

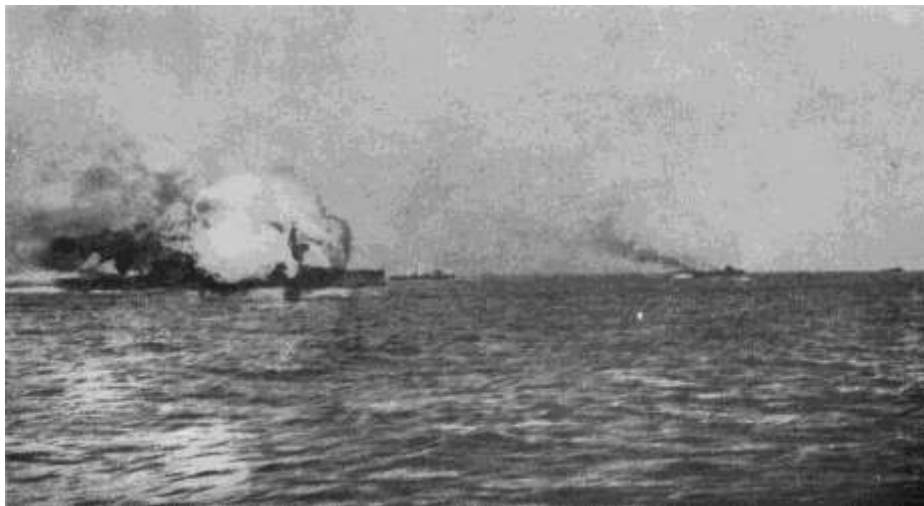
Walter Harris – The Youngest Victim

By far the youngest name recorded on the Benson War Memorial is that of Walter Harris, who was born on the 23rd July 1899 and was a resident of Turner's Court (a Farm Training School) before he enlisted in the Royal Navy late in 1914.

Walter was the son of Richard Harris & Elizabeth (nee Dyer), one of six children and was brought up on a farm near Chertsey in Surrey where his father was a shepherd. Richard died in 1915, around the same time Walter was at Turner's Court.

Walter – like many other young men – rushed to enlist when war broke out in 1914, and joined the Navy (which accepted boy entrants) and commenced his training in April 1915. He was posted to HMS Invincible on 11th January 1916 with the rating of Boy 1st Class (nr J/39938)

HMS Invincible was the first of her new class, a battlecruiser, 20,000 tons weight, which carried a heavy armament of 8 x 12 inch guns, were extremely fast (all turbine engines) but which were lacking in defensive armour to save weight. Invincible carried the flag of Admiral Hood and was the lead British ship at the battle of Jutland when it began on 31st May 1916.



Explosion of Invincible

The lack of armour soon became an important factor, with first Invincible and then also Indefatigable and Queen Mary being sunk after being hit by heavy enemy shells. Invincible exploded (the central magazine probably caught fire) and sank within minutes. Of her crew of 1,031 men, only 6 survived and Boy Harris was not one of them. He was just 16 years old when he perished.