

The Bright family was probably typical of many of our predecessors in the Culm Valley. They were not in trade or business but made their living as agricultural labourers who moved frequently to find work. Frederick Bright was one such itinerant farm worker. He was originally of Colyton, near Seaton, where he had been born in 1875. When he was 21, he married Charlotte Jarman at Honiton. She was from Holcombe, near Dawlish, where her father was a market gardener and her sister Mary was the village postmistress.

Frederick and Charlotte Bright had at least five homes in 15 years of marriage and more places were to follow in the years leading up to the start of the Great War. In 1911 they were living at Burrows Farm, a few miles south of Bolham Water in the parish of Clayhidon, with their children. The two eldest, Reginald and Hubert, were twins born on New Year's Day, 1897. By the time of the census these boys had already left home, having reached the school leaving age of 14. Reginald had found work as a gardener and was living with his aunt and grandfather at the Post Office in Holcombe, Dawlish. Three years later, he had become a farm boy and may have returned to live with his parents in Clayhidon. Hubert had gone in another direction. He did not work on the land but went into service for a widow called Thomasine Richards in Queen Street, Honiton.

The third son, Frederick Leonard, born in 1898, served in World War One and returned to the Culm Valley with pulmonary TB. He married May Salter and they had a daughter called Sylvia. Frederick was in and out of hospital and eventually died in an Exeter sanatorium on July 24th 1928.

May later married one of his younger brothers, Harry, who had been born in 1912. Harry, known as Big Daddy, and May lived in South View, Hemyock, until recent years.

## Reginald Charles Bright

On August 12th 1912, Reginald joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Sailor and began his naval training in Devonport. Here, the Navy's shore training establishment had a ship attached, known as HMS *Impregnable*. Reginald served in *Impregnable* until February 12th 1913 when he transferred in quick succession to a number of ships as he worked his way through his Boy Service.

He served in HMS *Gibraltar*, an old cruiser then in use as a depot ship at Plymouth; in HMS *Vivid*, another Plymouth shore establishment; in HMS *Lancaster*, a cruiser bound for the West Indies, although Reginald did not go with her, and in HMS *Talbot*. He was always judged as 'Very Good' in character and 'Satisfactory' or 'Excellent' in ability.

On October 7th 1913, he was sent to HMS *Skirmisher*, a Portsmouth-based light cruiser which led the 7th Destroyer Flotilla. Immediately before the outbreak of war he graduated to Ordinary Seaman and at this point *Skirmisher* took the 7th Destroyer Flotilla to the mouth of the Humber to lead patrols on the East Coast. On December 16th the Germans raided the Yorkshire coast and the *Skirmisher*, at the head of the flotilla of destroyers and torpedo boats, put to sea in pursuit. Heavy seas forced the torpedo boats back to the Humber, but *Skirmisher* continued alone up the Yorkshire coast although she missed the two German ships.

The East Coast raids, which caused much damage and loss of life among the civilian population, shocked the British people and made them aware of their vulnerability to German raids across the North Sea. Indeed it was Britain's sensitivity to the threat from this direction that had led to the international treaty guaranteeing Belgian neutrality some years before. Germany's invasion of Belgium in 1914 had been the reason for Britain and its navy entering the war.

It is clear that Reginald liked the Royal Navy for in 1915 he extended his service for a 12 year period. He remained with HMS *Skirmisher* in the Humber until 1916 when he sailed with the ship to the Mediterranean. In July 1917 he was promoted to Able Seaman and transferred back to the shore establishment, HMS *Vivid*, in Devonport. Over the next six months, he must have made several trips from Plymouth to Hemyock where his parents were now living in Egypt Cottage.

In December 1917 Reginald was sent to HMS *Blake*, the depot ship of the 11<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla based in Harwich. One of the destroyers of this flotilla was HMS *Mons*. On February 19th 1918, during a voyage aboard *Mons* in bad weather and heavy seas, Reginald was lost overboard. At the ensuing Naval Court of Enquiry the finding was that 'he had been washed overboard and drowned and that no blame was attributable to anyone'. His body was never recovered from the deep. He was just 21.

After the Great War, a way had to be found to commemorate members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave. It was decided that Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth would each have an identical memorial; an obelisk to serve as a leading mark for shipping. Reginald is remembered today on Panel 27 of the Plymouth Naval Memorial on The Hoe. It faces the sea, looking out over Plymouth Sound. Reginald is also remembered, with seven others, on the Clayhidon war memorial.