

Dedication of Able Seaman George Stone's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone



George joined the Royal Navy as a 15 year old Boy Seaman in 1916. He served during the last years of the First World War, throughout the peace between the wars and died on 19th December 1939, just a few days after his 39th birthday and just a few months after the start of the Second World War.

While serving on HMS Furious George caught pneumonia and was sent ashore to a hospital in Scotland - where he died.

The then practice of non-repatriation of the War dead, established during the First World War, meant that Commonwealth servicemen and women who died on active service during World War Two were buried at or close to where they died. At that time it was thought repatriating large numbers of war dead back to their homes would be very bad for civilian and service citizen's morale.

The 1939 register listed George's wife Constance and their four young daughters living at 'Hillsboro' Long Park Road, Saltash. Servicemen were not included on that register.

When George died his widow was offered a Royal Naval Funeral in Scotland. But, Constance and their children wanted George brought back to St. Stephens-by-Saltash for funeral and burial: close to his family's home where she and their daughters could attend and visit his grave.

It was agreed that instead of a Royal Navy funeral in Scotland George's body would be transported to Saltash railway station: but, from there Constance would be responsible for arranging and funding her husband's funeral and burial herself. Hence George's grave only had a small cross headstone: and not a Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) provided Headstone.

In August 2016 a member of Saltash Heritage was trying to identify all those named on our local War Memorials, including locating and photographing the war graves of those buried in our local Church and Chapel-yards that were listed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC).

Using Saltash Heritage and CWGC records George Stone's grave was located: but the family provided small cross headstone was found broken off at ground level, was in at least three pieces, laid flat and slowly disappearing into the ground.

Saltash Heritage informed the CWGC who agreed to provide and install a headstone: but first they needed Burial Authority and Church permission. This permission was obtained and the Clerk to Saltash Town Council completed, signed and returned the necessary CWGC supplied forms.

Saltash Heritage kept other interested parties: such as local branches of the Royal British Legion, the Royal Navy Association, Saltash Town Council and St. Stephens Church; informed.

On Wednesday 22 March 2019 the CWGC installed the Headstone. It was agreed that the surviving pieces of the small cross should remain where they were, lying on top of the grave.



'Following many months of research by Saltash Heritage speculative letters were sent around the country in an attempt to trace members of George Stone's family. A service of dedication was organised and just three days before the ceremony the Saltash Heritage Secretary received a call in response to one of her letters sent out to an address in Exeter. The call came from the youngest of the five daughters of Able Seaman George Stone, Nancy Chown. A very shocked and surprised Nancy could not believe the amount of work that had been put into organising the service and tracking down of the family. This call then resulted in Nancy her older sister Margaret, Nancy's son and daughter, and two of Margaret's sons, her daughter in law and grandson, arriving at St. Stephens Church on the 29th of March 2017. Here, following the 10.30am Holy Communion service, they were joined by Saltash Mayor Cllr. Hilary Frank and her consort Shojiro who unveiled the CWGC Headstone.'

Saltash's Priest-in-charge the Revd Catherine Sigrist conducted a Service of Dedication attended by eight



family members, Royal Navy Chaplin the Revd Ralph Barber RN and other Royal Navy personnel, the Union Standard and 12 Standards from local branches of the Royal British Legion, Royal Navy Association, and four Buglers from the Devon and Somerset Fire Brigade Ceremonial Band Corps of Drums, and members of the public.

During the service of dedication the president of the Saltash & District Branch William (Bill) Dent gave the Exhortation, the four Buglers sounded the Last Post, Standards were lowered, there was a minute's silence, the Buglers sounded Reveille and Bill Dent gave the Kohima Epitaph. This was followed by the Naval Prayer said by Revd Ralph Barber RN, other prayers by the Revd Catherine Sigrist, and family members laid wreaths and a photograph of George on his grave.

Peter Clements, Lizzy