



Arthur Frank Whatley 1894 – 1916 **Royal Navy Able Seaman HMS Indefatigable**

Able Seaman Arthur Whatley died when the battle cruiser Indefatigable sank during the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916. He was 21 years old.

Family background

Little is known about Arthur Whatley's background and no living relatives have been traced.

Arthur's father, Frank Whatley, came from a family of farm workers in Dinton. His mother's father, Henry Case, was a shepherd who moved around for work: from Homington to Somerset then to West Amesbury (where Arthur's mother Clara was born), to Shipton Bellinger and then to two villages near Box.

Frank and Clara met when she was a maid at the Chorister's School, Cathedral Close. He had left farm work in Dinton and was a general labourer lodging in Railway Terrace, Fisherton Anger, the area around St Paul's church.

Frank, 29, and Clara, 26, married in 1893 and Arthur was born in Railway Terrace in October 1894. Sadly Clara died of pneumonia and exhaustion when Arthur was four. They were then living at 2 Orchard Place, at the eastern end of Devizes Road. It appears that Frank was not able to look after his son on his own for the 1901 census shows Arthur, then six, living with their Devizes Road neighbours: Samuel Poole, a maltster, and his wife Ellen. Frank was a visitor with the Webb family at 2 Mill Cottage, Churchfields.

Arthur was described as the adopted son of Samuel and Ellen Poole but it was not a formal adoption. His naval record gives his parents as Frank and Clara Whatley of Windsor Road, Salisbury. (A dead parent was sometimes named). Frank Whatley died in 1937 at Tower House, Coombe Road aged 73. Tower House was at that time a Public Assistance Institution and had previously been Alderbury workhouse. Cause of death is given dementia, chronic bronchitis and acute cardiac failure. He is described as formerly being a general labourer from Amesbury but nothing else is known about him.

Schooling

Arthur was awarded a scholarship to Bishop Wordsworth's School from September 1907. This covered his tuition fees and came from the Rose and Harrison charity of Amesbury. He had previously been at Amesbury elementary school and was a chorister at St. Mary & St. Melor church in Amesbury. Nothing is known about where he lived in Amesbury nor while he was at Bishops School.

Life after school and in the navy

Arthur left school in December 1909 to be a clerk but later became a shop assistant and in 1910, just before his 16th birthday, he joined the Royal Navy. He was 5 feet 2 inches tall with brown hair, blue eyes, a fresh complexion and a scar on his forehead. Two years later he was two inches taller and his chest measurement had increased by more than four inches. At that time many young men were attracted to the armed services because of the guaranteed three meals a day, decent clothing and security of employment.

Arthur spent a year on the wooden training ship HMS Impregnable, then eight months on armoured training cruisers and in barracks at Devonport, near Plymouth. On 1 March 1912 he began service on the newly completed HMS Indefatigable, the lead battleship of her class. Later that year, on his 18th birthday, he was promoted to 'ordinary seaman' (no longer a boy) and signed on for twelve years. His character

was always described as “very good” and his ability “satisfactory” or “superior”. In March 1914 he was promoted to Able Seaman.

War service

When war was declared *Indefatigable* was in the Mediterranean and was part of the first British attack on the Dardanelles, designed to test the Turkish defences. After a refit in Malta in February 1915 she sailed for England and spent an uneventful year patrolling the North Sea, a contrast to the warmth and exotic sights of the Mediterranean.

In 1916 the German naval commander decided to lure out some of the British Fleet, trap and destroy them. British intelligence uncovered his plans and the two fleets met on 31 May at The Battle of Jutland, two hundred and fifty ships confronting each other in the North Sea. High explosive shells ripped into thick armour plating, smoke billowed over 1000 feet into the sky, and ships exploded and sank. Current opinion is that there were faults in the storage and transportation of magazine charges to the guns which led to explosions when the battleships were hit, hits that they had been expected to withstand.

Arthur Whatley's battle and his life ended quickly. *Indefatigable* was the first ship to be hit, at about 16.00. She began listing but was hit again a couple of minutes later and exploded, sinking immediately. Two men survived from a crew of 1017.

The result of that day's fighting is still contested. The British Fleet lost more men (6077 to 2551) and battleships (14 to 11) but the German Fleet retreated under cover of darkness and stayed at home for the rest of the war.

Wreaths will be laid at the site of the battle on 31 May this year and there will be a service in Britain's most northerly cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney. Commemoration ceremonies will also be held in Germany.

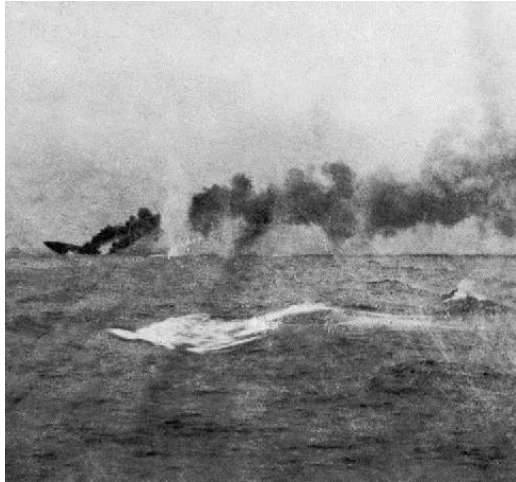
Remembrance

Arthur Whatley is commemorated on panel 12 of the Plymouth Naval memorial and on the Amesbury War Memorial as well as at St John's, Bemerton. His name also appears on the roll of honour at Bishop Wordsworth's School and in the Book of Remembrance at St Thomas's church, created in 2004 to commemorate everyone from Salisbury who died in the service of their country since 1914, including names missed from the Salisbury war memorial.

It is not clear why Arthur's name is on the St John's memorial at Bemerton but the link is probably Samuel and Ellen Poole. By 1911 they had moved to the western end of Devizes Road and others from there attended St John's. It seems likely that they kept their affection for the lad they had described as their 'adopted son' and asked for his name to be included. Samuel's brother Edwin was living in Eastleigh in 1911 with a 16 year old boarder from Bemerton, which establishes another link between the Poole family and the parish.

Research and writing by Bea Tilbrook and Wendy Lawrence
May 2016

HMS Indefatigable Sinking



Amesbury War Memorial



School Ship Impregnable



HMS Indefatigable 1912



Plymouth Naval Memorial

