

## **Old Wordsworthians at the Battle of Jutland**

### **Introduction**

The Battle of Jutland, the battle which won the war, as the new exhibition at the National Museum of the Royal Navy makes clear, was fought on 31 May and 1 June 1916. Five Old Wordsworthians were involved in the battle and two of those were lost when their ships were sunk. The cost in ships and men to the Royal Navy of imposing its will on the German High Seas Fleet and forcing it to retreat to its harbours was heavy but the long-term strategic gains were war-winning. The Royal Navy's blockade of Germany continued to erode the ability of the Kaiser's forces to wage war and the German decision to return to unrestricted submarine warfare, as an alternative to another attempt to challenge the Royal Navy in the North Sea, ultimately led to the involvement of the USA in the war. The USA's involvement forced the German Army into campaigns on the Western Front in the spring of 1918 which were designed to win the war before the Americans could arrive in strength. These campaigns left the German Army much weakened and prepared it for final defeat by the Allies in the last months of the war.

### **Backgrounds**

Leonard Browne was born in Leytonstone in 1888 but was fostered by Alice Gulliver, the schoolmistress at Morgan's Vale. In April 1898, he joined BWS from Downton School. On leaving school he found employment as a fitter and turner before joining the Navy in 1907.

Arthur Whatley was born in Salisbury in 1894 but was adopted, possibly as a result of his mother's death when he was four and the subsequent inability of his father, a labourer, to look after an infant son, by Samuel and Ellen Poole of 2 Orchard Place, Devizes Road, Salisbury. Circumstances changed, however, and the BWS Admissions Register for 1907, when Arthur joined BWS, suggests that the search for work had taken Arthur and his father to Amesbury. From Amesbury Elementary School Arthur was able to attend Bishop's through the generosity of the trustees of the Rose and Harrison Foundation. This Amesbury-based educational charity covered the cost of Arthur's tuition fees, at an annual rate of £5/5/0 to include books and stationery, for the duration of his school life at Bishop's. Arthur started there as a Day Scholar, in Form IIA, in September 1907, possibly lodging with the Pooles in Devizes Road or perhaps taking the half-hour train journey from Amesbury each day. He left in December 1909 and, after a brief spell as a shop assistant, joined the Navy in 1910.

Geoffrey Oliver Horrell was born in Teffont Evias in 1898, the son of Ernest, a corn miller and later a dairy farmer, and his wife Elizabeth. He joined Form IIC at BWS in May 1910 and left in December 1912 to join the Royal Navy.

Roderick George William Mills was born in Margam, Glamorgan in 1895, the son of William, a schoolmaster, and his wife Amelia. Roderick joined Form IIC at BWS in January 1910 from his father's school, Hyde National Elementary School, and left in May 1912 to join the Royal Navy.

William John Parker was born in Weymouth in 1898, the son of John, an auctioneer and house agent, and his wife Annie. William joined Form 3A at BWS in January 1912 and left in March 1913, to join the Navy.

### **Naval careers before Jutland**

All, apart from Leonard Browne who joined the Navy aged nineteen as an acting Electrical Artificer 4th Class, joined aged fifteen or sixteen as Boys 2nd Class. All intended the Navy as a long term career, signing on for the usual initial engagement of twelve years. Leonard trained at HMS *Vernon*, the Navy's torpedo school. Arthur, Geoffrey and William went initially to the Boys' training establishment, HMS *Impregnable*, at Devonport. Roderick went first to HMS *Ganges II* at Shotley.

Leonard Browne's naval career was largely on big ships. From April 1908 to December 1909 he served in the battleship *Canopus* in the Mediterranean Fleet. In May 1911 he joined HMS *Dreadnought* and was with her until she paid off in June 1913. He was briefly on the cruiser *Thetis* before joining HMS *Black Prince*, an armoured cruiser in the Mediterranean Fleet in 1914. With her he took part in the unsuccessful pursuit of the German battlecruiser *Goeben* in early August 1914, immediately preceding the declaration of war. Following service in the Red Sea *Black Prince* joined the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow in December 1914 and remained in that fleet until her loss at Jutland.

Arthur Whatley also served on big ships, starting with the armoured cruisers *Donegal* and *King Alfred*. In March 1912 he joined the battlecruiser *Indefatigable*, on her first commission. This ship initially served with the Home Fleet but in December 1913 joined the Mediterranean Fleet, where Arthur also found himself involved in the unsuccessful pursuit of the *Goeben*. The *Indefatigable* was involved in the bombardment of two Turkish forts at the entrance to the Dardanelles in November 1914. In January 1915 she proceeded, via a short refit in Malta, to join the battlecruiser force in the Grand Fleet, based, from February 1916, at Rosyth.

Roderick Mills' early sea time was also in battleships. In April 1913 he went to sea for a year in HMS *Prince of Wales*, a battleship in the Home Fleet. When war broke out he was at the gunnery training establishment, HMS *Excellent*, at the beginning of his career specialisation. He was at sea again, in the battleships *Venerable* and *Duncan*, from August 1914 to January 1915 after which he returned to *Excellent* for most of 1915. In January 1916 he joined the new battleship *Malaya* at Newcastle, where she commissioned in February prior to joining the 5th Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow.

William Parker's war at sea began on 4 December 1914 when he joined the brand new light cruiser HMS *Caroline* as she commissioned for the first time.

Geoffrey Horrell first went to sea on 14 May 1915 in HMS *Erin*, a battleship in the Grand Fleet based at Scapa Flow.

## **The Battle of Jutland**

The Royal Navy's Grand Fleet, under the command of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, was based at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys. Here he kept direct control of the Battle Fleet, the main strength of which on 30 May comprised sixteen battleships and three battlecruisers. Detached at Cromarty Firth was Vice-Admiral Sir Martyn Jerram with eight more battleships and these ships joined Jellicoe at sea around noon on 31 May. The Battlecruiser Fleet, under Jellicoe's subordinate Vice-Admiral Sir David Beatty, at Rosyth, comprised six battlecruisers supported by the four fast battleships of Rear-Admiral Hugh Evan-Thomas' 5th Battle Squadron.

When the battle began, with the first clash of scouting forces at 2.28pm, Beatty's force was sixty-five miles to the south of Jellicoe and fifty miles to the north of the German Battle Fleet under Vice-Admiral Scheer. Vice-Admiral Hipper's German Battlecruiser Fleet was, however, only just over the horizon. When Beatty and Hipper made contact, Hipper attempted to draw Beatty south towards Scheer. Hipper's five battlecruisers opened fire at 3.48pm at a range of about 15,000 yards. By 4pm the battlecruiser HMS *Lion*, Beatty's flagship, had been hit five times. In the line of battlecruisers astern of the *Lion*, HMS *Princess Royal* was hit twice and HMS *Tiger* at least eight times by 4pm.

It was in this run to the south that OW Arthur Whatley was lost in HMS *Indefatigable*. At 4.02pm *Indefatigable*, sixth ship in Beatty's line, was hit by several 11-inch shells from the German battlecruiser *Von der Tann*. From the *New Zealand*, the battlecruiser next ahead of *Indefatigable*, the navigating officer watched as the *Indefatigable* was hit aft and, soon after, on the foc'sle and the fore turret. There was a lot of smoke aft and following a delay of about half a minute following the hits for'ard there were sheets of flame and dense smoke as the ship blew up. Lieutenant Stephen King-Hall observed the destruction of the *Indefatigable* from the light cruiser HMS *Southampton*, from about a mile distant. He saw a column of smoke and flame appear suddenly where *Indefatigable* had been. As that smoke parted he saw, briefly, the '*Indefatigable*' on her side with a further burst of flame and smoke. From the *Indefatigable* there were two survivors from the ship's company of 1,019 men.

Also involved from the start of the battlecruiser action was OW Roderick Mills, a gunlayer in the battleship *Malaya* in the 5th Battle Squadron. *Malaya* fired 215 rounds from her 15-inch guns and thirty-one rounds from her 6-inch guns. In return *Malaya* was hit by seven times by German 11-inch or 12-inch shells. The severest hit started a cordite fire in the starboard 6-inch battery. Mills survived, but *Malaya* lost sixty-three men killed and thirty-three wounded during the battle.

When Beatty sighted Scheer's battleships at 4.45pm he turned north and tried to lure Scheer on to the guns of Jellicoe, which he succeeded in doing at 6.26 pm. At this point HMS *Erin*, with OW Geoffrey Horrell aboard, deployed as part of Jellicoe's twenty-four strong battleship force. *Erin* was fourth ship from the front of Jellicoe's line and about 12,000 yards from Scheer's leading battleships but her view was obscured by smoke and she was unable to

open fire. Indeed she was unlucky in this respect throughout the battle and she alone of all the British battleships at Jutland fired no rounds from her main armament.

Massively out-gunned and out-numbered by Jellicoe's battleships Scheer turned his fleet away to the south after ten minutes in action. At 7pm Scheer returned to the attack but was again forced to turn away. The main clash of the battle fleets had ended.

OW William Parker served at Jutland in HMS *Caroline*, part of the Fourth Light Cruiser Squadron, scouting for Jellicoe's battleships. *Caroline* was lightly engaged, firing three rounds from her 6-inch main armament and nine from her 4-inch guns. At 9.05pm she launched two torpedoes at German battlecruisers but scored no hits. *Caroline* is the only surviving ship from Jutland and may be seen today, preserved by the National Museum of the Royal Navy, in Belfast.

During the night there was more fighting, largely involving cruisers and destroyers, as Scheer sought to escape with his battleships to the south and Jellicoe endeavoured to position his fleet for another interception in the morning.

In that night time fighting Leonard Browne was lost on the *Black Prince*. At around midnight *Black Prince* stumbled across the centre of the German battle fleet. The battleship *Thuringen* illuminated her by searchlight and opened a heavy fire with her secondary guns at a range of about 1,100 yards, firing twenty-seven 5.9 inch and twenty 3.5 inch. As the flames took hold in *Black Prince* she was further engaged by three more battleships, *Ostfriesland*, *Nassau* and *Friedrich der Grosse*. By 0.15am *Black Prince* was merely a glowing, but still moving, wreck and shortly afterwards she disappeared in a tremendous explosion with the loss of all 857 of her ship's company. Her end was witnessed by the captain of the destroyer *Spitfire* as *Black Prince* surged past his ship. He felt the intense heat from the flames aboard *Black Prince*, flames which he saw emerging from every corner of the ship. Soon after she had passed by into the darkness he heard her explode.

By 3.55am Jellicoe, informed by the Admiralty that Scheer had slipped away, led his fleet back to Scapa Flow.

### **Careers after Jutland**

After Jutland the three OW survivors continued their service in the Navy. From November 1916 William Parker began to specialise as a Seaman Gunner. He remained in the Navy until 1928 when he retired from the service with the rank of Petty Officer. Geoffrey Horrell continued to serve on *Erin* until February 1918 when he moved, briefly, to the old battleship HMS *Hindustan* which was acting as the parent ship for the Zeebrugge and Ostend expeditions of April 1918. He was aboard HMS *Vindictive* during the raid on Zeebrugge, on St George's Day 1918, from which he returned 'without a scratch' as the BWS magazine recorded in its July 1918 edition. Geoffrey returned to *Erin* and continued his service in her until September 1919. From May 1917 he began to specialise as a torpedoman and he finished the war as a Leading Torpedoman. Geoffrey continued in the Navy after the war. He

spent from 1920 to 1924 at HMS *Vernon*, the Navy's torpedo establishment, and in 1927 he secured his warrant as a Gunner (Torpedo). Ten years later he was promoted to Commissioned Gunner and in 1943 to Lieutenant. Roderick Mills served on *Malaya* until August 1917 when he returned to the gunnery school at *Excellent* for ten months. The BWS magazine of July 1918 reported that '*Gunner Mills is doing well in the Navy. He has passed his tests in Gunnery with great credit, his marks averaging 87%. He is too young to be promoted to warrant rank, but his prospects of rising in the Service seem to be distinctly good.*' He completed his war service on the light cruiser *Glasgow*, where he was promoted Petty Officer, and returned to *Excellent* in April 1919. After the war he remained in the Navy and achieved his warrant rank in 1923 with promotion to Acting Gunner. In 1933 he became a Commissioned Gunner and in 1942 a Lieutenant. He was awarded the M.B.E. in 1941. He died in Kent in 1969.

### **Memorials**

Leonard Browne is remembered on the original memorial in the chapel at BWS (as L. Brown). He is also remembered on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Portsmouth Naval Memorial on Southsea Common and on the Morgan's Vale and Woodfalls memorial.

Arthur Frank Whatley is remembered on the original memorial in the chapel at BWS. He is also remembered on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Plymouth Naval Memorial, on the Amesbury war memorial and that of St John's Church in Bemerton. His name also appears in the Book of Remembrance in St Thomas' Church in Salisbury, although not on the war memorial outside the Guildhall.

Both were first remembered at BWS in the school magazine of December 1916. In recording the loss of seven OWs the editor of the "Old Wordsworthians' News" page wrote: '*Two of these, L Browne and A Whatley, went down with their ships in the Battle of Jutland*'.

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(BWS 1965 - 73)