

Frank Waterman

Researching Frank Waterman's story began, continued and ended in a mystery for me to puzzle over, taking in such personalities as Lord Kitchener, Winston Churchill and Oscar Wilde.

Frank was born to John and Emily Waterman, in Woodgreen near Fordingbridge. The family were living in Breamore, where John was an agricultural labourer, but Frank doesn't appear to be present for the night of the census, although his brother William and sister Clara are. By 1901 they are living in Nursling Street, John is still working as a labourer, and the children are Frank, Gertrude, Frances, Charles, Daisy and Clifford. I'm certain Frank and William are one and the same, as his name is sometimes given as William Frank, and he was registered as William. The family are at Dairy Cottage in 1911, but Frank – now working as a domestic gardener – seems to have moved, boarding with William and Lucy Bundy at Whitsbury near Breamore. Or is he?

If the Frank in Whitsbury is *our* Frank, who is the William Frank Waterman, born on 15th May 1889, in Fordingbridge, who is listed as already serving in the Navy? The answer is simple; there were two men with the same name, both from the Fordingbridge area. The widespread nature of the name has led other researchers into error. The Waterman listed in the book at Nursling church, the one which lists where you can find the graves of the men on the memorial, isn't the right Waterman, nor is the William Smith or the Henry Cooper the correct man.

William Frank Waterman started service on 22nd November 1909 on HMS Exmouth. He also served on Ocean, Victory, Furious, Crescent, Swiftsure, Jupiter, Argonaut, Terrible, Europa, Good Hope and Hampshire, rising through the ranks to become a leading stoker. It's poignant to read that he was hardly any bigger than me. 5 foot 5 inches, 35 inch chest, brown hair, grey eyes, fresh complexion, with 3 tattoos on each arm, although I don't know whether he had those before he served. However, another record records him as volunteering in 1914, so I suspect that's a mistake made at a time when many details had to be transcribed.

Frank saw action at Jutland and survived, but was less lucky only a few days later. On the 5th June 1916, HMS Hampshire left Scapa Flow and struck a mine, with a loss of over 600 men. Many of his shipmates were lost at sea, but Frank's body was recovered and is buried at the Lyness Naval Cemetery, Island of Hoy.

With the loss of the Hampshire, we find ourselves embroiled in conspiracy theories, some of which date back to just after WWI. Was the ship deliberately targeted in order to kill Lord Kitchener, who was aboard for a diplomatic mission to Russia? Some of the theories were libellous, let alone

ridiculous. Lord Alfred Douglas (yes, *that* one, the cause of Oscar Wilde's downfall) was successfully prosecuted on Churchill's behalf for making wild accusations about the sinking, and sentenced to prison. Kitchener himself has a memorial at Hollybrook, near Southampton General Hospital.

Ann Laird - Rownhams May 2015