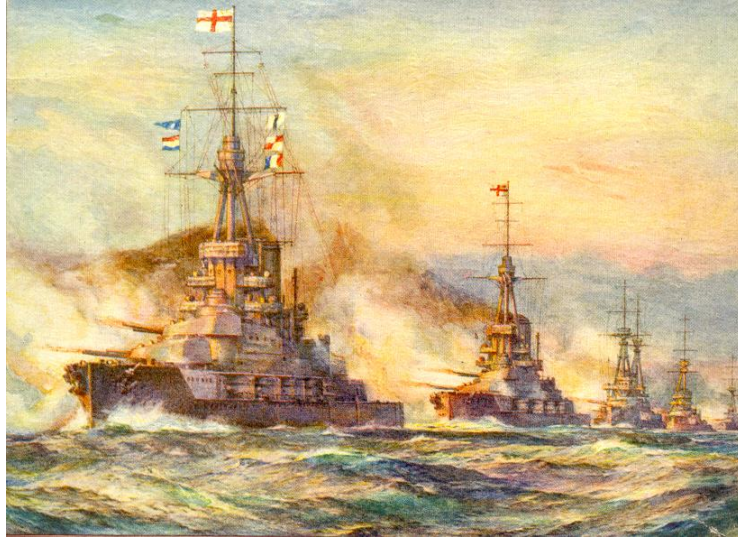


Harry Wyles

Able Seaman

J/2798

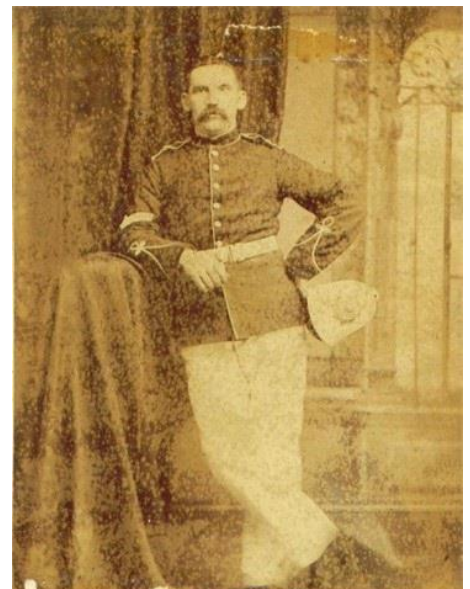
HMS Indefatigable



When researching the lives of the men on Kington War Memorial, I am occasionally surprised by the direction my research takes me. The cosmopolitan lives of some Kington families in the early twentieth century comes as a total, but admirable, revelation. Kington after all is a rural community so to discover that some natives of Kington travelled the world is completely unexpected. The Wyles family are one such Kington family.

This particular biography must start with Harry's father, the well-travelled, John Wyles, who was born in Kington in 1858. John's early life in Kington is shrouded in mystery and the first real information associated with him is revealed in family papers which disclose that John joined the Royal Marine Light Infantry in Bristol on the 17th March 1876, at the age of 18 years and 2 months.

Royal Marines are the seaborne infantry arm of the Royal Navy. The first official unit of the English Naval Infantry, called the Duke of York and Albany's Maritime Regiment of Foot, was formed in 1664. The name Marines was first coined in 1672, but the Marines we know today can only truly trace their direct ancestry back to 1755 when 'His



John Wyles, Royal Marine

Majesty's Marine Forces' were formed. In 1802, in honour of services performed to the crown, they were designated '**Royal** Marines'. Following the Crimean War in 1854/55 the Navy began developing Naval Brigades. These Brigades were self-contained assault units formed of Royal Marines and regular sailors trained in infantry tactics and artillery. Initially Royal Marines were landed as skirmishers followed by fighting sailors and their artillery. In 1862, from these units, the Royal Marine Light Infantry (RMLI) was formed and it was the RMLI that John Wyles joined in 1876.

From the 1881 census we are able to trace Private Wyles to the coast of Peru, near Lima, where his was serving aboard Her Majesty's Ship Penguin, on the Pacific Station. A far cry from the rural life he knew in Kington. Through his career John was to serve on numerous ships including HMS's Boudicea, Plymouth, Raven, Nelson, Speedwell, Vivid and Cambridge. It appears he spent most of his service aboard ships but in 1889 did find the time to marry Elizabeth Thornton in Plymouth. A year after this happy event the birth of their first child, Sarah Ann, occurred in Kington. In the 1891 census Liza is living with Sarah at what appears to be John's uncle James' house, Brick Kiln Cottage at the top of Kingswood Road. Shortly after Elizabeth moved back to Plymouth to be nearer her husband, and the family lived at 7 Union Place, right in the center of Plymouth. Shortly after the move they were blessed with their second child, the focus of this biography, **James Henry Wyles** (Harry), on the 3rd March 1893. Parish Records show that Harry was baptized on the 9th March at St Mathews Church, Plymouth.

The next record we find informs us of John's discharge from the Royal Marines, on the 16th March 1898. He had served for 21 years, 16 of which were afloat. John, Elizabeth and his two children returned to Kington and initially lived with Uncle James at Brick



Sarah and John Wyles

Kiln Cottage. It is at this point that events become confused and appear to take a very tragic turn for the worse. In the first quarter of 1899, in Kington, a second daughter, Elizabeth, is born to John and Elizabeth. Also in the first quarter of 1899 an Elizabeth Myles died in Kington. Elizabeth Myles is 30 years old, the same age as Elizabeth Wyles. I believe this is a misprint in the records and in fact Elizabeth Wyles died in childbirth. No record exists of an Elizabeth Wyles dying but she does disappear from all records. This might also explain why their second daughter was named Elizabeth. As is ever the case life goes on and grieving must come to an end. This is the case for John and toward the end of 1900 he marries a young woman of 26 called Sarah Ella Skelding. A couple of months later, the 1901 census informs us that John, Sarah and the three children are living at No 11 Headbrook and John has found himself a new job and is a Rural Postman. The following year, 1902, Harry's half-sister Rhoda arrives and in

1903 another sister, Hilda, makes her entrance. Records demonstrate John's commitment to duty when on the 6th April 1901 he enrolled into the Royal Fleet Reserve. Between 1901 and 1908 he regularly volunteered for service, attending training camps in Plymouth. Corporal Wyles was retired from the Royal Fleet Reserve in January 1908, having attained the age of 50.

We must now turn to Harry Wyles and discover the adventures of his life story. As we know, Harry was born in 1893 in Plymouth but was soon living in Kington. He attended Kington Boy's School, the quality of his education is unknown but we know Harry must have been intrigued by his father's tales of 'daring do'. As a consequence, by the 2nd April 1911, the date of the 1911 census, Harry had joined the Royal Navy and was serving aboard one of

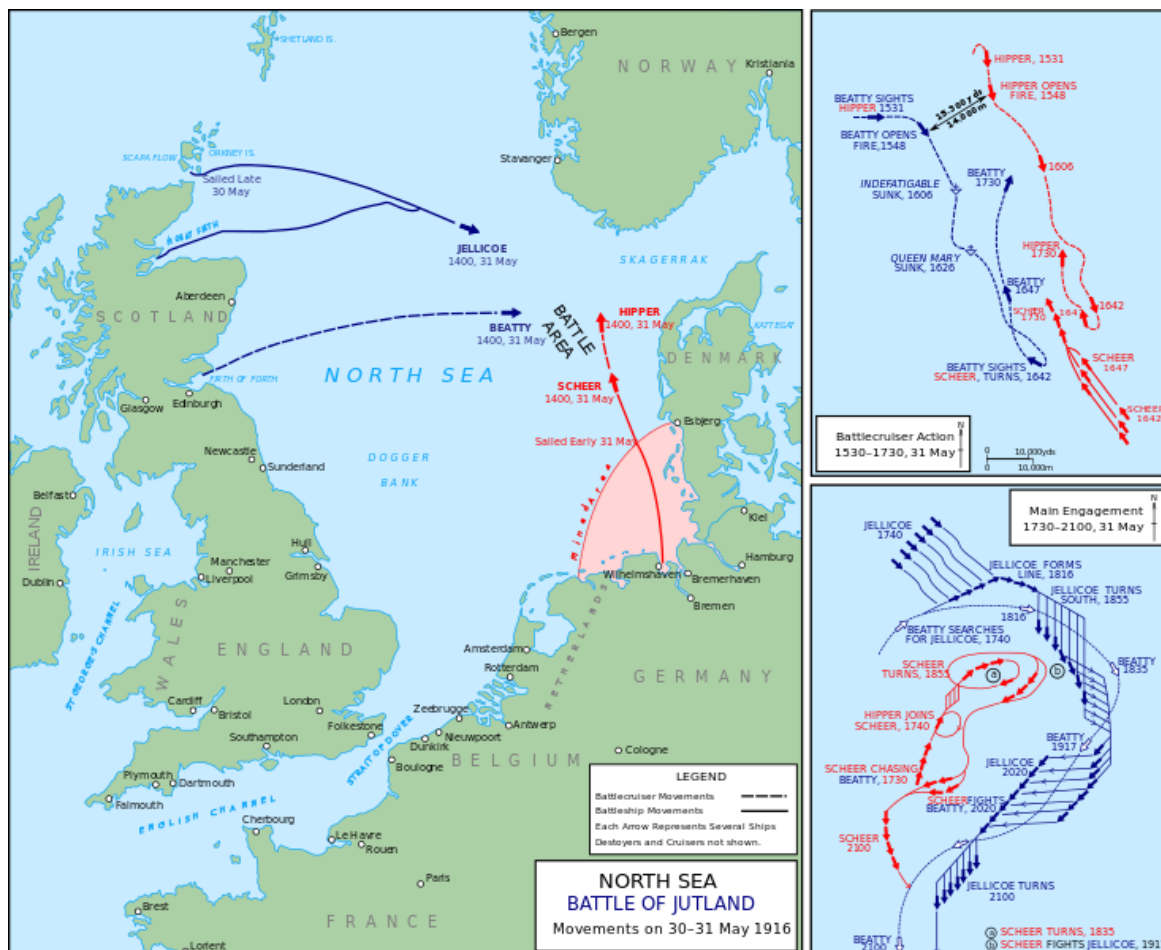


HMS Warrior c1905, 1st Class Cruiser

the navy's heavy armoured cruisers, HMS Warrior, in Devonport, Plymouth. I must clarify, this Warrior is not the Warrior currently moored in Portsmouth harbour, but a successor. Harry was an Ordinary Seaman, service number J/2708 and aged 18. At some point Harry was drafted to HMS Indefatigable, an 18500 ton battlecruiser. Laid down in Devonport Dockyard on the 23rd February 1909, HMS Indefatigable was launched just 8 months later on the 28th October and finally commissioned into the Royal Navy on the 24th February 1911. At the outbreak of the 1st World War she was serving in the Mediterranean and on the 3rd November 1914, under orders from Winston Churchill, took part in the bombardment of Turkish positions at the Dardanelles. Following this she was brought back to British waters where she served with the 2nd Battlecruiser Squadron forming part of Admiral Beatty's Battlecruiser Fleet which in turn formed part of Admiral Jellicoe's, Grand Fleet.



HMS Indefatigable c 1909



Throughout the early phases of the war the British fleet were dominant and were set the task of enforcing a blockade of Germany ports. In late May 1916 Jellicoe discovered the German High Seas Fleet had put to sea. To counter this enterprise he put the whole of his Grand Fleet to sea with the intension of intercepting and destroying the German Fleet in one decisive action. The interception took place in the North Sea just west of Jutland, the peninsula forming mainland Denmark. The resultant battle was called The Battle of Jutland and took place on the 31st May and 1st June 1916. British ships engaged the German Fleet at 3:30pm on the 31st and under the command of Captain Charles Sowerby, HMS Indefatigable was at the heart of initial fighting.

Many know the story of the World War II cruiser HMS Hood, blown up by shells from the German battleship *Bismarck*. Not so many know that HMS Indefatigable was lost in similar tragic circumstances. What follows is an Admiralty report detailing the fate of HMS Indefatigable at the Battle of Jutland

At the other end of the line the duel between the Indefatigable and the Von der Tann had been growing in intensity till, a few minutes after 4.0, the British ship was suddenly hidden in a burst of flame and smoke. A salvo of three shots had fallen on her upper deck and must have penetrated to a magazine. She staggered out of the line, sinking by the stern when another salvo struck her; a second terrible explosion rent her, she turned over and in a moment all trace of her was gone.....

1017 men lost their lives when Indefatigable sank. There were only two survivors, Able Seaman Elliot and Leading Signaller Falmer, both were picked up by a German torpedo boat. Harry Wyles lost his life on the **31st May 1916**, in horrific circumstances. His body was never recovered. Today HMS Indefatigable is protected as a war grave, along with the other Jutland wrecks, under The Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.



The photograph on the left shows HMS Indefatigable, on fire and struggling, after being hit by shells from the *Von der Tann*, shortly after she blew up and sank. Harry was awarded the 1915 Star, Victory and British War medals. For his sacrifice, the name James Henry Wyles is recorded on the Royal Naval Memorial in Plymouth, panel 12. In a way Harry had come home.

Plymouth Royal Naval Memorial is situated on Plymouth Hoe and looks directly toward Plymouth Sound. After the First World War, an appropriate way had to be found of commemorating those members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave, the majority of deaths having occurred at sea where no permanent memorial could be provided. An Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports of Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth, should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer and Plymouths was unveiled by HRH Prince George on 29 July 1924. The memorial commemorates 7,251 sailors who lost their lives in the First World War.



Plymouth Royal Naval Memorial

Back home in Kington, John had lost his only son. His only solace was that Harry died serving his country. He and Sarah moved away from Kington and appear to have settled near Maidstone. John died on the 25th October 1923 aged just 65. An inconsiderable age but John had led a full and exciting life. Sarah lived until she was 86 and passed away in Hereford in 1960. This is the story of two men who travelled from Kington to serve their country. One gave the ultimate sacrifice.

