

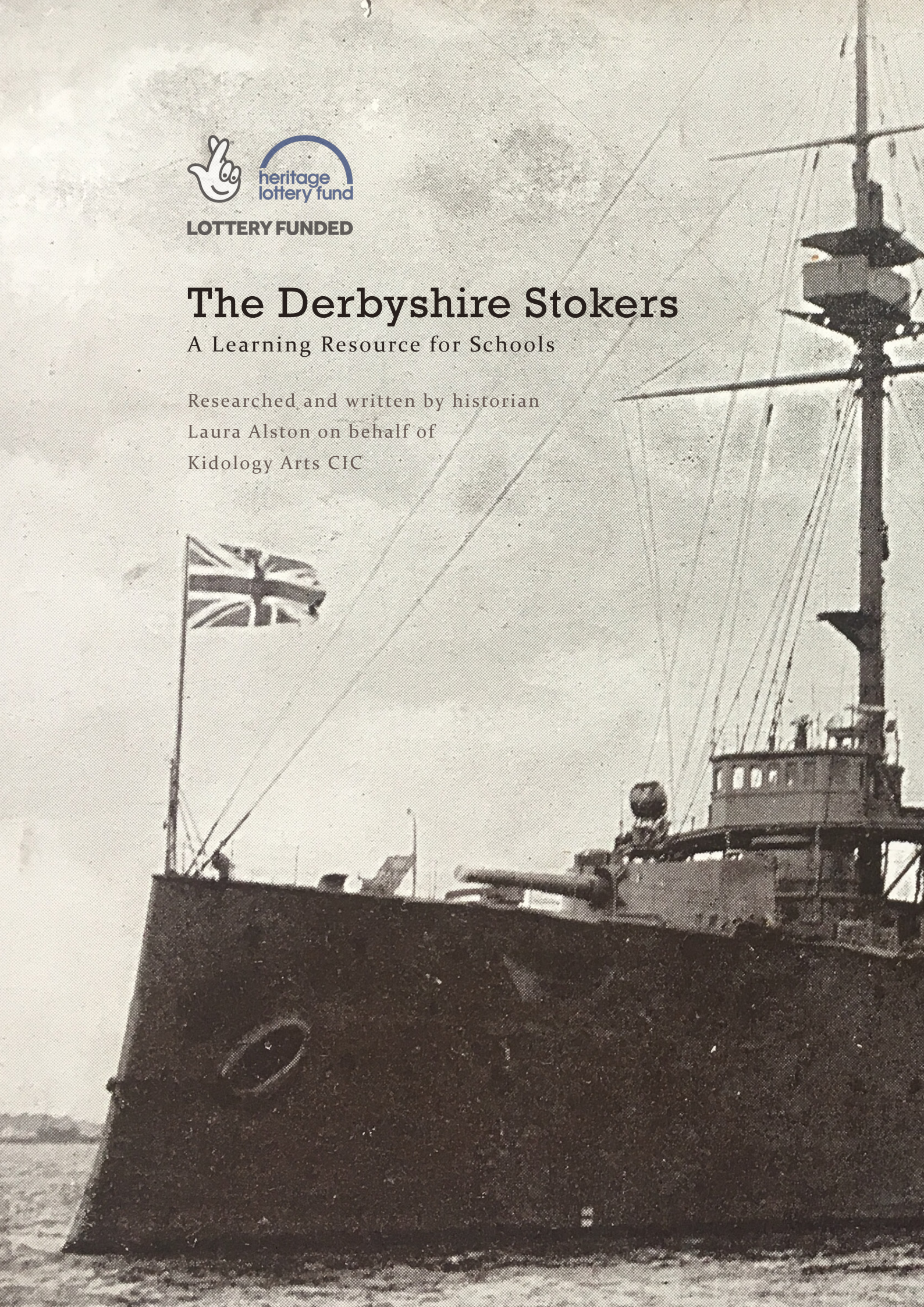


**LOTTERY FUNDED**

# The Derbyshire Stokers

A Learning Resource for Schools

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Kidology Arts CIC



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# Introduction

This resource is a collection of stories about the lives of real people who lived in mining villages in North East Derbyshire during the First World War. They have been written to introduce children to the experiences of people in their community during those days. The stories have been researched and written by historian Laura Alston [BA MA currently studying for PhD at the University of Sheffield] and Kidology Arts with the support of Heritage Lottery Fund. All intellectual and artistic material belongs to Kidology Arts and Laura Alston.

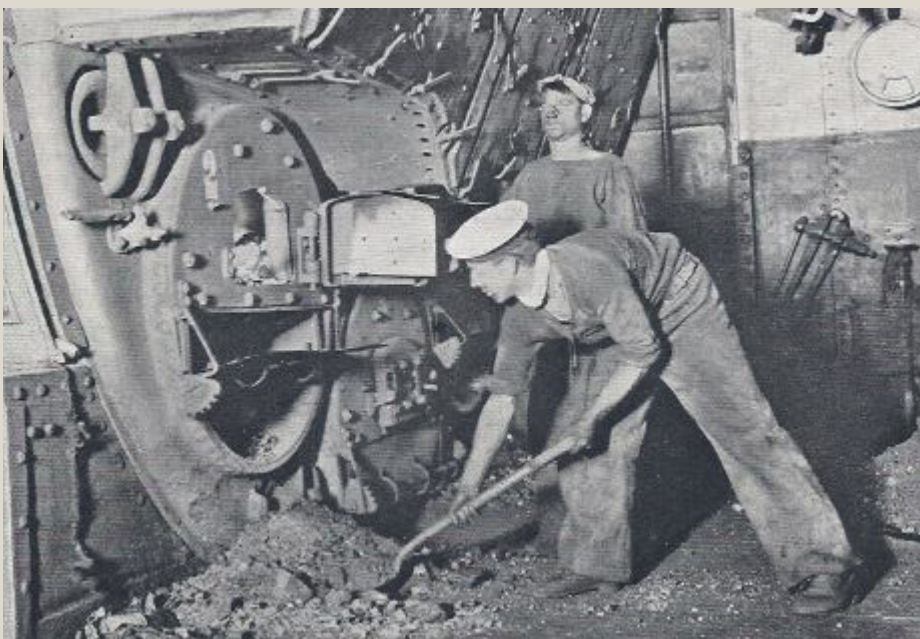
It is up to you how you use these resources in lessons but some suggestions are below.

Learning Objectives – using these stories can help your pupils:

- Understand their local community's role in events of global historical importance.
- Learn about events happening locally and internationally during the First World War and how these were connected.
- Begin to understand historical consequence and what the legacy of the First World War was both locally and globally.
- Understand historical experience and perspective - how different viewpoints can tell us different things about history.
- Understand memorialisation and remembrance through the telling of the stories.
- Depending on your choice of use for the resource, this pack can also encourage different skills such as exploring history, art, creative writing, roleplaying poetry and drama.

# Ways to use the Learning Resource

- Discuss the stories with the children. Think about what life was like in the early 20th century for people in the local community. Get the children to draw out comparisons with the stories. Make the links between mining and becoming a stoker and think about what skills would have been needed to be a stoker.
- Use the stories to introduce children to the history of the Battle of Jutland and get them to think about how their communities played a role in it.
- Introduce the background to the First World War and how the Royal Navy took part in it and then give different groups of children different stories to read themselves. Get the children to tell each other the stories. Each group could then produce pieces of creative writing based on the themes in the story they have read.
- Encourage children to act out the stories, perhaps turn the stories into a school play that can be shown to the whole school or as a special assembly.
- Use the stories as a starting point to examine the First World War through art and poetry. Use graphite and charcoal to draw ships.
- Use the stories on a day trip to your local church or war memorial to help the children understand their local community, the role it played and the remembrance of these men's contributions to the war effort.



# The Stories

Over the first half of the twentieth century over 700 men from Derbyshire joined the Royal Navy as stokers. Over 200 of them came from a handful of mining villages in North East Derbyshire and Chesterfield. The men who signed up as stokers often came from a mining background, their skills as miners made them ideal for the work of a stoker. They knew how to use coal, about engineering and were very strong; they had to shovel coal into furnaces all day.

The work of a stoker was incredibly hard. They worked in the engine rooms, deep in the bowels of the ship. It would have been very hot near the furnaces. It would have been as dark and dirty as working down the pit at home.

Many of the men signed up to be stokers before the First World War began, often on short service, which should have only lasted 5 to 7 years. When war was declared in 1914 they were not given a choice about leaving and their service was extended.

The Royal Navy was very active during the First World War. They enforced blockades along the German coastline, allowing or blocking food imports to different countries and they escorted ships carrying supplies and soldiers to the front. The First World War saw the introduction of huge new warships called Dreadnoughts, which would have been powered by several hundred stokers. These ships fought in naval battles and so the stokers' job became even more dangerous than before.

German U-Boats would target their torpedoes at the engine rooms of the ships and so very few stokers survived a direct hit to the ship. The Battle of Jutland was the major naval battle, which took place in First World War. Almost every Derbyshire stoker would have been involved in the battle. The Royal Navy suffered very heavy losses and many stokers lost their lives. These men are commemorated on naval memorials in Portsmouth and Plymouth as well as on the war memorials in the villages where they lived. After the First World War men from Derbyshire continued to sign up as stokers.



# Thomas Henry Redfern

Thomas was born in Longlands, Bolsover on January 25th 1892. He was one of 9 children. His parents were Thomas [born 1859] and Mary A Redfern née Wagstaff [born 1868]. Mary and Thomas married on March 15th 1886 in Bolsover. Thomas's siblings were Allan G Redfern [born 1887], Florence B Redfern [born 1889], Lillie Redfern [born 1891], Ivy Redfern [born 1896], Frederick Redfern [born 1898], Benjamin Redfern [born 1900], Norman Redfern [born 1902] and Zena Redfern [born 1907].

Thomas's father, Thomas, had been born in Burton on Trent and was a brick maker. His father was George Redfern [born 1837], his mother was Elizabeth Kirk [born 1837]. Sadly Elizabeth died soon after the birth of her second child, Thomas, around 1860. In 1865 George married again to a woman named Martha Taylor [born 1847]. They went on to have 10 children, making the total 12 with Thomas and his elder brother George [born 1856]. George Redfern was an engine maker in Yorkshire. The family lived in Swadlincote when Thomas (senior) was young. Thomas's great-grandfather, also called Thomas, was also a brick-maker. Thomas's Mother, Mary Wagstaff, had been born in London. Before joining the navy, Thomas was employed as a rope hand in a coal mine.



In 1910 Thomas signed up to be a Stoker 2nd Class in the Royal Navy and was recorded in that year as living in barracks in Portsmouth with other Stokers and some Cook's Mates. The first ship he served upon was the Victory II in March 1911, then the Renown from April 1911, from the Renown he returned to the Victory II, then onto the Jupiter in October 1911 before returning to the Victory from March 1912. Thomas then went to a ship named the Black Prince which he served upon from May 1912 to June 1915, during which time he was promoted to Stoker 1st Class and was also put in detention for 50 days for absence.

Thomas then returned to the Victory II in July 1915 and then went onto the HMS Hampshire. While serving on the Hampshire Thomas was again held in detention for 7 days. In June 1916, the HMS Hampshire took part in the Battle of Jutland. After the battle, the ship was taking Lord Kitchener to Russia when it was destroyed by mines off the coast of Orkney after going ahead of the destroyers which were protecting it. Thomas lost his life along with all the rest of the crew and Lord Kitchener.



Naval punishments were very harsh for the slightest of crimes; this was also heightened by the pressures of the war. Although overall Thomas's character was noted as fair and satisfactory and he continually returned to the Navy, he was heavily punished for his unauthorized absences. It may be that Thomas had not anticipated that he would be swept up in the War when he signed up in 1911 and struggled to return when he was given a leave of absence. Perhaps the conditions aboard the ships were unbearable, or he could not return on time to his ship for any number of reasons. These questions are left unanswered in the naval documents.

Thomas was recorded as being 5 ft 7 in with dark-brown hair, brown eyes and a fresh complexion, he had no wounds, scars or marks. He never married as he was constantly in the Navy from the age of 19.

By 1911 Thomas's family had moved to Scarcliffe. Thomas's brother Allan became a Coal Miner in his 20's. His sister Florence married James Everett on the 4th of January 1911. James was also a Coal Miner like Florence's brother.

# Cledwyn Griffiths Walker

Cledwyn Griffiths Walker was the son of Samuel Walker [born 1860] and Ellen Walker [born 1865]. He was born on the 26th of October 1899, the youngest son of 9 children at Ashover Village near Chesterfield. His siblings were Arthur Walker [born 1892], Walter Walker [born 1894], Leonard Walker [born 1896], Allwood Walker [born 1898], Linda Walker [born 1902] and Edith Walker [born 1904]. Cledwyn's father Samuel worked as a self-employed stone mason, his brothers Arthur and Walter were employed as spare labourers, his brother Leonard was a Gardener and Allwood was a Farm Labourer.

The family household was also home to Mary Jane Bunting, who was Ellen's sister and who was dependant on the family as she was both deaf and mute. Mary Jane was classed as reliant on the parish, however she had been employed as a Charwoman when younger. Whilst the rest of the family were all born in Ashover, Ellen and her sister Mary Jane had been born in Sheffield but her family had moved to Ashover when she was young. Ellen was the daughter of James Bunting [born 1826] who was a General Labourer from Matlock and Phoebe Bunting [born 1828] who died sometime before 1891. Prior to her marriage to Samuel Walker Ellen worked as a domestic servant, also just before her marriage there was a young child living in her Father's house named Annie Bunting, however it is not clear who her parents were.

Samuel Walker, Cledwyn's father, was the youngest son of Harriott Walker née Willcockson [born 1821], a widower and housekeeper with eight children. Samuel's siblings were William Walker [born 1842] who worked as a lead miner, Alwood Walker [born 1844] also a lead miner, Griffin Walker [born 1846] who was also a lead miner, Walter Walker [born 1851], Harriott Walker [born 1854], Ann Walker [born 1856] and Thomas Walker [born 1858]. Samuel never knew his Father William Walker [born 1809] who was a farmer of 43 acres. William died around 1860. Harriott and Samuel also had a daughter named Edah and a son named Richard Edwin Walker Goodall [named after William's mother Mary Goodall] who both died before Samuel was born.

The Walker family can be traced back through several generations living in Ashover, as far back as a William Walker [born 1610] and Mary Alwood [born 1612] who married in 1632. The name Allwood was used continually throughout the family tree. It is a mystery as to why Cledwyn was given a Welsh name, given the family had been in Derbyshire for generations. There are property documents between the Walker family, the Willcocksons, Allwoods and the Hopkinsons, all of whom married into the family at various points, going back to the 1500's in Derbyshire Archives.

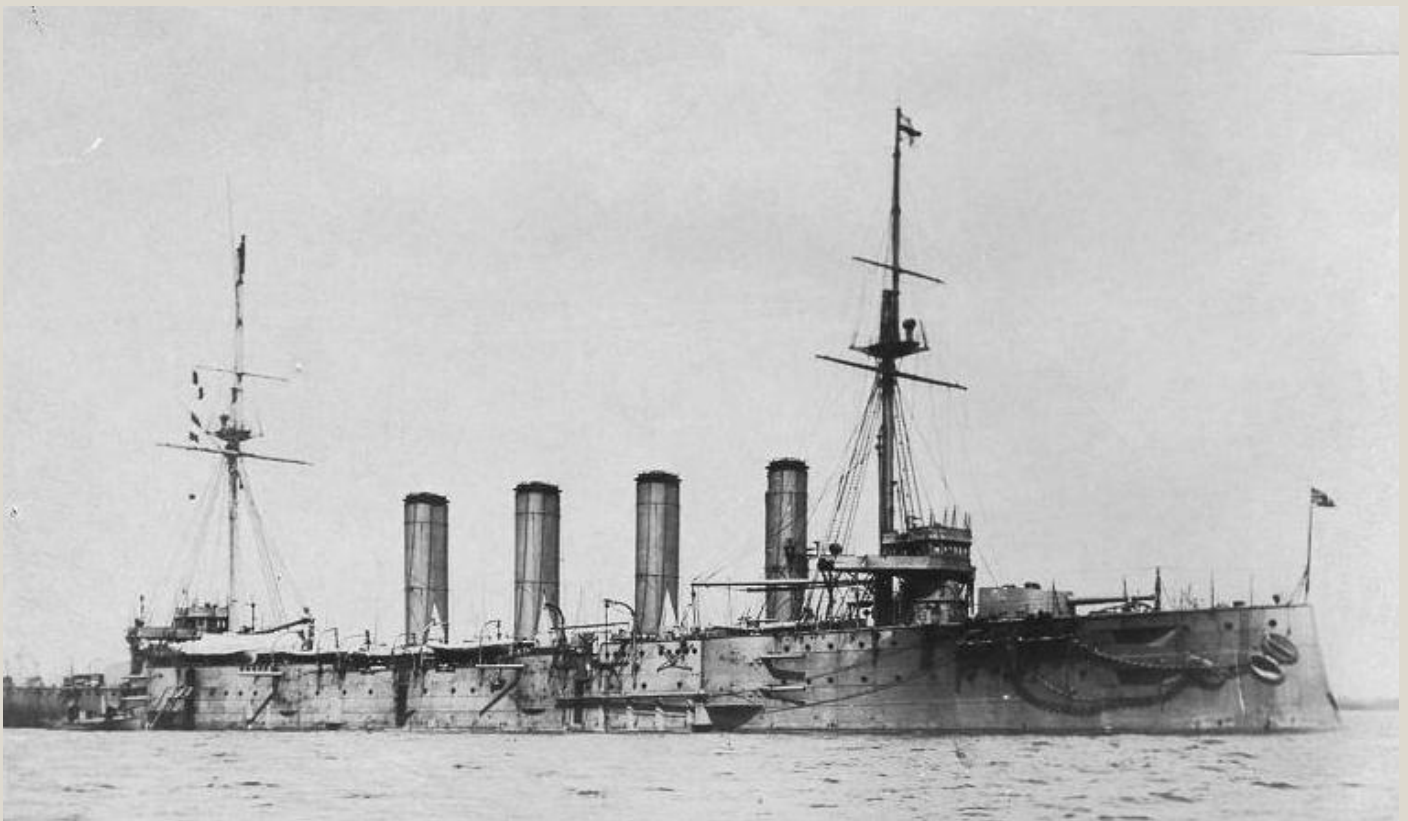


Prior to the war Cledwyn was employed as a Quarryman.

Cledwyn served upon two ships over the course of the First World War. The first was the Victory II, as a Stoker 2nd Class, from 1917. Cledwyn then went onto serve on the HMS Leviathan [pictured below] as a Stoker 1st Class. The Leviathan was a Drake Class armoured cruiser which had a crew of 900. Cledwyn's naval record was logged as satisfactory throughout.

Cledwyn left the Royal Navy after 1918 and was awarded a war gratuity, a lump sum of money, which would have helped him set up his life back home after the war. War gratuities were an initiative formalised in 1918 to pay soldiers and naval servicemen who had served overseas for more than 6 months by the end of the war.

Cledwyn was 5ft 8in, with brown hair and eyes. He sustained some injuries during battle. After the war Cledwyn married a woman named Bertha Travis in December 1933. He died aged 59, in 1959, in Derby.



# Bertram Figg

Bertram or 'Bertie' Figg was born on the 10th of April 1889 to Caroline Figg [born 1850] and George Figg [born 1841]. He had many siblings: Caroline Figg [born 1870], Ellen Figg [born 1873], Elizabeth Figg [born 1876], Robert George Figg [born 1878] who was a coal miner, John Figg [born 1880] who was a coal miner, Charles W. Figg [born 1885] who worked as a groom, Arthur A Figg [born 1888] who was a plough driver and farm labourer, Alfred Figg [born 1892] who was also a farm labourer and Lillie Figg [born 1895]. By the time he was 11, Bertie's eldest four siblings were no longer in the household. Some of the children attended Orwell School and West Hallam School.

Bertie's father George was employed as a gamekeeper at Mapperley Pond. He had been born in Sussex, to George Figg [born 1796] and Jamima Figg [born 1800] and was one of six siblings. His father George was an agricultural labourer and his mother Jamima worked as a launderess after she was widowed. Bertie's mother Caroline was born in Bramshot in Hampshire, her maiden name was Massingham. She was the daughter of Thomas [born 1812] and Lucy Massingham [born 1821] and was one of eight children. Her father Thomas was also an agricultural labourer. Caroline and George married on the 20th of July 1872. The first three of Caroline and George's children were born in Sussex, their first child Caroline having been born 2 years before their marriage. The family had then moved to Cambridge where Elizabeth, Robert and John were born. The rest of the children were born around Shipley and Mapperley in Derbyshire, where the family settled. Robert George Figg also went to war, he enlisted in the Labour Corps of the Nottingham and Derbyshire Regiment.

Prior to the war Bertie had worked as a Pipe Moulder at Stanton Ironworks. Stanton Ironworks was one of the biggest employers in the area, during the war the factory manufactured shell casings. Bertie was 5ft 10, he had light brown hair and brown eyes.



Bertie signed up to become a 2nd Class Stoker in 1916, serving first aboard the HMS Victory II. Whilst on the Victory he was promoted to Stoker 1st Class. Bertie then was assigned to the Q-10 Sloop HMS Begonia. This was one of 12 sloops, part of the Azalea Flower Class of ships, which were minesweeping boats, built as part of the Emergency War Programme for the Royal Navy. Bertie served on the Begonia from August 1916 to November 1917 when the ship was sunk after a collision with a German submarine off the coast of Casablanca. Bertie died in the accident.

Bertie's obituary in the Ilkeston Pioneer 25th October 1917 read:

“Mr. and Mrs. Figg of Derby Road Risley have been officially informed by the Admiralty that the mine sweeper “Begonia” on which their son Bertram Figg was a first-class stoker, has been lost with all hands. He was 28 years and single, being the sole supporter of his aged parents. He was the fifth son, but all his brothers are married. He had been in the navy about two years and was a moulder at Stanton Ironworks when he enlisted. He was at home on furlough three months ago, when he said his boat had been in action six times, but he made very lightly of the dangers of the deep”.

Bertie's war gratuity was paid to his mother, who was by this point a widow.

Bertie's brother Robert George also served in the army during the First World War as a Private in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment.



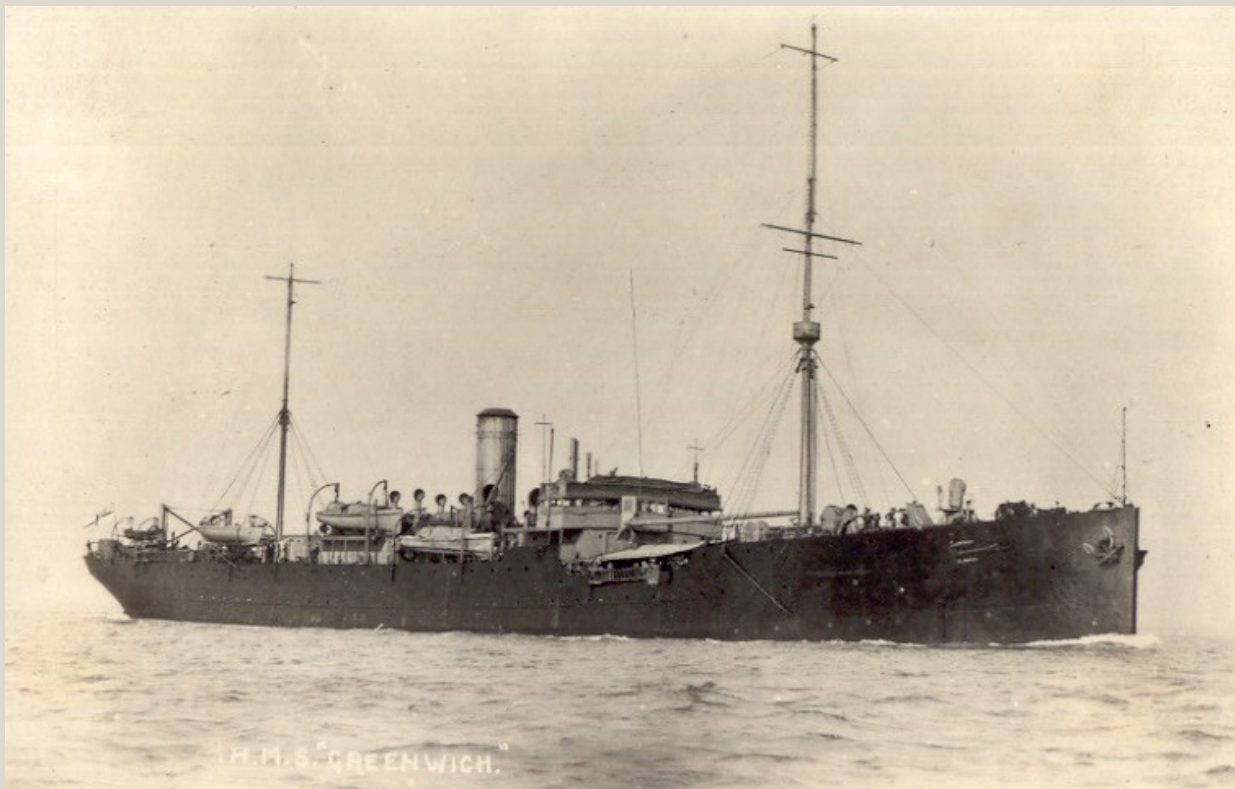
# Isaiah Taylor

Isaiah Taylor was born on the 22nd of March 1900 in Blackwell near Alfreton. His parents were Mary Ann Taylor [born 1875] and George Henry Taylor [born 1879]. Isaiah had one older brother named George [born 1898].

Unfortunately, George died just after Isaiah's birth. Isaiah's mother Mary then remarried in 1901 to James Bingham, a coal miner from Tibshelf and the family then all moved to Tibshelf. From 1901 Isaiah lived with his mother, brother, stepfather and several half siblings: James Bingham [born 1901], Noah Bingham [born 1903], Fred Bingham [born 1904], Joseph Bingham [born 1906] and Sampson Bingham [born 1908].

Isaiah was a collier before he joined up to the navy aged 17, firstly as a ships boy on the 14th of September 1917 on the Powerful, the Victory I, then as a seaman in March 1918 on the Kildoman Castle, the Victory I, The Dolphin, the Victory I again and the Greenwich. In August 1919 Isaiah became a Stoker aboard the Greenwich and then on the Victory II. During his time as a Stoker, his conduct was recorded as 'good' and 'satisfactory', he also completed an oil fuel course. In February 1922 Isaiah was invalided aboard the Victory, possibly due to astigmatism which causes blurred vision. He was awarded unemployment insurance by the navy.

Isaiah was 5ft 5 and had brown hair and blue eyes. He had a scar on his left eyebrow, his index finger and two scars on his back.



# Elisha Omar

Elisha Omar was born on the 3rd of September 1885 in Hasland, Chesterfield. His mother was Hannah Omar [born 1853]. Elisha had several siblings: Emma Omar [born 1874], Walter Omar [born 1876], Priscilla Omar [born 1877], Annie Omar [born 1880], Alfred Omar [born 1888] and Mary H Omar [born 1890]. Elisha worked at Tilley Colliery in Chesterfield prior to his military service.

He joined the Royal Navy on the 25th of July 1904 on short service as a seaman. He served on the Firequeen in 1906, then the Formidable, the Montague, the Victory I, the Prince George, the Victory I again in 1907, the Drake and finally the Victory I again in July 1909.

In August 1909 he was discharged from the Navy for being medically unfit.

On the 18th of December 1909 Elisha married Elizabeth Dowspring. They had a daughter named Doris Omar [born 1911]. Elisha returned to work as a coal miner.

On the 9th of November 1914 Elisha joined the army, as part of the Sherwood Foresters Regiment.

