

Private Peter McMullen (PLY/9648) d 17 April 1915; Stoker 1st Class Richard Whitford, died 19 April 1915; Private William Connor Lancashire Fusiliers d 17 April 1915 and buried on the same day.



McMullen 29 May 2013



Whitford 29 May 2013



Connor 1 March 2013

McMULLEN

The *Barrow News* Saturday 24 April 1915 reported:

A MARINE'S DEATH INQUEST AT BARROW

At the Barrow Police Buildings, on Monday afternoon, Mr. Coroner F. W. Poole conducted an inquiry relative to the death of Peter McMullen, a private in the marines aboard one of H.M. ships in port. He was last seen alive at 1.45 a.m. on Saturday by Private Marshall, when he was walking about close to his hammock. Deceased did not speak, but looked as if he had been 'slightly drunk'. At 2.30 a.m. Private Marshall was going the rounds of the ship when he found deceased lying on his back on the deck. He thought he was asleep at first, and when he shook him he got no response. Examination showed there was no life in the body.

The previous day, deceased, who was 35 years of age, did not eat any food.

A post-mortem conducted on the body by the police surgeon, Dr. Hughes, revealed the fact that death was due to natural causes.

A verdict to this effect was recorded.

Elsewhere on the same day the *News* recorded:

BARROW CEMETERY SCENES REMARKABLE COINCIDENCE BURIAL OF MARINE, STOKER AND SOLDIER

The Barrow Cemetery on Tuesday afternoon was the scene of a unique and impressive occurrence, when the burial took place, about the same hour, of the remains of a marine, a naval reserve, and a Lancashire Fusilier. The two former belonged to one of H.M. ships which was stationed in the Barrow docks, and a profound degree of tragedy is mixed up with their respective deaths.

The naval reserve man, R. Whitford, of Queen-street, Devonport, only joined the vessel as stoker on Wednesday last week. He was taken ill the following day, removed to the local hospital for infectious diseases, and on Sunday died. The marine was Private Peter McMullen, of Belfast, whose sudden end during Friday night has already been the subject of a coroner's inquiry.

With the exception of a few relatives, the cortege which escorted both coffins to the Cemetery entirely consisted of Navy men and marines. The remains of Private McMullen were placed in a gun carriage, the coffin being wrapped with a Union Jack, and surmounted by the deceased's helmet and other accoutrements. The conveyance, attended by the marines' band, firing party under Lieut. Burrough, R.M.L.I. and a numerous contingent of marines and bluejackets, was drawn by sailors, and as the cortege proceeded through the town it made a mournful but impressive spectacle. The funeral party went to the isolation hospital (*i.e. Devonshire Road Hospital – at the top of the Cemetery - now a housing estate*) for the coffin of the deceased stoker, and entered the cemetery from the north side. A number of wreaths included two from the ship's crew, and in the case of the marine, one from his colleagues

of the R.M.L.I. Much public interest was manifested in the burials, and the funeral scenes were watched with the greatest reverence. The usual volleys at the marine's grave were interspersed by appropriate music from the Marines' Band, and the Last Post was sounded by a bandsman and Bugler Doidge, R.M.L.I. Among the officers who attended the interment were Capt. Watts and Capt. Rishmond, R.M.L.I.

A short distance away, the remains of a Lancashire Fusilier were being committed to a grave. Military honours were accorded. We understand that another death has occurred aboard the ship referred to above.

The ship referred to above was H.M.S. Essex, a Monmouth class cruiser. I can find no reference to a third death on her <http://www.naval-history.net/xDKCas1915-04Apr.htm>

From *Ancestry* we learn that Peter McMullen, Private, Royal Marines Light Infantry was billeted at Devonport at the time of the **1911 Census**. He is listed as being from Derry, rather than Belfast. It is noted that he and many others belonged to HMS Sutlej, but had slept aboard HMS Andromeda.

From the **Royal Marines Registers of Service Index**, we learn that he was born on 18 December 1879, and enlisted on 6 Feb 1899.

Stoker 1st Class Richard WHITFORD (158115) (RFR.Dev.B.434) H.M.S. Essex Aged 41

R H Whitford died on 19 April 1915. Husband of Alice Whifford (*sic* – *from CWGC*), of 21, Queen St., Devonport. I got his first name from Naval History.net.

From *Ancestry* he had married on 14 March 1899.

At the **1911 Census** the family was living at 7 Holmans Buildings, where Richard Henry Whitford (38), born Veryan, Cornwall, was a labourer in H.M. Dockyard; Alice Whitford née Sullivan (33), wife, a machinist (tailoress) working at home, born Devonport; Violet May Whitford (12), at school, born Devonport; Alice Annie Whitford (5), at school, born Devonport; and Jane Sullivan (75), mother-in-law, born North Hill Parish, Cornwall. At the **1901 Census** Richard, Alice & Violet had been living at 14 Holmans Buildings.

From the **Royal Navy and Royal Marines War Graves Roll**, Richard's DoB is given as 20 August 1872, and his birth place as Trewaitha, Cornwall. This is a parish of Veryan. From the Royal Navy Register of Seamen's Services we find that he signed up for 12 years' service on 4 November 1890, serving on various ships. He joined the Reserve on 5 November 1902, re-enrolling for 5 years from 5 November 1907, and after a further short period in the Reserve he joined HMS Essex on 15 April 1915, dying of "malignant scarlet fever" on the 19th April.

Private William CONNOR, (4763) 4th Battn., Lancashire Fusiliers, died 17 April 1915, aged 26

Husband of Harriet Connor, of 120, Victoria Square, Oldham Rd., Manchester. Died of pneumonia. *CWGC*

The 4th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers stayed in the UK for the duration of the war.

Ancestry's Registers of Soldiers' Effects states that William Connor died on 17 April 1915 at Barrow Military Hospital (now Cambridge Street School) of pleurisy. There is a note on the edge of the paper dated 13 September 1915 which appears to say "for death's child with our undertaking." Presumably a child born posthumously.

I have been unable to be certain that I'd identified the right William Connor on *Ancestry*. Too many William Connor's served in WW1, and then there's William O'Connors