

# 1914 – The CA goes to war

By Ted Osborn



**Tucked away in the trophy cupboard in the CA Council Room is an oak tablet or plaque, 570 x 420mm (23 x 17 inches) in size commemorating those members known to have died fighting for King and country in the First World War. It needs cleaning and major refurbishment to cure the ravages of 100 years, but the 12 names on it shine out brightly in gold. Those who died were all yachtsmen, each was one of us, so we thought we would find out something of them and remember them once more.**

One hundred years ago the sailing world was a very different place from what it is now. Yachts were heavier, slower and more difficult to handle. Many needed paid hands since they had large gaff rigs and were often rigged as cutters or yawls, with cotton sails and vegetable ropes. No electrics of any sort were fitted and the magnetic compass was the only instrument. Few had engines and those that did have them could only call them auxiliaries for manoeuvring in flat harbour waters. But they were comfortable and stable boats, often big enough to live comfortably on board.

GRP, GPS, echo-sounders, laptops and chart plotters would have amazed our forebears, as would VHF, Satnav and mobile phones.

The CA members themselves were the same, however, and we would have immediately felt at home in their company. They may have had skills we have often forgotten – anchoring since marinas did not exist, navigation only by sextant and DR/EP, communication only by Morse and flag – but their logs are full of fine meals cooked afloat, the joys of a good landfall, the pleasure of meeting up with friends afloat and fine sunsets in good company.

The CA had been formed only six years earlier but was well established with its ethos of self-help and a helping hand for each other. The *Yearbook*, *Bulletin* (now called *Cruising*), register of local representatives (now called HLRs), port information service, crewing service and cruises in company, and so much else already existed and were well regarded.

By 1914 membership had reached more than 500 – the subscription was only one guinea per annum (£1.05) – and the organisation was flourishing enough to move from the offices of one of its members to its own premises at



Picture: Imperial War Museum

Denison House, Victoria, and to employ a secretary.

As far as we can tell, membership was split between retired and still working, old and young, professional and commercial, just as we are today. One big difference, however, was that many had met the patriotic spirit of the times by also joining the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR). This had been set up ten years earlier in response to the threats of war with Germany so well written about by Erskine Childers. Part of the attraction of the RNVR was that volunteers had to spend some weeks each year cruising and training in a big warship. It was soon found by the Navy that yachtsmen could handle small boats in any circumstances; that they were enthusiastic and technically knowledgeable, and ideal for command. Many were therefore given immediate commissions as officers.

In the run-up to the war many members sold or attempted to sell their yachts – the war was not quite the

surprise that many now assume it was. Various CA cruises and local meetings were cancelled; some yacht yards were converted to constructing seaplanes; the Needles passage to the Solent was closed and the Nab entrance available only during daylight hours. Soon all night sailing was banned and the Admiralty ordered many areas to be swept clear of all moorings.

When war finally broke out in 1914 the CA had to go into a state of suspension for the duration with no activities. We closed down with the statement:

“Now that sport and pastime have for the moment to go their way and that all are occupied in mind or body by sterner business, the Association will wish Godspeed to those who have been called to the colours.”

The RNVR chaps were immediately drafted into full-time service with the Navy, mostly in the coastal and small auxiliary fleets. Other CA members enlisted immediately in different arms with the initial wave of enthusiasm

that greeted the outbreak of war. It was thought that 50 per cent of members were eventually called to the colours or volunteered.

Unlike 40 per cent of other volunteers, yachtsmen were fit and active. They were found to be extremely competent and able and were sent to serve in patrol vessels, blockading units, boarding parties, mining and torpedo work and even intelligence work and secret operations, often in positions of command. One yachtsman even made it to Chief Yeoman of Signals in the navy's biggest battleship. He wasn't a CA member though.

Of the 12 CA deaths recorded, three were in the big-ship navy and two in small vessels. One had risen to become a surgeon commander, two had become lieutenant commanders, and one had managed to be a captain in the fledgling Royal Navy Air Service.

*Continued overleaf*

As the war progressed, many more yachtsmen were incorporated into the Royal Naval Division and sent to the western front as soldiers. They performed particularly well in the little-known siege and capture of Antwerp by the German army. At least seven of the 12 CA members on the memorial lost their lives in France or Belgium.

All of the CA members serving in the forces would have been awarded campaign medals and some undoubtedly would have also earned medals for gallantry. It is not possible to obtain details of awards with certainty since many records are now missing, so this has not been attempted.

The 12 members of the Cruising Association on the Memorial Plaque, or Memorial Tablet as it was first called, are:

### **CGA Burnett**

Charles Guy Arbouin Burnett first enlisted in the Artists Rifles but was transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers as a Lieutenant. He was killed in 1916 aged 34 and left a wife and daughter. He had been educated at Oxford where he was a member of the University rowing eight and sailed from Cornwall where he was active in the Royal Cornwall YC, first in the yacht *Asthorne*, a 4.5 tonner, then *Witch*, an 8-ton cutter, and finally *Viola* also an 8-ton cutter. His sailing was adventurous and usually single-handed (he submitted logs to the CA where he was also a Council member) but took a 'boy' with him on longer passages. One story is that he would keep warm by heating 'asbestos apples' in a wire basket over a primus stove.

### **BC Child**

Bernard Child was a career navy man having started as a boy at the RN College, Osborne, on the Isle of Wight. He became an Engineering Lieutenant and joined the CA only the year before his call-up and death. As far as we know he never directly owned his own boat.

### **FL Coplestone**

FL Coplestone seems only to be known by his initials. He was a full-time naval officer following a family tradition, who was a cadet on *HMS Britannia* at Dartmouth in 1908 (we have a photo of him at the time). He joined the CA

in 1910 while based on *HMS Exmouth* at Grays. His elder brother served on *HMS Hyacinth* when flagship of the South African squadron, and also died during the war.

### **WHS Garnet**

We have not been able to find any service records of this member but all officers in the Royal Navy Air Service were volunteers, usually from previous service in the army. At his rank of Captain he would certainly have been a flier, but not necessarily from an aircraft carrier since many were based at coastal stations on local protection duties. He had joined the CA in 1911 with the 5-ton cutter *Osprey* based at Heybridge.

### **H de B Grant**

Humphrey de Butts Grant was born in Cyprus in 1885, son of a British serviceman, and died aged 30 in 1915 when reconnoitring the Front with his colonel. He had joined the Royal Fleet Auxiliary with a commission on its formation in 1904, but appears to have enlisted before the war to become a Captain and Battery Commander in the Royal Artillery. He was originally based at the RA Mess, Woolwich, from where he joined the CA in 1913. He was a member of the Solent YC and earned a reputation as a good judge of horseflesh and always game for a lark, but does not appear to have owned his own boat although regarded as very able around them. He is buried in Loos, northern France.

### **OH Hanson**

Oswald Hesketh Hanson became a Lieutenant Commander in the RNVR as did two of his brothers, including Herbert James Hanson, who was one of the CA founder members and long-time manager of the Association. OH Hanson was taken prisoner at Antwerp following a rapid German advance and then executed by firing squad for attempting to warn soldiers on a train that the German army was near. He came from Chester, but became a London solicitor before going to war, and is buried in Belgium. He had joined the CA just after its formation and owned the large gaff-cutter *Wayfarer*, 44-tons, with a tender named *Barnacle*.

### **VV Jacob**

Victor Vivian Jacob was killed in September 1915 during service as a Lieutenant in the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. He had joined the CA only in 1913 with the *Acushla*, a 6-ton cutter. He is buried and commemorated at Loos in northern France, but we have no further information.

### **CD Marshall**

Charles Devereux Marshall, always known to his friends as Devereux, was an eminent surgeon who was another of those who joined the RNVR before the war. On call-up he took part in the first warship battle of the war (off Heligoland) on board *HMS Euryalus*. He was then transferred to Baghdad where he became Principal Medical Officer for the Persian Gulf. He died of cholera in Bombay in September 1918 at the age of 50 and is commemorated on a memorial at Kirkee near Poona in India, where remains of those originally buried in places where maintenance was not possible are commemorated and re-buried. He was one of the original founder-members of the CA in 1908 having attended the very first meeting, joining its new committee on the spot and being responsible for much of the design of the constitution. He did his sailing from Bursledon, first with the 21-ton ketch *Maud* and then with *Cygnets*, although this latter may have been his tender. He had a reputation as a very strong swimmer who would prefer to swim to and from his boat rather than take a tender.

### **IM Mead**

Temporary Sergeant Ivor Merlin Mead of the Royal Engineers was killed in May 1917 and buried at Westouter Cemetery in Belgium. He was a despatch rider -presumably on horses rather than motorbikes. He was 33 and he probably received a field promotion just before his death. He had volunteered immediately the war broke out. Living in Falmouth, he had joined the CA in 1912 with a 9-ton cutter rigged boat called *Black Duck*.

### **GH Millar**

Gilbert Henry Millar was a technical officer in the National Physical

**TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO AT THE CALL OF KING AND COUNTRY LEFT ALL THAT WAS DEAR TO THEM ENDURED HARDSHIP FACED DANGER AND FINALLY PASSED OUT OF THE SIGHT OF MEN BY THE PATH OF DUTY AND SELF SACRIFICE GIVING UP THEIR OWN LIVES THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE IN FREEDOM, LET THOSE WHO COME AFTER SEE TO IT THAT THEIR NAMES ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.**

CGA Burnett	Lt N Fslrs
BC Child	Eng Lt RN
FL Coplestone	Lt Cdr RN
WHS Garnet	Cpt RNAS
H de B Grant	Cpt RA
OH Hanson	Lt Cdr RNVR
VV Jacob	Lt 13th O&B LI
CD Marshall	Sgn Cdr RNVR
IM Mead	Sgt RE
GH Millar	Cpt
BB Quiller Couch	Cpt RFA SR
ES Turner	Lt RNVR



Memorial plaque

Picture: CGS Photographers, Ewell, Epsom, Surrey

Laboratory, which he joined from college only in 1912. He had already volunteered for the RNVR and on call-up he was sent to Antwerp with OH Hanson where he also was taken prisoner. More fortunate than Hanson, he escaped after a year and rejoined the services as a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Air Service in a manner similar to Garnet. He obtained his Pilot Certificate and was posted to *HMS Furious*, one of the first aircraft carriers. He died aged only 29 in 1918 in a flying accident with the rank of Captain and is buried in Fife. He joined the CA in 1912 and owned the 5-ton yacht *Blodwyn* with its tender *Ripple*.

**BB Quiller Couch**

Bevil Brian Quiller Couch was the son of the well-known poet and author Sir Arthur Quiller Couch (who was also life-commodore of the Royal Fowey YC). He was a war hero recognised at the time and, like his father, was a poet. His romantic letters to his fiancée, the poet May Wedderburn Cannan, were published after his death in *Tears of War*. His sister, Foy Felicia, received the dedication in Kenneth Grahame’s

first edition of his *The Wind in the Willows*, which attributed to Quiller Couch the inspiration for the character Ratty. Quiller Couch joined the CA in 1911 and became HLR for Fowey where he kept his only recorded boat, a canoe. In correspondence with the CA he seemed keen to get cruising yachts racing each other to improve sociability and better sailing. On the CA Memorial he is shown as a Captain in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Special Reserve, but in other records his rank is given as Major.

**ES Turner**

Edwin S Turner served in the RNVR as a Lieutenant and died, presumably of wounds, in March 1919, which was four months after the armistice came into force. Except that he was promoted from Sub-Lieutenant to full Lieutenant in 1916, we have no other records of his service and his death was in fact only notified after the CA Memorial tablet was designed. Fortunately there was space to add his name and by chance it appears in the correct alphabetical order. ES Turner was another founder-member of the

CA being elected to the first committee to run the Association and was very active in its management until the war. He proposed, and organised for a time, a ‘gear swap’ service, which he started by wishing to swap an anchor for a primus stove. His own boat was called *Rani IV*, a 4-ton sloop. He is buried at Huyton-with-Roby, Lancashire.

We would like to have more information about all these gallant and unfortunate members. If you know anything more about any of them, please inform the CA Office.

We believe that the memorial was originally financed by members’ direct subscriptions to a fund specially created for it, rather than from CA central funds, and think that its refurbishment should therefore be financed similarly.

**If you would like to contribute to such a fund to enable the Memorial to last another 100 years, please contact Martin Hull, the General Manager, on 0207 537 2828 or email [generalmanager@crusing.org.uk](mailto:generalmanager@crusing.org.uk) as soon as possible please.**

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