

# WESTENDER

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## THEN AND NOW



**WEST END HIGH STREET LOOKING TOWARDS SHOTTERS HILL c. 1910**



**THE SAME SCENE TODAY**

Our feature photograph this edition shows West End High Street around 1910. The road is compacted dirt, as was usual before roads were tarmacadamed. Shotters Hill is quite clearly seen and the old National School, latterly the Parish Hall on the left. Our current picture shows the same scene today, albeit with somewhat less traffic than is usual. Gone is the school and most of the buildings in the original photograph.

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## SARAH SIDDONS ... actress

A Review by Stan Waight



SARAH SIDDONS BY GAINSBOROUGH 1785



THE THEATRE IN FRENCH STREET, SOUTHAMPTON

The speaker at our February meeting was our old friend Geoff Watts. I must admit that, before the meeting, I wondered what the link between the famous actress and Southampton might be. It immediately became clear that Geoff is a member of the city's Sarah Siddons Fan Club, which occasionally performs on the streets of the city, and a rather firmer connection emerged later in the talk. In his inimitable way, Geoff spoke off the cuff for an hour and kept a packed house rivetted to its seats; it would be almost impossible to do justice to such a performance in a short report. There were comparatively few slides, most of which were contemporary portraits of the people who were part of the story, and he began with the famous one by Gainsborough.

In early plays, female roles were played by men, and the first actress did not appear until 1660.

John Ward was an actor on the theatrical circuit during George II's time whose daughter Sally married another actor, Roger Kemble, in 1753. The Kemble's first child, the Sarah of our story, was born in Brecon in 1755 and showed talent for the stage as a child. During her early career, Sarah met yet another actor and, against opposition from her parents, married William Siddons in 1773.

Sarah and her husband joined a company in Cheltenham which was attended by many of the London gentry and she was recommended to the celebrated David Garrick, who invited her to Drury Lane. Her first performance was a flop, but Garrick persevered and cast her in Richard III - another flop, which resulted in her being dropped from the company. In a return to the provinces, Sarah gained in confidence and stagecraft and she went on to settle for four years in Bath, where her reputation was established. Drawn back to London, she was re-engaged at Drury Lane to great acclaim and for 30 years reigned as the greatest tragic actress. She met many famous people and was befriended by Samuel Johnson. George III and his queen were greatly impressed and Sarah was invited to Buckingham House to perform and read to their family.

The further link with Southampton was forged when Sarah's great friend Charlotte Fitzhugh took up residence at Bannister Park. Sarah came to visit her quite frequently and even owned a house in the town for a few years. On one occasion, in 1809, she actually performed in the theatre in French Street, partly because she was a leading player against the aristocratic 'picnics' that were taking place in the London theatres. These sensational events were diverting attention from serious theatre, but normality was soon resumed. Sarah had moved to Covent Garden in 1808 and stayed there until she retired in 1812. She died in 1831 and her funeral in Paddington Green attracted over 5000 mourners.



## GOSPORT FERRY

By Peter Wallace



**A SAILOR MAKES HIS FINAL JOURNEY ABOARD THE GOSPORT FERRY AS SEEN BY PETER & MARGARET WALLACE**

On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013 whilst on a day trip to Gosport, Margaret and I found ourselves witnessing an unusual event near to the terminal of the Gosport to Portsmouth Ferry.

A large group of people (mostly dressed in black) were gathered near to the terminal ramp waiting in glorious sunshine for a hearse to arrive. At the stroke of twelve noon a coffin carried by six pallbearers (of which some were ferry crew) was reverently conveyed down the ramp onto the ferry named "*Spirit of Gosport*" followed by the mourners.

The ferry slipped its moorings, moved away very slowly from the pontoon and proceeded on a circular journey around Portsmouth Harbour followed by two harbour fire tugs spraying water from their water cannons by way of a salute, a third tug and a second ferry completed the procession. Due to the bright sunshine the two jets of water formed rainbows high in the sky and a flock of sea gulls appeared from nowhere which made the event very moving.

After talking to several locals I was told that this funeral procession was for the Captain of the above vessel. On returning home I looked on the web site of the Portsmouth News to find out more information on the deceased. He was Rhett Gibson, aged 51 from Gosport. He had served for 34 years in the ferry company from pontoon boy to pilot.

## WELHS WEBSITE ANNOUNCEMENT

It is with regret we have to announce that Ray & Doreen Niblett, who have acted as web designers and webmasters for our excellent website since its start have decided to call it a day. They have for several years carried on the task from Australia since they emigrated. We wish them well for the future and will miss their input, and wish to express our thanks for all they have done for WELHS. Meanwhile, we have to find a willing webmaster/web designer who will design and maintain a new website for us. If any members/readers feel they would like to do this please make contact with Peter Wallace (tel: 01489 786521) or Nigel Wood (tel: 02380 471886). Our existing website will continue for the time being, but will not be updated and unfortunately no new editions of "Westender" will appear on it. Ed.

## NEW BEGINNINGS IN WEST END VILLAGE (1884-1894)

By Pauline Berry

We are fortunate to have Cdrom copies of many (but not all) of the St. James' Church Parish magazines in our archives thanks to the hard work of Nigel Wood. They started in 1884 when they were painstakingly handwritten by the Vicar, the Revd. Charles Tudor Williams and continued in printed form from 1888 onwards.

In 1885 the vicar reported on the new font, in the original church, donated by 'a lady' whom we now know to be the local benefactor, Mrs Harriet Haselfoot of Moorhill House. It was dedicated to the memory of the first incumbent of St. James' Church, the Revd. J.W. Hatherell. Regret was expressed in this magazine, regarding Mr & Mrs Alfred Jackson of 'The Wilderness' who were leaving to move elsewhere, *"who for 28 years have been hearty and generous supporters of all good works"*.

Unemployment was rife at that time and a soup kitchen was set up for the hungry residents of West End, costing one (old) penny per quart (2 pints). Mr & Mrs Blathwayt of 'Woodlands' supported this enterprise, in addition to donating, like many others, to the rebuilding of the Church soon after. There were many church meetings to discuss this latter project.

The next vicar, the Revd. Charles R. Patey (1888-1905), wrote about his plans to revive The Cottagers' (Villagers') Show which had lapsed earlier. In 1889 Mr & Mrs W.C. Fletcher of Hatch Grange, gave their permission for the show to be held on their land. Unfortunately it rained on 'the day', but this did not stop 105 exhibitors displaying their goods, flowers, vegetables, crafts and fine laundry for the many visitors to view. The following year the Cottagers' Show was held at 'The Wilderness', newly occupied by Mr & Mrs John R. Blakiston.

Following rapid construction, 1890 also saw the consecration of the newly built St. James' Church. The service, witnessed by 500 parishioners, was conducted by the Lord Bishop of Guildford. This big occasion was marred only by the fact that despite generous public subscriptions, there was still a debt of £1,200 left to be paid out of the total cost of £8,000.

The Winter Coal Club was doing well, whose many local members had joined to pay a small regular sum of money in order to receive a single delivery of either 8 or 16 cwt. of coal to warm them through the winter months.

The year 1891 was recorded by the vicar as having 'bad weather' and a relief fund was started, contributed by the wealthier residents of West End. Local men, needing work, were paid to clear away the deep snow and the Soup Kitchen was restarted for those in need.

This was also the year that the Oddfellows Society was created, which was a sickness benefit for its 35 members who were willing to pay regularly into the scheme. The incentive was the sickness payments which could be paid out to members, varying from 8 to 20 shillings weekly or an £8 death benefit for a man (half that for his wife). Medical benefit for 'juveniles' was charged at one penny per week. So successful was this society that it continued well into the twentieth century.

A Cricket Club in West End completed its 17th season in 1892 (formed in 1875) and the Church Magazine provided a list of its members including well-known names such as Willis, Finden, Hollingworth, Walker, Small, Axtell, Haines and Wiltshire. That year was the turn of Harefield Estate to hold the Cottagers' Show at Mr Edwin Jones' Riding School.

The April 1894 magazine reported the opening of the 'new' Reading Room, constructed of corrugated iron roof and timber walls and frame. This was sited on Shotters Hill, just above the present Viking Garage. Again this was thanks to the generosity of Mrs Harriet Haselfoot. A Working Mens' Club was quickly formed to meet in this large room as a social club. It soon had a committee and 50 members who paid one penny per week to belong, playing billiards, cards etc.. The club continued here until the building was demolished circa 1960.

Around this time, mention was frequently made about the provision of a new and permanent Vicarage to be built next to St. James' Church. This was eventually built in 1900 and is now Elizabeth Court, retirement apartments. Before that date large private houses nearby (The Lodge, Pinewood and

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Winton House now Merlyn House) had provided temporary 'vicarages' for the local clergy.



**WEST END CRICKET TEAM circa 1890**

Once again in 1894, the successful Cottagers' Show was held on Harefield Estate. It attracted 1,000 visitors, 300 exhibitors and a Band of Pipers who enjoyed a happy day in the grounds.

Finally, on December 4th that year, was the very first election of the new West End Parish Council. The request had gone out that only '*upright, prudent, business-like men*' could stand for election, regardless of religion or politics. The first eight members to be elected were: G.H. Haines (Builder), G.H. Elliott (Schoolmaster), W.H. Gater (Solicitor), H. Haines (Builder), G.E. May (Baker & Grocer), A. Fray (Farmer), J.R. Blakiston (gentleman) and S. Houghton (Woodman). Women in West End had to wait another 30 or more years for this privilege.

Thus ended a decade of beginnings and happenings in West End, which proves that it was not just another sleepy Hampshire village, but it was ready to progress into the 20th century and beyond.



**St. JAMES' CHURCH, WEST END circa 1905**

## SOME THOUGHTS ON TITANIC

By Ron Pattinson

### UNSINKABLE

We are well aware that the Titanic was certainly not unsinkable, but where does the myth come from, nobody in authority at White Star, the owners, had said she was unsinkable, likewise nobody at Harland & Woolf, Belfast, the builders had claimed she was unsinkable, so where do we go from here.

Captain E.J. Smith, Titanic's captain on her fatal voyage had said in an interview with a newspaperman "*I cannot imagine any mishap, or accident that would cause this ship to founder*". But he was speaking in 1907, five years before the Titanic was built, furthermore, he was speaking about another ship altogether.

A passenger embarking on the ill-fated liner asked a crewmember, "*Is this ship really unsinkable?*"

"*God himself could not sink this ship*" was the reply. But for heavens sake, he was a member of the deck crew, he had only just joined the ship himself.

So where to now, well at the time there was a very influential magazine called 'The Shipbuilder' and one of its editors had said that the Olympic class of ship, with all their bulkheads were "*practically unsinkable*". So there you have it, a collection of misquotes and a comedy of errors and we end up with THE UNSINKABLE TITANIC.

### THE TRAGEDY

There were 55 child victims of the sinking, all of them in 3rd class except one, she was in first class and she died because of the arrogance and stupidity of her parents.

The Allison family were wealthy Canadians, Mr & Mrs Hudson-Allison, their daughter and a baby boy, also in the party was Mrs Allison's maid and a nurse for the baby, the little girl slept with her parents in their cabin, the baby was with the nurse and the maid in their cabin.

When Titanic hit the iceberg, many people were unaware of anything untoward, but there was quite a commotion in the alleyway outside the maid's cabin, so she quickly got dressed and went to her employers room, she told them of her concern but Mr Allison, annoyed at being disturbed told her abruptly to go back to bed.

Rebuffed, she made her way back, but on making enquiries of an officer, she was told to make her way to the boat deck, she went back to her room and told the nurse, her reply was curt and to the point.

"*If this is the case*", she said, "*the master and mistress can do what they like, but they are not going to tell me to risk my neck*".

Both girls got the baby dressed and wrapped up against the cold and went up on deck where they got into two lifeboats, the maid in lifeboat 8, the nurse (Alice Cleaver) with baby Trevor in number 11.

When the parents finally made their way to the boat deck, they could find no trace of the maid (Sarah Daniels) or the nurse or the baby, unwilling to let their two year old daughter go into a boat without them, their little girl became a tragic statistic, Helen Lorraine became the only First Class child to perish. Incidentally Alice Cleaver, the nurse, has a history of her own, but that is another story.

### THE RIDDLE IN THE GRAVE

There are three burial grounds containing victims of the Titanic disaster, Fairview Lawn is a multi-denom-

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inational cemetery, Mount Olivet is Catholic and Baron-de-Hirsch is Jewish, all these places are in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The Jewish cemetery contains just ten graves, one is definitely Jewish, a man by the name of Mr F. Wormald, he was a bedroom steward, 8 graves are unknown, so are Jewish on the balance of probability, but one person is a Catholic, so what on earth is that all about.

Michel Navratil was a thorough going rogue of the first order, he was French and married with two small sons, opinion varies as to the boys ages, but as far as I know the eldest was two and a half, the other about 15 months.

Michel was estranged from his wife and on the run, he was wanted by the law for embezzlement, con tricks and various other nefarious activities, things were getting too hot for him, he decided to leave the country as quick as possible, but he detested the idea of leaving the two things he worshipped, his sons, so he changed his name and procured a new identity with all the paperwork to go with it.

The next thing was to book passage on the first available steamer, he snatched his boys and dashed to Cherbourg, his ship was the Titanic, on he got with his precious charges.

What happened next is history, Michel might have been all the horrible things that he was accused of, but cowardice was not one of them, when the ship was down he went up to the boat deck, handed his boys to an officer, watched them put into a boat, lifeboat D and said for many to hear, "*Please look after my babies*". He then walked away and was never seen alive again.

So why is he buried in a Jewish grave when it is known he was a Catholic, well as I said, he changed his identity in order to get away, and all his papers found on his body when it was pulled from the ocean stated that his name was Louis Hoffman, which is of course a Jewish name.

When the truth was discovered, this was because pictures of the two boys were circulated round the world and eventually were seen by the frantic mother, she of course identified her sons and also her wayward husband by a photograph of his body.

Enquiries were made about what should be done, but the Jewish authorities insisted that death had exonerated him of all his sins saying "*The Jews have welcomed him into our keeping and we look after our Own*". So there he lies to this day.

## **SIZE IS IMPORTANT**

It has always been said, and a big thing has been made of it that the Titanic was the largest ship afloat, well strictly speaking she was, but only marginally, her gross tonnage was slightly more than the Olympic, about a thousand tons, but in size she was exactly the same, she was constructed from the same plans and her dimensions were precisely the same, same height, same length, same width, so where was the difference?

To explain, when Olympic sailed on her maiden voyage, J. Bruce Ismay, White Star's chairman, sailed with her, ostensibly he was there to check for any faults, but probably he just went for show, to swank in other words.

It came as a shock when first class passengers complained that the forward part of the two promenade decks got very wet if there was any sort of sea running, so he ordered that while Titanic was fitting out, certain alterations were to be made.

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The forward one third of these decks were to be enclosed, part of this enclosed area was to be used as a first class apartment, an a la carte restaurant, also a small eating place which became known as The Café Parisien, this became very popular for young first class people.

The enclosure of the forward part of these two decks is the only way one can tell one ship from the other.

## THE FORECAST

Many of the women survivors stated in one form or another that something terrible was going to happen to the ship, they dreamed, or had premonitions, or visitations from some godly presence or whatever, they made great play to anyone who was stupid enough to listen, strange thing was, nobody unconnected to these females heard them mention anything untoward BEFORE they boarded the ship, so I dismiss these ladies out of hand, they were in my humble opinion wise after the event and lets face it, anyone can be a clever clog with the benefit of hindsight.

You might ask yourself this, if you thought the ship was going to sink, would you get on the damn thing?

In 1898 a book was published and briefly it told the story of a whole bunch of extremely wealthy people, they were dissatisfied with the way they were taxed by the government, (nothing changes there) they elected to take their skills and know-how to the new world, so en bloc they booked passage on a liner leaving Southampton for New York, on the way the ship struck an iceberg, (sound familiar) the ship sinks and all these wealthy families are thrown into the icy water, they have just minutes to live, but in that time they think how futile things were for them, each and everyone had enough money to buy anything they wanted, except the one thing they needed most, the means of their salvation, futile indeed, and that was the title of the book - Futility. The author, whose name I think was Morgan Robertson, died in 1913, so he lived long enough to see how close he was to the truth, the bizarre facts don't end there, in his book the name of the ship was TITAN.

The book of course was a work of fiction, it was never intended to be a forecast, any more than H.G. Wells "Things to Come" or "War of the Worlds", it was a sheer coincidence, but spooky I think.

There was though a letter written by one Henry T. Wilde to his sister and it was posted in Queenstown, Southern Ireland on the day Titanic sailed, it was an ordinary letter but it contained one strange phrase, "*I still don't like this ship, I have a queer feeling about it*".

What that queer feeling was no one knows because Henry Tindall Wilde was the chief officer on Titanic and he perished with the ship.

## A BIG "THANK YOU" TO EASTLEIGH BOROUGH COUNCIL'S HEWEB

**P**eter Wallace (Treasurer), Lin Dowdell (Secretary) and Nigel Wood (Editor/Museum Curator) were invited to attend the meeting of Eastleigh Borough Council's HEWEB at the 2000 Centre in Hedge End on 11th March 2013. It was the annual awards of Grants by HEWEB and we have been very fortunate to receive £400 towards the cost of a new Photocopier, which will be used for the future production of all WELHS publications/occasional papers as well as this bi-monthly newsletter. Our existing machine has put in sterling service over the years but is very slow when one is producing anything of size, like for example this newsletter. Many local voluntary groups were at the awards evening and more than £12,000 was given out. It is a credit to EBC/HEWEB that they help support so many local groups who enrich our community and our sincere thanks go out to HEWEB Co-ordinator Jon Riddell, the Mayor Cllr. Rupert Kyrle (Chairman) and all the members of the HEWEB committee for their continued support over the years. Ed.



## LIFE IN NELSON'S NAVY

### A Review by Stan Waight



Anne Baxandall returned to us at our March meeting to speak about life and conditions in the Royal Navy during the time of our most famous admiral. Whether it was the subject that appealed or just that our meetings are becoming more popular, it was a full house. It's a pity that Anne's otherwise first-class delivery was marred by what she called 'a tickly cough'. Her talk was so detailed that it is impossible to do it full credit in a short report.

She began by describing Nelson's most famous ship, HMS Victory. Launched in Chatham in 1765 she was completed at a cost of £57,000 in the values of a time when an agricultural labourer received 45 pence per week. She was a 1st Rate with 102 guns. One of Nelson's foibles was to have his ships painted in black and yellow - a colour scheme that was gradually adopted by the whole navy.

A career as an officer was a chosen one, and promotion owed as much to nepotism as it did to ability. Entry as a Midshipman took place at the age of 12 to 14 and promotion to Lieutenant was by examination; thereafter it was by seniority.

Victory's crew totalled over 800, and included many trades. When not in battle, men of the lower ranks didn't have to work as hard as their counterparts in the Merchant Navy and 'board and lodging' was better than working as a labourer ashore. Prize money could also be a great attraction. As a result, recruitment was not as difficult as is often thought and the press gang was only used as a last resort. But the crew was usually a motley bunch and included many nationalities - organisation into a smooth running team was not easy.

The living quarters were very cramped and often pervaded by smells from the animals that were kept to provide fresh meat. Nevertheless, cleanliness was the order of the day and quantities of vinegar were used as a disinfectant.

Feeding the men was always difficult. When fresh food ran out, recourse had to be made to ships' biscuits, salt meat, dried peas, oatmeal etc. Fortunately, Britain had control of many overseas ports where fresh food could be obtained. Clean water was carefully conserved and beer was widely drunk. Rum or grog was served twice a day and lime was used to ward off scurvy. Tobacco had to be chewed because of the fire risk in smoking.

Work was carried out in four-hour watches and off-watch time was often spent playing dice and cards or singing - a fiddler was always on hand. But discipline was very strict and punishment varied from stopping the grog ration, putting men in irons, flogging and in the most serious cases death. Despite popular belief, keel-hauling was not practised in the Royal Navy.

The main purpose of the ship, going into battle, was obviously perilous. The woeful inaccuracy of the big guns meant that close-quarter engagement with massive broadsides was necessary. The splinters caused by heavy cannon-balls against the ship's timbers were the main cause of injury but there were more casualties from accidents and disease than in action - the ship's surgeons were ill-equipped by our standards and sterilisation was virtually unknown.

Anne used many nautical expressions during her talk - 'clearing the decks', 'showing a leg' and 'the heads' (the loos) were all known to me but 'tow rags' (cloths towed in the sea and used like toilet paper) were something new!!

Pity about the cough!

## SOME REMAINS OF THORNHILL PARK HOUSE

Written by Roy Andrews - Photographs by Peter Wallace



**PHOTOGRAPH (left) & DRAWING (right) SHOWING THORNHILL PARK HOUSE** *(images courtesy of Bitterne Local History Society)*

Growing up in the 1940's and 1950's in Thornhill, then still part of West End Parish, my playground was the woods and fields which surrounded my home. In the fields, we had to keep our eyes open or be chased off by the 'farmer's girl'. However the woods were one big adventure playground that I spent many a happy hour in. It mostly came to an end in 1953 when Thornhill became part of Southampton and soon after the woods and fields disappeared under housing. A few acres of woodland were retained between Thornhill Park Road and Byron Road, behind the Bittern Pub, where I could continue to play.

A few years ago, my dentists' receptionist, whom I had known for many years as we worked our way through three dentists, and who had lived on the edge of the remaining Thornhill woods for many years, happened to mention that there were two stone pillars deep within the woods that she thought must be part of the Thornhill Park Estate. This was somewhat of a surprise to me as in all the years I had played in the woods I had never seen anything like this.

Moving on a couple of years, I was talking to a lifelong childhood friend, who is a few years older than me, on 'Skype' as she has lived in Australia for many years, when she also mentioned remembering the two pillars and was able to give me a rough location for them. A wander around the woods in the approximate area revealed nothing.

Then, as I mentioned in the last newsletter, into the museum one Saturday recently came Ron Pattinson with several interesting stories to tell amongst which was his memory of living in Thornhill before WW2 and playing on the two pillars, from the demolished Thornhill Park House, in the woods. Even better he could confirm that the pillars were still insitu three years ago.

With the aid of a sketch map drawn by Ron, Peter, also an old Thornhill boy, and I went to the woods and spent a fruitless hour trying to find the pillars impeded by a thick ground covering of brambles.



**PHOTOGRAPHS SHOWING THE PILLARS WITH THE AUTHOR** *(images courtesy of Peter Wallace)*



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So back to Ron who kindly agreed to accompany me to the location and this time the pillars were found hidden under brambles where they had lain for around ninety years, to a large extent looking very much like tree trunks. Returning with Peter later, we were able to clear the brambles and take the attached photographs, colour versions of which will be held at the museum. The pillars are ten feet seven inches long, the base of each is eighteen inches in diameter and this tapers to sixteen inches in diameter at the top. From pictures, including historic information and details of Thornhill Park House, held in the WELHS Museum, the pillars appear to be of the Ionic design (the other possible styles are Doric or Corinthian) although the base and tops of the two pillars are missing. They appear to have been made from a type of marble which has an attractive red streak running through it. However over the years, the stone surface has been weathered by rain and surrounding vegetation. Although still in remarkably good condition, the pillars have fretting covering their surface which causes them at a quick glance to look like fallen tree trunks.

There were originally five pillars in a portico on the south side of the house, which was situated between the present Thornhill Avenue and Cowper Road, and had been added during the tenure of Colonel Frank Willan who lived in the house from 1878 to 1910.

The house was demolished around 1930; my dad born in 1915 used to say he could remember playing in the house when derelict in the late 1920's. He eventually bought a newly built bungalow on the estate in 1938. Ron Pattinson also remembers once finding his way into the cellars of the demolished house in the 1930's. The base of the house was evident until the mid 60's when houses were built on it.

Why were the two pillars abandoned in the woods some distance from the site of the house and also the main road and what happened to the other three? Are they still out there somewhere? Those who held the answer are probably long dead. The pillars however, protected by the brambles and their size, could survive almost indefinitely as a piece of Thornhill history.

## THREE MYSTERIOUS EMPTY ENVELOPES

**By Nigel Wood**



**BLACK HOUSE, WEST END**  
For many years the home of the Gater family  
now it is a Health Clinic

I recently received an e-mail enquiry via our website....

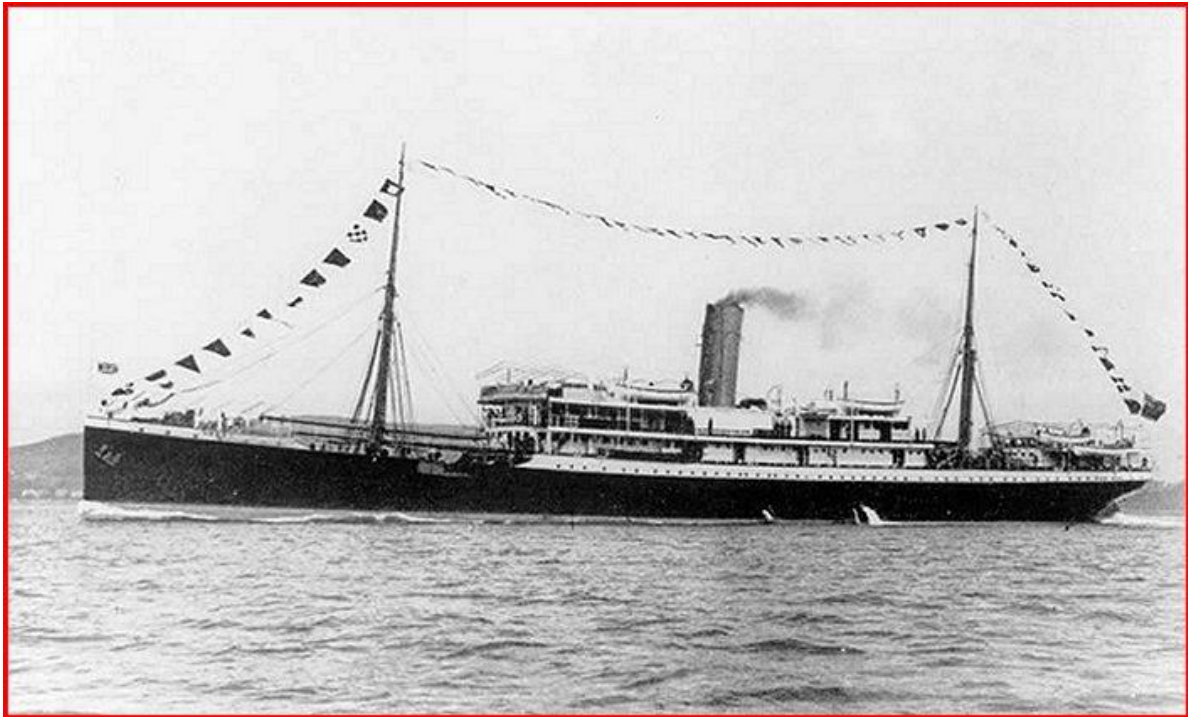
*"Dear Curator or Assistant,  
Many years ago, I inherited a stamp collection from my Uncle who lived in Southampton.*  
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## THE LOSS OF S.S. MENDI IN 1917

By John Avery



The *Mendi* was on charter from her owners Elder Dempster to the British government as a troop ship.

The black native community in South Africa had willingly volunteered to fight for the mother country and had joined the South African Native Labour Corps. The men were not to be armed with firearms but were to be used for digging trenches, carrying equipment and as stretcher bearers etc. There remained a fear among the government that the black community could rise against the white minority hence the reluctance to arm them.

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 1917 the ship left Capetown calling at Lagos and Plymouth with the final destination to be Le Havre. She carried 805 black privates, 5 white officers and 17 NCO's.

On the morning of 21<sup>st</sup> at 5 am the S.S. *Darro* travelling at full speed south of St Catherine's on the IOW, emitting no warning signals in the dense fog, rammed the *Mendi* amid ships. The *Mendi* was virtually sliced in half. The *Darro* made no effort to lower her life boats or to assist in anyway. An escort destroyer *HMS Brisk* took on the role of picking up survivors but as very few of the men could swim it was mainly dead bodies being piled onto the deck. The *Darro* hovered to about ½ mile away from the casualty. The captain and crew of the *Darro* did not raise a finger to help save any of the lives..

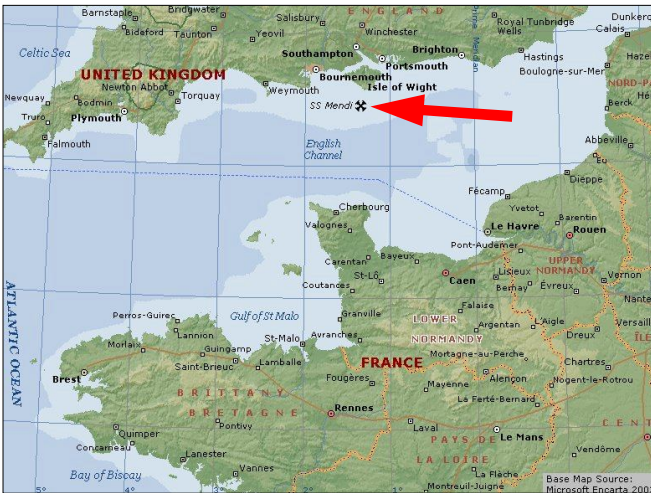
The Reverend Isaac Wauchope Dyobha loudly sang words of comfort to support the dying men and was heard calling out "Be quiet and calm, my countrymen, for what is taking place is exactly what you came to do. You are going to die, but that is what you came to do.

"Brothers, we are drilling the death drill. I, a Xhosa, say you are my brothers. Zulus, Swazis, Pondos, Basothos and all others, let us die like warriors. We are the sons of Africa. Raise your war cries my brothers, for though they made us leave our assegais back in the kraals, our voices are left with our bodies."

607 black troops and 33 crew members were lost in the icy waters off the Isle of Wight. The *Darro* suffered no casualties.

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The Hollybrook Memorial image courtesy Ann MacGillivray

Eyewitness stories of the bravery exhibited by the doomed men aboard the *SS Mendi* have become legendary. The most famous story is that of the death dance the men performed as the ship went down. Great anger was demonstrated by relatives and families as there was little effort made to advise them of the tragedy. Some families travelled hundred of miles to try to learn news of their loved ones but were turned away by government officials. The families appointed lawyers to seek compensation but without any success.

The Inquiry into the collision found the captain of the *Darro*, Captain Henry W Stump, to be at fault for "having travelled at a dangerously high speed in thick fog, and of having failed to ensure that his ship emitted the necessary fog sound signals." The captain of the *Darro* had his licence suspended for a year. His failure to render assistance to the *Mendi's* survivors was publicly criticised at the Inquiry.

The Duke of Kent, President of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, visited Southampton Hollybrook Cemetery on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2013 to unveil the latest information panels put in place by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The cemetery contains 113 burials from the First World War and 186 burials from the Second World War.

It also contains the Hollybrook Memorial, which commemorates by name almost 1,900 servicemen and women of the Commonwealth land and air forces whose graves are not known.

Each of the panels carries information about the site of the cemetery or memorial, and the reason why it is situated where it is.

But each panel also carries a QR (Quick Response) code which when scanned with a Smartphone provides access to further information, including the personal stories of some of the casualties buried or commemorated at the location.

There are other memorials commemorating the *Mendi*. There is a plaque at the Delville Wood Museum in France, at Port Elizabeth in South Africa and in the Avalon Cemetery in Soweto. The Mendi Scholarship was set up to create opportunities for black children and so far has awarded 4500 bursaries. After the war, the South African government created "The Order of Mendi for Bravery" Decoration it is awarded to South African citizens who have performed an extraordinary act of bravery that placed their lives in great danger, or who lost their own lives including in trying to save the life of another person, or by saving property, in or outside the Republic of South Africa.

Today the bridge telegraph from the *Mendi* can be seen at the Maritime Museum, Bembridge, on the Isle of Wight. Following a long personal campaign by a former army major, Ned Middleton, the MOD declared the wreck of the *Mendi* as an official war grave in 2009 which now makes it unlawful to remove artefacts from the wreck.



## SOUTHAMPTON MARITIME FESTIVAL

Information courtesy of John Avery

The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology on behalf of the **Southampton Heritage Federation** is delighted to announce the *Southampton Maritime Festival*, taking place on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> and Monday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2013 at the Ocean Cruise Terminal, Southampton. This exciting new event promises to celebrate the long and proud maritime heritage of Southampton in style. Never before has an event of this scale been seen in Southampton!

The Festival will be taking over the docks and water within Dock Gate 4 to bring you a whole host of activities and attractions that hark back to the Second World War with a 1940s theme. There will be a wide range of historic vessels in attendance, including a flotilla of Dunkirk Little ships, numerous displays and demonstrations and even a Lancaster bomber fly over. With so much going on, it'll be sure to keep the whole family entertained!

A highlight of the festival will be the arrival of the Steam Tug *Challenge* as she returns to Southampton, fresh from her recent Heritage Lottery Funded refit. *Challenge*, a veteran of the Second World War, will be accompanied by a flotilla of Dunkirk Little Ships. His Royal Highness Prince Michael of Kent, patron of the **Dunkirk Little Ships Restoration Trust**, will also attend. Heritages buses will provide a park and ride service to the docks from the city centre throughout the event and the SS *Shieldhall* will offer cruises up and down Southampton Water.

Amongst the numerous displays and demonstrations over the course of two days will be Second World War re-enactors, vintage Rolls Royce cars, and the Historical Diving Society demonstrating 'Hard Hat' or Standard Diving Gear. Visitors will be able to try their hand at controlling Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs), see the Pufferspheres from the National Oceanography Centre, and learn more about Southampton's historic trams. They can explore the various exhibits and stalls of heritage organisations and traders or take a pit-stop at one of many eateries while enjoying the live music and entertainment. The fleet of historic vessels will be moored alongside the terminal, waiting to tell their colourful stories.

As well as being a fantastic day out for all the family, Southampton Maritime Festival will raise awareness of the city's rich seafaring traditions. The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology is urging local residents in particular to get involved; whether people wish to enjoy the attractions or join in as a valued volunteer, they can help make the festival an event for Southampton to be proud of.

The Festival is sponsored by Associated British Ports, Southampton and Williams Shipping. It is supported by Southampton City Council and the National Oceanography Centre.

More information and updates can be found at: [www.southamptonmaritimefestival.com](http://www.southamptonmaritimefestival.com)



### SWAYTHLING ROAD WEST END

This charming turn of the century photograph from our archive shows the Swaythling Road at West End, just past the location of the present day Master Builder pub. Blenheim Villa's are just to the right of centre and still stand today.

## ENGLISH SUMMER FAYRE AT TOWNHILL PARK HOUSE

### Early bird alert! English Summer Fayre at Townhill Park House Saturday 6th July 2013

The Gregg School is located in West End's Townhill Park House, the former home of Lord and Lady Swaythling. The school will be holding a traditional English Summer Fayre on Saturday 6th July 2013 from 11am to 3pm and the organisers are keen to spread the news in the local community so as many of us as possible get the chance to view the lovely Grade II Listed building and the restored gardens which were originally designed by Gertrude Jekyll.

The many attractions on the day will include fresh Cream Teas, a Pimm's Tent, a busy Craft Fair, a BBQ and a Grand Draw with some really great prizes including a 40 minute flight over the Isle of Wight for three people. There will also be a cricket match between current and former students and staff to watch.

If you want to walk up to the school you will find it set back off Cutbush Lane. Otherwise access for vehicles is via Atlantic Park View (off Townhill Way, postcode SO18 3RR for satnav directions) and there is free parking on site.

Details of the stallholders and other information will be posted on The Gregg School Facebook page from May onwards.

## THE NEXT MEETINGS ARE....

May 1

### ROMAN SOUTHAMPTON

*Dr Andy Russel*

June 5

### SOUTHAMPTON & ITS FRENCH CONNECTION

*Jake Simpkin*

July 3

### THE HISTORY OF ITCHEN FERRY VILLAGE & ITS FAMILIES

*Dr Cheryl Butler*

## On this day (April 3rd) in .....

**1367** Henry IV, the first Lancastrian King of England, born at Bolingbroke Castle in Lincolnshire, the son of John of Gaunt.

**1721** Robert Walpole became Britain's first Prime Minister, an office he held continuously until 12th February 1742.

**1860** The Pony Express, founded by William Russell, was first run - 1,980 miles between St. Joseph in Missouri and Sacramento in California - ended on 24th October 1861 when the first trans-continental telegraph line was completed.

**1882** Jesse James, American outlaw and robber, was shot in the back at close range by one of his own gang, Robert Ford, in St. Joseph, Missouri.

**1897** Johannes Brahms, German composer and pianist, died in Vienna.

**1924** Marlon Brando, American film actor and twice Oscar winner, born at Omaha in Nebraska.  
Doris Day, American singer and film actress, born at Cincinnati in Ohio as Doris Kappelhoff.

**1925** Anthony Wedgwood Benn, British Labour politician, born.

**1930** Haile Selassie was proclaimed Emperor of Ethiopia, a country he ruled for 44 years.