and those taken prisoner in actions at sea. Oscar told the Western Daily Press that the fare in the camp was very scanty and inferior. Breakfast and supper was black bread and half a pint of coffee. Bread rations given out in the morning had to serve for supper as well. Until one got used to it, the bread was almost uneatable; it was made of burnt corn, potatoes, sawdust and sand, a good deal worse than the German “war bread” issued to their own troops which the prisoners were not allowed. Dinner varied from cabbage soup with scarcely any meat and potato soup with no meat at all. Occasionally there was boiled rice and prunes which the prisoners considered a great treat. On Sundays there was a kind of pea soup.

⁵⁰ MN crew lists, BRO

⁵¹ Ibid. 13.6.1910



Kitchen Crew no. 4 at Ruhleben. Oscar Watts is 2nd left, middle row.

Prisoners were not compelled to work and were allowed to write two letters and four postcards a month, but half the letters were never sent and in any case they were kept 10 days before they were despatched. They were allowed to receive parcels though none ever came Oscar's way. He received two lots of tobacco from the Seamen's Union during his time in the camp.

The guards were rough and overbearing; the slightest offence was visited with 24 – 72 hours punishment in a dark cell. Oscar considered himself lucky that he did not experience this. Prisoners were allowed to smoke between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. though anybody caught smoking out of hours would be sent to the punishment cells. There were no arrangements for washing. There was plenty of cold water but prisoners had to buy hot water for a penny a quart.

There were five or six British seamen in the group when he was released, including a British Consul from somewhere in Russia who had the misfortune to be passing through Germany when war was declared. When he last saw them, all the crew of the *Sappho* were as well as could be expected. Mr Aitken, the Chief Engineer "whose death was widely rumoured in Bristol some time ago" was alive and in good health. The other ship's officers, (who Oscar named with their titles): Captain Jenkins, Mr Aldritch (*sic*), First Mate, Mr Ernest Daniels, 2nd Mate, and Mr Butterworth, 2nd Engineer, all shared the experiences described. He confirmed that Captain Jenkins and six shipmates were allowed to attend Robert Bowditch's funeral.

The newspaper further reported that “the case of the prisoners has been taken up by the Seamen and Firemen’s Union who have obtained a decree from King’s Bench that they would get wages from the date of signing on and including the time of their imprisonment.” It comes as no surprise that the owners had appealed against the ruling.

“Mr Pedersen has suffered ill-health as a consequence of his internment and being out of employment, his position is precarious.”

Conditions for the men improved following intervention by the International Red Cross, and neutral diplomats, mainly American. The USA had not then entered the war.

On 12th December, 1915, Alex Stewart, a fireman, home address 57 Southgate Street, Gloucester was the next *Sappho* man to be released on grounds of age. His association with the ship went back to November 1913 when he signed on in Swansea, aged 60, as a trimmer, for £1.15s. per week. The crew list gives his birthplace as Leith. and his age, then sixty. A few months before a poignant letter from Alex was printed in the WDP under the heading “Appeal for Bread”:

“There is a note of pathos in the appended post card received by Mr C. Parsons from a friend who is a prisoner at Ruhleben:

‘5 July 1915

‘Just a few lines to let you know that all is well here at present and hope this will find you having a pleasant time. Give my very best respects to your father and mother and all your sisters and grandfather. Ask mother if she would send me a loaf of bread and a bit of tea for which I would be very thankful.

Yours truly

Alex Stewart.’

Unfortunately the newspaper does not give a first name or an address for “C. Parsons”, though the tone of the letter and the fact that the recipient’s parents and a grandparent were still living makes me suspect that he was quite young. The only “candidate” I can suggest is Charles Parsons, then aged 15, whose father was a docker. He lived at 67 Jacob’s Wells Road, Bristol.

Several more Bristol seamen from other ships were also released in December 1915: E. Jones of the *Sinainn*, William Bryant, carpenter of the *Rossall* and “F. Bolerwin” of the *City of Munich*, whose surname, as will be explained later is a misspelling.

On 5th January 1916 news came from Flushing that a hundred English prisoners were due to leave Ruhleben the next Thursday morning and would embark for London on the steamer *Orange Nassau*. James Wiggins of the *Sappho* may have been part of this quota for on 12th February the Gloucester Journal carried the meagre report: “Gloucesterian released from

Ruhleben: Mr James Wiggins of 9 Exhibition Street.” His story was evidently not interesting enough to warrant further elaboration.

For over a year nothing appears in the press about the internees. Then in September 1917 a short report again alludes to the desperate plight of the *Sappho* families in Gloucester from whom two applications (un-named) for relief had been received.⁵² Then, in October a list of prisoners lately released includes the name “W. Jenkins of St Dogmaels”.⁵³ For a Captain to abandon his crew seems to go against the unwritten “rules of the sea”. Jenkins must have been in a frail state of health, though at fifty five, he was three years younger than John Aitken, the engineer, though was presumably in worse shape.

On the 8th, 11th and 16th October 1917, the Western Daily Press published the lists of those “local” men who were still interned at Ruhleben. From *Sappho* these were Aitken, Butterworth, Daniels, Griffin, Lawrence, Meadows and Watts. Strangely, the list does not include Charles Aldridge, the Mate, still only 30 years old, (who in the absence of Captain Jenkins, was the senior officer), Tom Davis or Alex Stewart though all three were still alive. Duncan MacKenzie, the Scotsman, and Joseph Leonard, an Irishman, were also alive, though were not in the “Press” list as they were not from the Bristol/Gloucester area.

Duncan Mackenzie, *Sappho*’s steward, whose home address was Fore Street, Fowey, Cornwall, was born on 2nd September 1876, at Campbeltown, Ayrshire.⁵⁴ He had been at sea all his adult life. At about 10 o’clock on the night of 24th March 1903 he was one of a crew of four aboard the schooner *Carrie* when she ran into bad weather off Gwennap Head, in Cornwall and struck the Runnel Stone. The ship took on water through a gash in her side and soon began to sink. The four men had no alternative but to take to the lifeboat as in the pitch darkness the *Carrie* disappeared below the heaving sea. They tried to steer for the lights of Penzance, but with the sea running very high, the Captain was washed out of the boat. They tried to save him, but could not reach him in time, and he was drowned. In the panic they lost an oar. Having to scull with the remaining oar, amazingly they managed to get near the shore, to the cliffs between St Buryan and Porthgwarra, but with no beach they had no chance of getting to land in the boat. They decided to take their chances and jumped for it, “every man for himself”. Mackenzie was washed on to the rocks on the shore “three or four times” but each time the sea took him out again. Eventually despite the battering he had taken, he managed to catch hold of a boulder and clambered up the cliff. He looked about for the others but could see nothing of them. Giving up all hope of finding them, at about two a.m. he staggered into a nearby farmhouse belonging to Mr John Hosking of Boscawen who looked after him until the next morning when the Coastguard, Mr Blight, took him to Penzance. The newspaper which printed the harrowing account said “He is twenty six years of age and is terribly exhausted.”

⁵² GChr 26.9.1917

⁵³ WM 15.10.1917.

⁵⁴ A boy of the same name and approx. age attended Hart House School, Tregony, 16 miles from Fowey in 1891 but the family assure me that this is not Duncan the mariner.

The bodies of the master of the *Carrie*, 31 year old Harry Clemens, of Newquay, a married man, and the mate, Harry Barnicutt, aged 33, of Tywardreath, married with three children, were never recovered and they are recorded in the register of "deaths at sea". The fourth man, Gordon Stephens aged 18, was buried at Newquay cemetery.

Mackenzie, was first stated by the press to be "of Campbeltown" but this was altered later, stating he was a native of Torpoint.⁵⁵ His "official" Merchant Navy record, dated 30th June 1904 gives his year of birth as 1878 and his age (again) as "26". At this time he had a half yearly agreement as an Able Seaman to serve aboard the *Silvia* of Beaumaris, with his previous ship, given as the *Lizzie R. Wilce*. Fortunately it re-states his place of birth as "Campbeltown", which must confirm that he was the man shipwrecked the previous year. The *Silvia*, (Master, John Peard of Polruan, Fowey), was registered at Beaumaris, North Wales and owned by Mr F.W. Mutton.⁵⁶

After his ordeal, Duncan, stayed at the "Sailors' Rest" at Fowey, and was between ships when he met his future wife, Emily Houghton who he married in 1906. In 1911, he was away leaving Emily at Fowey with their children, Kenneth, 4, and Gilbert, aged one. Between 1st July and 31st December 1912 he was contracted as a steward on the *Webbern* of Teignmouth, a vessel engaged in the home and coastal trade, which included voyages from Torquay to Requiada in Spain and from thence "any port between 22 degrees North and 72 degrees North."⁵⁷ Duncan was probably away when his daughter Katherine, was born in 1913, the year he joined ss. *Sappho*.

The possibility of identifying Able Seaman J. Leonard whose address at Ruhleben is given as Lime Street, Dublin appeared remote. The surname did not sound particularly "Irish" and I wondered if this had simply been his last port of call before he joined *Sappho*. However, after much pondering I noticed there was also a William Leonard of Dublin on the POW list who belonged to the *City of Belfast*. His address was simply recorded as "Rush", a suburb in the Dublin docklands. When I had another look at the entry for "J. Leonard" I saw that he too came from Rush. It was too good to be true, and after some frantic googling I came across a piece in the "Fingal Independent" dated 16th September 2005, which stated that 21 men from Rush were at Ruhleben. Among the names mentioned are William Leonard, born in 1869, of the *City of Belfast*, and his son, **Joseph Leonard**, "a crewman of the *City of Cadiz*", who was interned with him. William, who was married to Mary Smith, had two other sons, Matthew and Patrick, who were both seamen. In the Irish census of 1911, "House no. 59" at Rush, was occupied by Mary Ellen Leonard, 47, a Roman Catholic, with her children Joseph, 16, John, 14, Mary Catherine, 12, Thomas, 7, and Christopher, aged two. Presumably the father and the two older sons were (as usual) at sea. It is quite likely Joseph, who would have been nineteen in 1914 is the "J. Leonard" who appears next to William in the BFMS list,

⁵⁵ Royal Cornwall Gazette, 26.3.1903; Lake's Falmouth Packet & Cornwall Advertiser, 28.3.1903; West Briton & Cornwall Advertiser, 30.3.1903; Cornish Telegraph 1.4.1903.

⁵⁶ Anglesey Archives, W/DB/359

⁵⁷ SW Heritage Trust 1976/WEBBERN/128062

though the article is mistaken in saying he was aboard the *City of Cadiz*. It is probable he served sometime aboard this vessel – among the internees there were men from Bristol aboard both the *City of Belfast* and the *City of Cadiz* – but I believe Joseph was our man aboard the *Sappho*. His father, William Leonard was released on 7th January 1918 but there is no release date beside the name of the younger Leonard. It must be remembered that the above is circumstantial.

On 7th March 1918, George Meadows, the quartermaster, was released, which left Aitken, Aldridge, Butterworth, Davis, Watts, Lawrence, Griffin, Mackenzie and Leonard. From this time on the national and local press carry brief details of batches of prisoners being released from Ruhleben and other German camps, though none of these men are named. It is possible that some of the *Sappho* men were among them, though no release dates appear against their names in the records.

“Home is the Sailor.....”

An Armistice was signed on 11th November 1918 and the remaining *Sappho* prisoners were gradually repatriated.

Of those who had been released earlier, **Oscar Pedersen**, by then of Hiercombe, Churchill Road, Gloucester died aged 80 in March 1929. His funeral at the Wesley Hall, followed by interment at the Cemetery, was attended by his daughters Alice Roddick, Elizabeth Bray, May Hawkes, his sons Percy and Fred with their spouses, and a large number of descendants.⁵⁸ (Some of these, Kim MacMillan, Rachel Lisa Abbott, Jim and Glynn Pedersen can be found enquiring about their ancestor on various websites.)

On 17th May 1919 the Gloucester Journal reported that **James Wiggins** of 9 Exhibition Street had been charged with obtaining six shillings and tenpence “out of work donations”. It was stated that he “drew the money on December 30th, on which day he was employed at the National Saw Milling Factory, Bristol Road. He was paid for four days including December 30th, the day he had started work there as a fireman where he continued until January 13th.” James pleaded guilty, and told the court

“when war broke out I was working on ss. Sappho and was taken prisoner where I remained for 2½ years. Owing to treatment I received my memory is very bad. When I signed the employment register at 10 a.m. that morning I was not aware I would be starting work that day.”

The chairman said the case was not as serious as it had first appeared. Wiggins admitted receiving the money wrongfully and was fined 10 shillings.

By 1914, James and Louisa had buried at least eight of their children. Another tragedy followed in July 1920 when their son, George Henry died at the Netley War Hospital, aged

⁵⁸ GJ. 16.3.1929

twenty, probably of wounds received during the late war.⁵⁹ It may be that Louisa never recovered from this final blow, for she died over the Christmas period of 1922 aged only forty nine. James placed the following acknowledgment in the Gloucester Citizen: “Mr Wiggins and family wish to thank all kind friends and neighbours and also the Women’s Section of the Labour Party for sympathy in their recent sad bereavement; also for floral tributes sent.”⁶⁰

In 1939, James, who never remarried, was “a dock labourer, heavy work” at Church Street, Gloucester. He had moved to 95 Hartland Road by the time of his death in June 1945 aged eighty two. On 3rd July again in the Gloucester Citizen the Wiggins family acknowledged the sympathy of their friends and neighbours.

Family historians have reason to bless parents with a less than rare surname who oblige by giving their children slightly more unusual Christian names. It was through the names of his sisters Beatrice and Matilda that I was able to distinguish **Captain William Jenkins** from the many other Welshmen called William Jenkins, and thus complete another piece in the jigsaw of his life. An “In Memoriam” notice in the Western Mail of 29th April 1939 was the key:

“JENKINS. In loving memory of Captain W. Jenkins of Cwm, St Dogmaels” who was “ever remembered”. This fine sentiment was followed by two strongly worded lines:

*It was hard to say goodbye, dear Brother.
Injustice fall on the doer. Leave Retribution to God.*

Clearly, somebody was very badly bruised, and that somebody was “sister Matilda.”

From this cryptic clue the only thing I can suppose is that there had been a rift of some sort between William’s wife and his sister. A previous notice inserted by Matilda five years before gave the information that William died on 30th April 1931:

*We sorrow for your death dear Brother
Laid to rest and none of us knew
Your life was hard, your sorrow past
Peace at least.*⁶¹

On 11th November 1939, Matilda inserted another notice:

“In sacred memory of a wonderful mother, Ann Jenkins of St Dogmaels; also of father. From Matilda and Beatrice.”

John Aitken returned to 13 Davey Street. He was still at the same address when his wife Hannah died on 18th February 1926 aged sixty six, the event reported in the obituary notices

⁵⁹ Ibid 31.7.1920

⁶⁰ GCit 5.1.1923

⁶¹ WM 30.4.1934

of the Western Daily Press, is followed by a note from John Aitken and family thanking friends for their condolences. John himself died on 13th August 1937 at Southmead Hospital, Bristol. He left effects amounting to £330.2s 4d.

William Frank Butterworth who was working as an engineer in 1921 later set up on his own account making and selling bicycles. In the 1930s demand for the type of cycle he built decreased and in 1937 he went bankrupt with liabilities in the paltry sum of £115.⁶² In 1939, described “engineer fitter”, he was living with his wife Elsie Grace at 4 Christina Terrace, Hotwells. According to his granddaughter, Louise Argent, he was affected greatly by his time at Ruhleben; he never returned to the sea and died in Bristol on 23rd December 1941.

Ernest Benjamin Daniels returned home 29 days after the Armistice to find his family in mourning for his daughter, Emma, aged 20, who died in the winter of 1918, probably in the ‘flu pandemic.

Ernest did not stay home for long, and was soon back at sea. His wife, the lonesome “Mrs Ernest Daniels, Saul” carried on attending social engagements singly, as she had done before the war, as for the funeral of her uncle Richard Lodge, son of the late Captain Thomas Lodge of Frampton-on-Severn.⁶³ She was often present at other such events in the ensuing years, which were faithfully recorded in the Gloucester press.

Ernest’s Merchant Marine seaman’s pass survives, date stamped Avonmouth, 22nd August 1927, giving his particulars: Bo’sun’s Mate, born 1876, at Frampton-on-Severn, resident Saul, 5 feet 5½ inches tall, with blue eyes, dark hair and a dark complexion.⁶⁴ Under the heading “A well-known Frampton mariner” his retirement from the sea in 1939 is reported in the Gloucester Gazette, *“after fifty two years in the Merchant Service, having begun his career under sail at the age of thirteen. For the past twenty three years he had been with the Bristol Steam Navigation Company in vessels plying between Gloucester and the Continent. During one of these cross-Channel voyages aboard ss. Sappho in 1914 he was taken prisoner by the Germans.”*⁶⁵

A rather more highly coloured account of Ernest’s hectic life appears in another Gloucester paper, the Citizen, 14th October 1939:

“In 1887 Ernest Daniels sailed from London and Sharpness in the Colonial clipper ships to Australia and New Zealand, his first ship from Sharpness being the London wool clipper, North Brook, a very unlucky ship which experienced no fewer than 13 dis-mastings in twenty years and was finally abandoned after a fire at sea. His next ship from Sharpness was the Australian emigrant ship Scottish Knight whose crew were mostly Sharpness and Berkeley men. He also sailed in Devitt & Moore’s crack 4-master Port Jackson which did the fastest

⁶² WDP 27.1.1937

⁶³ GJ 12.10.1912

⁶⁴ NA. BT/349

⁶⁵ “The Gazette”, on-line 13.10.1939.

day's run under sail, 346 miles in 24 hours. Mr Daniels then spent many years in steam, including 23 years for the Bristol Steam Navigation Company, to and from the continent in ss. Sappho the last ship to leave the Port of Gloucester before the Great War. He was taken out of her 20th July 1914 and remained a Prisoner of War in Germany until 29 days after the Armistice. After the war Mr Daniels was twelve years in Elders and Fyffe's banana boats and made 99 voyages to the West Indies and back.



The 4-masted barque Port Jackson, owned by Devitt & Moore, built 1882, in service 1906-1916

"In his sea career he has had many hairbreadth escapes both at sea and in foreign parts. Among many well-known sailors he met were Captain T. Greenway and Mr W. Roberts of Saul, and Mr F. Brinkworth, of Frampton, all of whom he met in Melbourne. He has tramped in the Australian Bush and in the South African Veldt. He is one of the few members of the crew of the Scottish Knight still alive having been rescued after nine hours in a lifeboat in heavy seas in the Channel. He was washed overboard from a steamer's bows and washed back in again without injury. Mr Daniels has now retired due to failing health."

Phew! The young cub reporter eagerly lapped up all this stuff. All I can say is the ships existed. The *Scottish Knight* was in Australia in 1887, the *Port Jackson*, built in 1882, was in service 1906, and the *North brook*, an iron-masted square-rigger, was built in 1874. There is little doubt Ernest went to Australia and met the local seafarers mentioned, but I can't see

him as a swagman tramping blithely over bush and veldt. I can't help the suspicion that Ernie may have been a teensy wee bit of an old story-teller.

According to his granddaughter who has a curious grasp of history, "Ernest was a tenant of a house in Passage Road, Saul which he named *Terra Nova* after sailing to New Zealand with Captain Cook on the ship of that name. His wife was pregnant so he wanted to come home and left the ship, not going to the Antarctic. The baby was my father Percy Oliver Daniels."

66

The entry was corrected by another relative, Wendy Blake, Ernest's great granddaughter: "I just wanted to make note that the *Terra Nova* was Robert Falcon Scott's ship, not Captain Cook's, given that he, Cook, died in 1779. Scott sailed on the *Terra Nova* on his expedition to the Antarctic."



Ernest Daniels, (right) in a pose reminiscent of "Popeye the Sailor" with one of his mates, at Buchanan's Wharf in Bristol. (courtesy of Pat Poole)

Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole took place 1910-13. The *Terra Nova* left Melbourne 18th October 1910 and arrived in New Zealand on 31st October. Ernest's race back home in time for Percy's birth, which would have to have taken place sometime during the period January to March 1911 does not fit the pattern of general male behaviour in that era; secondly, he would have had to travel by time machine. Thirdly, as he was proud of the local celebrities he met in Australia he would surely have boasted to the young reporter about even a merest wisp of a connection with the national hero Captain Scott! This is how family myths and legends are born. But.....there is a still a house called *Terra Nova* at Passage Street, Saul, so anyone's guess is as good as mine.

Ernest and Edith do not appear on the 1939 registration record, but they were living at Alpha Cottage, Saul, when Edith died, aged 75, on 25th January 1949. Her funeral at Fretherne church was attended by numerous relatives and friends. Ernest remained at Alpha Cottage until shortly before his death on 1st August 1957 which took place at his

⁶⁶ Cotswold Canal Heritage Website

daughter Lilian's house, 7 Whitminster Lane, Frampton-on-Severn. Ernest Benjamin Daniels left "effects under £50" of which probate was granted to his daughter, "Lilian Dorothea Kate Hunt, married woman". He is buried at Saul churchyard along with Edith, his wife, plus their daughters and sons-in-law, Lilian and Victor Hunt and Estella and Frederick Spencer.

After Ruhleben, **John Lawrence** went back to sea after a brief interval. His seaman's identity card (William John Lawrence) dated simply "1918" states he was AB., born at Framilode, 29th October 1888. His "mug shot" shows a long faced young man, hair slightly receding, and wearing a bushy moustache.⁶⁷

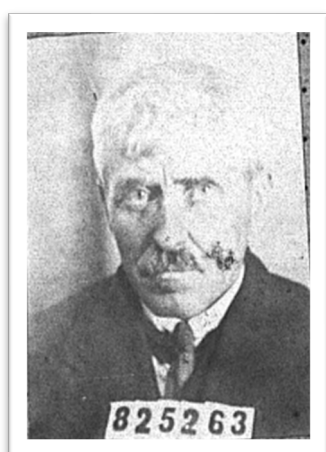


William John Roan Lawrence married Hannah Anderson, at Gloucester in 1920. Their children, Reginald, Mary and Cecily were registered at Wheatenhurst between 1921 and 1928. It seems likely that John was another adversely affected by his ordeal as a POW and he died, aged only forty one, on 21st February 1930 at the Gloucester County Mental Hospital. His funeral took place at Framilode Church.

He is last mentioned in 1950 in the reminiscences of Mr William J. Wathan of Saul whose father-in-law was

*"Second Mate to Captain Bray of the Hero, and was a Severn Pilot. The ship got away from Germany just as war was declared in 1914 and made passage to Gloucester in safety. Not so, a sister ship, Sappho; on her (sic) were Ernest Daniels of Saul and John Lawrence of Framilode who were made prisoners of war."*⁶⁸

John Lawrence's father Samuel, formerly a master mariner of Framilode, died aged 78 in March 1934. Among the family mourners was his daughter-in-law, the widowed Mrs John Lawrence.⁶⁹



Duncan Mackenzie who spent the whole of the war at Ruhleben, returned to Fowey. According to his grandson David *"when Duncan was repatriated, he arrived home wearing Anthony Eden's brother's trousers!"*⁷⁰ (Timothy Eden, the elder brother of Anthony, Prime Minister, 1955-57, was held at Ruhleben 1914-16.) David also said that his grandfather could speak two or three languages learned whilst he was interned. As with Butterworth and Lawrence, imprisonment had a lasting effect. Duncan *"was certainly radicalised, probably by events witnessed*

⁶⁷ NA BT/350

⁶⁸ GCit 17.2.1950

⁶⁹ GJ 17.3. 1934

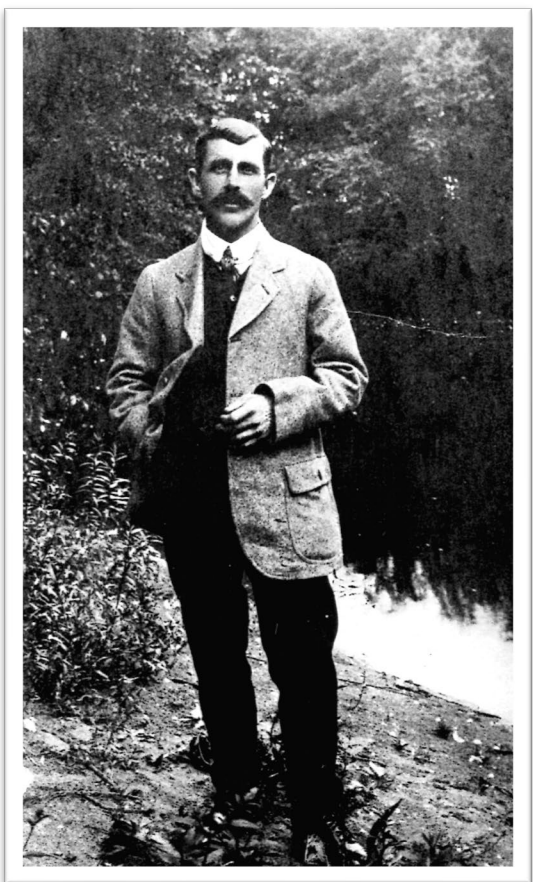
⁷⁰ 'The Ruhleben Story' website; sadly David died before I started the project.

at the end of the war in Germany.”

His identity card dated “1918” states he was a steward, nationality “Scotch”, born 22nd September 1877 at Campbeltown, Argyllshire and gives three dates, 1st July, 12th August 1919 and 14th March 1921, presumably times he was at sea. His photograph shows a middle-aged man with a full head of white wavy hair, far seeing eyes, slightly turned up nose, a cleft chin and a bushy moustache. The image, though head and shoulders only, suggests strength.⁷¹

In 1939, Duncan was a wharf labourer, living at 6 Union Place, Fowey, with his wife Emily. His birthdate is recorded as the same day and month, 22nd September, but in 1876 rather than the 1877 stated on his Merchant Marine ID. He died in 1946 aged sixty nine.

Some crew members encountered difficulties in their private lives. **George David Meadows** returned home to Epney but his marriage appears to have foundered and by 1939 he and his wife Emily were living separately, though both are recorded as “married”. George D. Meadows, born 11th August 1866, a waterman, was alone “near Epney Cross” while Emily, born 14th January 1877, was at 4 Meredith Cottages, Painswick. Fred Bennett, “incapacitated”, her blind nephew, by then aged 40, still lived with her. George Meadows died in 1949 aged 82.



The marriage of **Oscar Hubert Watts**, also failed. He and his wife Ethel separated, each making new lives with other partners. Oscar sued for divorce in 1926 as “he wished to marry the mother of his two children.”⁷² The suit, which was granted, was heard at Swansea, possibly to avoid scandal as divorce still held a stigma.

Oscar Watts in the 1920s.

The same year Oscar married Louise Priday and they had two more children, Dora and Christopher. Oscar was working as a general labourer in 1939 when he and Louie were living at Pentric, Nans Lane, Gloucester. He died aged seventy two in 1957. His grandson Andrew Longridge who lived with his grandparents when he was young told me that after the war Oscar “built a railway carriage home which is still lived in.”

⁷¹ NA BT/ 350 by kind permission of National Archives.
⁷² GChr 9.7.1916



Oscar with Louie in later life.

There is so far no trace of **Charles W. Aldridge**. I have conjectured that he went to live in Scotland as he gave a Glasgow address at Ruhleben and his wife's surname, Cameron, suggests that she was a Scot. In 1911 his father Ambrose William Aldridge, was the pilot "at anchor, Walton Bay" in the Bristol Channel, aboard the ss. *Peerless*, a vessel of a considerable size, with an international crew of nineteen aboard. (In 1917, *Peerless* would be torpedoed off Lands End with loss of life.) In 1939, Ambrose was living in retirement at Victoria House, Sharpness Gardens with his wife Constance and other family members. He died on 22 January 1951 aged 88, leaving £1,348.2s.0d, with probate granted to John Aldridge, a commercial traveller, presumably his eldest son by his second marriage, who was born in 1904.



The Merchant Marine card of **Thomas Andrew Davis**, born 19th October 1883 shows that he returned to sea in 1918 as a fireman. His ID photo shows a pleasant faced, clear-eyed man in a regulation roll neck jumper who sports an impressive bushy moustache.⁷³



The ID card of the Irishman, **Joseph Leonard** gives his date and place of birth as Rush, Dublin, 1st June 1895.⁷⁴ His photo shows a dark-haired young man with full lips and prominent ears wearing a collar and tie and a light raincoat. It is an "Irish" face, and his likeness might be seen walking down the Dublin streets even today.

⁷³ ibid

⁷⁴ ibid

Edward Griffin went back to sea until at least 1930, on many different ships, and seems to have ended his service as “3rd Mate” at Barry.

The on-line article “Cabbage Soup Again”⁷⁵ attracted this comment from Ms Ruth Hughes:

“My great grandfather **Robert Bowditch** was a Merchant Seaman aboard ss. *Sappho* impounded in Hamburg and interned at Ruhleben in early November 1914. He died of pneumonia two weeks later due to the terrible conditions; had he lived until December men of his age were repatriated.” Robert’s widow, Jane Bowditch, died in 1926 aged sixty one.

Sefton Delmer in his account of Robert Bowditch’s death remarks that “no-one in the camp had heard the name of this British fireman, neglected and allowed to die”. Sadly this seems to be the case still. Robert Bowditch is not named on the National Merchant Navy Memorial in London or on the Bristol Merchant Navy Roll.

The ss. *Sappho* appears to have been the only Bristol registered ship impounded by the Germans in 1914.

Part 3. More Bristol POWS: seamen and tourists

Like his Gloucester colleague, the Lord Mayor of Bristol also received “Greetings from Prisoners of War at Ruhleben” on a card dated 22nd December 1914. The signatories were deciphered as:

“C.M. Pow, G. Wilshire, J. Atken, (*sic*), J.C. Adams, R.B. Steadman, W. Gallop, D. James, G. Brehards, F. Baldwin, F. Pigg, J. Cottele, O. Milton, C.B. Short, W.F. Butterworth, J. Carter, A.G. James, W. Bryant, S.J. Thomas, S. Makepeace, H.E. Veale, C. Dugay, E. Lewis, H.W. White, H. Williams, S. Williams, C.W. Aldridge, R. Martin, F. Green, T. Briggs, F. Fortune. All Civil Prisoners of War.”⁷⁶

The *Sappho* crew members were a distinct bunch and obviously all knew each other. This would not generally have been the case with the other Bristol men who signed the card who comprised seamen from different ships, plus businessmen and students. It seems probable that someone took the trouble to go about the camp asking “Are you from Bristol?” and collected the names from among the hundreds of internees. That they are not in alphabetical order confirms that this was a lengthy process and that the signatories were collected piecemeal. Aldridge, Aitken and Butterworth, all Bristolians, the three officers belonging to *Sappho* signed the Bristol card and their experiences have already been described. Most of the interned seamen are named in Marcus Bateman’s invaluable index

⁷⁵ Elgin Strub-Ronayne, in “Centenary News 1914-1918” on-line

⁷⁶ WDP 6.1.1915. As far as I know the postcard itself has not survived, therefore the only evidence is from the pages of the WDP. Some of the spellings of the names are as deciphered by the Editor

“British Fishermen and Merchant Seamen Prisoners of War, 1914-1918” (BFMS); some are listed in three tranches in the WDP as “Bristol Mercantile Roll of Honour” 8.10.1917, (RHa), 11.10.1917, (RHb) and 16.10.1917 (RHc). For the others I have relied on the dedicated website “The Ruhleben Story” (TRS). The vast majority of those named below were held at Ruhleben unless otherwise stated and for simplification I have listed the seamen first.

“C.M. Pow” is **Charles McKenzie Pow** of 2 Orchard Road, Bishopston, born in North Shields 5th August 1872. In 1914 he was Chief Officer aboard the *Sangara*.

On 31st March 1901, aged 28, he was Chief Mate aboard the *George Fisher* a ship at anchor at Garstang, Lancashire. He was in Bristol by 1902 when he married Eva Andrews; MN records show that he was Mate aboard two BSN Co.’s ships, *Ino* and *Juno*, during July and December 1906.⁷⁷ He is listed in the WDP “Roll of Honour” 16 October 1917.

The ss. *Sangara*, owned by the British & African Steam Navigation Company of Liverpool, survived the war and was sold at Hamburg in 1919. After his release from Ruhleben Pow returned to the sea. His MM identity card, date stamped Bristol, 16th November 1926 confirms his rank as First Mate, “by examination” and describes him as 5 feet 11½ inches tall with brown hair (crossed out and “grey” inserted) and blue eyes, with “a mark” on his left

eye.⁷⁸ In 1939, he was living at 4 Derby Street, Redfield, “a stores assistant, Aircraft Works; War Service: Mercantile Marine”, with his wife Eva and sister-in-law Ethel Andrews.



⁷⁷ MN crew lists, BRO

⁷⁸ NA BT/349

Three Bristol men were aboard the ***City of Berlin***, (Palgrave, Murphy & Co, Dublin) which was seized in August 1914. This ship was used as a “block ship” by the Germans for target practice and was sunk off Pernau in July/August 1915.⁷⁹ The birthdate of **James Coward Adams** (otherwise J.C. or James Adams), the Second Engineer, of 10 Walton Street, Bristol is shown in BFMS as “1863” but he was actually born on 26th March 1861. In 1871 aged ten, he was living at Myrtle Cottage, Dowry Road, Clifton, one of the children of Emma Adams. The father of the Adams family was absent which suggests he was a seaman. James was only eighteen in 1879 when he married Florence Louise Leach, who was a few years his senior. In 1881 in James’ absence Florence was living with her parents George and Louisa Leach at Stapleton. She makes no further appearances until 2nd April 1911, living alone at 10 Walton Street, a record which indicates she had given birth to one child which had died in infancy. As she was “missing” for so many years is it possible she could have gone to sea with James? A “J. Adams, engineer, born Bristol, 1865” who was aboard the *Liscannor*, in July 1911⁸⁰ is probably the same James, dates of birth always being rather fluid. As “J. Adams” he is named in the Roll of Honour, 8th October 1917. Like the majority of the mariners he returned to the sea after his release. His MM Identity card dated 10th November 192- (last digit obliterated) which gives his full name, describes him as Second Engineer, by Certificate, 5 feet 9½ inches tall, with brown hair, brown eyes and having the tops of three fingers on his left hand “injured”. He was then aboard the ss. *Addington*.⁸¹ He was ashore by 1939, when he was a marine engine fitter, living with Florence at the old address, 10 Walton Street.

David James, fireman, 4 Lime Road, Ashton Gate, (BFMS) was born David John James in 1879 at Barton Regis, the son of a blacksmith, also called David; his mother, Rachel, nee Atwell, came from Pill and in 1891 the family lived at Hotwells Road. By 1896 David was at sea, as a “Boy” in the BSN Co.’s ship *Nigel* which was afterwards renamed *Juno* by the Company (to fit in with the classical theme of the fleet.) In February 1901 he was a fireman aboard *Kansas City* and later the same year, a greaser on *Port Morant*.⁸² He married his wife Elizabeth in 1907 and in 1911, described himself “mariner” when they were living at 11 Lime Road, (a few doors away from his address in 1914) with their baby son, Alfred, aged five months. He is named in the Roll of Honour, 11th October 1917. He was the brother of Alfred G. James, (qv).

The man whose name was interpreted on the card as “H.E. Veale” is **Henry Vale**, fireman, of 7 York Street, St Philips (BFMS) who is “H. Vale” in the Roll of Honour, 16th October 1917. His MM Identity Card, (dated 1918), gives his date of birth as 25th May 1888 and states his full

⁷⁹ WDP 23.10.1915

⁸⁰ MN crew lists, BRO

⁸¹ NA BT/349

⁸² MN crew lists, BRO

name Henry Edward Vale.⁸³ He cannot otherwise be traced; after repatriation he did not return to his lodgings at 7 York Street; the house was put up for auction in June 1919.

“W. Gallop” is **Walter Gollop**, of 19 York Avenue, Ashley Down, the First Officer of the *San Wilfrido* (BFMS), a 6,458 steam-powered British tanker, built by Armstrong, Whitworth and Co. Ltd in the Low Walker Yard and operated by the Eagle Oil Transport Company of London. She had the unfortunate distinction of being Britain’s first naval loss of the war. On the day before war was declared, she left Hamburg (*en route* for New Orleans) in ballast and had come as far as the River Elbe about eight miles above Brunsbuttel where she allegedly received permission to proceed. As no pilot was available to take her through the minefield at Cuxhaven, she followed “the usual channel”, a course she must have taken before. The men in charge of the harbour tugs realised the ship was in danger and shouted to the Master, who attempted to go full speed astern, but the ship was caught by the strong ebb tide and drifted into the mine zone. Three explosions occurred and *San Wilfrido* settled down by the stern with a heavy list to port and was soon firmly aground. A German tug rescued the crew who were then arrested and made prisoners of war. The whole affair is confirmation (as if we needed one) of the ludicrous nature of war.

Walter Gollop, born 28th October 1888 at Sidmouth, Devon was the eldest son of Walter Richard Gollop, a police constable (later sergeant) and his wife Isabella. In 1901 he was living at Torquay with his parents and siblings Edgar, Herbert and Emily Rose. By 1911 the family had moved to 375 Gloucester Road, Horfield though Walter, aged 22, was already at sea; his younger brother Edgar, who was at home, was a seaman apprentice. Walter’s signature on the Lord Mayor’s card was misread “Gallop” but a few days later he was (incorrectly styled) “*Captain*” W. Gollop when listed with Samuel Makepeace, (*qv*) and others as members of the Merchant Seamen’s Guild who had been interned at Ruhleben.⁸⁴ He does not appear on the “Roll of Honour”. He was back in Bristol by 12th February 1919 when he married Beatrice Hampton at Broadmead Chapel.⁸⁵ His MM Identity card which gives his date and place of birth shows he was a certificated Master, but rated First Mate; he went back to sea between May 1919 and June 1920. In 1939 he was at home in Bristol, with his own business as a “battery charger” living at 51 Ashley Down with Beatrice, their son Jack and several younger children. Walter died in 1949 aged fifty two.

Also aboard *San Wilfrido* in 1914 was **John Carter**, AB, of 112 West Street who appears on both BFMS and the Lord Mayor’s card as “J. Carter” though is not on the “Roll of Honour”. He was born in Bristol on 26th August 1892, one of fourteen children of George Carter, a coal haulier and his wife Mary. John’s mother died before 1911 when he was living in the family home at West Street with his father and assisting with the business. He presumably had

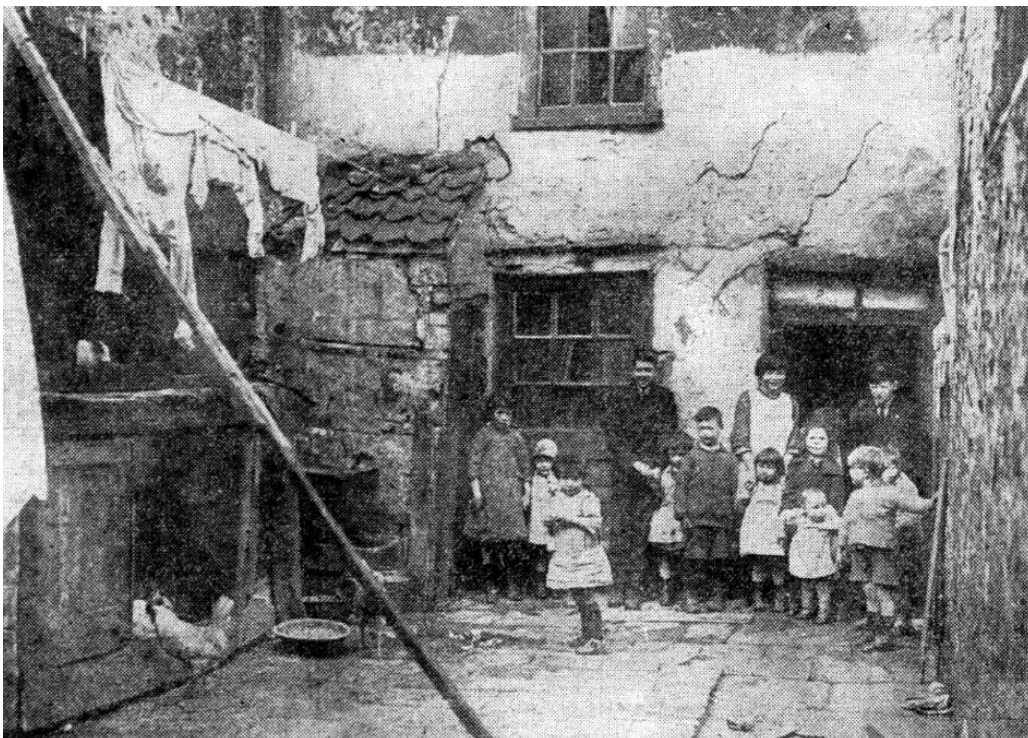
⁸³ NA BT 350

⁸⁴ WDP 8.1.1915

⁸⁵ Ibid 14.2.1919

sea-going experience by this time as he had qualified as AB. in 1914. After Ruhleben he returned to the Merchant Navy and is recorded aboard "*Cazaritza*" on 23rd February 1920.⁸⁶

Henry Hector Williams (H. Williams on BFMS) of 4 Warren's Court, Bristol, was a fireman on the ***City of Belfast***, (Palgrave, Murphy & Co, Dublin) when she was seized in the River Elbe in 1914. He signed the Lord Mayor's card and is named in the Roll of Honour.⁸⁷ He was born 5th February 1895 one of ten living children (of twelve) of Edwin, a gas plumber, and Mary Ann Williams. In 1911 nine members of the Williams family, including Henry, lived in three rooms in the vicinity of a slaughterhouse at Warren's Court, off Frogmore Street, a place said to be one of Bristol's "blackest" spots.



Warren's Court



After Ruhleben, Henry returned to sea in 1918. His ID photo shows a grimy young man still covered by the oil and soot of the ship's engine room suggesting it was taken immediately he came ashore.⁸⁸

Almost the entire fleet belonging to Palgrave, Murphy & Co. of Dublin must have been on the River Elbe when war broke out, for the ***City of Cadiz*** was another of the Company's vessels to be

⁸⁶ NA BT350

⁸⁷ WDP 16.10.1917

⁸⁸ NA BT/350

impounded. Three Bristol men were aboard. **Alfred George James**, a cook, of 22 Lewin Street, Redfield, who signed the Lord Mayor's card as "A.G. James" and is likewise recorded on BFMS. He was christened on 4th July 1884 at St Andrew's Church, Clifton, the son of David and Rachel, and the brother of David James (*qv*). In 1906 he was the cook aboard the *Argo*,⁸⁹ and is named in the Roll of Honour, 11 October 1917.

Another scrawl on the Lord Mayor's card was deciphered as "G. Brehards", a surname so rare as to barely exist. In fact it was misread and the name belonged to one **George Richards**, "a marine fireman" of 19 Philip Street, Ashton Gate (BFMS). In 1891, aged fifteen, George the son of William, a marine engineer and his wife Ellen was living at Stracey Street, Bedminster. He is probably be G. Richards, fireman, (doubling as 2nd engineer), born in Bristol circa 1871-76 who was aboard the vessel *Islander* in 1896 and the BSN Co. owned *Apollo* in 1911.⁹⁰ He is named in the Roll of Honour, 16th October 1917 again as G. Richards.

The man reported by the WDP as "J. Cottele" was released from Ruhleben in December 1915. Though he is not in the BFMS index he may be **John Sampson Cottle**, who was born in Bedminster on 19th March 1883. By 1901, aged 18, described "seaman, AB", he was at home, 63 Essex Street, with his widowed mother and three younger siblings. A ship's fireman, he married Florence Julietta Farthing, aged 24, of Salisbury, at Bedminster in the spring of 1911, and shortly afterwards they were living at 86 Bedminster Parade.

His story appears in the Nottingham Evening Post,⁹¹ under another variation of his name: "Mr J.R. Cottell, a prisoner at Ruhleben for 17 months has returned home to Cotswold Road, Bedminster. A sailor of thirty years' experience of seafaring, he left Swansea for Hamburg aboard the Dublin owned steamer *City of Cadiz* on July 29 1914 which reached the German port by August 4th when the German authorities insisted on the British flag being torn down and interned the crew."

He said: *"We were packed like sardines when the Germans took us in hand. At Ruhleben we were quartered at the racecourse. We made the best of things, organised football and dramatic societies. The night I came away it was Cinderella. A Barton Hill man was engaged in the stagework and a student prisoner made all the costumes. We had Steve Bloomer the famous international player with us. The football leagues were in full swing. Barrack no. 9 was top of the league when I left. We also had Pentland of Queens Park Rangers. Bloomer does not run about much these days but for all that scored some pretty good headers and coached the team."*

(Bloomer and Pentland were among several footballers in the camp who organised the leagues. Steve Bloomer, 1874-1933, who played for Middlesbrough, Derby County and England was one of football's first superstars. He had arrived in Germany three weeks

⁸⁹ MN crew lists, BRO

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ 11.12.1915

before war was declared to coach Berlin Britannia FC and spent 3½ years interned at Ruhleben. Frederick Beaconsfield Pentland, 1883-1962, who had played for QPR, Blackburn and other clubs, was also an England International who like Bloomer, was in Berlin on a coaching assignment. He was released from the camp late in the war and when recuperating in the West Country he met and later married his VAD nurse, a war widow. He went on to have a successful career in management in France and Spain; his statue - "Bonbin" – "the Bowler Hat" – as he was called, still stands at Bilbao Athletic's ground.⁹²⁾

In 1939 Mr & Mrs Cottle lived at Portishead in a house called "St Kilda", which perhaps reflects a happy memory of one of John's voyages. By then he was a "locomotive driver". He died in 1966.

The man who signed "F. Baldwin" is **Alfred "Fred" Baldwin** of the *City of Munich*, yet another vessel of the Palgrave Murphy fleet. In the BFMS index his name is given as "F. Bolerwin" of 1 Queen Street, "Beaminster", (Bedminster). The surname Bolerwin does not exist and probably arises in the space between the man's accent and the handwriting of the German clerk who recorded the information.⁹³ The error is repeated in the Bristol Roll of Honour, 8th October 1917.

Fred was born about 1860, the son of Joshua Baldwin, a mariner, originally from Kent, and his wife Harriet. In 1851 Joshua was a lodger at Kite's Nest, Wheatenhurst, in the home of another mariner, John Jackson, his wife Harriet and their six children, the eldest of whom was Harriet junior.⁹⁴ All the young Jacksons were born at various villages along the Bristol Channel, whereas Joshua, less than helpfully, (but one imagines proudly), gives his birthplace as "own craft". He and young Harriet Jackson were married later that year at Wheatenhurst. By 1861 Harriet was living at 8 Spring Street, Bedminster, with their three sons, George, 9, William, 5 and Alfred, 8 months, whilst "Captain Joshua" was aboard the coaster *Victoria*, home port: Benfleet, Essex, which was at anchor on the Welsh side of the Bristol Channel at Newport. The mate was Joshua's twenty four year old brother James; as no other crew members were named it may have been a two-man operation.

Joshua was at home with his family at Spring Street in 1871. George and William were, like their father and grandfather, mariners. There had been three new arrivals during the decade, Henry, Harriet, and Thomas. Meanwhile "Alfred", aged eleven, a scholar, was listed as "Frederick". With his pedigree it is no surprise that by 1881 he was at sea. In 1884 he married Fanny Wathen and by 1891 they were living at 26 Hope Square with their daughter Julia Velina.

Fred, having previously served on board the *Fernbrook* spent almost the whole of 1891 as a fireman aboard the Liverpool registered *Ontario*, of the Mississippi & Dominion Steamship

⁹² TRS

⁹³ A Baldwin family, my neighbours in Kingswood many years ago were locally pronounced "Bollin".

⁹⁴ Jenny, nee Jackson, the wife of W.J. Wathan of Wheatenhurst (1914) was a member of this family.

Company.⁹⁵ In July 1896 he was a fireman on the BSN Co.'s *Juno*. He was at home at Hope Square on census night 1901, with Fanny and their three children, Julia (otherwise known as Lavinia), 14, Elsie, 8 and Alfred, 5 with Frederick Wathen, Fanny's brother, as a lodger. That same year Fred would be aboard our old friend the ss. *Sappho*. In 1911, he was aged 52, occupied with "seafaring work, stoker" by which time he and Fanny had moved to 3 Queen Street; they had been married for 27 years, with the now familiar story of loss: Julia and a fourth child had died in the interim. Only Elsie, 18, and Alfred, 15, were currently living. The last records of Fred's sea service were for January and July 1911 as a donkeyman aboard the *Echo*.⁹⁶

The ***City of Munich*** was seized in the River Elbe in 1914. Fred endured sixteen months at Ruhleben until released in December 1915 under the amnesty for "older" seamen (over 57 years of age.) He arrived at Tilbury aboard the *Mecklenburg* where he was interviewed by a reporter from *The Times*. He described the countryside he had seen from the train on the journey to the German frontier, and paid tribute to the Red Cross ladies who had kindly looked after the party at Roosendaal before they embarked for home at Flushing.⁹⁷ Fred died in 1919 possibly in the flu pandemic, aged fifty nine.

Captain Henry D. Neil, born 1872, at Hampton Wick, Middlesex, whose home address was 18 Addison Road, Victoria Park, Bristol was the master of the Cardiff trader ***Dartwen***, (W. & C. T. Jones Steamship Co.) This ship was impounded following one of her regular Atlantic crossings from Montreal to Avonmouth, Rotterdam or other European ports. Neil did not sign the Lord Mayor's card, but is named in the "Roll of Honour" 11th October 1917.

Henry married Elizabeth Parker the daughter of a parchment maker at Bedminster in 1897, and in 1901 was away at sea leaving his wife with her parents and toddler son, Leonard Parker, aged two, at 12 St Luke's Road. On 2nd April 1911, Captain Neil, then aged 38, a master mariner, was at home at 21 Clarence Place, Cotham, with his wife, their sons, Leonard, Harold, Herbert and Frederick and an adopted daughter, Florence. Henry Parker, his father-in-law, a widower, lived with them.

It is probable that Henry returned to sea after his release from Ruhleben. His wife Elizabeth died in 1938 aged 64 and by 1939, the widowed Henry, a "master mariner, retired" was living with his youngest son and daughter-in-law at the West India Pub in Bridgwater. Henry, also an ex Merchant Navy man, and his wife Vera, were the licensees. Captain Henry Neil died at Bridgwater in 1947.

Also from the *Dartwen* was **William George Davies**, a cook, aged 30, (W.G. Davies, BFMS) who gave his address in Ruhleben as 178 Coronation Road, Bedminster where he lodged with William and Annie Walton. As with Captain Neil he was not found by those collecting

⁹⁵ NA BT99/1692

⁹⁶ MN Crew lists BRO

⁹⁷ The Times, 12.12.1915. The story was not picked up by the local papers.

signatures for the Lord Mayor's card, but he is named in the Roll of Honour of 8th January 1917. Released at the end of the war, he married the Walton's daughter Annie at Bedminster on 26th April 1919. It is likely he was the "W.G. Davies, ships' cook" who was aboard the *General Lukin* and whose ID card is date stamped at Barry, 22nd July 1925.⁹⁸

Another member of *Dartwen's* crew, Robert Anderson of Cardiff, provides a glimpse of life at Ruhleben in 1915. Robert, who had discovered a talent for amateur theatricals wrote home to a friend: "*our great triumph was 'Androcles and the Lion' by Bernard Shaw. We had to give it eight times before our fellow-exiles were satisfied.*"⁹⁹

Lynfield, a defensively-armed merchant ship, Cardiff/Salonika/Alexandria, was captured by a submarine and sunk on 8th January 1917, 32 miles SE by S from Malta. One crew member was killed, David Smart, 34, the 1st Engineer, a native of South Shields. "The Master, Captain Ellery of Bristol was rescued by a French ship *Chili* but taken prisoner with the rest of the crew."¹⁰⁰ **Captain Joseph E. Ellery**, of 293 E. Stapleton Road ("J.E. Ellery" on BFMS) was imprisoned at the Salzerbad Camp. On 2nd April 1911 his home address was 74 Whitehall Road where he gave his details "aged 40, Merchant Service, born Fowey, Cornwall" and signed the census form. His entry was deleted by the official which would imply he was no longer under the roof on census night, and must have gone to sea before the form was collected. His wife Elizabeth, 38, who was born in Portsmouth, had given birth to seven children, five of whom were still living: Nellie, 16, Linda, 14, Elizabeth, 12, William, 9, and Florence, 7, all born in Cardiff.

Though Joseph survived imprisonment, he died in Bristol during the 1st quarter of 1920, possibly indirectly as a result of his incarceration. He was aged forty nine. I have failed to find an obituary notice for him.

The ss. May Scott, (May Scott Steamship Co., Newcastle) had one Bristol man aboard, **Thomas Briggs**, of 97 Lower Cheltenham Place, Montpelier (BFMS). A brief paragraph in the Newcastle Journal, 25th August 1914, gave the news that the ship had been impounded but the crew were safe. Thomas Briggs was named in the WDP Roll of Honour, 8th October 1917. He was "Released to Holland, May 1918" (BFMS). Two Bristol men called Thomas Briggs were at sea in the years following the war: the first, born 1882, was a fireman of the *Eaglet*, 20 June 1919 to 11 May 1921; the second, a mess room steward, born 1891, was aboard *Changuinola*, 25 May 1921 to 24 June 1921.¹⁰¹ This Thomas Briggs married Lillie Leigh, daughter of a lighterman in 1919 and in 1939, then working as a docker was living with his

⁹⁸ NA BT348

⁹⁹ Western Mail, 31.5.1915. see also R.B. Steadman

¹⁰⁰ "British Merchant ships lost by enemy action".

¹⁰¹ NA BT350

wife at 148 Cheltenham Place; the address suggests that he may be the Ruhleben POW. (He will turn up again in 1923 during “the loss of the *Echo*”.)

There were two Bristol men aboard the **ss. *Mount Temple*** of the Canadian Pacific Line, the 4th Engineer, Frederick Flower and William Oxford, a steward. The ship departed Montreal in 1916 with a diverse cargo of more than 700 horses for use at the Front, 3,000 tons of corn, 1,200 cases of eggs, plus 22 crates of dinosaur fossils destined for the British Museum. The ship was captured by the German Imperial Navy, on 6th December 1916 and scuttled. In the melee four crewmen were killed, the horses broke loose and as they swam towards the raider they were shot from the deck by the enemy officers and crew. In a grotesque spectacle, the sea ran red with their blood.

The German officers “conversed freely” with *Mount Temple*’s officers and politely “regretted the state they were in”. When the raider was engaged in chasing a vessel, the prisoners were shut up in the water tight compartments and “fervently hoped the Allied ship would not return fire.” The *Mount Temple*’s surviving crew and passengers, numbering over a hundred people, were taken to the prison camp at Swinemunde where they arrived 31st December 1916. The US citizens among them were released the following March, but the rest were interned for the duration.

The engineer, **Frederick John Flower**, of 71 Clarence Road, New Cut, Redcliffe, was born on 23rd December 1891, the son of Albert and Emily Flower. In April 1911, he was an engineer/fitter’s apprentice, ashore at the time and living at the family home; his father who worked for Bristol Corporation had the interesting job of “Engineer in charge of the Mayor’s Paddock Baths”. After his ordeal as a POW Frederick Flower returned to sea, as shown by his undated ID.¹⁰² On 1st September 1924, he married Fanny Harriet Bishop at St Mary Redcliffe. In 1939 he was “a marine engineer/fitter”, and lived with his wife at 1 Dennyview Road, Long Ashton.

William Oxford, an assistant steward, aged 29, gave the address of a lodging house, 72 Pulteney Street, Bath. (BFMS) He is perhaps William Lawrence Oxford born 21st October 1887 at Brinklow, Warwickshire, whose MM documents show that he went back to sea as an assistant steward between March 1919 and September 1920.¹⁰³

There were three Bristol men aboard the **ss. *Nicoya***, (Elders & Fyffes, Glasgow), a banana boat, which voyaged between Port Limon (Costa Rica) and Avonmouth. The *Nicoya*, “with papers in perfect order” left Hamburg fifty hours before war was declared but was stopped in the Elbe and taken back to port in charge of a river pilot. Her captain declined to leave the ship and on 18th August 1914, “his whereabouts were unknown”.¹⁰⁴ The home address of the Chief Officer, **Samuel Makepeace**, was 3 Brynland Avenue, Bishopston who was born in

¹⁰² NA BT350

¹⁰³ NA BT350

¹⁰⁴ Manchester Evening News 18.8.1914

January 1871, recorded that year “aged three months” the youngest of five children of Henry William, a lace manufacturer, and Elizabeth Makepeace of Portland Square, St Pauls. Ten years later he was a schoolboy living at 6 Eastfield Street, Westbury-on-Trym with his parents and elder brother Harry, aged 18, “a mariner”. After his mother Elizabeth died in 1883, his father married a second wife, a widow, Mary Deacon, in 1888. By 1891, both Sam and Harry were away at sea. In 1901 Sam was 4th mate aboard ss. *Shropshire*, then at anchor in Liverpool. In 1906 he married Helena Beatrice Morris, the daughter of a hotel landlady, at Birkenhead. They had a baby daughter Mary Elizabeth who sadly died in 1908 followed a few months later by Helena herself. An obituary notice in the WDP reads: “December 2, 1909, at Queen’s Hotel, Birkenhead, Lena, dearly loved wife of Samuel Makepeace, youngest son of H.W. Makepeace of Rokeby Avenue, Redland.”

In 1911, 3 Brynland Avenue, (where Samuel lived in 1914) was occupied by a widowed hospital nurse, Harriette Williams and her four daughters, Nina, Vera, Nesta and Silvia. Samuel signed the Lord Mayor’s card, Christmas 1914, and is noted again by the WDP on 8th January 1915 in a list of members of the Merchant Seamen’s Guild who were “interned in the Concentration Camp at Ruhleben”; as an officer, he is correctly given his title, “Mr S. Makepeace of Bristol”. He is also named in the Roll of Honour 11th October 1917. Samuel’s father died aged 81, in December 1816; a death notice of 21st December mentions only his wife Mary but no other relatives.

After Ruhleben Samuel returned to sea as a Master Mariner; his age – 54 – is given on his surviving MM record card, date stamped 24th February 1929.¹⁰⁵ He retired to Madjeston Cottage, Gillingham, and after many years as a widower married Marjory Aish at Bourton, Dorset on 29th January 1935. He died in June 1938, with his death notice requesting “no flowers or mourning.” Mrs Makepeace inserted an equally brief acknowledgement thanking friends for their kind sympathy in her bereavement.¹⁰⁶ He left £5,200. 4s 3d, probate granted to his widow.

Pierre Elies, (“P. Elies”, BFMS), the *Nicoya*’s 2nd steward, of 53 Richmond Terrace, Avonmouth, aged 38, was a French national. In 1911 he was in lodgings with a family called Parker at 34 Belmont Road, St Andrews and when at home made ends meet as a French teacher. In the Christmas edition, 1916, he was thanked by the editor, C.G. Pemberton, for his contributions to the Ruhleben Camp Magazine.¹⁰⁷ Although **L. Cosgrove**, greaser, of the *Nicoya* is listed in BFMS as being “of Bristol” (no other address) his connection with the City appears to be slight, even though he appears in the “Roll of Honour”, 8th October 1917. He was released from Ruhleben on 7th January 1918. MM records show that an “L. Cosgrove”, greaser, again with no address, and a stamp over-written 10th February 1925, made at least 25 voyages, November 1921 to March 1934¹⁰⁸. A single man, Lawrence Cosgrove, an

¹⁰⁵ NA BT348

¹⁰⁶ Western Gaz. 3.6./10.6.1938

¹⁰⁷ TRS

¹⁰⁸ NA BT348

unemployed “general engineer”, date of birth 10th March 1878 was living in Manchester in 1939.

Captain Alfred E. Jago, born in 1872, of 20 Claremont Avenue, Bishopston, (BFMS) was Master of the 2123 ton ss. *Pendennis*, which belonged to the R.B. Chellev Steam Navigation Company, of Truro. Though he came from Devon/Cornwall where the name Jago is common, his early life is uncertain until his marriage to Florence White of Basingstoke, at Dartmouth in August 1897. From then on, Florence and their daughter Gwendoline can be found together, first in 1901, with Florence’s parents George and Louisa at Totnes, and in 1911 as visitors to a school in Bournemouth. They were presumably at the Bishopston address when Captain Jago was captured at the outbreak of war. In 1914, the *Pendennis* was returning to Hull from Eupatoria (Yevpatoria) on the Black Sea with a cargo of timber when she became stranded in neutral Sweden. After two years, the frustrated owners decided to attempt a rescue, as told in a short item in the West Briton & Cornish Advertiser in July 1916: “Cornish Steamship Captured by Germans. The *Pendennis*, locked up at Sundsvall since the outbreak of war arrived at Gothenburg and the owners sent over officers to bring the ship home. The master of the *Pendennis* is Captain Jago, of Bristol.”¹⁰⁹ German intelligence presumably got wind of the enterprise and as the *Pendennis* was trying to break out she was taken by the submarine, U48 on 6th July 1916, without loss of life. Fortunately Jago did not share the fate of Captain Charles Fryatt who was captured and tried by the enemy of attempting to sink a German submarine and was executed in Bruges by firing squad on 27th July 1916 as a *franc-tireur*, (a terrorist). The news caused international uproar, and at a personal level, given that the whereabouts of the *Pendennis*’ crew was unknown, Florence Jago’s anguish can only be imagined. Eventually, after three months, due to the efforts of the Imperial Merchant Service Guild, the five British men (including Jago) and five Finns who had been taken prisoner on *Pendennis* were located at a POW camp at Gefangenlager, near Frankfurt.¹¹⁰

For the remainder of the war the *Pendennis* herself was used by the Germans as a collier and was returned to the owners in 1919.

In 1939, after recently retiring from a lifetime at sea, Jago, aged 67, died suddenly in 1919 at his home in Exmouth. His obituary gives tantalisingly few details: “at the outbreak of war he was in Sweden where he was detained for a time. He endeavoured to get to England in a vessel carrying a cargo of timber, but was captured.”¹¹¹

Captain Jago was survived by his wife, Florence Louisa, their daughter Miss Gwendoline Jago, and his nephew Walter Jago.

¹⁰⁹ West Briton & Cornish Advertiser 13.7.1916

¹¹⁰ Ibid 5.10.1916

¹¹¹ Exeter & Plym’th Gaz. 25.8.1939

William Bryant, a carpenter, of “28 Somers Hill, Bristol”, was aboard the cargo steamship *Rossall*, (Galbraith, Pembroke & Company) when she was seized at Bremerhaven in 1914. He signed the greetings card, Christmas 1914 and is named in the Roll of Honour, 8th October 1916 though he had been released from Ruhleben in December 1915, probably among the group of 100 former prisoners who embarked for London on the *Orange Nassau*. A carpenter would have been a specialist crew member, but I have been unable to find an appropriate Merchant Navy card for him. Also aboard *Rossall* was the Gloucester man, **Walter Rutland**, described “sailor, 88 Lysers Avenue” (BFMS) who had previously been aboard the *Sappho* and signed the greetings card to the Mayor of Gloucester at Christmas 1914.¹¹²

Walter Edward Richard Rutland was born in 1861 in Cheltenham and married Emma Gray at Gloucester in 1887. They were living at 2 Bridges Cottages, Clement Street, when the birth of their daughter, Catherine Louisa, on 23rd September 1888 was announced.¹¹³ In 1905 he was aboard the BSN Co.’s *Ino* when the Master, Nathaniel Wicklen, was charged with using two unqualified men as pilots in the Bristol Channel, Charles Lawrence of Saul, second mate, and William “Billy” Price, AB of Lydney, who were crew members.

Rutland was called to give evidence along with a roll-call of other witnesses, pilots Henry Griffey, Thomas Henry Price and Enos Phillips, plus Ephraim Savage, foreman harbour master at Sharpness and William O’Brien. The case was dismissed.¹¹⁴

On 2nd April 1911, aged 48, Walter was at home, 104 Seymour Road, Gloucester, with his wife Emma and their four surviving children, Florence, 21, Walter, junior, 16, Henry, 14, and Edith aged twelve. The same year, he was a crew member of ss. *Ino*, when he was presented with the Admiralty Medal and a gratuity of £50 for long service which included twenty three years in the Royal Naval Reserve. His current skipper, Captain McKechnie, who had known him as “a drill comrade in the RNR for 19 years” gave him a glowing report.¹¹⁵ As a Reservist, Walter could have been called up by the Royal Navy in 1914, in which case he most probably would have served in the RN Division, when sailors surplus to requirement at sea were deployed as soldiers. His imprisonment at Ruhleben may have saved him from the trenches. It’s an ill wind..... He was released from the camp on 7th January 1918.

E. Jones, seaman, of 16 Little Ann Street, St Philip & Jacob, Bristol (probably in lodgings in tenements there where many families lived) was aboard the ss. *Sinainn* of the Limerick Steamship Company (BFMS) when she was seized by the Germans in August 1914. He was released from Ruhleben on 7th December 1915 and is named in the Roll of Honour, 11th October 1917. (An “E. Jones” born in Bristol in 1867 was 3rd Engineer on board *Homer* in 1891; and a man of the same name, born Bristol 1880/1, a fireman or trimmer, was aboard

¹¹² GJ 9.1.1915

¹¹³ GCit 26.9.1888

¹¹⁴ GJ 17.6.1905

¹¹⁵ Ibid 20.5.1911

Port Royal, 1901, *Milo* and *Port Kingston*, 1906.¹¹⁶ The captured *Sinainn* which was used as a transport ship by the German army, hit a mine and was wrecked on 26th September 1916. She still lies at the bottom of the Baltic Sea.

Clarence Bertram Short, (C.B. Short, BFMS), of 9 Clift Road, Ashton was an apprentice aboard ss. *Treglisson*, (Hains Steam Ship Company, St Ives, Cornwall). He signed the Lord Mayor's card, Christmas 1914 and is named in the Roll of Honour, 16th October, 1917.

Clarence was born in February 1896, a son of Thomas Richard Short, a commercial traveller, and his wife Kate. His father wrote to the WDP in September 1914 with the news that his son was a prisoner at Bremen, going on to say that "the Captain's wife, Mrs Richards, who was able to get a passport and had returned [to England] after being a prisoner, reported they were now well treated after it became known that German prisoners were being shown consideration in England. The governor [of the prison camp at Bremen] told the lady that the British fleet was in harbour, too afraid to come out and that the Germans had huge guns with which they were able to bombard Dover from Calais."¹¹⁷



During his time at Ruhleben, Clarence's portrait was painted by a fellow prisoner and was included in the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1920:

"Among the exhibits is one painted on a piece of 3-ply wood with a scraping knife at Ruhleben Camp, entitled "no. 301, Clarence B. Short". The artist, George Spiers Goodchild went to Germany three days before war broke out to study art, was arrested and put in solitary confinement and afterwards sent to Ruhleben. It took nine months for him to get painting necessities from Denmark. The only material he could get was 3 ply wood and he worked in a stable loft, 3 yards square with just 1½ square feet of light for the canvas and sitter. He had to use a palette knife as he had no brushes. The portrait is of a young Mercantile Marine apprentice who had been taken prisoner at Bremen."¹¹⁸

Alas the whereabouts of this historic artefact is currently unknown. I was advised by the Royal Academy that

"It was the only occasion that Goodchild showed his work with us and I cannot find a record of him exhibiting publicly anywhere else in the UK. A Christie's catalogue online suggests that George Goodchild was from Belgium. He did not offer the painting up for sale and so it

¹¹⁶ MN Crew lists, BRO

¹¹⁷ WDP 12.9.1914

¹¹⁸ Ibid 22.5.1920

would have been returned to him after the exhibition. We do not know what happened to it after that time.”

George Goodchild, like his painting, has proved elusive. He is mentioned in the first issue of the Ruhleben Camp Magazine, March 1916, as having appeared in a play “The Great Adventurer” and again in May 1916, as having “exhibited in the camp’s third art exhibition”, (possibly the portrait of Clarence?) Oddly, no-one from the Short family commented on the 1920 newspaper report.

Clarence Short continued his career in the Merchant Service, as indicated by his ID card dated 1918.¹¹⁹ He married Rosina Russell at Long Ashton in 1922 and had been promoted to First Mate by 14th September 1925.¹²⁰ In 1939 he was a “Master Mariner” living at 5 Lower High Street, Bristol, with Rosina and their son Alan, born in 1924. He died in Weston-Super-Mare in 1977.

Albert V. Carey, (known by his second name, Victor), who lived at “Wavecrest”, South Road, Portishead, was 1st Mate aboard the *Trevider* (Hains Steam Ship Company, St Ives) when the vessel was apprehended at Brake in March 1915; he was taken prisoner with the rest of the crew and confined at Schloss Castle, Hanover.¹²¹ He was named in the Roll of Honour, 8th October 1917.

Victor Carey came from a family of Pill mariners and pilots, who had followed the sea for at least the previous three generations. His date of birth is incorrectly given as “1883” when in the census of 1891 “Victor Carey, aged five”, was living with his parents, Thomas and Emma



at “the Elders”, Portishead. In 1911, the couple were at “Wavecrest”, by then aged 70 and 67, respectively, having begat fourteen children of whom only seven were then living. None of their offspring lived with the old couple at this time. Victor himself was evidently at sea.

On his release from the prison camp, Victor re-joined the Hains Steam Ship Co. as First Officer aboard *Tremeadow*, having achieved his Master’s Certificate by examination. He arrived with the *Tremeadow* in New Orleans, USA, in March 1919. In the turn round for the voyage home he met with a fatal accident when working on the ship, “fracturing his skull and neck, ancillary vein and artery”. His death, aged 35, was registered as “Died at Sea” on 11th April 1919, address given again as “Wavecrest, Portishead”, where

¹¹⁹ NA BT/350

¹²⁰ NA BT348

¹²¹ Whitby Gazette, 19.3.1915

his widowed mother, Emma, still lived. Emma died in 1925, aged 84, having outlived eight of her children.¹²² Victor's photo on his MM ID card, dated March 1919, just before he sailed on *Tremeadow*, which is probably the last likeness taken of him, seems to portray a man of haggard visage, used to extreme suffering.¹²³

The ***Victorian Transport***, (Empire Transport Co, West Hartlepool) in which **Charles F. Dugay**, of Welling Arms, Clifton, was a fireman (BFMS) was arrested by the Germans in September 1914 on the Baltic coast, near Gdansk; the officers and crew were confined on the island of Daenholm, near Stralsund where they "were all well and the owners were confident they would be made comfortable and be well-cared for. However, it is feared that they may be kept there until the end of the war unless an exchange can be arranged."¹²⁴ No such exchange occurred, and by Christmas, Charles was at Ruhleben when he signed the greetings card to the Lord Mayor.

Despite believing himself a citizen of Bristol, Charles was born at Southampton in 1879. In 1881, aged two, he was a "nurse child", (i.e. a foster child) of Caroline Fryer at South Stoneham, Hampshire. Ten years later he was an inmate of Muller's Orphan Homes, at No, 1 Ashley Down, Bristol, after which he worked as a general labourer at Romsey, Hampshire where he stayed for the next twenty years. He then took it into his head to return to Bristol where he joined the Merchant Service. He is named in the Roll of Honour, 8th October 1917. He was released from Ruhleben on 7th January 1918, after more than three years in captivity. His MM records show that he was at sea again as a steward from 1922 with two surviving documents date stamped Southampton, in 1926 and 1932.¹²⁵ His death, aged 61, was registered at Winchester in March 1939.

His shipmate on the *Victorian Transport*, **Marwood Bailey**, of 42 Armstrong Street, Ilminster (BFMS) appears in the Roll of Honour, 8th October 1917, though he had been released from Ruhleben ten months earlier. His homecoming to Somerset in February 1917 is recorded in an underwhelming article from which it can be deduced he was either a reticent interviewee or the reporter was bored stiff by the assignment. The largely uninformative piece states that the *Victorian Transport* had arrived from Durban, South Africa when she was impounded by the Germans. Bailey had been among '4,000 prisoners' at Ruhleben where they were strictly guarded and not allowed newspapers so were unaware of the progress of the war, though they were able to converse freely with each other. He praised the efforts of the ladies who had sent parcels to the camp. He had suffered hardships but had enjoyed good health and was looking well under the circumstances. He had travelled nearly all over

¹²² WDP 2.4.1925

¹²³ NA BT 350

¹²⁴ Dundee People's Journal 26.9.1914

¹²⁵ NA/ BT 348

the world especially Egypt, Soudan [sic] and South Africa, the last during the Boer War. His family, now of 2 Arlington Villas, Ilminster, and friends were pleased to see him.¹²⁶

Marwood, born in December 1864 was at Ilminster in 1871 with his parents Thomas, a labourer, and Louisa. In 1880 he served one month for “common assault” having got into a fight. It seems that this minor fracas triggered his departure from the town as thereafter he spent his whole life at sea apart from his few years at Ruhleben. He was not caught by a census again until 1939 when he was registered as an inmate at Cotford Mental Hospital, Bishops Lydeard. He was buried at Ilminster Cemetery on 17th July 1952 aged eighty eight.

Frederick “Fred” Sandford Fortune, “F. Fortune, stoker, 4 Dove Lane, ship unknown” was interned at Havelberg Camp. (BFMS) Like Charles Dugay, he was a Muller’s Orphan. The Fortune family was ill-named. The father, Francis James Fortune, a shoemaker, lost his first wife Mary Jane, aged 30, in 1895, and also buried several of their children in the years before and after her death. The one surviving child of the union, Harold, was aged four when his father married his second wife Edith Mary Stone in 1897; the couple went on to have their own three children, Gertrude, Frederick and Stanley. The baby, Stanley, died aged



two in 1901 and by 1911, the parents seem to have separated, with Francis living in lodgings at Wedmore, Somerset and Edith at Temple, Bristol with her daughter Gertrude and a new baby, Francis, aged four months. Meanwhile, Harold, by then a seaman working in the Bristol Channel, was in trouble

at Sharpness, accused with another youth of stealing an eclectic range of small items including towels, a vest, a bicycle bell and toothpaste valued at £1. 2s. 6d.¹²⁷ The court heard that both boys had been in trouble before and had previously spent four years at the *Formidable* Training Ship at Portishead. By 1911, Harold was in the Workhouse at Gloucester. No records survive for his merchant service which must have been of a casual nature.

Life was not much better for his half-brother Fred, then 13, an inmate at Muller’s Orphanage, 10 Kingsdown Parade. He presumably joined the Merchant Navy in his late teens but nothing of his service has survived, likewise the name of his ship when he was

¹²⁶ Taunton Courier, 7.2.1917

¹²⁷ GCit. 11.1.1911

captured. The Havelberg camp contained about 4,500 civilian internees including 400 British



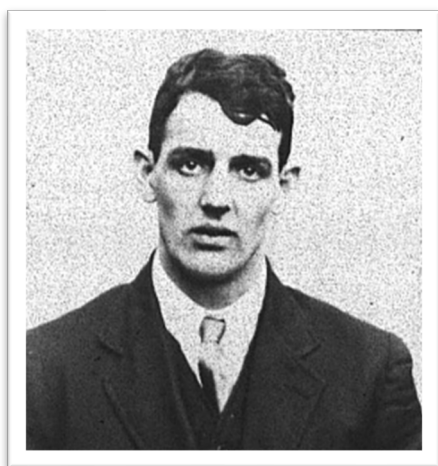
Indians. Fred went back to sea after his release: two of his MM Identity cards survive: the first is marked with several dated voyages between December 1919 and August 1921 but with no destinations shown. The second, for 1921, gives his date of birth as Christmas Day 1897, and describes him as 5 feet 8 inches tall, with grey eyes, fair hair and a light complexion. His photo shows a good looking young man with a longish, thoughtful, sad face and a cleft chin.¹²⁸

Fred went to London in 1928 and must have been looking for work when tragically he met his death in a road accident:

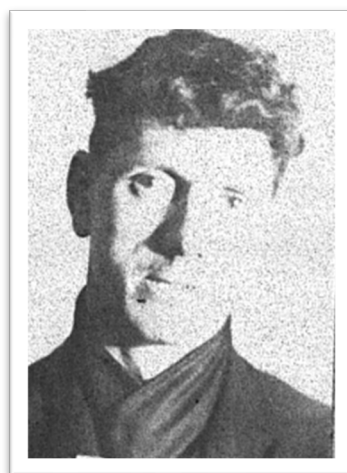
“Frederick Sandford Fortune, a ship’s fireman of Clarence Road, New Cut, [Bristol] was knocked down and killed by a taxi cab on March 9th shortly after he had asked a Policeman the way to a casual ward, at midnight. He died two days later at Lambeth Hospital from a fractured skull.”¹²⁹

It seems unlikely that either of the two boys maintained any contact with their parents. In any event, Francis Fortune died aged 54 in 1921 and in 1939, Fred’s mother, the widowed Edith Mary was a patient in Fishponds Mental Hospital.

Richard (Arthur) Guidrey, a trimmer, 194 Coronation Road, Southville, ship unknown, but formerly of the *Clara Zelk* (BFMS) was born in Bristol in December 1896, a son of Richard, a dock labourer, and Charlotte, who in 1901 lived at 1 Waterloo Court, St George’s Road with their large family.



Richard Guidrey



his brother John Henry

¹²⁸ NA BT/350

¹²⁹ WDP 23.3.1928

Richard senior died in 1906 and in 1911 Charlotte, an office cleaner, was at 68 Raleigh Road with Richard, 15, a box maker, a younger son and two daughters. Her elder son, John Henry, 25, was already at sea as a trimmer, and Richard would later follow the same occupation, though from their respective IDs (so far as can be judged from mug shots) this heavy job would have suited the elder brother better than the younger. Richard returned to sea after Ruhleben, as shown by his MM record card date stamped January and July 1919, but as a steward.¹³⁰ In 1927 he married Violet Hudson and by 1939 was ashore as a railway labourer, living at 20 Kenmare Road, with his wife and their three children

Richard Martin ("R. Martin" who signed the Lord Mayor's card in 1915) is mentioned in November 1916 in a brief press report about the war record of five sons of the Martin family: "Mrs Martin of 1 St James Street has two sons killed in the war, one wounded and discharged for injury, one at Ruhleben and another with the British Forces in Africa."¹³¹

Because of two miracles, an address given and the blessed Mrs Martin having stayed put for several years (!) Richard her son can readily be traced. Margaret Martin, nee Kelly, born about 1859, a charwoman, mother of nine, two of whom had died in infancy, was the widow of William, a dock labourer. In 1911, three children lived with her at 1 St James Street, Nellie, 18, John, 15, and Kathleen, 12. Ten years previously at the same address, the children were Michael, 18, William, 14, Nelly, 9, Richard 6, and Kate aged two. It appears that Richard was given the same name as an elder brother who died young but within the family for reasons unknown was called "John". **Richard Martin** born about 1896 was among the Bristol seamen incarcerated at Ruhleben. His later adventures are a blank.

The signature of "R.B. Steadman", was that of **Ralph Buchanan Steadman**, twenty years old and a student. The letter he wrote home to his parents, Clifford and Elizabeth, from Ruhleben was published in the Western Daily Press on 8th June 1915 under the heading:

"CHEERY LETTER TO PARENTS".

"Mrs Clifford Steadman has received a letter from her son Ralph B. Steadman who after leaving Clifton College proceeded to Germany to learn the language but was interned at the outbreak of war. He writes:

I am afraid the place almost agrees with me, at least with the fresh air, you know. I am feeling exceedingly fit. Am enclosing a programme of a revue which was played here most of last week and will be on again tomorrow, Friday and Saturday. It has been very successful and I think, great fun. The heats for the sports started yesterday and the finals will be run on Empire Day. I managed to win my heat in the three-legged race with another fellow and am in the mile tomorrow. There have been several plays, "Androcles and the Lion" and "Captain Brassbound's Conversion". Have met a young fellow called Robson from Teignmouth who

¹³⁰ NA BT/350

¹³¹ Clifton & Redland Free Post 16.11.1916

was at school with young Anderson. The weather has been like summer lately and I have had my cricket clothes sent from Dresden. We are able to buy lettuce, radishes and cucumber and I eat a great lot of eggs. I often get a couple of eggs with some tongue or corned beef and have that fried. That little bottle of sugar lasted six weeks. Tea is the best drink in this hot weather. There have been football leagues formed between the different barracks and also Rugby Football teams. I have had several games of the latter. Cricket is starting soon. I am going on with the languages so the time does not hang much at all. Have had three parcels, dated Apr. 16, Apr. 30 and Apr. 30. The things you send are splendid, the bread and butter in excellent condition. I have had many postcards from Dad and some from you. I have a large beam on one side of my bed and have rigged up all kinds of things on it. It looks very much like a grocer's shop."

Ralph's prowess as a batsman is confirmed by his 50+ averages in several issues of the camp magazine. In June 1915, he played for the Ruhleben "Varsities" team against "The Rest" in the "Cricket League" and in August 1916 took part in a memorable match between "Masterman's XI" and "The Next XVI". On the latter occasion sweepstake tickets were sold, each of which contained the names of three of the twenty seven players. The prize winning ticket would be the one with a combination of the names of the three highest scorers, which turned out to be Masterman, 90, Steadman, 60 and Mounsey, 26. (TRS)

Ralph was born on 29th September 1894 and in 1901 lived in middle-class comfort at 62 Worrall Road, Clifton with his father, who owned a boot factory, his mother, his elder sister Nancy, a maidservant and a governess. By 1911, the ménage of parents, three children, two servants and a nurse, had moved to 11 Percival Road. Ralph's uncle, Percy Steadman who was also in the boot trade, was prominent in Bristol's philanthropic Anchor Society.

At Bournemouth in 1928 Ralph married Doris Pettey, a farmer's daughter after which he left the family firm and set up his own footwear business; unfortunately the enterprise went bankrupt in 1935 in the sum of £291; three years later at his discharge he was living at The Oak Cottage, West Town, [Brislington], Somerset.¹³²

By 1939, he was an aircraft worker, living with a group of other men at 31 Royal York Crescent, Clifton. At this time, his son John, born in 1931 was away at school in Southport, whilst his wife Doris was with her parents on the family dairy farm in Hampshire. Doris is recorded as "a Citex Driver" probably some obscure wartime occupation. Their daughter, Vanessa was born in Bristol in 1941. Ralph Steadman died in 1974.

"S. J. Thomas" otherwise **Samuel John Thomas** was a mariner, born in 1874 at Pill, Somerset. In 1891, aged 17, he was an apprentice marine engineer, living at Easton-in-Gordano with his father George, a retired master mariner, mother Eliza and sister Edith. He was presumably at sea in 1901 but appears again in the census of 1911 at Heywood Terrace, Pill. By then he was "a Mercantile Marine engineer in charge of a Bristol Corporation

¹³² WDP 19.10.1935 & London Gaz 23.9.1938

dredger". He was married to Annie with three sons, Raymond, 10, and twins, Grenville and Graham, aged three. What he was doing in Germany in 1914 is not explained, but I discovered his identity by a fluke. At a vestry meeting in April 1915, the Vicar of Pill suggested that, with the Bishop's approval, it would be "a graceful act to re-elect Mr S.J. Thomas, at present interned in the German Concentration Camp at Ruhleben as his warden". Mr Thomas was duly elected in his absence.¹³³

The rest of the Bristol men who signed the Lord Mayor's card are more difficult to identify positively. Some appear to be businessmen, others may be seamen but they are not listed on the BFMS database.

"H.W. White", was one of a group of Ruhleben prisoners who signed a message of "hearty good wishes" to Edward Letchworth, "Grand Secretary of the English Freemasons" on 9th December, 1914, "hoping that they would soon have the pleasure of greeting the Grand Master and their brethren in person."¹³⁴ This may be Hedley W. H. White, born at Cowbridge, Wales in 1876, who in 1891, aged 15, was working for the Ordnance Survey and lived with his widowed mother at Rock Terrace, Lower Clifton Hill. His elder brother William H.F. who was three years older, also worked for the O.S. In 1901, aged 25, Hedley was a land surveyor of 96 Wolseley Road, Clifton.

"G. Wilshire". The Ruhleben Story quotes from the *Berliner Tageblatt* repeated by *The Times* and *The Scotsman*, 7th February 1916, that "G. Wiltshire" was "an English racehorse trainer, who was released at the beginning of February following a request by the Committee of Racehorse Owners". Whether this is the same man who signed the Bristol card it is impossible to say.

"S. Williams" a "merchant seaman from Sidmouth", stated to be an internee at Ruhleben is listed in a report of "The Scotsman", 7th January 1915, (quoted in TRS but not listed in BFMS). If "Sidmouth" is the name or origin of his ship, rather than his birthplace then it is possible he may be Samuel W. Williams, mariner, born in 1857 at Brockweir, Colford, Gloucestershire, who lived at 24 Millbrook Cottages, Bedminster in 1911, with his wife Eliza and daughter Rose.

The ground under **"E. Lewis"** is even shakier. An Edward Frank Lewis, born in Bristol, 7th May 1891, a greaser, 5 feet 4½ inches tall, with brown hair and blue eyes seems a possible candidate. A man of this name married Elsie Hugo in 1917. I have no information which suggests an early release. He was at sea again by 1918 and his MN ID photo shows a man with neatly combed hair, wearing a stiff collar and tie.¹³⁵

The surname "Pigg" rare in Bristol, predominates in Durham. There is a possibility that the initial of "F. Pigg" has been misread for **"R. Pigg"** in which case he may be the seaman of the

¹³³ WDP 8.4.1915

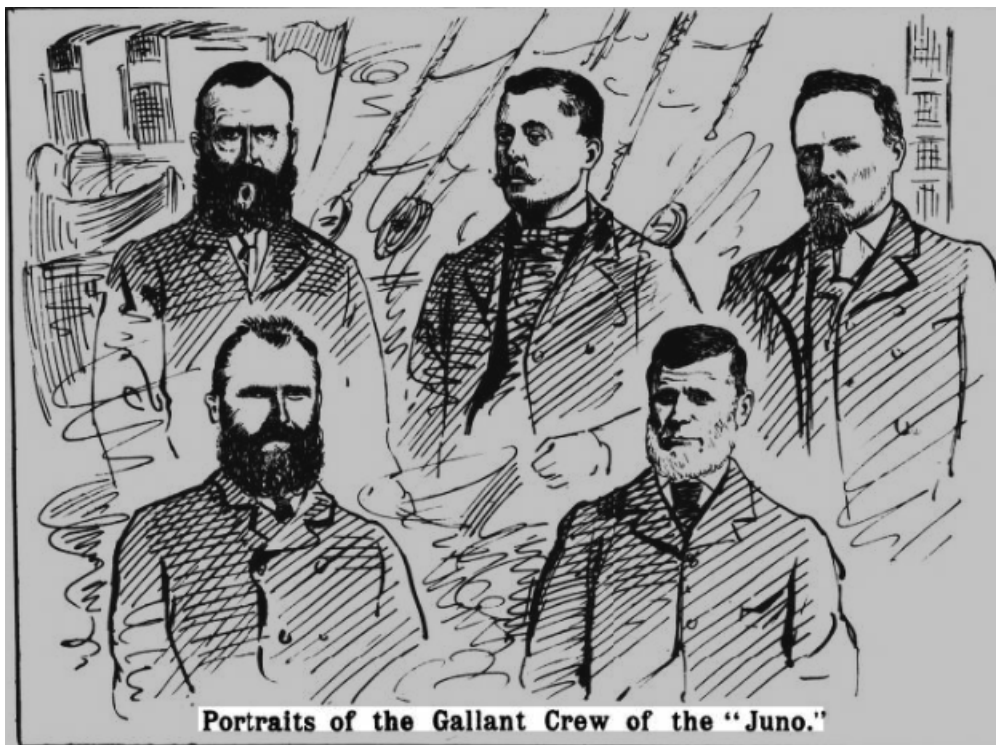
¹³⁴ TRS, quoting The Times, 28.12.1914.

¹³⁵ NA BT350

Cato who would later attend Captain Gregory's funeral in 1933. A Robert Pigg married in Bristol in 1918. For "**O. Milton**" I have no suggestions at all.

In conclusion, the indefinite time the prisoners spent in the Camp seems to have been in general bearable, if tedious. However, we have to remember that there was no guarantee that Great Britain and the Allies would ultimately win the war, and the men appear to have been admirably stoic in the best traditions of the British stiff upper lip. As previously iterated, at least they were saved from the horrors of the war in the trenches. It is a mystery to me why so little is known about such a unique experience. Was there a parallel in the Second World War?

Part 4. Sappho's sisters



"I always keep out of the way of you newspaper chaps!" said Captain Leonard Star of the *Juno* in his rich brogue when accosted by the man from the *Mercury* on a day in May, 1887. Star was well known as a raconteur, and for many an hour he entertained his passengers during routine crossings of the Irish Sea from Cork to Bristol 'with amusing anecdotes, an inexhaustible store of knowledge and never failing wit.' The determined pressman wanted a first-hand account of a recent exciting night at sea when *Juno* and her crew had gone to the rescue of a stricken ship and *"I got him into the right vein"*, he wrote. Star duly delivered.

"It was a fine night, the horizon clear as a wire; the wind had lulled a bit but there was a heavy sea running. Eastaway, my second mate, who was on watch, called to me.

"I saw a curious flashlight just now, Sir, in the direction of the Smalls," he said. Shortly afterwards we both saw it.

I said "It must be the Lighthouse fellows signalling to the shore. There must be something wrong."

"Then, several times, we both did see the rockets before we saw the Smalls light on the horizon. As we got nearer the rockets were still being sent up, a lot altogether, so we stayed on our course to the Smalls and kept a sharp look-out. I went below and fetched an old glass and that was what did the trick. I now made out that something I had taken for a rock was the mast of a ship, the sails set and the yards tacked. As we got nearer we saw there were men on the mast so I ordered the boat ready at once, told the crew to see all was made snug and a spare of oars put in. Eastaway said he would go in the boat and a crew was found. I took the helm and got broadside on so that the boat might drop beside the wreck as they could never have rowed to it. We were close to the reefs and the spray was flying fiercely. As soon as we were broadside, she did roll. The men got into their cork jackets and seizing the opportunity the boat was dropped in the water and was off. We gave them a cheer as they went which was answered by the men on the wreck. It was lucky they had the spare oars as the first lot soon broke.

"Now came the difficult work. They had a long line with them as they could not get down to the wreck. Their only chance was to heave the line to those on the mast. It was ticklish work. But at last, the Captain who was lowest down on the mast caught it and made it fast. He then hauled in the slack until he got to the middle and made a bowline which he slipped round the engineer, and he, jumping into the sea was hauled into the boat. This went on until they had hauled in seven of the crew. Now making fast the end of the line to a life buoy they returned to us and we took the saved men below and put them in hot blankets.

"The boat now returned to the wreck, but fresh difficulties arose then, for the wind was rising fast and the sea was getting up but worst of all, all the while they were trying to get to the rest of the men the tide had turned and floated the buoy to which was tied the end of the line which had got entangled. All the work had to be gone over again. It was a critical time. I did not think they would be able to save the poor chaps and it did seem hard to leave them there. Time after time they rowed in to chuck the line, missed and had to row back out in the surf to bale the boat out as she was getting full almost to the thwarts. Eight or nine times they did try, our crew getting exhausted and the poor chaps on the wreck to despair. But though the wind was rising every minute our chaps stuck to it gamely and at last success crowned their efforts. The line was made fast and one by one the remainder of the crew was hauled off, the Captain being the last to leave. As he was being hauled into our boat the men on the Lighthouse rang their bell and cheered and cheered. They had been

compelled to watch without being able to give any assistance. The Captain was a fine fellow, but believe it or not, not one of the sixteen men could swim a stroke!”

“Well, Captain,” said the reporter when Star had finished, “That was a fine thing!”

“Yes,” he answered. “It was good pluck.”

The reporter then appealed to the citizens of Bristol to raise a fund to reward the courageous crew of the *Juno*.

The sequel came the following August. The officers and crew assembled at Bristol’s Marine Office to meet representatives of the Board of Trade, the R.N.L.I., the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners Society, and other dignitaries in respect of their daring rescue of the *George Moore* of Glasgow on the night of 20/21st May. The *George Moore* was bound for France with a cargo of metal and coal when she was totally wrecked on the Smalls Rock in the Bristol Channel. The *Juno* was on her way to Bristol from Cork when the second mate Thomas Eastaway saw distress signals. As soon as the admirable facts became known it was decided to reward the crew of the *Juno* for their gallant conduct. “With manliness, courage and tact, Captain Star and his crew managed with great exertions and braving great danger to rescue all sixteen men of the *George Moore*.” The Board of Trade awarded a silver medal to Captain Star, and the same to Thomas Eastaway, with bronze medals to James England, the carpenter, J. Dyer and John Lavis, quartermasters and Thomas Pike, AB, with £2 each for the five crewmen plus another £7 for Eastaway and £4.10s. each for the others. Captain Star was also presented with ‘a binocular glass’, (it was obviously noted that the one which had played its part on the night in question was ‘old’) and six volumes of ‘Gill’s Commentary’ on the Bible (which had been printed in Ireland by boys from an industrial school) and a testimonial on vellum. Captain Star in paying tribute to his crew said there were several reasons why the rescue had been successful; in the first place they had a first class ship, able to do anything, go anywhere, fitted out in an excellent manner. The crew of the *Juno* had the enormous advantage of having been together for some time: the crew didn’t change much and it was a good thing for men to work together and to keep together. He particularly commended the conduct of the engineers and the men in the boat – “they did as they were told and went away without a murmur.”

The assembly decided that all on board that desperate night had played their part in the rescue and would be rewarded from the citizens’ fund which had raised £54 13s. which was distributed as follows: Thomas Payne, Chief Officer, was awarded 3 guineas, David Jenkins, the Chief Engineer, 2 guineas, W. Sambrook, the second engineer, 2 guineas, with £1 5s. each to the rest of the crew including the stewardess, Alice Thomas.¹³⁶

I have not been able to positively identify Alice Thomas, though it would seem likely that she was probably a widow, approaching middle age, with a previous connection to the sea,

¹³⁶ BMerc 28.5.1887, Bristol Magpie, 11.6.1887, WDP 23.8.1887

similar to another stewardess of the *Juno*, the tragic Lily Seavill,¹³⁷ who took her own life in August 1894 when she jumped over the side of the ship off Portishead.

Lily was seen crying outside a cabin door by the mate, Walter James Whyatt. He had someone take her below, but several minutes later a lady passenger reported she had climbed on to the rail and gone over the side. It appears that she had previously been upset and one of the stewards reported the matter to Captain Star and he spoke to her. She told the captain that “some persons had called her a wicked woman”. Star told the inquest: “I told her not to give way so. She had always been an excellent character.” After this, he said, she went back to her duties and he heard no more until he was told she had gone overboard. He immediately reversed the engines and her body was recovered, but life was extinct. She had worked on *Juno* for five years. “I never had an occasion to speak a cross word to her.” Lily, aged 36, was a widow, her husband having been lost in the wreck of the *Constance*, off Plymouth six years before. The inquest decided she had committed suicide due to temporary insanity. Her death is registered ‘at sea’ 28th August 1894.

The death of her husband Edward, aged 29, of Pill was likewise registered ‘at sea’ on 21st January 1888, along with the two others who are identified in the death registers as Thomas H. Rees, 20, a fireman from Cardiff, and William Wilde, 30, AB of Bristol. Walter Whyatt, who gave evidence at the inquest in 1894 who was at this time *Juno*’s mate would become the tragic master of the *Cato* (1899).

In 1881, Edward Seavill married Lily Denford in Bristol. The same year the couple, with a baby daughter, were living at 8 Albert Street, St Paul’s, with Edward’s parents, Peter, ‘second mate in the Merchant Service’ and Mary. Ten years later, Lily, then aged 33, a widow, ‘stewardess on a steamship’ was living at 7 Peter Street, Bedminster, with her two children, Mary Ann, 10 and Edward William, aged seven.

The Seavills were a well-known maritime family from Easton-in-Gordano and Pill. Captain William A. Seavill, obviously a relative, was for many years master of the ss. *Argo*. He retired in 1902. A ‘P. Seavill’, seaman, probably Peter, Lily’s father-in-law was among those saved when BSNC’s *Aline* collided with ss. *Ben Lomond* at Scheldt in 1901 on a voyage from Antwerp. Three men, S. Blick, J. Mundy, and J. Clarke drowned when the boat being lowered from the stricken *Aline* capsized. They are identified only by initials in the ‘deaths at sea’ registers, but with three different dates, 28th November, 3rd and 13th December 1901 which presumably refers to the days their bodies were recovered. All three appear on the *Aline*’s ship’s manifest: J. Clarke, AB, born about 1850, of Totterdown, left a widow and seven children; J. Mundy, born about 1867, a fireman, of Freeland Road, Hotwells, was a widower who left two children who were being looked after by his brother. Blick’s initials were ‘E.T.’ according the manifest. He was also a fireman, born about 1849; he lived at Southville and

¹³⁷ WDP 4.9.1894. The newspaper gives Lily’s name incorrectly as ‘Saville’.

left no dependants. He may have been a relative of Charles Blick, born about 1831, recorded as master of ss. *Sappho* [!] in 1876 though retired from the sea by 1881.¹³⁸

Leonard Greenham Star, who retired in 1900, after many years as master of the *Juno*, finished his long career of 50 years at sea as captain of the *Argo*. It will come as no surprise to learn that he was an Irishman, born in Limerick in 1831. He died suddenly of 'an apoplexy' in Clifton in 1907. One of his sons took Holy Orders and another became a medical doctor.¹³⁹

Thomas Eastaway, of whom we have heard before, was mate of the *Argo* in November 1906 when he was involved in another rescue. Once again he was on watch at the time, about four in the morning when through the pitch darkness, despite a choppy sea and the wind running a gale he heard a faint cry "Ahoy! We are a shipwrecked crew. Save us!"

He rang down to stop the engine and in the gloom they spotted a ship's lifeboat with a burden of seven exhausted men, their boat half full of water. They were taken on board the *Argo* and then told their rescuers that there was another boat in the vicinity with a number of their comrades aboard. *Argo* stood by for fifteen minutes on look-out until they spotted a frail craft, beaten about by sea and wind, with another crew of exhausted sailors. They too were taken off, but only just in time, for their boat was waterlogged. They were well cared for aboard the *Argo* and soon began to recover, though many had been in a bad way. Out of the nineteen men saved, twelve were Spaniards or Italians. *Argo* proceeded to Dublin where they were taken to the Sailors' Home to be looked after. The wrecked ship the ss. *Ross* of Cardiff had foundered off Bishop's Rock.¹⁴⁰

On 8th December 1911, the crew of another member of the sisterhood, ss. *Milo*, carried out a daring rescue of a ketch, the *Rival* of Rye, which sank in the Bristol Channel. *Milo's* men managed to get a longboat beside the vessel and took off the crew before she sank. The master, Captain Thomas George Hunt, of Pill, and Mr George Henry Warren, second mate, of Bridgwater were honoured by the Board of Trade several months later in August 1912. A third man, David Owen, did not receive his bronze medal until December 1914, by which time the First World War had been five months underway.¹⁴¹ The ss. *Milo*, built in 1903, was sold by the company on 7th December 1916.

For *Sappho's* sisters who had escaped incarceration at the outbreak of World War in 1914 whilst it was not quite "business as usual", trade from Bristol, amazingly continued during hostilities. Ships plied across the North Sea to the neutral Netherlands and to the Mediterranean where Italy was an ally. Now, to the natural perils of the ocean, new and even more deadly dangers were added: marauding enemy U-boats and mines. The regular

¹³⁸ WDP 22.11.1901, BT&M 26.11.1901, MM lists, BRO

¹³⁹ WDP 17.12.1900, 7.11.1907

¹⁴⁰ BT20.11.1906

¹⁴¹ GJ 31.8.1912, WDP 18.12.1914

'Shipping News' which detailed the arrivals and departures to and from Bristol and Sharpness was no longer published for obvious reasons though on a very few occasions, a brief announcement appeared: thus in 1915 it is revealed that *Pluto* had "defied enemy submarines during two voyages to Amsterdam."¹⁴²

Apollo, due to sail for Antwerp in February 1915 was "detained at Cardiff" due to a query over her carriage of "red earth". Similar freight aboard *Juno* the previous December had been "condemned", presumably due to worry that it might fall into enemy hands. A notice in May 1915 mentioning the Bristol Steam Navigation Co. among others may refer to this dubious matter: "contraband goods and goods on the prohibited list may be shipped to Holland provided they are consigned to the Netherlands Oversea Trust."¹⁴³

In October the same year, *Tasso* was forced to remain in her moorings at Genoa as her bronze propellers had been stolen!¹⁴⁴

On 2nd February 1916 *Argo* struck a mine in the English Channel. Owing to the minimal news given out at the time, the report did not specify the location and simply stated that "one life was lost". "The Wreck Site" states that the event took place "5 nautical miles NW of Boulogne with the loss of two lives, a sixteen year old deckhand, John McGibbon from the island of Islay and an Indian fireman/trimmer, Athar Huda."¹⁴⁵

On 2nd May 1917, *Juno*, on a voyage from Rouen to Cardiff in ballast, was sunk by the German submarine UB-18, 17 miles E1/2N from the Barfleur lighthouse. "One person was lost" though again two names are given, Benjamin William Smith, steward, of Harwich, and Frederick George Jones, 19, of Norwich.¹⁴⁶

Pluto continued to run the gauntlet until 10th April 1917, when returning from Rotterdam, she was torpedoed and sunk by German submarine UB20 in the North Sea 32 miles S.E. from Lowestoft. "There were no casualties". What happened next? It has to be assumed that the crew were taken prisoner by the raider, and were imprisoned in Germany, but without knowing their names we may never know.

Captain Nathaniel Wicklen, of 5 Pomeroy Street, Cardiff, who in 1905, during Walter Rutland's time, had commanded the *Ino*, had been at sea all his working life. He left Bristol Steam for Liverpool, where he became master of the *Eskmore*. He lost his life "supposed drowned", after the ship was torpedoed without warning at midnight on 13th October 1917. Those who survived the vessel's sinking clung to the bottom of an upturned lifeboat for 13 hours before being rescued. Captain Wicklen was survived by his wife Gertrude.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² WDP 1.10.1915

¹⁴³ WM 4.5.1915

¹⁴⁴ Ibid 13.10.1915

¹⁴⁵ On line, "The Wreck Site" <https://wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?174807>

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, the Wreck Site

¹⁴⁷ WM 25.10.1917, GJ 3.11.1917)

The steamships *Juno*, launched in 1868, and *Argo* in 1871 which had been lost in the war ran regularly between the City Docks and Irish ports for nearly 50 years, carrying passengers and livestock, cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, donkeys, geese, turkeys etc, winter and summer with scarcely a minor mishap apart from the odd casualty among the animals.

On 24th February 1877 *Juno* had been the first steamer to enter the then new Avonmouth Dock which opened that day.



How did *Juno* return in 1917? It is stated that she was “a familiar sight in her regular berth at Cumberland Basin until the mid-1920s when the venerable ship went to Dartmouth where she finished her useful life as a coal hulk. She made her last voyage in August 1927, towed to Preston by a Bristol tug for an appointment at the breaker’s yard with Captain Star – a son of Leonard? - on the bridge and in the bows Captain Frank Carey.”¹⁴⁸

Argo presumably limped back into port for repairs after her mishap in 1916, as she also remained in service for many further years. She was scrapped in the 1930s and replaced by a new *Argo* which made her Bristol debut in 1935.

Homeward Bound

The first inkling that ss. *Sappho* herself was on the way home was when she is named among a list of ships which had passed The Lizard, the most south westerly point of the British mainland on 25th August 1919 and was then proceeding up the Bristol Channel where she docked in the Port of Bristol on 2nd September. There was no dancing in the streets and

¹⁴⁸ WDP 3.8.1927

the only announcement of her arrival was restrained: "she was in Hamburg when war broke out and has been interned since 1914."¹⁴⁹

By 13th October she had resumed cross-channel trading and from then on makes regular appearances in the Shipping News as though nothing had happened. It was as though the past five years had been an uncomfortable blip: "least said, soonest mended."

Seamen are notoriously superstitious and there may have been mutterings that *Sappho* was an unlucky ship when after only one month, 14th November 1919, a thirty four year old docker named in the press as Daniel George Kinshome¹⁵⁰ of Knowle, who was engaged in covering up a hatch fell 27 feet into the hold. He died shortly after his admission to hospital. Ernest House, a Bedminster labourer, told the inquest that one of the beams of the hatch had collapsed; he remembered having had difficulty closing it the previous evening. John Campbell, 1st Officer, said the "after combing" of the hatch seemed to have been knocked out by something heavy. He had not noticed anything untoward about the hatch itself and his report noting the repairs needed did not mention it. The beam had never fallen down before. The Master, Captain Henry Arthur Owen, said the hatches had fitted perfectly during the last six months and no play had been noticed before the accident. The solicitor for the owners said the ship had been overhauled in June, which must have been before she made her voyage home. It would be interesting to know the whereabouts of *Sappho* during the six months Captain Owen mentioned. The verdict was "Accidental Death".¹⁵¹

On 31st January 1921, William Burnham, working aboard the ship at Bathurst Basin also fell down the hold, but had a lucky escape: he got away with a fractured wrist and an injured leg. More serious was another accident a few weeks later, reported 17th February, when 2nd Engineer James Murray, who was in lodgings at 85 Bath Road, was struck in the face by an iron bar when supervising machinery aboard *Sappho* at Cumberland Basin. He suffered a fractured jaw and lost the sight of his right eye.

The loss of the ss. Echo, 1923

On Monday 26th February 1923, a thick blanket of fog came down in the English Channel. The ss. *Echo* with eighteen hands and the usual general cargo was homeward bound from Hamburg, approaching the Terschelling Lightship when a Portuguese ship, the *Coimbra* loomed up out of the murk. She struck *Echo* amidships and water immediately gushed in through a great hole in the side which put out her boilers. It was clear that the vessel was beyond hope. Fireman Thomas Briggs of 4 Ellsbridge Passage, Elbrood Street was in the forecastle when the collision occurred. With five other members of the crew he got into a punt with the apparent idea of seeking help from the other ship but the fog was too thick to see anything and they failed to find her. By luck, they drifted back to *Echo* which was still

¹⁴⁹ WDP 3.9.1919; Clifton & Redland Free Press, 4.9.1919

¹⁵⁰ His name was "Kenshole"; he came originally from Devon.

¹⁵¹ WDP 18.11.1919

afloat but her decks were under water. The absence of the port boat suggested that the Captain and the other twelve crew members had already got safely away.

As the six launched the starboard boat they “felt the ship go”. Fortunately the lifeboat was equipped with oars and a modicum of provisions. They rowed for fourteen hours in the teeth of a fierce gale, during which they saw no trace of the port boat with the rest of the crew. They felt sure their twelve shipmates had perished.

Huge seas threatened to overwhelm the small boat, but eventually almost at the end of their strength, they were spotted by a trawler, the *Richmond*, which took them on board and brought them into port at Lowestoft. The six men in their borrowed gear, and the fishermen who saved them were photographed but not individually named: Two Bristolians were among the six, Briggs, and a man identified in the press simply as “W. Hyman” but is probably William Colston Hyman, a Bristol seaman of that name born in 1877. The rest were the 2nd Mate, variously shown as Daniel Duthorne or David Duthie of Swansea, Gerard Pellervel or Gerald Pennell, of Wicklow, with two Gloucester men, John Wyburn, the son of the publican of the Berkeley Hunt and H. (or M.) Blatchford of Sherborne Street.

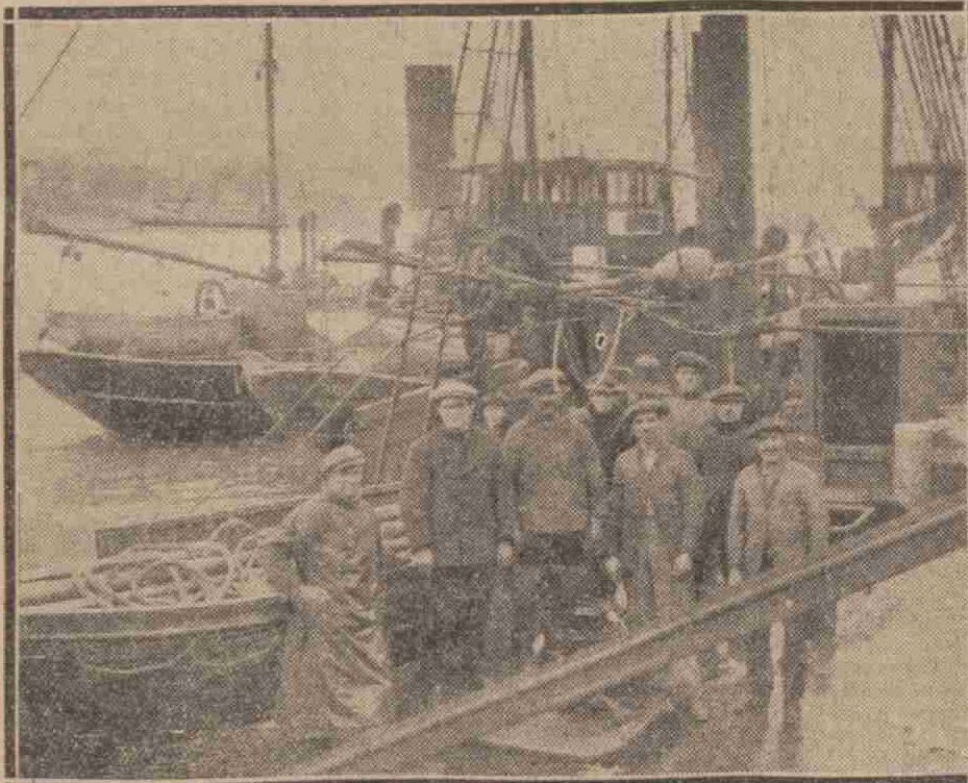
Briggs himself is intriguing. The newspaper account gives his address, which proved to be the same in 1911 when he lived with his brother George, a French polisher, and family. Thomas, then aged 28, was a single man, self-employed as a chair frame maker. Nothing to suggest any connection with the sea there: perhaps his business failed? Even more intriguing, he has appeared in this story before, possibly the man of this name who was interred at Ruhleben; from his date of birth he must be the second of the two names suggested.

The story of events back aboard ss. *Echo* during which time the other six were paddling about on the punt is told by Fireman “O. Taton” of 6 Tower Terrace, Temple, who was at work in the stoke hole when he heard the signal for full speed astern.

“I knew something was very wrong and made a dash for the ladder. As I reached the deck I saw the other ship loom up out of the fog. She crashed into our starboard side. Her bow went right through into the engine room. It was obvious Echo was doomed. I got into the port lifeboat with the master, Captain P. Furlong, the Mate, the Chief Engineer, the Second engineer, three firemen, two deckhands, the engineer’s steward and cook, twelve of us altogether. Some of the chaps had scarcely any clothing on as they had come straight out of their bunks. We drifted about until half past two before we were picked up by the French steamer Yainville bound for Antwerp. My hands were so numb from rowing that I had difficulty getting aboard and collapsed on the deck. The French served us cognac and members of the crew gave us clothes from their own stores.”



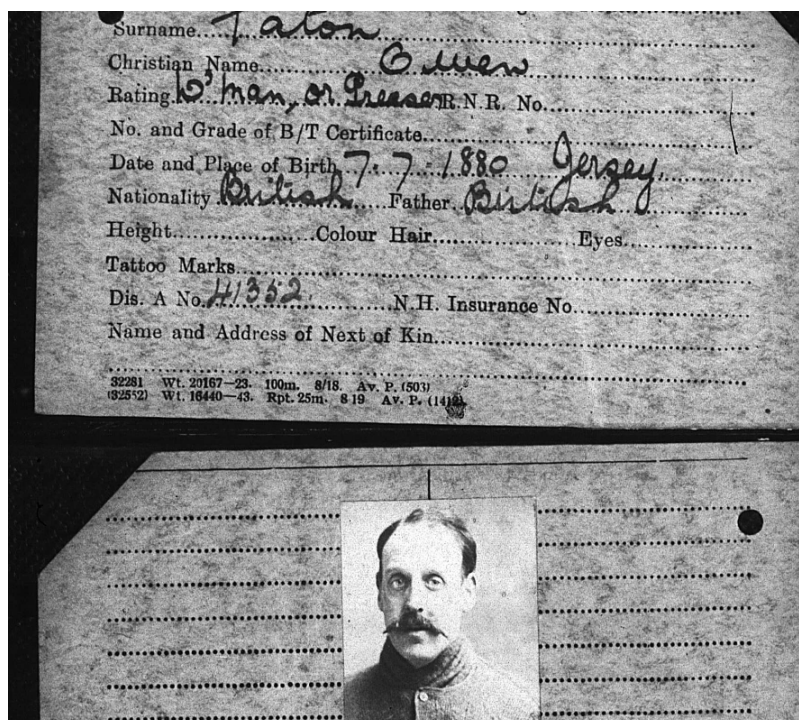
"ECHO" CREW AT MARINERS' HOME, LOWESTOFT.



CREW OF TRAWLER "RICHMOND," WHO RESCUED "ECHO" CREW.

Twenty eight years before, when he first went to sea, Taton said, he had survived a worse experience: when homeward bound from South America, his ship was lost and he spent

many hours drifting about in the sea clinging to a plank. He was eventually saved by the *Drummond Castle*, one of only seven out of a crew of thirty.¹⁵²



Owen's Taton's MM card, 1924.

Owen Taton is one of those people not only lucky enough to have an unusual name, but the main details of his life can be reconstructed from official records, which have survived at almost every point. This is so remarkable I have chosen to include it in full.

Owen Anwyl Taton was born in St Helier, Jersey on 7th July 1880 and christened there at St Saviour's Church, his parents' names recorded as Michel and Emma, nee Flood, who were married in Jersey in 1874. In 1881 at eight months old he appears in the census for St Helier, with his parents, his father's name now Anglicised to Michael, a gardener, aged 38, "born in France", and Emma, who was English, the same age. An elder child, Harriet, aged 14, born at Grouville was presumably from Michel's first marriage.

In 1891, the family turns up next in South Wales, at Cadoxton Road, Barry, Cardiff. The father by then is named as *Matthew* Taton, 44, a butcher's representative, mother Emma, the same age, born at Torrington, Devon. Owen "Anywel" Taton, a scholar, aged 10, had a younger brother, four year old Percival, born in Cardiff, which shows that they had arrived in Wales at least by 1887. The change of the father's first name is mysterious: there is nothing official to suggest that Michel had died and Emma had married his brother, though this is a possibility. Harriet Taton, Owen's elder sister, was married in Cardiff to Henry Mitchell, just before the census; she is recorded "living in" as a nurse at the Theatre Royal Hotel with Henry, originally from Bristol, still living with his parents.

¹⁵² WDP 1.3.1923, GJ 3.3.1923

Owen attended Holton Road (mixed) School, Barry, where the beautifully written record shows his father's name (again) as Matthew and the boy's date of birth (mysteriously) as 7th July 1882. (A slip of the pen or subterfuge?) Owen achieved up to Standard IV; he "left to go to work" on 11th May 1894.

Owen told the WDP reporter in 1923 that he had been shipwrecked "twenty eight years ago" which shows he must have gone to sea shortly after he left school, aged 14-15. (Not unusual – my father-in-law first went to sea aged fifteen.) It would be nice to think that he had remembered some French from his father and was able to speak to the crew of the Yainville in Jersey patois!

In 1901 he was a seaman, aged 21, one of three lodgers at 1 Tubal Place, Bristol, the house of John and Alice George; they had a daughter, Sophia, aged 19 who worked at a mineral water factory. Having placed his feet well and truly under the table, he and Sophia were married at St Mary Redcliffe, on 23rd December, 1901.

By 1906, variously described AB or fireman he is recorded on the *Wells City* and *Brooklyn City*, after which, certainly by 1911, he settled for the short distance coastal vessels of the BSN Co., spending time variously on our old friends *Argo*, *Juno* and *Milo*.

In 1911, unlike most seamen, he was again caught by the census, at home at 14 Tower Street, Temple, aged 31, with his wife Sophia, 28, and five children, Walter, 8, Alice, 6, Emily, 4, Harold George, 2, and Ivy Sophia, an infant less than a month old. Two of Sophia's brothers lodged with them. Owen helpfully describes himself "seaman, home from sea."

He was in the Royal Naval Reserve, thus was on standby when war broke out in 1914, but continued at sea though he and Sophia spent some time at St Austell, where their son Reginald Owen was born in 1916. (Reg later went to Temple School, Bristol where he won prizes in essay competitions and for table tennis.) By April 1917 Owen was called up by the army for service with the RASC. He learned to drive a heavy goods vehicle and was soon on active service in France. He left the Army in 1919 with 10% disability from rheumatism, "attributed to army service" and was granted a pension of 5s 6d per week. Reference was made to his "four children". (Alice had died, aged two, in 1913 and Walter would have been deemed old enough to work. They later lost two other children, John, born and died in 1920 and Emily died at 15 in 1922.) In 1923 Owen received both Army and Merchant Marine Medals, with appropriate ribbons for his war service.

His MN card dated 4th October 1924 describes him as 5 feet 6 inches tall, with blue eyes, dark brown hair and a fair complexion. He had a tattoo "True Love" on his right arm. He was by then an "Assistant Engineer".

On 4th January 1929 the Western Daily Press in a short paragraph reports the horrific death of his mother, Emma Taton (84) of 6 Tower Terrace, Temple, who died from severe burns to her legs and body when an oil stove caught her clothes on fire.

In 1939, for the first time Owen was away at sea during a census, when Sophia was living at Cossington Road with their youngest son Herbert, a painter and decorator, born in 1922. On 14th March 1945, the Western Daily Press reported that Owen Taton, 66, of Cossington Road, Knowle West had been taken to the BRI with head injuries after scaffolding collapsed at the Albion Dockyard. Once again he survived. He died five years later in Bristol, in the spring of 1950, aged 69.

After the interview in 1923, the newspapers showed no more interest in the rescued men from either lifeboat. Owen Taton and Captain Furlong (who remains elusive) are the only ones out of the twelve in the port boat mentioned by name in the original report. However, a few weeks later there was a sad sequel. George Lloyd Gibbons, aged 50, of 2 Kenilworth Place, Newtown, a donkeyman aboard ss. *Echo*, was admitted to Bristol Royal Infirmary very seriously ill. He died on 15th March 1923, of pneumonia and heart failure, “believed attributable to the shipwreck on 26th February.”¹⁵³

More of ss. Sappho

No further mishaps aboard *Sappho* were reported until January 1924 when a hobbler¹⁵⁴ called Merryweather was helping to move *Sappho* from Bristol Floating Harbour to Bathurst Wharf. Just as she was being drawn into her new berth, the man fell down between the ship and the quay. His absence was not noticed at first until his faint cries for help were heard. A cork fender, a light, and a rope were lowered and Merryweather was able to catch hold. He was pulled to safety, severely “scragged” but otherwise was (apparently) unhurt.¹⁵⁵ He was taken to the General Hospital for observation where no doubt he contemplated his narrow escape from a grisly death.

On 13th June 1924, *Sappho*’s sixteen year old cabin boy, John Herbert George Matthews of Peter Street, Bedminster, drowned at sea when the vessel was off Pendeen, Cornwall. Nothing much seems to have been made of this tragedy until December when his father, James Henry, who himself had been severely injured at Avonmouth two years before, went to court to claim compensation for the boy’s death from Bristol Steam Navigation Co. It was argued that the claimant was partially dependant on the boy’s wages of 30 shillings a week which would have been helpful in maintaining the family home for a few years hence. The Judge agreed and Matthews, senior was awarded £120.¹⁵⁶

In September 1924 *Sappho* was among the queue of sea traffic held up on departure when a dense fog “thick as a hedge” enveloped Bristol docks. There appears to have been no

¹⁵³ Ibid Inquest, 17.3.1923

¹⁵⁴ “Hobblers” stationed at Pill, helped to tow the ships up the Channel, often using rowing boats.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid 23.1.1924

¹⁵⁶ WDP 19.12.1924

human casualties on this occasion though the steamer *Ettrick* ran aground at Sea Mills Reach.¹⁵⁷

On 1st May 1924, a graphic account by an (anonymous) "Bristol Seaman" appeared in the local press. He had been aboard *Sappho* during a storm at sea and a simultaneous fire, a few days before:

"We had encountered some very heavy weather but on the Saturday afternoon she was rolling so badly that we could hear that her cargo had shifted and was adrift – but worse was to follow – at the height of the storm, about 3 p.m. we saw smoke rising from no. 2 hatch. All hands were called at once and as soon as we found the [whole] ship was not definitely alight, the fire hose was connected and everything prepared for opening the burning hatch. The engineers got steam pipes ready to turn into the hatch as soon as possible.

*"We altered course and put in at a little river mouth between Falmouth and The Manacles. Meanwhile the hatch was kept battened down in an endeavour to smother the fire and the water was kept playing both on the hatch and the tarpaulin surrounding it. Having run the ship in, we opened the hatches and saw fire smoke but could see no flames. However we kept the steam and water playing into the hatch until it got less. Flames were now visible and we kept the hose playing until they were extinguished. We afterwards found that the origin of the fire was a case of matches which had shifted and caught alight from the tossing of the vessel. We have been working hard to put the ship seaworthy again and will proceed to Bristol, calling at Swansea on the way."*¹⁵⁸

The arrivals and departures of *Sappho* continued to be mentioned regularly in the "Shipping News", but no more obvious disasters, minor or otherwise were reported. Captain Owen was still skipper, on 24th April 1926 when she departed Gloucester Docks with a cargo of coal.

A letter from "C. Hawkins Garrington, of Littlewick, Berkshire" to the Western Daily Press published 26th January 1927 reads:

".....more than a dozen steamers ranging in age from sixty to 24 years old are still sailing from Bristol on routes for which they were originally built. These are Enid, 60, Arklow, 41, Wells City, 37, Ravenswood, 36, Chicago City, 35, Westward Ho!, 33, Cambria, 32, Britannia, 31, Ino, 28, Sappho, 27 and Findhorn, 24."

On a November day in 1929 with the Avon clogged with shipping, "the fog came down like a thief in the night; you could not see a hand from your face between Sea Mills Reach and the Horseshoe Bend." *Sappho* was again one of a dozen ships stranded overnight in the Avon mud. The next morning they were seen lying at all angles, the Dutch trader *Paersum* being

¹⁵⁷ Ibid 8.9.1924.

¹⁵⁸ WDP 1.5.1924

the most precariously placed: “only a miracle saved her from falling over broadside”. She was righted by handy volunteer Bristol seamen.

Sappho continued making her regular cross-channel voyages. In 1933 she was involved in a collision with the *Montreal City* and went into “P.” Shed at the Royal Edward Dock, Avonmouth for repairs. She should have sailed on the morning tide, 30th June, but at 6.45 a.m. smoke was seen billowing out from the hatches where cotton bales were stowed. The Fire Brigade soon got the situation under control, but the wary master, Captain Martin, refused to comment to the eager pressman who entitled his piece “Smouldering Cotton Peril at Avonmouth”. The doughty old ship survived again, but not the cargo.

The loss of the ss. Teane, 1928

On 25th January 1928, the ss. *Teane* (owned by the Bristol firm of Turner, Edwards & Co.) sailed on one of her regular voyages to Portugal, from Swansea to Oporto. Within a couple of days she had passed Lundy and was confidently expected to arrive at her destination on 31st January. When she failed to appear as scheduled, the Lloyd’s Agent in Oporto telegraphed his worries, “So far we have no news of her.” On 8th February the Western Daily Press was reassuring. “Many steamers larger than the *Teane* have experienced such delaysshe would have experienced the full force of recent gales, and not being equipped with wireless would have been unable to state her position unless spoken to by another ship.” But the same day she was officially posted as “missing” though even two days later “the owners have not yet abandoned hope.” Bizarrely, the ship was still named in the “Shipping News” as “loading at Spanish ports for Bristol”.

By the 15th February, the ss. *Teane* was “presumed lost with all hands” and a fund was opened for the dependants. Nine out of the 15 crew members were Bristol men:

Captain A.F. Newbury, 62 Ashley Road, Stokes Croft

H. Jolliffe, Bridge House, Stoke Bishop

F.R. Boyce, 44 Upton Road, Southville

W.F. Pettersen of Burnt Island, Fife, Scotland

R.J. Johnson, 7 Milford Street, Merrywood

W.G. Jarvis, 47 Theresa Avenue, Bishopston

E. Dimsford, 8 Perrett’s Place, Cathay

I.J. Jenkins, 18 Talbot Street, Ashton Gate

W. Sollvar, 14 New Street, St Jude’s

A. Gould, 3 Salmon Court, Kingsdown

A.B. Jamiel, T. Tuitt, U. Jozaffe and D. Fatinga, came from Cardiff. B. Holm was of Swansea.

At the enquiry which took place in December, Captain James Airey who had been mate aboard the ship in 1927 said *"The Teane was a very dangerous ship. It was impossible to drive her with a head sea."* Willie Claude Mitchell and Albert Baker who had also previously served on the ship said she was rather dirty, rolled violently with a peculiar roll, took in a lot of water and in bad weather could not get up sufficient steam to make safe headway. John Ivor Jenkins, who had been at sea 30 years said that at times her steering gear would jam and there was always an escape of steam from the steering engine. Alexander Christensen said it was *"a slippery cargo, worse than grain"*. He agreed about the peculiar roll: *"She moved 15 degrees slowly, then lurched about another ten in a beam sea."* Despite these negative remarks the court came to the conclusion that the probable causes of the disaster were a) exceptionally heavy weather or b) inadequate trimming of her cargo; consequently part or parts of it shifted sometime after passing Lundy.¹⁵⁹

Captain Gregory of the new) Cato

Captain John Gregory was well known in Bristol as the master of the ss. *Cato*. She was "a good looking ship, and a credit to the harbour", a familiar sight to Bristolians passing her berth on the port side of St Augustine's bridge.¹⁶⁰ Her regular run, Bristol to Dublin, resumed after the war, usually twice, but later three times a fortnight, returning with a cargo of Guinness.

These voyages were routine and without undue incident. There seems to have been only one "nightmare" trip. In December 1930, in mountainous seas, *Cato* lost her rudder and had to be taken in tow by another ship which later claimed "salvage".¹⁶¹

John Gregory, 1869-1933, who had been in charge of *Sappho* for a few voyages prior to her detention in 1914, was an Irishman from County Wicklow, his "Certificate of Competency as Master of a Foreign Going Ship", dated 27th May 1898, shows that he qualified as a master mariner before he was thirty, and he is described as such in the Irish census of 1901, at 44 Lower Main Street, Arklow. He was then a single man, living with his widowed mother Letitia, his younger brother William, also a mariner, sister Elizabeth and a cousin, 10 year old Anna Mary Kinch. By 1911, then "2nd Officer, Merchant Service" he had been married seven years and was at home at 53 Richmond Road, Dublin. He and his wife Lucy were parents to four little girls, Olive, Renie, Letitia, and Lucy, as well as Kathleen Kearon, Lucy's daughter by her first husband who had been lost at sea.

¹⁵⁹ WDP, WM, 21.12.1928, 12.1.1929

¹⁶⁰ Ibid 10.8.1929

¹⁶¹ WDP 24.6.1930



Captain Gregory of ss. Cato, above, wearing the Mercantile Marine War Medal, awarded to mariners who had served in the Merchant Navy and who had made voyages through a war zone or danger zone during the 1914-1918 war.

The family was living in Bristol certainly by March 1914, when he took over as relief skipper aboard *Sappho*, immediately prior to the appointment of Captain Jenkins. He then took command of *Cato*, then a new ship which had made “a capital run from Glasgow” in June 1914. On arrival she could be seen “dressed overall in flags at St Augustine’s Bridge, destined to join the Bristol Steam Navigation’s fleet for the Bristol – Dublin run.”

Alas, the First World War intervened shortly afterwards and no “Shipping News” is posted. Captain Gregory, aged 63, died suddenly on 8th May 1933, from a stroke, half a mile north of the Muglins, a rocky outcrop near Dublin during one of his regular crossings to Ireland. His death came as a great shock to all. On the way to the funeral at Cotham Methodist Church his grief-stricken widow collapsed at the church gates. This was the second husband she had lost to the sea and she was too ill to attend. for the duration.



The service, in the presence of a large congregation of family and friends, included the sailor's hymn "Eternal Father, Strong to Save....." and a setting of Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar."

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning at the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

The interment at Canford Cemetery was attended by *Cato's* entire ship's company, and included some familiar names: William Gregory, possibly John's brother; the Irishman J(oseph) Leonard, formerly of *Sappho*, (one of the Ruhleben POWS), J(ames) Murray, the engineer aboard *Sappho* who had suffered the horrendous accident in 1921, and T(homas) Briggs, of the *May Scott*, another Ruhleben alumnus, possibly the same man who survived the sinking of the *Echo* in 1923. John Gregory's obituary notice ended with the poignant phrase

"Safe Home. Safe Home in Port."

The Loss of the ss. Alecto, 1936

In April 1936 ss. *Sappho* was sent to the ship breakers without any gush of sentiment for her long and eventful service. She was replaced on the Bristol-Swansea-Antwerp fortnightly run by the BSN. Co.'s new purchase, ss. *Alecto*, whose name, after one of the Furies of Greek mythology, continued the classical theme.

Just before the first anniversary of the start of her sea service, *Alecto* left Bristol for Swansea on Tuesday, 26th April 1937 with general cargo, mainly tinplates, for one of her routine cross-Channel voyages. She was reported as safely "passed The Lizard eastbound", 30th April. On Sunday morning 1st May she ran into dense fog in the North Sea off the Nordhinder Lightship and collided with a Yugoslav vessel, the *Plavnik*. Out the crew of fourteen, ten were drowned.

One of the survivors, Thomas May, said "*After the collision I was fortunate in being able to jump on to the Plavnik's deck but others in the crew fell into the water The Alecto sank almost immediately.*"

The *Plavnik's* crew put out their lifeboat and managed to pluck three other survivors out of the sea. A tug, *Zeehound*, set out from Ostend to render assistance but the heavy fog hampered all attempts at rescue and all they could find were a few floating spars. The *Plavnik*, which also sustained a damaged bow on the port side, arrived at Flushing at 3 p.m. on the afternoon of 1st May with her forepeak under water. Aboard were the four survivors named as:

First Officer Thomas May, 41 Rochester Road, Brislington (a native of Dover, Kent)

Mr E.D. White, Chief Engineer, 44 Hampstead Road, Redland

A. Yates, seaman, Ham Bressay, Shetland

E. Anderson, seaman, 73, Port Tennant Road, Swansea



Mr & Mrs May with Shirley at home in Brislington.

Though still serving as first mate, May had earned his master's certificate seven or eight years ago. Before joining *Alecto* at Christmas he had been sometime without a berth. Mrs May, who was at home in Brislington, spoke to the WDP reporter while their four year old daughter Shirley played in the garden. She was unaware at that time that her husband had jumped from one ship to another. She said of him: *"He is a very strong swimmer; that probably saved him.*

Thank heaven." Told of the loss of the master, she said *"Captain Austin is a delightful man. I know him well as I have been on the Alecto several times. It is a terrible tragedy but it could have been a good deal worse for me."*

Mr White, the Chief Engineer, the other Bristol survivor, had "served in the RNVR during the late war with the rank of Lieutenant Commander. He was educated at Merchant Venturers' School where his brother the late Mr Fawcett White was a master. He has been at sea 40 years and was Engineer on the *Date Tree* which sank off Cornwall two years ago."

Those who were lost:

Captain T. Austin, master, Swansea

Mr Ivor Ellis, Second Officer, Liverpool

Mr F. Wright, 78 York Road, Bedminster

J.T. Wixon, steward & ship's cook, 24 Rosebery Avenue, Mina Road, Bristol

Charles Nelson, seaman, Swansea

Trevor Harris, seaman, Swansea

G. Sealey, donkeyman, 123 City Road, St Paul's

J. Smith, donkeyman, 18 Horsefair

E. Patnelli, fireman, 21 Paul Street, Kingsdown

John Charles, fireman, Swansea.

An additional line at the end of the report makes uncomfortable reading to us in the 21st century: "NB. Sealey, Smith, Patnelli, & Charles were coloured men."



John Thomas Wixon, the steward, who was 59, had been at sea since he left school. During the war he had been torpedoed twice: off Queenstown in the *New York City* and again on *Fernfield* in the Mediterranean. After the latter escape he spent two days in an open boat before being picked up. It was "ironic that he should have died when doing his normal duties." His wife, Blanche said she had just written a letter to him. "*Last Sunday I gave him a little black kitten to take with him for luck.*"

John Wixon, left.

Mr Fred Wright, the 2nd engineer, had been shipwrecked twice before too. "*This is the third time and I know he is lost,*" his wife said, brokenly. Her eldest son, Tom, aged 16, employed at "Filton Aeroplane Works" could not be told the tragic news until he got back that evening from Clevedon where he had gone for a cycle ride. The newspaper was "doing what it could" to contact their daughter, Margaret, a nurse at a hospital in Liverpool, asking her to return to her mother at once. The two younger children, Peter, 10, and Pauline, 9, were at home.

A memorial service which took place on 9th May at the Seamen's Church in Prince Street was attended by Mrs Wixon, Mrs Sealey, Mrs Patnelli, and "representatives of the child orphaned by the death of John Smith". The two Bristol survivors, Messrs Thomas May and E.D. White were also present along with First Officer T. Irwin, formerly of *Alecto*, plus the officers and crew of ss. *Ino*, the agents of the Company, Ship Owners, Dockers and Bristol Ship Lovers Society plus "several coloured seamen who paid their respects the coloured seamen who died." The crew of the *Plavnik* sent a message of sincere sympathy.

Captain Austin of Hartlepool, had been in command of the *Alecto* since she was bought by Bristol Steam Navigation Co. in 1936. Just before he left port he had said he "hoped to be back in time for the Coronation."¹⁶² Second Officer Ellis who likewise died in the tragedy had just returned to duty after recovering from an operation at Christmas.

¹⁶² Daily Herald, 3.5.1937. King George VI & Queen Elizabeth, the present Queen's parents.

A Memorial Fund had been immediately opened, but life - and business – had to go on. The Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth took place on 12th May amid national and local festivities. The Company announced that a ship called *Ardgarroch* had been chartered to take the place of the ill-fated *Alecto*.

The Fund which closed in September raised £1,182 12. 8d, with the monies distributed in September 1937.¹⁶³

In November the same year, there was more trouble. The ss. *Ino* was lost.

The Loss of the ss. Ino, 1936

The Campbeltown Shipping Co. which had built *Sappho*, also built *Ino* in 1899. She was 229.8 feet long, with a 32.8 feet beam, gross tonnage 1240.37, net tonnage 777.63; 99 horse power with a triple expansive steering gear. She had been in service between Bristol and the Continent for 38 years when she departed on 12th November 1937 loaded with a cargo of 1,714 tons of zinc concentrates and a crew of eighteen men. The voyage was an unusual one as she had recently been sold to a London company on condition of her safe arrival at Antwerp. Two days into the crossing, on Sunday, the 14th November, she was making 8 or 9 knots when she developed a five degree list to port. On inspection the zinc cargo in nos. 2 and 3 holds had shifted and had become “a sea of mud, like a bog moving back and forth to the motion of the ship”. With the weather deteriorating rapidly “though nothing like as bad as it had been in a notorious winter of storms two years before” with the vessel shipping a great deal of water aft, she refused to steer. The master, Captain G.J. Midlane, gave the order to launch the lifeboats, a manoeuvre which was only successful in the case of the port boat. At 4 a.m. on 15th November, they abandoned ship. *Ino* sank 8 miles West by North of the Wandelaar Lightship off Ostend. All eighteen crewmen got away in the port lifeboat, which was so tightly packed they could not use the oars to row. In the emergency nobody had a chance to go below to fetch additional clothing; in particular, the twenty year old steward, Stanley Vine, was without a coat. After a short while he collapsed, overcome, as they believed by exposure. In the bitter cold, shipping water and continually trying desperately to bale, they struggled for three miles and all of them were near the end by the time they were spotted by a pilot boat which had been attracted by flares and whistles. They were picked up by the boat and taken into port at Ostend. Sadly, Vine was found to be dead on arrival, a tragic carbon copy of the fate of the other young steward, Ted Lockett, in the *Cato* disaster of 1899. The Second Mate, J. Vowles, of Pill and C. Fitzpatrick AB, of Armada Place, Stokes Croft were the first survivors to get back to Bristol where Vowles paid tribute to Captain Midlane “*who had cheered up his crew when everything seemed hopeless.*”

¹⁶³ WDP, WM, 3.5.1937 – 15.3.1937 passim,

At the Board of Trade enquiry held the following July, Captain Midlane was exonerated from all blame for the loss, which was due to the “slackness” of the owners in respect of the loading in that they desired to avoid the expense of fitting shifting boards or bins; the whole matter being dealt with in a casual manner with the master and officers unfamiliar with the carriage of zinc concentrates. Stanley Vine’s death was attributed to an aneurysm, a defect of the heart.¹⁶⁴

The Master, Captain C.J. Midlane, 67 Howard Road, Westbury Park, like so many seafarers has proved elusive. He must be the Charles James K. Midlane who was recorded aged nine months in 1881, living in the Isle of Wight, with his mother Naomi, “a mariner’s wife”, two elder sisters and an elder brother. At this time, his father, like so many of his kind, was absent at sea. Naomi and Frank Midlane married in the IOW in 1875. Naomi, who lived to be 104 (!) died at Ryde, IOW, in 1954. Charles, who is missing from subsequent censuses, married Bertha James in Cardiff in 1910. (In 1939 he was at home, 1 Dock Road, Cardiff, with his wife and daughter Freda – described a Master Mariner, ss. *Lepretto* [?]) The rest of the crew are named as:

1st Mate, Mr M. Kavanagh of Arklow

2nd Mate, Mr J. Vowles, (from a family of seafarers well established at Mariners’ Row, Pill)

1st Engineer, Mr F. Marsh, 26 Cotham Road South

2nd Engineer, Mr C. Thorley, 11 Ramsay Road, Horfield

Able Seamen: J. Redwood, Dublin, F. Quick, Port Talbot; T. Quick, E. Anderson, R. Fernandez, J. Apier, T. Burns, (aka “Paddy” Burns, the brother-in-law of Stanley Vine, the deceased steward) all of Swansea.

Donkeyman: C. Fitzpatrick, Armada Place (Charles Fitzpatrick - who may or may not be a relative of James and Julia who are known from the *Sappho* - was born on 16th March 1881. He was still at Armada Place in 1939, then a ship’s fireman, living with his wife Belle.)

Firemen: N. Scarodines, J. Nichols, of Swansea

Mess Room Boy: S. Neale, Swansea.

Up until the time of her loss *Ino* seems to have been relatively incident-free, though in 1926, off Eastbourne, medical assistance was summoned when a seaman, William Keogh of Arklow, was taken ill on board. Two doctors, Deane and Croucher, rowed three-quarters of a mile to get to the ship, but too late to save 38 year old Keogh. They conveyed his body ashore.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ WDP 15-18.11.1937, 21.7.1938, 1.8.1938

¹⁶⁵ Ibid 27.8.1926

In March 1928 the ship was held responsible for a collision with ss. *Kennebee* in the Bristol Channel off Avonmouth when she struck a heavy blow into the other ship's starboard side, having strayed off course due to high spring tides.¹⁶⁶

In January 1929, a docker, Albert Bosnia Coles, 34, of Sea Mills was in the cargo hold unloading spelter cake when he tripped. His foot became stuck in bag of nails and when trying to extricate himself, he gashed his hand. He brushed off the injury, saying it was "only a scratch". A few days later he died in hospital of tetanus.¹⁶⁷

The Loss of the ss. Cato, 1940

In September 1939 Britain found itself again at war with Germany. Early in the morning of the 3rd March 1940, the ss. *Cato* struck a mine "off the West Coast". Only this vague war-time description of the location was allowed, but it was in fact in the Bristol Channel. Out of a crew of fifteen, only two men escaped death. One, amazingly, was the perennial survivor, Thomas Briggs, the fireman, now of Filwood Park, Knowle, the other, Alfred Kayser, a donkeyman, of Wraxall Grove, Bedminster.

Two able seamen, William Cornelius of 19 St John's Crescent, Bedminster and Sidney Hennessey, of 12 Oxford Street, Totterdown were taken out of the water, but were found to be dead. Their bodies were brought ashore. Cornelius, who was the lampman aboard the ship, originally came from Plymouth. He was aged 59, and left a widow, Lily. Hennessey, aged 25, also left a widow, Emily Elizabeth, nee Jones. The two men were officially recorded as "drowned". The rest, named below, who were born in Bristol unless otherwise stated, were: "Missing, presumed drowned, when the ship, *Cato*, sank after explosion, Bristol Channel, presumed mine".

Captain Richard Martin, 65, Master, last place of abode: Dublin

George Herbert Scott, 38, First Officer, born Cardiff, abode Bristol, 55 Eden Grove, widow, Winifred, nee Mahoney, and a three year old son, Philip.

Charles Shiels, 50, 2nd Officer, born in Edinburgh, abode Bristol, 13 Lawn Avenue, Fishponds, widow, Edith.

Ernest Dilke White, 66, Chief Engineer, abode Bristol, 44 Hampton Road, Redland, widow, Ethel Eliza. (In 1891 Ernest lived at the Rose of Denmark, the well-known pub in Dowry Square, Hotwells where his parents John and Annie were licensees. He had at least two children, Muriel and Mervyn. His sister Elma, who was five years his junior, placed an obituary notice in the WDP on 7th March.)

Sidney James Andrew, 36, 2nd Engineer, abode Bristol, 1A St Andrew's Road, widow, Hilda.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid 23.3.1928

¹⁶⁷ bid 15.2.1929

Hugh Beedie, 41, steward, born Falmouth, abode 5 Bassett Place, Falmouth, widow, Ella.

Harold Young, 36, fireman, abode Bristol, 27 Sion Hill, Clifton, widow, Dorothy, nee Abbott, married 1929. (A tablet to the memory of Harold, inscribed from "his loving wife and daughter" was unveiled at the Seamen's Chapel, the following 23rd May.)

William Hickey, 50, AB, deckhand, born Dublin, abode 182 Quarry Road, Dublin, widow, Mary Anne.

Leslie Cox, 24, AB, deckhand, abode Bristol, 21 Shipton Walk, West Street, parents, Albert Edward, a docker, and Louisa.

Denis Harris, 20, mess room boy, abode Bristol, 69 Montreal Avenue, Horfield, parents Daniel and Margaret.

Walter Hendy, 32, fireman, abode Bristol, 18 Angers Road, Totterdown, parents, Walter Charles and Clara.

"Captain Martin had come out of retirement to deputise for the regular master, Captain Payne, who fell ill a month ago. He was well known in Bristol shipping circles having traded Bristol/Hamburg with the Moss Hutchinson boats. Mr E.D. White was one of only four survivors of the *Alecto* which sank a few years ago. (see above, 1936). It was the first voyage of the boy, Denis Harris."¹⁶⁸

The two survivors, Thomas Briggs and Alfred Kayser were reunited with their families on 5th March. Though still suffering from the effects of their experience, both said they would go back to sea as soon as they found a ship. Briggs said *"I saw the deck was swimming in water and it was obvious we were in a desperate plight. Kayser was alongside me and Cornelius and Hennessey also came on deck from below. I ran round to a raft and threw it overboard. Pools of water were surging round it. Kayser pushed it away from the side. It was like a mill-stream as we both jumped into the sea. Kayser hung on to a floating hatch cover. A trawler came on the scene and it was just about an hour and a half after the explosion before we were picked up. A life-line with a buoy attached was thrown and I was hauled aboard just when I was about exhausted. Kayser was also taken aboard and I saw the other two being picked up."* (Sadly they did not survive.) *"It was only about three minutes after we tumbled on deck that Cato went down. She was broken in two by the explosion. After she sank we were bruised by the wreckage; the cargo also came to the surface which added to the danger."*

Alfred Kayser, born 17 May 1894 in Fulham, was in Bristol by 1919 when he married Harriet Girling; between 1920 and 1938 they had seven children. His MM documents show that he was at sea at least from 1920, aboard *San Gaspar*, 1924, and later on *Montreal City*. He was

¹⁶⁸ WDP 4.3.1940

away in 1939 when Harriet was living at 263 Wraxall Grove with several of their children. He died in Thornbury aged 74.

DECLARATION

*Delete as necessary

I declare that I do not possess a ~~B.S.I.C.~~ and I apply for a *replacement* ~~Discharge Book~~ (Great Britain, Eire or Canadian) or ~~Discharge Book~~

*Discharge Book

*British Seaman's Identity Card

(a) ~~Not having had previous sea service~~

(b) For the following reason: *Dis. A. Red.*

A Kayser
(Signature of Seaman)

No. of B.S.I.C. prepared: _____

Documents attached: P.45(3); C.R.S.154; P.80(M)*

(If not attached, state cause)

Documents received: *27 OCT 1953*

Date: *AVONMOUTH* Name of M.O. _____

(P.T.O.)

Alfred Kayser's "replacement discharge book" is dated 1953.

Mrs Lily Cornelius, the widow of William, told the Western Daily Press that she had had a presentiment of the disaster. *"I dreamed I was crossing a bridge when the middle crashed. I called out for help to save me from the water."* William Cornelius, who "loved the sea, had never worked on land. He ran away to sea when he was fourteen years of age, he is now sixty. He has been continuously employed in the Merchant Navy or the Royal Navy. His twenty one years in the RN included service in the last war; he was torpedoed when HMS Majestic went down. One of his sons, aged 16, had been torpedoed twice in the present war."

A Memorial Service for the lost men of the *Cato* was held at the Seamen's Mission, Prince Street attended by widows and families. The Chapel was packed with mourners many of whom stood outside. The Bishop of Bristol, Dr C.S. Woodward said *"I think nowhere is courage more clearly shown as that by the men of the Merchant Service."*

*"People very seldom give a thought when they sit down to their meals to the men who risk great dangers to bring them a large proportion of their food. Our daily bread is bought with the blood of these men."*¹⁶⁹

The Bishop's text was echoed by Mr Sidney R. Cosford who addressed the Round Table: *"Our island could not exist for more than a few months without them, the great-hearted merchant seamen, and yet Jack has not yet had his fair due."*¹⁷⁰

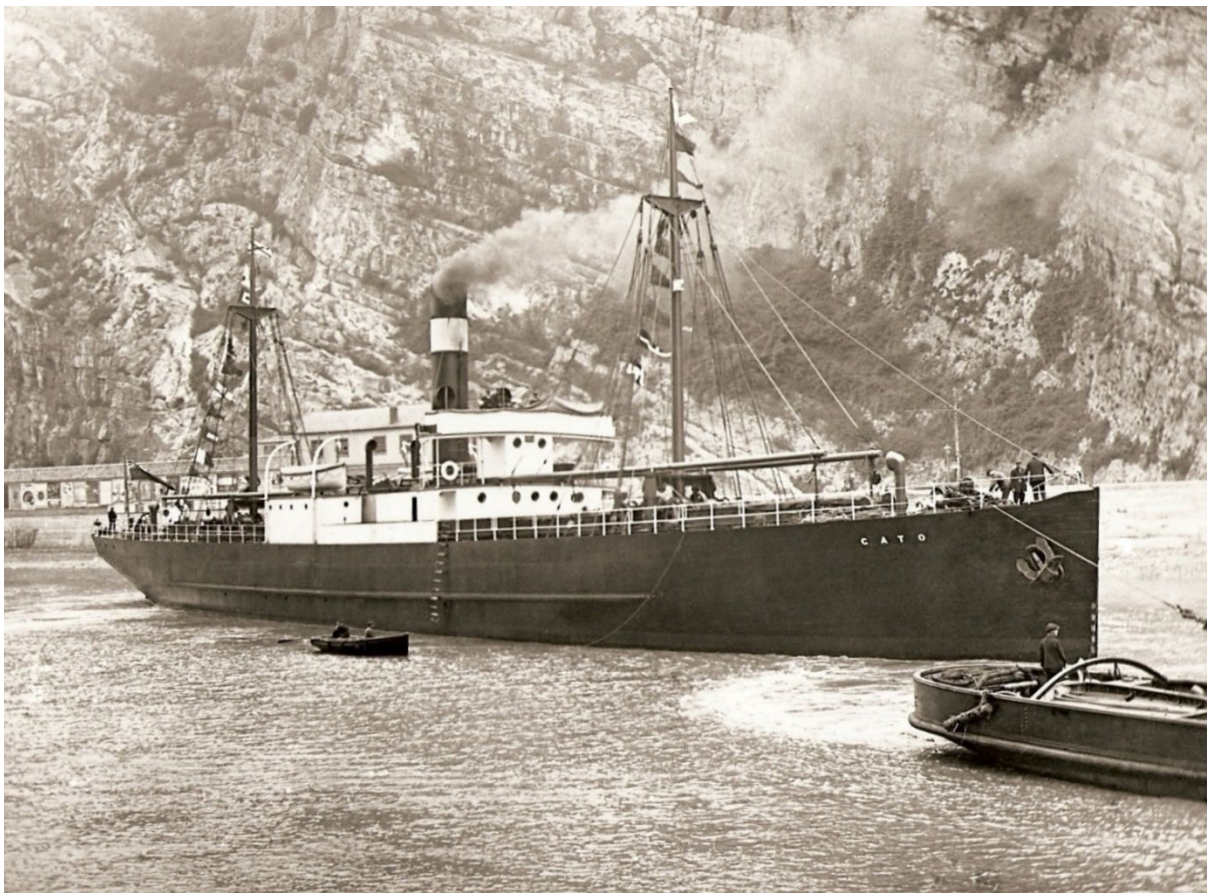
¹⁶⁹ WDP 4-11.3.1940; 23.5.1940

¹⁷⁰ Ibid 4.9.1940

Epilogue: Old Mariners Talking

“A new *Ino*, launched in April 1946 was soon to be joined by a new *Cato*.”¹⁷¹

The Bristol Steam Navigation Company, known by the end of its long life as ‘BSNC’, was founded in 1821 and continued as a freight service until 1980. The policy of giving the same names to new acquisitions continued to the end, a new *Cato* would replace the previous *Cato*, or a new *Ino*, would come on the scene. The ships, even the latest *Sappho* recalled by the anonymous “old salts” below were different vessels with the same names as those of old.



The new ss. Cato going through Cumberland Basin on her maiden voyage.

“I worked at BSNC from 1945 till 1951 as a clerk in the Continental & Customs Department. There were six vessels, two chartered steam ships, *Capito* and *Melito*, and four built at the Charles Hill Dockyard, Bristol. *Cato*, *Ino*, *Juno* and *Milo*. They operated a weekly service Bristol-Antwerp-Rotterdam-Plymouth-Cardiff-Bristol-Newport-Swansea, round trips and a twice weekly service Bristol-Dublin. Two sheds were used, one at Bathurst Wharf and ‘A’ Shed at Canon’s Marsh.”.

¹⁷¹ WDP 25.4.1946

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"I sailed as relief 1<sup>st</sup> Mate on the *Milo*, UK-Continental run. In the 1950s it was almost impossible to obtain a permanent position with BSNC.....they were great ships, and once in, hardly anyone left the Company."

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"In 1956 I sailed as 2nd Mate and 1st Mate on the *Cato* – I was on the Bristol-Dublin run, otherwise the "Guinness Run", around 34 – 40 hours total sea time weekly. The masters on *Cato* were Captain Jenkins (who was also master of *Echo* for a long time) and Captain Dudgeon."

~~~~~

"I joined in Bristol. In those days *Echo* and her sister, *Apollo*, were on a service from the Bristol Channel to Antwerp and Rotterdam with a call at Plymouth on the return trip. The Skipper was Captain Jenkins, I was 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate. It was unusual for a home-trade ship to have a third mate but the number of ports and general cargo seemed to dictate the need. Not that I was complaining.....she was a very nicely appointed ship. After leaving Swansea the weather was inclement and I was very glad to get to my bunk. I was a tad surprised when we went between Lands End and the Longships – coming from a deep-sea background this seemed risky. It was the deep-sea background that got the better of me and Captain Jenkins. We parted company on our return to Cardiff. Mostly down to me but you learn and I did. I never did go back to small ships."

~~~~~

"I am from Dublin. I worked on the *Dido*: Captain Llewellyn and then Captain Murphy. I remember the *Dido*, *Hero* and *Apollo*; I worked from Avonmouth-Le Havre-Rotterdam-London, 1969. The *Apollo* was a beautiful ship."

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"By the time I was with them, the fleet was down to two ships, *Echo* and *Apollo*. I sailed on both as a fill-in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate, 1976 and 1977 when I was trying to get my brain to pass my Master's Ticket. *Echo*'s skipper was Wally Keys and *Apollo*'s was Joe Earl. A great run from Avonmouth to Dublin and back or Avonmouth to Cork and back and sometimes a really long trip (joke) Avonmouth to Cork to Dublin and back. I was asked to stay long-term but they couldn't give me any employment guarantees so I went back deep-sea. Shortly after that BET took them over, put one of them on the East Coast and then sold them both – a real shame. Those two ships were good sea boats and well designed in my opinion; if I'd been there twenty years earlier I would have stayed."

### ***The final misadventures of ss. Cato***

In 1957 *Cato* over-ran, and sank the *Sea Prince*, her tug. Six years later at about 8 o'clock in the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> April 1963, she was herself rammed and sunk in Avonmouth docks by the ss. *City of Brooklyn*.

She had come in the previous night from Antwerp, her usual run. The hatch covers had been removed and the dockers were preparing to unload the cargo of steel, calcium phosphate and tea.

At the same time the *City of Brooklyn* owned by the Ellerman Lines was making her way into the dock and swinging towards her own berth; she rammed into *Cato*'s starboard side, cutting her in two.

Chief Officer Ted Foley, still in his nightclothes and wearing his dressing gown, jumped off the ship on to the quay, then returned on board to check on the crew who were still in their quarters. All ten managed to escape, without further mishap, though wearing only shirts and trousers. They had to leave the rest of their possessions behind.

*Cato* sank within twenty minutes. Later, she was raised and taken to Newport South Wales where she was broken up.

### ***Harry's Story***, (as told in about 2000/1)

*"When I commented on the skill required to bring a great ship into dock, Captain Mowat remarked, "It's much the same as driving a car into a garage." But, like most seamen, he is over-modest. There is very much more in it than that."*  
*John Hone, "Bristol Pilot" (Everybody's Magazine, 1949)*

Harry Grenfell Mowat first went to sea in 1938 when he was about sixteen years old .....

".....and then, of course, the war took over and the Ministry of War sent us on to any ships they wanted to. And I went on various tramp ships, a tanker and one ship, taking trains, locomotives anyway to Cherbourg. That was after the invasion was over. I didn't really get in on the act. I wish I had, or again I might not have survived, who knows? I eventually ended up with the Bristol Steam Navigation Company after I did one or two voyages with the Bristol City Line, but somehow I didn't like them very much. I found that the Bristol Steam were a really very good company, they were lovely people to work with. And of course sailing straight from Bristol, my home, where I was brought up.....when I joined the Bristol Steam, all the masters there were Geordies; they were a wonderful bunch, they really were. I never looked back. They were good at teaching you. They were very interested to bring on a young seaman, so I thrived there and after about two and a half years I was skipper. I was 30 then or 31. But on deep-sea ships of course, you'd expect to be

perhaps 40 or so. But at this time, shipping was really on the way out. There were plenty of ships and not enough men so there was good promotion

"I got my Second Mate's certificate in 1942 I think or '3. Then my Mate's ticket after the war and eventually I got my Master's certificate in 1952 when I was working for the Bristol Steam. .... it was a pretty stiff exam. You can get a deep-sea Master's certificate or a coast-wise which I could have got but I preferred to go on for the foreign-going ships. (The exams were) pretty hard. And they've upgraded them as the years have gone by until now you've really got to be clever to get a Master's ticket. And of course there are so few ships, British ships, around. They push the standard right up so they get the cream now. I couldn't pass a present day Master's ticket. No way. In the days when I was taking my tickets it was far more on the practical side. Now there's much more of the theory to it. And a lot more electronics and satellite navigation, you know, it's changed altogether. I remained with the Bristol Steam until 1959 and then because my wife wasn't all that well, I left and joined the Port of Bristol in their dredging flotilla. I stayed with them until they started selling all their dredgers and in 1982 I think, I left. So that was over 20 years with the dredgers. The *Frome* was a lovely little dredger. I was five years on her and then they decided they were going to close Bristol so I went to Avonmouth, cos there was more going on at Avonmouth.

"When I was a kid I used to go down the docks and go aboard whatever ships would let me aboard and chat to the sailors there .....my father, though he loved the sea was a Professor at Bristol University. He had no contact with the sea except he used to go to America. He sailed on the maiden voyage of the Queen Mary, I believe. I wasn't very brilliant academically. I went to Clifton eventually (but) I couldn't get away from that quickly enough. It was a jolly good school but I didn't really like it. So when he realised I really wanted to go to sea, he very soon pushed me off. He had a friend who knew somebody in the Blue Funnel Line so I signed a four year apprenticeship with them; three and six a week which was quite good money in those days. The first thing I had to do when I set foot aboard this ship was to clean out the bog. And that's the way you were treated. You did everything from the bottom up, clean the bilges, or go up the mast, do anything. So you learnt everything from the bottom to the top. They were not heavy handed in a way but they looked after us. (The interviewer asked here "No cat o' nine tails or anything then?") No. I did get sent up the mast head once. Like the crow's nest. Jolly nice it was really, except it was raining. Lawrence Hope who owned the whole firm was a wonderful man. He really looked after his crews and his apprentices. It wasn't all happiness though. I did one very long voyage of thirteen months which was a bit lonely because the crews were Chinese. Even my fellow apprentice was a Chinaman, and so you imagine 13 months with just Chinese to talk to, it could be a bit lonely. As an apprentice you were neither one thing nor the other, you weren't an able seaman and you weren't an officer so you were in the middle there. And it could be a bit lonely... so, if there were four of you had a good time, but if only two and you didn't get on with your shipmate, the other apprentice, it wouldn't be so good. Thirteen months, twice round the world. I joined the ship in Singapore and called at Manila, then across the Pacific

to Honolulu, through the Panama Canal to New York, loaded up with army stores and things. And then round the Cape to Port Said through to Alexandria when Rommel was only 60 miles away, a very exciting time that was. And then from there we went to Jedda where we picked up a load of pilgrims for Singapore. Then from Singapore we went through various islands, Java and Sumatra. Then again through Thursday Island, north of Australia, across the Pacific to Honolulu then again through the Panama, that's the second time round you see, and we ended up in England. The cargoes would be scheduled weeks before. The itinerary was pretty well laid out at that time. 'Course it all altered after Singapore fell and all those ships which went out to the Far East, became under the Ministry of War transport and they went anywhere; they were practically unplanned.

"I didn't complete my four year indentures. I wanted a more adventurous life really; I was getting a bit staid by then, so I cancelled my indentures and went to sea as an able seaman. I did nearly a year and then I became Third Mate, mostly on tramp ships. I thought they were more exciting. I thought I'd go to places where I wasn't likely to go with the Blue Funnel Line. But of course I couldn't because the Ministry of War just directed us to go wherever we were needed. When I had sufficient time in port I sat for the Second Mate's certificate. I became a Second Mate, with a firm called Watts, a remote tramp concern. I went to Palermo then on to Port Said, back to Gibraltar, then to Rio, Santos, Paranagua and various other places, somewhere in the Caribbean, to Bunka, and then home again, that would be a five months voyage, the average sort of voyage then. It was probably pretty much the case until the '60s I would think. I suppose the '60s was the peak of the post-war period of the merchant service. And then it gradually declined and faded away to next to nothing.

"At sea you'd be on one of three watches, either four to eight, eight to twelve or twelve to four, day time and night time. And there was an eight hour day on watch on the bridge, rather a nice easy job really. Doing the navigation and watching at the helm and steering its proper course. A nice easy job really, but when it comes to Bristol Steam that was different altogether. Usually there were only two mates, whereas there would be three on a deep-sea ship. And we had a tight schedule; we usually did seven ports in a fortnight. So we would be loading in the day time, we'd be going round to another port for the next day. Usually it would be Bristol, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, and then from Swansea, we would have a quick dash up the Channel to Antwerp and Rotterdam. So you had a twelve hour watch every day, four to eight, eight to twelve, twelve to four divided up between the two Mates, so that was for twelve hours. And when you got to port, you'd have the loading to do, or a discharging. So you might reach Rotterdam, six o'clock in the morning and you might be on duty with perhaps a catnap until eight or nine at night. Then you'd sail and then you'd have to go on watch again. It was really quite a hard life. But I loved it. It was great. It was so busy as opposed to deep-sea ships, these small ships which varied from about 1100 tons of cargo to 1500 perhaps, you were watching the weather all the time, you didn't plough through, you had to go into shelter if you were caught in a sou'west gale. Though sometimes, if you were caught you had to plough on through it. It was never boring. You never really had

enough sleep, ever. But once you got to sea, you had two days, perhaps three days at sea and you did settle down then. We got used to it.

“When I was Mate, (of course the mate was the dogsbody on the ship), if it was my watch below, I’d have to be chasing the sailors to do a bit of painting or scraping or something like that, or rigging. It was much more democratic than on a deep-sea ship. Sometimes there was a ‘Tom, Dick and Harry attitude’ but you could be too familiar sometimes, and it didn’t always work. On these ships we had a crew of fourteen of which four would be sailors or seamen, three engineers, the captain and two mates, steward, the cook of course, a most important man. On the deep-sea ships there’d be 30-odd crew. Yes, nine sailors, three mates, captain, four engineers, stewards, donkey men, firemen. It was much more formal, it depended on the skipper a lot, some captains were free and easy, some had a natural authority. Others could be very awkward to get on with.

“Bristol Steam ran a very tight schedule on some of their runs; Dublin and back was very tight, so was the schedule of seven ports in a fortnight, to Rotterdam and Antwerp. They had a number of other ships which couldn’t be employed in the general cargo and we used to carry coal. We’d go anywhere with the coal. Could be to Ireland or France or Germany or even up in the Baltic. So that was a different life altogether, but still very interesting, new places all the time. They said “Take this cargo”, and you took it. Some of them were a bit awkward, like the voyage when I left, the *Cato*, which was my last ship on the Bristol Steam.<sup>172</sup>

“She loaded a cargo of zinc concentrate. It was very wet and we had to let all the water sink before we sailed. And it had to be pumped out from the bilges. But this particular voyage, the new skipper hadn’t been warned and as soon as *Cato* left Rotterdam, it slopped over on one side and she went over on her beam ends. This was the sort of thing, if you didn’t learn that, then you were in trouble. I think the shipper should have warned him (the captain) really. Yes. He didn’t get into trouble over it, the captain, he was completely exonerated. The skipper managed to beach her and eventually she was towed back to Rotterdam and put back in commission. There was an enquiry over it and of course the Board of Trade issued a pamphlet; that you must make sure this is pumped out, allowed to settle and be pumped out before you sail.\*\*

“Bristol was more fun than Avonmouth. We thought so. Going up the river Avon? Yeah, it was an exciting river. You could feel the tension building up with some of the skippers. You had to enter at the right time and there were so many things to consider like the traffic might be coming down or the visibility, fog, and the spring tides were pretty desperate, going up there with a four knot tide sweeping you up. And when you arrived at the Cumberland Basin, you’d have to get into that narrow little lock. And if you didn’t you’d be

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<sup>172</sup> *Cato* was sunk in 1963, see above, p.100



carried beyond - which occasionally happened. It was exciting, but when you're young you really quite enjoy a bit of excitement. All part of the job.

"If you were going to Dublin there was no compulsory pilot. But once you went abroad, continental, then you had to have a pilot unless you had a, a pilotage certificate, which you could get by passing the exam. And we all used to pass this exam. We did all our own pilotage, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea. That could also be very exciting at times. ....

"Avonmouth was full of very interesting ships; we had ships from all over the world. It didn't have such a good atmosphere as Bristol but it still had its own particular atmosphere. When I first went there it was still very much a rural port, but now it's built round. But it wasn't like that originally, it was a pleasant port to go to. Probably one of the most pleasant really in Britain I would think, for the larger ports. It was always very interesting. We knew all these ships, all the history of their companies, Ellerman's and the Port Line, and the banana boats. They were part of the scenery.

"Some ships were more social than the others. *Apollo* was the best ship in the Bristol Steam really. She ran like a liner. And we had an exceptionally nice captain there, an exceptional crew, so we did socialise a lot, especially when we got to port, we might do a bit of drinking and going ashore together. But as for spare time, there wasn't really a lot; you were catching up on sleep. It was a hard life but a jolly good life. When you were First Mate, you were thin, athletic, going about all the time; as soon as you became skipper you relaxed. You let everybody else do all the work and you just kept your eye on it and you usually grew rather fat. When I became skipper, after a couple of years I went from ten and a half stone to thirteen and a half. And I really don't know whether I would have survived had I stayed. When I came ashore and joined the dredgers, I was very quickly back to ten and a half stone which I remain to this day.

"When I left Bristol Steam, I wanted to upgrade myself again with an extra Master's certificate. That was sort of like a BSc. But unfortunately I was nearly 40 and it was really more than I could manage. I couldn't, my brain wasn't working so well then. So I was unemployed for several months. And that was pretty desperate. I couldn't get a job, an actual shore job which would have suited me, so then I thought, "Well I'll get some sort of ship under my feet again". I was determined not to go back to sea proper. My wife had been ill, and rather lost confidence for a while. She needed me ashore. And the family were growing up. I thought, "Well at least we can have some family life as well". So that was the outcome.

"Captaining a dredger was pretty awful at first. No discipline and a lot of them were set in their ways. So many of them had been there so long and you came as an absolute stranger. They all looked at you, "Who's this chap?" and tried to push you around. But after a while, you worked your way in. I managed to get myself on the *Frome*; the first five years were pretty awful, again the dogsbody, usually sent from one ship to another, doing the relieving

as the skippers went for their holidays or were sick. So that was pretty hard, the first four, five years.

“The port (Bristol) is a lot better than it was when they were running it down, the last seven or eight years when the dock walls were falling in and they were empty. The cranes were idle. It was really depressing. I couldn’t stand it anymore, that’s why I went to Avonmouth. Then they started getting the yachts here, and the *Great Britain*, and the *Balmoral* and the other paddle boat, the *Waverley*. It’s a lot better now, quite an interesting place. And the *Kaskalot*, those sailing ships which come up to A Shed.

“When the Bristol City Line boats used to come up to Bristol, the *Boston City* and the real old ones with tobacco, well you know the reputation of Pill in those days? And what a priceless place it was, I mean it was a real nautical village that, with all sorts of things going on. You’d have the Pill sailors, they’d buy things in New York and they’d put them in parcels, sew them up watertight and as they went past Pill at night, they dropped them overboard. The Pill boatmen would go out and pick them up. Then again, I don’t suppose it was anything more than cigarettes and perhaps nylons or whatever was going then. But there was always this, trying to get a few fags through and a few bottles of gin or whisky or something. But that’s not really smuggling in the real sense. Well it would be if you got caught, there would be a bit of trouble. Nothing outrageous ever. If you got caught on the continent, France or Antwerp, they used to descend on the ship and tear it apart, really give you a bad time. So you had to be very careful. Cos there’s always two ways. In Rotterdam, well it was mostly cigarettes. Some people brought watches in, Swiss watches, there was a great trade in that, I mean they were quite easy to conceal. But it wasn’t large scale. We occasionally had a stowaway on the foreign going ships, but never to my knowledge in the Bristol Steam. There was one man used to take brides over to America after the war in a Bristol City boat! Some girl that had been left behind by her G.I. boyfriend wanted to get out there. A steward, he was one of the ones that got caught. He kept her in his cabin all the way over and got her into America okay but once she got ashore, she boasted how she made it. The police traced it back to this steward and he very quickly got the poke from the Bristol City Line. And he ended up with us in the Bristol Steam. Very interesting story at the time; I think it happened just before I was on the *Boston City*, about 1949, or perhaps ‘47 or ‘48.<sup>173</sup>

“Deep-sea, Singapore, Hong Kong were fascinating, New York, completely different. Rather a lonely place. I enjoyed going to New York but I never really made any friends there. I’ve been to Manhattan, the loneliness of it all. You did feel a stranger in New York, you know. Halifax was an interesting place during the war. I saw a lot. I didn’t just sit aboard like some did. I climbed Table Mountain when I went to Cape Town. I went up country in Malaya when I had a chance. I found Rio, Santos and Paranagua fascinating; these South American ports.





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<sup>173</sup> I can’t prove this one, but it was by no means unique. A short trawl through the pages of the WDP revealed at least three Bristol girl stowaways who crossed the Atlantic. (7.1.1946, 25.6.1947, 2.10.1947)

What else can I tell you? The Far East. Singapore or Hong Kong, well it was British then wasn't it? You felt at home there. Lisbon or Cadiz or any Spanish port were very easy-going, you know. Rotterdam was a lovely place. Nice people. Antwerp too. The French ports, like Dunkirk, weren't very friendly after the war. Up there, I went up to Rouen, and when we got alongside, usually the foreman in other ports, or the dockers, helped you strip the hatches and all the rest of it. But when I asked a French foreman if he would help us to open the hatches, he said, "Non", with an absolute, No! No help whatsoever. But on the other hand another time in Rouen, when we sailed very late at night and nearly everybody on board was drunk, including the skipper, except me, the second mate, and the engineers, everybody else absolutely incapable. (I could forgive the captain because he was leaving after that voyage for an operation, and he'd drunk too much, that's all.) But when it came to sailing time, we were in a quandary, because we had to try and keep a schedule, and there was nobody, no sailors to steer, nobody to let go of the ropes or anything. But the French pilot, when he came aboard, I told him the problem, he said, "It happens, it happens". He added "I'll help you." And he helped us pull the gangway in. He went up on the bridge on his own and handled the telegraph and the wheel while we let go. And the second mate and I steered the ship down the river on his instructions until we got to the bar, and he was a real gentleman, I wish I'd taken that pilot's name. If I ever felt 'I don't like Frenchmen all that much', I'd think of him and then I change my mind. When the captain came to, he never said a word. No, he was a good skipper. He did a lot for me, he taught me a lot. I remember him coming up on the bridge next day and we were at sea by then. And he looked and wondered how we'd got there. And of course I couldn't very well tell the sailors off 'cos they were drunk, if the skipper was also drunk. Anyway it all passed off. We very much stuck together on those ships. You did your best. You wouldn't let your skipper down whatever."

**\*\***The accident with the transport of zinc which Harry describes as happening to the *Cato* is so remarkably similar, in fact almost identical, to the sinking of the *Ino* in 1936, (see page 98) that I believe he is recounting a memory that belongs to someone else and comes from a different period. Otherwise, there is nothing in his narrative about the enormous dangers of life at sea and Harry makes no mention of the gallant action in 1955 for which he and his boat's crew of seven were awarded Royal Humane Society testimonials. Perhaps he was not even asked the question. Joe Earl tells the story of the survivors rescued from the *Johannishus* below.

Captain Harry Grenfell Mowat, M.N. died aged 89 on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011, 'beloved husband of Jeanne and much loved father of Sheila, Robert, Penny, grandfather of Ben, Tom and Sarah, Steven, Laura and Faye, Tom and Michael and great-grandfather of Anya. Greatly loved by all his family and friends.' His funeral service at St Mary's Church, Leigh Woods, was followed by cremation at Canford Crematorium.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Particulars</b></p> <p>(1) Surname <u>EARL</u><br/>(BLOCK CAPITALS)</p> <p>(2) Christian or First Names <u>JULIAN STACEY</u></p> <p>(3) Date of Birth <u>1.6.1941</u></p> <p>(4) Place of Birth <u>SHEFFIELD</u></p> <p>(5) Colour of (a) eyes <u>BLUE</u> (b) hair <u>FAIR</u></p> <p>(6) Complexion <u>FRESH</u></p> <p>(7) Height <u>5</u> ft. <u>8</u> ins.</p> <p>(8) Distinguishing Marks <u>NONE</u></p> <p>(9) Nationality—see Panel 7.</p> | <p><b>3 Photograph of Holder</b></p>  <p>M.M.O. Embossing Stamp</p> <p>Signature of Holder <u>J. Earl</u></p> | <p><b>4 Particulars—continued</b></p> <p>(10) Dis. A. No. <u>R.G.80857</u><br/>(To be entered in all cases.)</p> <p>(11) Certificates held—<br/>Grade..... No.....<br/>(including E.D.H., Ship's Cook, Lifeboat, etc.)</p> <p>(12) Rank or Rating if not a certificated Officer<br/>(if A.B. Supt. to verify and initial).<br/><u>DECK BOY</u></p> <p>(13) National Service Registration No. ....</p> <p>(14) Is holder an Armed Forces Reservist? <u>No</u><br/>(Reservists include R.N.S.R. and H.M.S. "Gordon.")</p> |
| <p><b>LEFT-HAND FINGERPRINTS</b><br/>(Plain impressions of four fingers)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p><b>THUMBS—PLAIN IMPRESSIONS</b><br/>LEFT RIGHT</p>                                                         | <p><b>RIGHT-HAND FINGERPRINTS</b><br/>(Plain impressions of four fingers)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

**Joe (Julian) Earl – to sea as a Deck Boy, aged 16**

### Joe's Story



"The *Apollo* - What a wonderful ship – built by Charles Hill and Sons at Albion Dockyard, Bristol and launched by Mrs Douglas Lovell (Owner's Wife) on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1954.

"A motor vessel, flat decked aft of short funnel, 1266 tons gross; 254 ft. 5 inches long, 39 ft. 6 inch. Beam, 13ft. 7inch. Loaded draught; 8 cylinder Polar engine giving 12.25 knots. (in a run from Dublin to Avonmouth in the 1970's she often averaged 12.66 knots on the 212 miles voyage). 89,000cu.ft. refrigerated space. A crew of 18 including the Master. Cost £250,000.

"Described as a "revolutionary type of short sea trader without cargo handling gear and cargo winches" it was said that *Apollo* and her sister ship *Echo* were ahead of their time and possibly the best coasters ever built. (They certainly were – I served as Mate and Master on both of them for many years as well as sailing on several other coasters - They were the cream; well-known and well run.) Like the *Milo* her bridge was rounded at the fore part to enable the helmsman to see more while navigating the river to Bristol. Polished wood panelling in the accommodation, single berth cabins for all hands, the Master enjoyed a whole deck to himself with bathroom, bedroom and saloon, below this deck, the fore part gave the Chief Engineer a bedroom and saloon on the starboard side with the Chief Officer on the port side; running aft were the Officers' cabins and two Owners' cabins and beyond these lay the officers' pantry and dining area. On each quarter were saloons, one of which was the Captain's/Owner's special entertaining saloon. Not long after I took over as Master, I turned it into a very successful bar.

"The crew's accommodation was below this on the main deck with a large mess room and recreation room.

"For much of her life she operated, initially with the *Milo* and later the *Echo*, the cargo liner service between the Bristol Channel and Antwerp/Rotterdam, but in her later years she was used on the Irish services.

"In the early hours of Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> June 1955, on passage from Rotterdam, *Apollo* rescued 12 of the 14 crew of the blazing Swedish tanker *Johannishus*, which had been in collision with the Panamanian freighter *Buccaneer* about 40 miles off the Dutch coast. Captain Barnes' report shows that the crew of the *Apollo* carried out a fine act of gallantry. Her lifeboat was launched with a volunteer crew, when about 500 feet off, to make their way in heavy rain, poor visibility, burning oil and drifting smoke. Chief Officer Mowat in command of the lifeboat was conspicuous for the way he handled the situation and he and his boat's crew of seven were awarded Royal Humane Society testimonials.

# Tanker crew races death

**LONDON, Thursday:** Survivors swam a race with death through a sea of fire today when the 10,788 ton Swedish Tanker, *Johannishus* collided with the Panamanian freighter *Buccaneer*, 40 miles off the Dutch coast and burst into flames.

Lifeboats and rescue ships could not get close enough to the stricken vessel to rescue men standing on the deck minutes after the collision.

They were able only to pick up 25 who braved the heavy seas and blazing, oil covered waters to swim for their lives.

Seventeen of the crew are missing.

The Ramsgate lifeboat

radioed: "The *Johannishus* is on fire from stem to stern. We cannot get in to her because of the flames."

"The very sea is on fire."

Two United States Air Force amphibians circled the rescue ships and a helicopter stood by at Manston, Kent.

A small fire broke out on the *Buccaneer*, but quickly was quelled.

She is believed to be making for Rotterdam at reduced speed.

A.A.P.

[The Swedish oil tanker *Johannishus* loaded with several thousand tons of crude oil collided 25 nautical miles off the *Goodwin Sands* on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1955 with the smaller, also oil-laden Panamanian tanker *Buccaneer*.

With the *Johannishus* hit on the port side, the escaping oil ignited and set both ships on fire. The fire on the *Buccaneer* was extinguished after about two hours and she was able to proceed to the nearest port. The fire continued to rage aboard the stricken

Swedish ship. Twenty one men and one woman were rescued by other ships – 12 of them by *Apollo* - but reports state that twenty one other crew members were killed and another died shortly afterwards on land. Seven hours after the collision, the Ramsgate lifeboat station reported that there was no longer any possibility for other survivors.]

"I joined the Bristol Steam Navigation Co. as A.B. on the *Cato* on 7th. January, 1962. Shortly after, I decided to sit for my Mate's Home Trade certificate so I left on 12<sup>th</sup> May that year (the *Cato* was sunk later that month) to attend the Welsh College of advanced technology.

"I passed part of my `ticket` and returned to sea as A.B. aboard the *Milo* for a while to save up some cash, and eventually passed and gained my full certificate on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1962.

"I was now well on the way to an ambition which was to become a Master with the Bristol Steam Nav. and try to achieve it before the age of 30.

"However I could not apply for an officer's berth (with B.S.N.C.) without officer experience so I joined the mv. *Uskport* as 3rd. mate, running deep sea with phosphates from Casablanca. Then I found an opportunity to join a coaster as 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate, the ss. *Leicesterbrook* – a steam ship belonging to Comben Longstaffs. On the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1963 the Mate became ill after drinking out of a bottle of cleaning fluid after a night ashore – he thought it was lemonade as someone had put it in a lemonade bottle, so I was promptly promoted 1st Mate.

“After a few months there, I paid off and took some leave (we were due 23 days per year at that time) then took the opportunity to return to the Shipping Federation waving my discharge book and pressing the point that I had sailed as 1<sup>st</sup> Mate and insisting I ship out again as 1<sup>st</sup> Mate although I was only just 22 years old.

“So I was sent to Cardiff to be interviewed by the owners of the ss. *Rudry* who seemed quite impressed, so I signed on as Chief Officer aboard this rusty old steamer under the auspices of Captain Garfield Howells from Swansea – he had quite a fondness for the bottle, consequently I rapidly gained experience in ship-handling, dealing with ship chandlers, accounting and drawing the wages and a hundred and one other things that the Master usually does. Especially as we were on foreign-going articles running down to through the Bay of Biscay taking coal down to places like Bordeaux, Saint Nazaire, Bayonne also Santander (with pitch from Newcastle) and then usually returning with grain.

“I paid off for Christmas and was then able to return to B.S.N.C. as an officer with experience – that’s how I came to join the *Apollo* as 3rd Mate in 1964.

“Reconstructed as a container ship in the autumn of 1968 in Rotterdam, *Apollo* was lengthened by 24 ft. and hydraulic McGregor hatch covers fitted, her new capacity being 72 by 20 I.S.O. containers.

“I was there at the time and remember working out the new stability tables required with the extra weight and ballast tanks etc.

“The work was completed in December and she started sailings on the Irish service on January 1969.

“She was, in 1976, the last vessel to use the original lock out of the Old Dock at Avonmouth opened by the *Juno* in 1887. This occurred in the evening in the dark, and I was requested to switch on all floodlights for a newspaper photograph which turned out well.

“Entering the Avonmouth Docks during a 60 mph gale in November 1977, *Apollo*’s engines failed and she hit the entrance pier. Again I was Master – although I was, of course, ultimately responsible it was just one of those things – we had been through some atrocious weather returning from Dublin, normally on reaching King Road off Avonmouth I would slow down, stem the tide (for maximum control) and perhaps stop engines while awaiting the signal to enter the locks. On this occasion however the locks were ready, so as I approached Avonmouth in severe gale force winds, I swung the vessel hard a’port away from the entrance took a round turn to give me sea room and place the Westerly wind directly astern to minimise lateral drift and proceeded between the piers before stopping the engines to reduce speed. Shortly after, all I required was a touch ‘dead slow’ ahead on the engines to ‘kick’ her to port and into the locks.





***Captain Joe Earl with (damaged) Apollo***



“There was no response from the engine when I gave the order, except the whooshing sound of escaping air indicating I had no engine movement. The vessel missed the lock entrance and ploughed head on into the granite wall on the starboard side of the lock sustaining damage to our bow and also the quay wall. The ship’s stern then fell heavily to port due to the wind, causing damage to the ships side 3ft. below the belting on the port quarter. We managed to warp the vessel into the locks whereupon I conversed with my Chief Engineer Dennis Hyde, he informed me that the engines failed due to a fractured air pipe probably caused by the pounding the ship suffered on our way home from Dublin, (the crack was in a copper/brass pipe within a nut that secured it to the air start mechanism, therefore undetectable until he tried to restart the engine.)

“We decided to convey the offending pipe to the shipyard adjacent to the locks and have it repaired with all possible speed. After explaining the situation to Jeffries Ship repair men, they braised and annealed the pipe immediately.

“The engines repaired, we left the locks for the berth with the wind (according to the Dock master) of 45 knots, we reached ‘N’ berth in the Old Dock with no further incidents. Nobody was hurt. There was a lovely photo of me standing by the bow damage, requested and taken by the local Evening Post, I was not particularly amused – it had been a long couple days since we left Dublin.

“The damaged fore peak water ballast tank was filled with cement as a temporary repair until such times we could be pulled out of our schedule for dry dock to effect repairs.

“I understood later, that we had a free dry-docking under insurance which proved to be beneficial in a number of ways.

“On Monday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1979, at about 1900 hours we sailed from Cork on passage to Avonmouth the forecast gave us force 5/6 but further South the forecast that midday warned of 6/8 SW or Westerly winds. But something was wrong; it didn’t feel right. I went below to see the Chief Engineer and asked to give us all possible speed.

“By 2000 hours the wind speed had reached 30 knots the seas were building up and pushing us ahead, by midnight it was a full storm force 10 - my ship was very difficult to steer due to the heavy following seas pushing us on the stern and quarters.

“This was the night of the Fastnet yacht race which claimed 15 lives and 23 lost or abandoned boats. The terrible thing was I could hear all the distress signals broadcast from the yachts astern of me but not a thing I could do, it was too dangerous for me to turn about and even if I did I wouldn’t have made any headway in those seas – I would have just been hove to.



“Laid up at Newport following the closure of the Bristol Steam services in April 1980, *Apollo* was sold in the July to the Anna Martina Shipping Company, Caicos Islands. She was last reported in 1982, up the Amazon with defective machinery.

“I joined the *Apollo* in the first instance on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 1964 as Third Mate under Captain Barnes. I gained my Master’s Home Trade Passenger Ships Certificate on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1965.

“I remained with the company until I was made redundant 17 years later.

“Of course I sailed at some time on all of the company’s ships, being Mate of the *Milo* for about three years tramping around, also the *Pluto* and *Juno* on the Dublin run, the *Hero* and *Dido*, but then Mate, relief Master of the *Echo*. (I first became Captain of the *Echo* on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1971 – two days before my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday thus achieving my ambition) until being made permanent Master of the *Apollo* on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1975.”



***M.V. Apollo 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1964.***

### ***The Final word***

..... goes to “Colin K.” who sailed on the last *Sappho* in 1965, so we end as we began:

“I served on the *Sappho*<sup>174</sup>, (built at Goole in 1945 and then named *Falster*). A ship with no deck gear whatsoever, just a windlass for the anchor: no gyro compass, just a magnetic one on the monkey island, viewed through a periscope in front of the helmsman in the wheelhouse below. Four trips, 12<sup>th</sup> June to 13<sup>th</sup> December 1965, signing off and on again each time. A very eventful and eye-opening period of my sea-going life, my one and only venture into the world of coasting. We worked a 5 hours on, 5 hours off system of watch keeping, only four of us on deck, and when in port the jenny was switched off around 10 p.m. We had paraffin lamps on gimbals in our cabins and mess room. In that short time I sailed on her we were broached by a following sea around the Lizard and both accommodation doors were burst open, flooding straight down the ladders into our cabins, port and starboard, very messy indeed. Also at one time we ceased almost all forward motion due to the sea hitting us harder head on than the engine could cope with. I left the wheel with the lights of Torbay on our port bow and five hours later resumed my trick at the wheel and the view was the same. So we took shelter in Torbay harbour till the weather

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<sup>174</sup> A previous *Sappho*, 1951-53, was sold to Comben Longstaff and renamed *Kentbrook*; she ran aground and sank four miles south of Aldeburgh in 1954.

abated! We also ended up on a mud bank up one of the continental rivers when steaming up it at night. I was helmsman; the pilot disappeared down below, leaving the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate in charge but he failed to appear in time to alter course around one of the bends, the Mate didn't seem to know what to do and as I didn't want a broken wrist, I stepped back from the wheel on point of impact. It was a good job I did; that wheel would have done some damage the way it spun back and forth. Suddenly the bridge was alive with people, stop engine, etc. We had to wait till daylight for tugs to pull us off. We got away with it cos once re-floated we just went about our business. There were no recriminations and I wasn't even asked to testify as to what happened. I bet the Mate took the flak for that one. As she was sold in '66 maybe nobody cared much about her anymore? The saga goes on: she had derricks at some stage in her life, but during my time they were all gone, as were the deck winches; after a cargo of coal from Wales to the Continent we often had to hose out the holds clean enough for a cargo of grain back to Avonmouth (!) and bucket and hand-line anything that the bilge couldn't take care of, up out of the hold. She was hard work in that respect, plus she never had a self-stowing anchor locker so there we were with river mud dropping on our heads, stowing the chain with long hooks. Happy Days.

"There was still one final drama awaiting us. Me and one of the Welsh lads were busy fitting the hatch boards alongside in Newport in heavy rain when he missed his footing and fell to the bottom of the empty hold! He survived but the court case pursued me for years after I went back deep-sea; even after I came ashore for good in the summer of '70. In fact the case was set May '71. Eventually I gave my evidence "in camera" in London as by then I was employed ashore. I often wonder what the outcome was. I remember his name was Alan Alderman. All so long ago now.

"There are lots more. I could probably write a small book on that ship alone.

Cheers,

Colin K."

How I wish Colin had written that book!



***Coming home – Low tide at Pill – author’s photograph***

### **Glossary**

#### **On the Bridge:**

The Captain & other officers when not occupied elsewhere.

#### **On Deck:**

Boy: a young seaman used as needed on deck or in the galley.

Ordinary Seaman: a relatively inexperienced hand.

AB: Experienced “able-bodied” seaman.

The Boatswain: pronounced “Bo’sun”, the senior crewman on deck. Responsible for maintenance of hull, anchor, cables etc.

The Boatswain’s Mate: assisting the Bo’sun as directed; painting etc.

The Quartermaster: who supervised the stores and distributed provisions.

The Carpenter: maintenance of equipment as required

In the Engine Room:

The Engineer: an officer in charge of the other members of “the black gang” in the engine room. He maintained the engines and ensured they were working properly.

The Fireman: also known as a stoker, worked below deck in the engine room, shovelling coal into the furnaces to make the steam to keep the ship moving and stoked the boiler; a tough hot job.

The Donkeyman: in charge of a donkey, a small steam-engine, usually for subsidiary operations on board ship, such as feeding the boilers of the propelling engines or pumping.

A Trimmer: a man who ensured the bunkers close to the stokehold/boiler room were kept filled with coal to enable the firemen to feed the furnaces to fire the ship efficiently. The fires would have to be cleaned periodically, raking out ash, clearing out stone residue to enable them to draw properly. He would also “blow” soot to clear the flues and was required to keep the ship in trim – “Shipshape and Bristol Fashion”. A trimmer might progress to become a fireman.

A Greaser: maintained and greased the moving parts of the engine.

In the Galley:

The Cook: self-explanatory, a most important person aboard, though there was no officially designated cook aboard *Sappho*; in his absence the vital task of feeding the crew may have been carried out by The Steward.

**Notes, Abbreviations & Sources:**

BFMS: Marcus Bateman’s ‘Index of British Fishermen/Merchant Seamen taken prisoner of war, 1914-1918’. The men are usually recorded with one initial of their first name and surname, the name of the ship and other information when available. Merchant Seamen and Fishermen were classed as “civilians” and interned in Germany with businessmen, students and tourists in Ruhleben and other camps. Unlike the Gloucester men, who with one exception were from one ship, ss. *Sappho*, the Bristol seamen were scattered about in a variety of vessels, and were therefore more difficult to pin down.

Most of the interned seamen will be found in BFMS. The Bristol seamen POWs are listed under “Bristol Mercantile Roll of Honour” in the Western Daily Press newspaper in three tranches 8.10.1917, (RH<sub>a</sub>), 11.10.1917, (RH<sub>b</sub>) and 16.10.1917 (RH<sub>c</sub>). For the others I have relied on the dedicated website “The Ruhleben Story” (TRS). The vast majority of those

named in this account were held at the Ruhleben POW Camp unless otherwise stated. For simplification I have listed the seamen first.

TRS: A website "The Ruhleben Story, 1914-1918" is an on-going project of Chris Paton, which contains the names (many with biographical details) of 2,083 of the 5,500 prisoners interned in the camp and much, much more. [christopherpaton@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:christopherpaton@tiscali.co.uk)

The article "Cabbage Soup Again" by Elgin Strub-Ronayne is in "Centenary News 1914-1918" dated 10 February 2014. [www.centenarynews.com/article?id+1446](http://www.centenarynews.com/article?id+1446)

The information on individual ships comes from "British Merchant Ships lost, damaged & attacked, 1914-1915" by Dr Graham Watson. Other information comes from Births, Marriages and Death registers, censuses, and the indispensable local papers, mainly the Western Daily Press, and those of Gloucester, variously the Journal, the Citizen, the Chronicle and the Gazette. Other newspapers are as cited in the footnotes.

The Merchant Navy ID photo shots are reproduced by kind permission of the National Archives Office.

I have adapted 'Harry's story' from a tape recording made by the playwright ACH Smith in conversation with Captain Harry Mowat, ca. 2000/1 when he was researching for the play "Up the Feeder, Down the Mouth and Back Again," an electrifying event produced at Bristol Old Vic in 2001. The tape is held under ref. OH10.2 at Bristol Museum Galleries & Archives and also appears in full on-line. The exploits concerning Bristol's famed Banana Boats were well chronicled in that production, though not that reported 13 October 1948, more unusual than most, when the ss. *Carina* docked at Avonmouth with a mixed bag of passengers: the West Indies Cricket Team captained by John Goddard *en route* to India, five survivors of a shipwreck and nine Jamaican stowaways. Those shipwrecked were aboard the *Loch Monar*, wrecked on a reef off Cuba during a hurricane. The stowaways were arrested and taken into custody.

The definitive story of Bristol's steam is still to be told, but as I am fast running out of time, and adhering to the maxim that 'the best is the enemy of the good' I present this short account in the interim. 'Worse things', as they say, 'happen at sea'.

BMe: Bristol Mercury

GJ: Gloucester Journal

GCit: Gloucester Citizen

GChr: Gloucester Chronicle

GGaz: Gloucester Gazette

WDP: Western Daily Press. To avoid unnecessary repetition the press reports come from this newspaper unless otherwise stated.

MM: Merchant Marine

MN: Merchant Navy

### Acknowledgements:

With Grateful thanks.....to David Asprey who passed me on to Mike Dowsing who gave permission for the use of his photograph of ss. *Sappho*. Mike's maternal grandfather Captain Gregory served aboard *Sappho* though not when she was interned; he was later Master of the 'new' *Cato*, which replaced the ship tragically lost in 1899. A brief biography appears in the text.

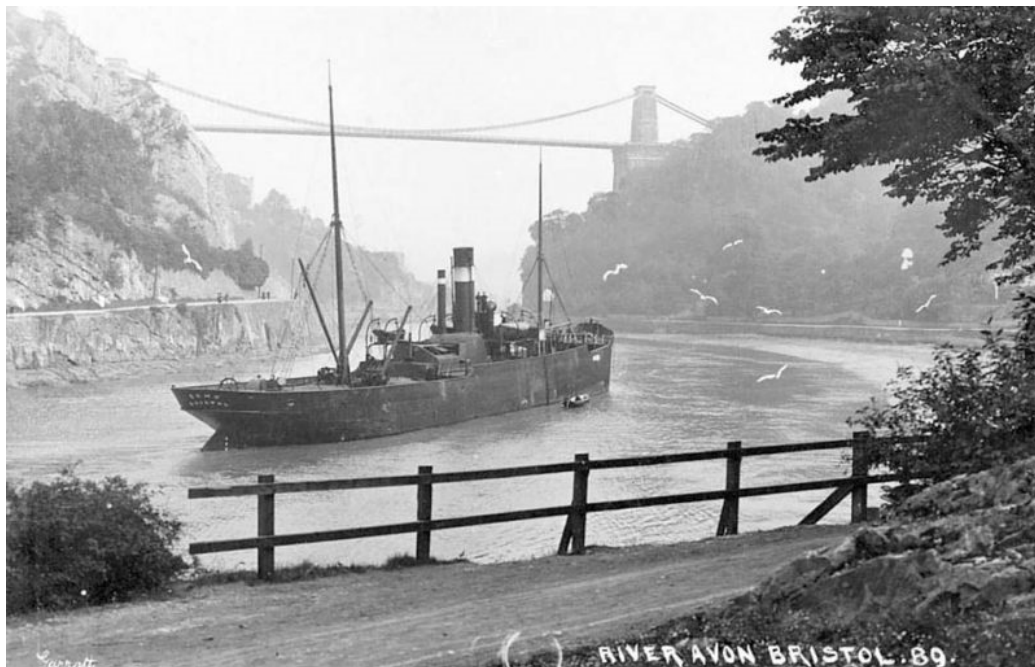
To Andrew Longridge, for his kindness in sharing with me the photographs of his grandparents Oscar & Louie Watts, the ship's company of *Sappho*, and the two teams, cooks and footballers. These photos remain Andrew's copyright. Oscar is also recalled by Rose Hewlett in her booklet 'Frampton Remembers'.

To Duncan Mackenzie II, of Fowey, grandson of Duncan of the *Sappho*.

To all those anonymous mariners who shared their experiences 'on-line' including Joe Earl, of 'Joe's Verses'.

To all those long-dead anonymous newspaper 'hacks' who reported the comings and goings of our little ships over so many years.

And always, to NAFL (George) with love.



**The ss. *Echo*, built 1891, sank February 1923 in a collision at sea, when returning Hamburg-Gloucester**



## Index of Names

- Airey, Capt. James, 92  
Aish, Marj, 66  
Aitken: John Burford, 28, 33, 35, 46, 50; Sidney, Capt W., Mary E., family, 5, 35; Mrs Ada Aitken, nee Stitfall, 36  
Alderman, Alan, 120  
Aldridge, Ambrose, 35,55; C.W.,28, 34, 35, 46, 55; Mrs C.W.,nee, Sophia Cameron, 35; Constance, 55  
Anderson, E. 95, 99  
Andrew, Sidney J, & Hilda, 100  
Apiel, J, 99  
Argent, Louise, 50  
Appleby, Chas, 39  
Ashman, Mr, Mayor, 19  
Atherton, Capt. D.H., 27  
Atwell, Rachel, mother of David James, 58, family, 58  
Austin, Capt. T. 96, 97  
Babb, Capt. 26  
Bailey, Marwood, 5. 71,72  
Baker, Albert, 92; Capt. 26  
Baldwin (Bolerin), F. 5, 45, 62; James, 62;, Joshua, 62  
Barnes, Capt. 113, 118  
Barnicutt, Harry, 46  
Bateson, Mr, 22  
Beedie, Hugh, 101  
Bennett, Capt, 26; Fredk Hy, 39, 54  
Blake, Wendy, 52  
Bland, Jn, 36  
Blatchford, H.M. 85  
Blick, Chas, 81, E.T. or S, 80  
Blight, Mr 46  
Bloomer, Steve, 61  
Bowditch, Robt, 28, 32-34, 36 56; family 33; Mrs Jane, nee Flatherty, 33  
Boyce, F.R. 91; S., 28  
Brasington, And, 38  
Bray, Capt, 53  
Brehards, G. R. 61, s.o. Wm & Ellen, 61  
Briggs, George, 85; Thos, 5, 64, 84, 85, 95, 100, 101  
Brinkworth, F, 51  
Broom, William, 20, 22  
Bryant: Wm, 6, 45, 68  
Burnham, Wm, 84  
Burns, "Paddy", T. 99  
Butterworth: Wm Frank, 5, 36, 46, 50; family, 36; Mrs Elsie Grace, nee White, 36, Campbell, John, 84  
Carey: A.V, 6, 70; family, 70, Capt. Frank, 83  
Carter, John, 59; family, 59  
Chidgey, E.W.,27  
Christensen, Alexr, 92  
Church, F, 23  
Clarke, J, 80  
Clemens, Harry, 46  
Cole(s), Albert Bosnia, 100; Alfred,10,13,14, 17, 21, 22; Alfred James, 25; Eliza, 25; Mrs, 16  
Cook, Jn, 37  
Cornelius, Wm, 100-101; Lily, 102  
Cosford, Sidney, 102  
Cosgrove: L, 6, 66  
Cottell/Cotele, J.S., 61, 62; fam 61  
Cousins, family, 37, Mary, 38  
Cox, Leslie, 101  
Croucher, Dr, 99  
Daniels, Ernest, 6, 28, 34, 38, 46, 50-53; Thomas, 38; Mrs Edith Laura, nee Hillman, 38, 52; family, 38, 52  
Davies, R, 27; W, 6  
Davis, Louisa, 38, 39; Thomas, 34, 37, 46, 55; family 37, 39; James  
Kitchener, 39; Jellicoe French, 39  
Deane, Dr, 99  
Delmer, Fredk Sefton, 33, 56  
Dimsford, E, 91  
Drummond, Daniel, 9-11, 13-15, 18; family, 18,  
Dudgeon, Capt. 104  
Dugay, Charles, 6, 71  
Duthorne/Duthie, Dani/David, 85  
Dyer, J, 79  
Earl, Capt. Joe, 104, 112, 113-118  
Eastaway, Thos, 78, 79  
Eden, Anth. & Tim, 53  
Eles, Pierre, 66  
Eilertson, Willie, 28  
Elfstrom, Oscar,10,11,13, 19, 23; Alice,18,19,20,22; family, 19  
Ellery, Capt Jos, 64; family 64  
Ellis, Ivor, 96, 97  
England, Jas. 79  
Evans, Harold, 16; Thos, 27  
Fatinga, D, 92  
Fernandez, R. 99  
Fisher, Richd, 10, 13, 22, 24  
Fitzpatrick, Chas, 98,99; Henry J, 10,13, 21,24; family, 24; Mrs, 16  
Flaherty, Thos, 33  
Flower, Fred, 65, Mrs (Fanny) 65  
Foley, Ted, 105  
Fortune, Fred, 56, 72-73; family 72; Mrs Edith (Stone) 72-73  
Fryatt, Capt, 67  
Furlong, Capt. P, 85, 88  
Francis, John F.P, 10, 13, 17; family, 17  
Fryer, Caroline, 71,  
Fuggle, Albert, 27  
Gallop, Walt, 59, Isabella, 59, family, 59, Mrs Beatrice, nee Hampton, 59  
Gerrish, Walter H, 8, 9; family: Ida, 9, Kate, 9  
Gibbons, George, 89  
Girling, Harriett, 101  
Goodchild, Geo, 69  
Gould, A.91  
Green, Jn Wm., 31  
Greenway, Capt.T., 51  
Gregory, Capt. John, 28-30, 77, 92-93, fam. 92  
Griffey, H. 68

Griffin, Edwd, 6, 31, 34, 46, 56; family, 31-32,  
 Griffiths, Dr., 15  
 Guidrey, Arth, 73-74, Richd, 73-74, Mrs Vi, 74  
 Gunney, William, 10, 13, 18; family, 18  
 Harewell, Geo, 37  
 Harris, Denis, 101; Trevor, 96  
 Hawke, Lord, 17  
 Hendy, Walter, 101; Clara, 101  
 Hennessey, Sidney, 100, Emily, 100  
 Hiatt, Mr/Mrs, 16  
 Hickey, Wm, 101  
 Hill, Chas. & Sons, 33, 112, Mr, 20  
 Hillman, Edith L, 38; Henry, 38; Richd, 39  
 Hodge, G., 39  
 Holm, B. 92; Wm & Martha, 37  
 Hosking, Jn, 46  
 House, Ernest, 84  
 Howells, Capt. Garfield, 115  
 Huda, Athar, 82  
 Hunt Capt. Thos. G. 81;  
 Lilian & Victor, 53  
 Hyde, Denis, 117  
 Hyman, Wm Colston, 85  
 Innes, G.O., 39  
 Irwin, T, 97  
 Jackson, A, 16; J.N, 62; (family) 62  
 Jago, Alfred, 67; Mrs Florence, & fam 67  
 James, A, 6; Alf, 62; D. 6; David 62; Rose, 37  
 Jamiel ----, 92  
 Jarman, Mr Chris.16, 17, 41  
 Jarvis, W.G. 91  
 Jenkins, Capt. 7, 93, 104;  
 I.J., 91; Matilda, 29, 49; family, 29, 30, 49;Myfanwy, 30; Capt. Wm, 28,29, 35, 46, 49; Mrs, nee Eliz Rees, 29, David, 79  
 Jennings, George, 42  
 Johnson, R.J. 91

Jolliffe, H, 91  
 Jones, E, 6, 68; Fred G. 82; W & T, 63; (Mrs Elsie Jones, nee Parker, 63.  
 Jozaffe, U, 92  
 Kavanagh, M, 99  
 Kayser, Alfred, 100-102,  
 Kearon, Kath. 92  
 Kelway, Mr, 16  
 Keogh, Wm, 99  
 Kinch, Anna, 92  
 Kinshome, (Kenshole) Dan, 84  
 Lambert, Wilf, 20  
 Lavis, J, 79  
 Lawrence, Chas, 68, J, 6, 34; Wm John Roan 40, 46, 53; family, 40, 53;Mrs Hannah Lawrence, nee Anderson, 53.  
 Letchworth Edw, 76  
 Lewis, Edw. 76  
 Llewellyn, Capt. 104  
 Leonard, Joseph, 46, 47, 55, 95; family, 47  
 Lockett, Alfred, 13; Edwin, 10,11,12,15,18,98; family, 13, 23,24; Harry,9,10-15, 22; Mrs Eliza,18  
 Lodge, Richd, 50; Thos, 50  
 Longridge, And. 54  
 Lovell, Mrs Douglas, 112  
 Lucas, Mr, 9  
 Lundgren, August, 9,10,13, 20  
 Mahomed, Moharren, 26  
 Makepeace, Sam, 6, 59, 65;  
 Mrs Mary (Deacon) & fam, 66  
 Marsh, F, 99  
 Marshman,---, 22  
 Martin, Capt. 91; Capt. Richd. 74, 100  
 Matthews,Herbert, G, 89;  
 James H. 89  
 Mauley, Capt.Thos, 26  
 May, Shirley, 96; Thos, 95, 96  
 McGibbon, John, 82  
 McKenzie, Duncan, 28, 46, 47, 53-4; Mrs Emily, nee

Houghton, 47; family, 47, 53; Capt. 68  
 Meadows, George, 6, 28, 33, 34, 39, 46, 48, 54; Emily nee Gough, Mrs Meadows, 39, 54, family 39  
 Merryweather, --, 89  
 Midlane, Capt. G.J. 98, 99; Berta, 99; Naomi,99  
 Milton, O, 77  
 Mitchell, Willie, C, 92  
 Moore, Wm, 10, 13-14, 20; Mrs, 18  
 Morley, Capt. T, 33  
 Mowat, Capt. Harry G. 105-111, 113  
 Mundy, J, 80,  
 Murphy, Capt. 104  
 Murray, James, 84, 95  
 Mutton, F.F, 47  
 Neale, S. 99  
 Neil, D. 6; Capt. Hy D. 63  
 Nelson, Chas, 96  
 New, Geo & Ellen, 42  
 Newbury, Capt. A.F. 91  
 Nichols, J, 99  
 Noble, Miss, 16  
 O'Brien, Wm, 68  
 Oswald, T, 16  
 Owen(s), Capt. 90; Capt. Henry Arthur, 84; David, 81; Capt. W.A, 27, 28,  
 Oxford, W, 65  
 Parker, Henry, 27; Mary E.,5  
 Parsons, Arth,15; Chas, 45  
 Paskey, A. 27  
 Patnelli, E. 96, 97  
 Payne, Capt. 101; Thos, 79  
 Peard, Jn, 47  
 Pigg, R (F), 76, 77  
 Pike, Thos, 79  
 Pedersen/Petersen, C, 6;  
 Percy, 43; Peter Jens, 41;  
 Theodore Oscar, 28,34, 41; family 41,42,43, 48; Mrs Jens, nee Alice Pullin, 43  
 Pemberton, C.G. 66  
 Pentland, Fred B. 61  
 Pendulton,E.G., 6  
 Pellervel/Pennell, Gerard, 85

Petterson, W.F. 91  
 Pettey, Doris nee Buck, 75  
 Phillips, Enos, 68  
 Pow, Chas.M. 6, 31, 57;  
 family, 57  
 Price, Billie, 68; Thos, 68  
 Prickett, Mr, 16  
 Priday Louise (Mrs Watts)  
 55  
 Quick, F., T., 99  
 Radcliffe, Mr, 20  
 Ramsay, Capt, 15, 17  
 Redwood, J. 99  
 Rees, Thos, 80;, Wm, 30  
 Richards, G, 6; Capt. 69  
 Rideout, Flo, 63burnham  
 Roach, E.J. 23  
 Rodda, Thomas, 9,10,13,16,  
 20, 25; Jane, 25.  
 Rose, Jn, 37  
 Rowles, Fred, 39  
 Rutland Walter, 6, 35,68,  
 82; fam, 68  
 Savage, Ephraim, 68  
 Scarodines, N, 99  
 Scotland, R, 28, 37  
 Scott, George H. 100; R.F,  
 52; Winifred, 100  
 Sealey, G, 96, 97  
 Searle, Alice (Mrs Elfstrom)  
 19  
 Seaville, Edwd, 80, Lily, (nee  
 Denford) 80, Wm, 80.  
 Shambrook, E.W. 6  
 Shiels, Chas, 100  
 Short, C.B. 6, 69; Mrs  
 Rosina, 70; family, 70  
 Sims, Albert, 27  
 Smart, David, 64  
 Smith, A.J., 26; Benj., 82;  
 Capt. 26; J.,96, 97  
 Sollvar, W. 91  
 Spencer, Estella & Fredk, 53  
 Star, Capt. 83; Leonard G,  
 77-80, 81  
 Steadman, Ralph, 32, 74-75  
 Stephens, (Wm) Henry,  
 10,13,16,22; family, 24;  
 Gordon, 47  
 Steward/Stewart, Alex, 28,  
 45, 46

Stitfall, Alice, Hannah, 36  
 Taton, Owen, 85, 87, 88, 89;  
 family, 87, 88  
 Taylor, Benj. 37  
 Thomas, Alice, 79, Thos, 75,  
 Capt. Wm, 12,16  
 Thorley, C. 99  
 Townsend, Edwd, 39  
 Travell, Albert, 10, 13, 21;  
 family, 24; Mrs Harriet, nee  
 Green, 24; Mrs Kate, 24  
 Tuitt, T, 92  
 Vale/Veale, H, 6, 58  
 Varcoe, --, 16  
 Vine, Stanley, 97, 98, 99  
 Vowles J. 98, 99  
 Warren, Geo H, 81  
 Wathan/Wathen Fanny, 62,  
 Wm, 30, W.J. 53, fam 62  
 Watkins, Geo T. 35  
 Watts, Oscar Hubert, 6, 32,  
 34, 44, 46, 54, 55; E., 28,  
 Mrs Watts,40, 54; family 40  
 Wayman, E, 28  
 Webb, A, 28; F, 28  
 Weir,Capt., 26  
 West Fred, 9-10, 13,16, 17;  
 Mrs, 16, 18; Edwy, 16;  
 family, 17-18  
 White, Ernest Dilke, 95, 100,  
 101; Ethel, 101, Fawcett,  
 96; H.W.76  
 Whiteway, Thos, 39  
 Whyatt, Walter, G, 9, 10-  
 26,80; Ann Eliza, (nee  
 Hitchcock) 9-11, 25;family,  
 25  
 Wicklen, Capt. Nath. 68, 82;  
 Gertrude, 82  
 Wiggins, G. 6; Geo Hy, 49;  
 James, 28, 34, 39, 45, 46,  
 48, 49; Jemima, 39  
 Wilde, W.M., 80  
 Wilkins, Ethel, 38  
 Williams, Capt, 26; G., 28,  
 Harriette, & fam, 66; Henry  
 Hect, 60; family, 60 , Sam,  
 76  
 Wiltshire/Wilshire, G, 76  
 Witchell, S., 27

Wixon, J.T., 96, 97, Blanche,  
 97  
 Woodward, Dr, (Bishop of  
 Bristol) 102  
 Wright, Fred, 96, 97; Tom,  
 97  
 Wyburn, John, 85  
 Yates, A, 95  
 Young, Harold, 101, Capt.  
 John, 8

### **Catalogue of the ships**

Addington, 58  
 Alecto, 95, 96, 97, 101  
 Aline, 80  
 Apollo, 8, 37, 61, 104, 109,  
 118  
 Ardgarrow, 98  
 Argo, 16, 23, 61, 80, 81-3,  
 88  
 Arklow, 90  
 Ashton, 28  
 Balmoral, 110  
 Bayonne, 13  
 Beatrice Hannah, 39  
 Ben Lomond, 80  
 Bivouvac, 23,36  
 Boston City, 110  
 Britannia, 90  
 Brooklyn City, 88  
 Buccaneer, 113-114  
 Cambria, 90  
 Capito, 103  
 Carina, 123  
 Carrie, 46, 47  
 Cato, 8, 9, 10-26, 77, 80,  
 92,93,100, 101,103, 105,  
 108,114  
 Changuinola, 64  
 Chicago City, 90  
 Christopher Thomas, 35, 36  
 City of Belfast, 6,7, 47, 58,  
 60  
 City of Berlin, 5, 6  
 City of Brooklyn, 105  
 City of Cadiz, 6, 47, 60, 61  
 City of Munich, 5, 62, 63  
 Clan Graham, 15,16  
 Clara Zelke, 73  
 Coimbro, 84  
 Constance, 23, 80

Czarita, 60  
 Dartwen, 6, 63, 64  
 Date Tree, 96  
 Dido, 8, 104, 118  
 Drummond Castle, 87  
 Echo, 8, 23, 35, 65, 84, 85,  
 89, 104, 112, 113, 118  
 Enid, 90  
 Elton, 14  
 Eskmore, 82  
 Falster, 119  
 Fanny, 39  
 Fernbrook, 62  
 Fernfield, 97  
 Findhorn, 90  
 Formidable (TS) 72  
 Franz Fischer, 8  
 Frome, 109  
 Glen Menzies, 33  
 George Fisher, 57  
 George Moore, 79  
 Gloucester City, 25, 33  
 Hero, 8, 30, 33, 104  
 Homer, 68  
 Inkula, 6  
 Ino, 8, 38, 40, 41, 57, 68, 90,  
 97, 98, 99, 103  
 Iron Acton, 36  
 Islander, 61  
 Jersey City, 33  
 Johannishus, 113-114  
 John, 26  
 Juno, 8, 25, 36, 57, 58, 63,  
 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 88, 103,  
 115,  
 Kansas City, 58  
 Kaskalot, 110  
 Kennebee, 100  
 Lady Tregidor, 39  
 Lepretto, 99

Lighter No. 8; 38  
 Liscannor, 58  
 Lizzie Wilce, 47  
 Llandaff City, 25  
 Loch Monar, 123  
 Lynfield, 64  
 Magnet, 40  
 Majestic (HMS) 102  
 May Scott, 5, 64, 95  
 Mecklenburg, 63  
 Merrimac, 18, 38  
 Melito, 103  
 Milo, 27, 69, 81, 88, 103,  
 104, 113, 114, 118  
 Montreal City, 91, 101  
 Mount Temple, 65  
 New York City, 97  
 Nicoya, 6, 65, 66  
 Nigel, 58  
 Niger, 16  
 Ontario, 62  
 Orange Nassau, 45, 68  
 Orion, 6  
 Paersum, 90  
 Palace Kingston, 37  
 Peerless, 55  
 Pendennis, 67  
 Plavnik, 95, 97  
 Pluto, 8, 27, 33, 39, 82, 118  
 Polymitis, 15  
 Port Antonio, 27  
 Port Jackson, 50  
 Port Kingston, 69  
 Port Morant, 58  
 President Lincoln, 35  
 Ravenswood, 90  
 Richmond, 85  
 Rival, 81  
 Rossall, 6, 35, 68  
 Robin Hood, 38

Ross, 81  
 Rossall, 45  
 Royal Albert, 18  
 Rudry, 115  
 Sangara, 6, 31, 57  
 San Gaspar, 101  
 San Wilfrido, 59  
 Sappho, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 26  
 onward, 36-38, 39, 40, 43,  
 46, 53, 56, 63, 68, 81, 83, 84,  
 89, 90, 91, 93, 103, 119  
 Sea Prince, 105  
 Sea Swallow, 12-15  
 Shropshire, 65, 66  
 Silvio, 33, 36, 39, 47  
 Sinainn, 6, 45, 68  
 Tasso, 3, 36, 82  
 Teane, 91, 92  
 Tel-al-Kabir, 26  
 Terra Nova, 52  
 Treglisson, 6, 69  
 Tremeadow, 70  
 Trevidor, 6, 70  
 Two Brothers, 32  
 Victoria, 39, 62  
 Victorian Transport, 5, 6, 71  
 Waverley, 110  
 Webbern, 47  
 Welcome Home, 40  
 Wells City, 88, 90  
 Westward Ho, 90  
 Yainville, 88  
 Zeehound, 95

*Eternal Father, strong to save,  
 Whose arm doth bond the restless wave,  
 Who bids the mighty ocean deep  
 Its own appointed limits keep;  
 O hear us when we cry to Thee  
 For those in peril on the sea.*