

RICHARD WILLIAM WHICHELLO

7928 Sergeant, Royal Marine Artillery b November 1882 Lost at sea September 1914

Richard William Whichello was born 17th November 1882 in **Benson**. His parents Walter and Bessie ran the Lamb & Flag Inn in Brook Street, with Walter also being one of a long line of butchers in Brook Street. Richard's mother Bessie died, possibly in childbirth, when he was twelve, but Walter re-married quickly.

Richard's grandfather, another Richard, had also run the Lamb & Flag and was also a butcher, but he had died young, leaving his widow Mary Whichello running the business with Richard's father Walter. Walter was just fourteen when his father died. The Whichellos were a well established family in Benson, and Richard had some six living siblings from his father's first marriage (to Bessie Wragge) and another three from the second marriage (to Mary Smith), plus many cousins as well.

However the family business was not for Richard, and on 27th January 1899 in London, at the age of 17, he gave up his job as a Pawnbroker's assistant in Wallingford and enlisted in the Royal Marines. He was described as being 5ft 9 inches tall, with a fresh complexion, brown hair and grey eyes.

Service life suited Richard: he was promoted Corporal in 1903, to Sergeant in 1910 when he also re-enlisted, and was awarded a Long Service medal in 1914. He also found time to meet and marry Beatrice Emily Bartholomew in 1910 at her home church in Kent, although they set up their family home in Portsmouth where Richard was based.

By 1911 Richard and Beatrice had a young son, Richard Henry, and Richard was a gunnery instructor in the Royal Marine Artillery in Portsmouth. When war broke out in August 1914 he was serving on HMS Hogue.

HMS Hogue was a large cruiser of 12,000 tons, well-armed with 12 six inch guns, but old and very slow. On 22nd September 1914 the Hogue, together with fellow cruisers HMS Cressy and HMS Aboukir, was on patrol in the North Sea when they were sighted by a single German submarine, the U9.

Steaming slowly in a straight line formation they were easy targets and U9 sank the Aboukir first. As she went down, the Hogue stopped to assist the survivors and was also torpedoed. Finally, the Cressy came to assist and was also a victim of U9. All three ships sank quickly with over 1400 men lost – including Sgt Richard Whichello.

Beatrice continued to live in Portsmouth, re-married there in 1918, and died there aged 93. His son Richard Henry lived to the ripe old age of 82, raised two sons in Portsmouth and worked for the Admiralty. His father Walter however, died a year later in 1915 – perhaps from a broken heart at the loss of his eldest son?