

Charles Stanley Garnsworthy (1888-1915)



Grave NWb31.7

The majority of Charles Stanley Garnsworthy's story takes place in Devon and on board ships, so his connection with Leyton is not, at first sight, obvious.

He was the only child of Captain Charles Garnsworthy and Maud Copplestone and was born on the 10th November, 1888 in Topsham, near Exeter in Devon.

On the 21st of March 1896 when Charles was 7 years old, his father died of yellow fever at the age of 38 years old. He was the captain of the SS Daventry and died at sea off the coast of Buenos Aires. Thus Charles was brought up by his mother and from 1901 onwards lived with her in Salisbury House, Monmouth Street, Topsham. – shown below. His mother lived on "private means". Salisbury House was his grandmother's and was a 6 room house with a live-in general servant.

One can therefore say that Charles's family was middle class and financially well off. In fact he left £559 to his wife in his will when he died.

Charles was born in Topsham (see picture below) which was a busy port at the time. His family had all gone to sea for a number of generations and therefore it was natural that he should follow in his grandfather and father's footsteps and join the Merchant Navy.



Charles gained his Certificate of Competency as a Second Mate on the 27th March 1909 and his Master's Certificate (see opposite) on 8th February 1913. He was described as a Master Mariner on his wedding certificate.



Salisbury House



His connection to St Mary's Leyton.



**Thornhill Road
today**

This grave contains the story of 2 families, the Gardners, who lived in Leyton and the Garnsworthys, who lived in Devon.

Charles Garnsworthy married Ethel Gertrude Maud Gardner on the 7th of July 1914 in the Parish Church of St James in Exeter. Ethel Gardner was born in 1891 in Leyton and had lived there as a child, before the family moved to Exeter. The family had lived in 5 Boscombe Villas, Thornhill Road, Leyton, where they also had a 17 year old general servant living with them.

Ethel's father, William Alfred Gardner, was a general & fancy goods dealer and the family seems to have been very affluent, as shown by the servants (2 in 1901) and the houses they lived in.

They moved from Leyton after 1897, by which time Ethel's grandmother, Esther, had died. She was buried in St Mary's Churchyard, Leyton on August 16th 1895. Christopher Gardner, Ethel's grandfather, went to Exeter to live with his son and his family.

After his marriage Charles Garnsworthy moved in with the Gardner family at 14 Sylvan Road, Exeter, which was a large house consisting of 11 rooms. As you will see from the description below of his movements between August 1914 and February 1915, he did not spend a lot of time with his new wife, as from August until his death, apart from a small break, he was at sea.

It would seem that after Charles Stanley's death, his wife Ethel never remarried and died in Exeter in 1971. She was 81 years old.

Charles Stanley Garnsworthy and the RNR

When the war started he joined the RNR (the Royal Naval Reserve). The RNR was founded as a reserve of professional seamen from the Merchant Navy and fishing fleets, who could be called upon during war time to serve in the Royal Navy. On mobilisation, it consisted of 30,000 officers and men.

Charles was employed on the Waverley and made a training voyage to Canada from 18th August to 7th November 1914. Two weeks later on the 25th November 1914 he was given a commission in the Royal Navy as a Sub Lieutenant. He joined the Clan MacNaughton on the 11th December 1914 and became an Acting Lieutenant on the 19th January 1915 for the "Period of War Only".

The Clan McNaughton before the war

The Clan McNaughton's official number was 129592. It was one of the 56 vessels owned by the Clan Line. This had been founded by Charles William Cayzer who had been a Conservative MP for Barrow-in Furness between 1892 and 1905. By 1914 this company was advertised as the world's largest cargo carrying line.

The Clan McNaughton was a 4985 ton steam powered, cargo vessel, whose port of registry was Glasgow. It was launched on Wednesday, 28th June 1911.



Clan Macnaughton before being requisitioned in 1914

When the war started

When war broke out the Clan McNaughton was docked at Angaur Island in the Pacific, which was a German colony at the time. The captain, hearing that the war had broken out, left quickly and sailed to Borneo. The ship arrived back in Tilbury on the 4th November 1914 and was then hired by the Admiralty on 19th November of the same year.

It was then fitted out in London as an Armed Merchant Vessel and was in service in Liverpool by the 4th December 1914. Thus it had only taken 12 days to make the ship a warship and mount the eight 4.7" guns on deck and fit it with camouflage.

The Crew

A crew from various places was put together, including RN officers and ratings, (RNR) merchant navy officers, like Charles Garnsworthy, reservists including 23 Newfoundlander reserves and 50 young sailors straight out of the training base at Shotley. Thus the crew would have been unfamiliar with the ship and how it sailed.

Ready for action

Once fitted out, the Clan McNaughton joined the 10th Cruiser Squadron at Liverpool. The ship's captain was Commander Jeffreys R.N., and the 24 ships comprising the squadron were under the command of Rear Admiral De Chair who was aboard the HMS Alsation.

The Squadron was divided into 4 patrols of 6 ships each. Clan McNaughton was a member of the D patrol. The ships were to patrol the North Atlantic between Iceland and St Kilda. The weather in the North Atlantic in winter is extreme. One Newfoundlander, Stephen Dicker from Bonavista Bay, joined the ship in January 1915 and voiced discontent about the conditions.

"Anyone that has experienced a month at sea in a boat like this will say that the landsmen has got a blessing."

The loss of the Clan McNaughton

Problems in January

The Clan McNaughton joined “D” patrol west of the Hebrides on Sunday 27th December. The weather was bad, a gale was blowing from the south west with driving snow and hail. The ships engines were not performing properly, and it was the slowest of all the ships in the squadron. On the 9th January 1915, the ship reported being unable to maintain a speed of more than 11 and half knots, which made it more vulnerable to submarine attack. Thus the ship could not comply with the orders “avoid the submarine menace, zig-zag by day and moonlit night and maintain a speed of 13 knots”. On Friday, 15th January the ship went back to Liverpool for repairs. **It was at this time that Charles Garnsworthy was made a Lieutenant.**

By Sunday the 24th January the Clan McNaughton had rejoined the D patrol, which now extended in a line 335 degrees north west of St Kilda. The dangers they faced lay in being struck by one of the mines in the area or in being torpedoed.

The loss of the Clan McNaughton and the death of Charles Stanley Garnsworthy.

The last contact the Clan McNaughton made with any ship in its patrol was on Tuesday, February 2nd 1915 at 7.30 pm.*** There was a severe gale blowing.

This was the last time that anything was heard of the ship. The next day when nothing was heard from the Clan McNaughton, two ships in the squadron started a search. About a week later some wreckage was found in the approximate area of the last known position, but it is not clear whether this wreckage was from the ship.

The Clan McNaughton sank with all the 281 crew (20 officers including Charles Garnsworthy, and 261 ratings) presumed drowned.



The Clan Line claimed £120,000 from the Admiralty for the loss of the Clan McNaughton, having received £4,500 per month as a fee while the ship was on government service. The Clan Line lost 28 (50%) of its ships and 348 employees died, throughout the war.

*Note:- *** There are different accounts as to when the last contact was made. The information used here is from “The Report into the Clan McNaughton” by John Williams.*

After the ships disappearance.

As the wreckage was never found there was a long delay in announcing that the ship was lost. It was not until the 24th February 1915 that the newspapers ran the story, with "The Times" listing all those who had died. Below is the article from the February 24th edition of the Exeter Express & Echo about the loss. It also goes on to mention Charles Garnsworthy's death.

'CLAN MACNAUGHTON'

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**British Armed Merchant Cruiser
Regarded as Lost**

The Press Bureau at 5.20 yesterday afternoon issued the following:—

The Secretary of the Admiralty regrets to announce that H.M.S. "Clan McNaughton," an armed merchant cruiser, Commander Robert Jeffry's, R.N., has been missing since February 3rd, and it is feared that the vessel has been lost. An unsuccessful search was made, and wreckage, supposed to be portions of this ship, has since been discovered. The last signal from the "Clan McNaughton" was made in the early morning of February 3rd, and it is feared that she was lost during the bitter weather which prevailed at that time.

**Topsham Naval Lieutenant Among
the Victims**

Lieut. Charles S. Garnsworthy, who is among the victims of the disaster, is the son of Mr. Garnsworthy, of Topsham. He was formerly in the Mercantile Marine, but transferred his services to the Royal Navy on the outbreak of war. About 24 years of age, he is a nephew of Councillor Garnsworthy, of Exeter, and a brother-in-law of Mr. Tom Fulford, auctioneer, of Sylvan-road, Exeter. Deceased had only recently married his wife, who is a daughter of ex-Councillor Gardner, formerly of High-street, Exeter, but now in Canada, resides with her sister in Sylvan-road.

Why did the ship sink?

The true cause of the Clan McNaughton's sinking has never been fully established.

In Admiral De Chair's autobiography he writes "Severe weather prevails almost continuously in northern latitudes during the winter months and 1915 was no exception to the rule; the heavy south-westerly gale on Feb 2 was one of the worst the Tenth Cruiser Squadron experienced during the whole war. It was in this gale that Clan McNaughton disappeared. She was on patrol and during that night the Tenth Cruiser Squadron were lying to, unable to make any headway in the heavy seas that were sweeping over them. All answered signals except Clan McNaughton and, as soon as the weather moderated Hildebrand, Patuca and Digby searched the vicinity for a week, but found no trace of the missing ship except a certain amount of wreckage. There was no reason to doubt her stability but mines had been reported floating and it was considered likely that one may have hit her during the gale."

However, the idea that it was hit by a mine has been discredited and it is now thought that the disaster was due to a combination of factors. Firstly, a bad Atlantic storm, coupled with the fact that the ship had been converted into something it was not built to be, due to the fitting of the naval guns, which destabilised it and made it top-heavy. Thirdly, a new and very mixed crew who had limited experience of the ship and how it sailed.

In the month following the loss a Question was raised in the House of Commons on the subject of the ship's stability with regard to the fitting of the guns. The Admiralty reported that they had been satisfied as to the stability of the vessel. We will never know the true story!

The story of Charles Garnsworthy highlights the, sometimes forgotten, contribution that the seamen of the Merchant and Royal Navies made in both World Wars, enduring terrible conditions.

To quote Brassey's Naval Annual which paid tribute to such seamen:- "They carried out work of an inestimable value to the allied cause under the most difficult and arduous conditions and they suffered heavy losses from submarine and mine attacks in the cause of the struggle".

The Memorials

Charles Stanley Garnsworthy's body has never been found. He is however commemorated on 4 different memorials – 2 graves and 2 war memorials.

1.



The Chatham Naval Memorial, Kent. - 1924.

He is one of the 8,500 sailors commemorated on the memorial who died in the First World War.



2.

Topsham War Memorial- outside St Margaret's Church, Topsham.



*The inscription reads:-
In honour of the Navy and
to the abiding memory of
these ranks and ratings of
this port who laid down
their lives in the defence
of the Empire and have no
other grave than the sea.*



3.



A memorial anchor.-The Garnsworthy family grave in Topsham Cemetery, Devon.

The Inscription on this side reads:-

In ever loving memory of Charles Stanley Garnsworthy his only son. Born November 10th 1888. Lost at sea whilst serving his Country as Lieutenant on HMS Clan McNaughton February 3rd 1915.

"Safely landed on thee eternal shore".

6.

St Mary's Churchyard, Leyton

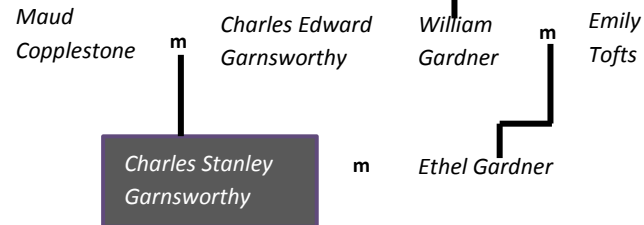
4.

There are three people commemorated on the grave in the north west section of St Mary's Churchyard, Leyton, but only one of these, Esther Gardner, is actually buried in the grave. Her husband Christopher is buried in Exeter and Charles Garnsworthy's body has never been found. **The basic family tree below shows the relationship between the three people mentioned on the gravestone.**



Family tree

Gardner/Garnsworthy



Key



Buried in St Mary's Churchyard



Commemorated on the grave in St Mary's Churchyard – but not in the grave.

The inscription reads:-

THE FAMILY GRAVE OF WILLIAM ALFRED GARDNER

IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE OF

CHRISTOPHER GARDNER

WHO DIED JANUARY 2ND 1905.

AGED 80 YEARS

INTERRED AT THE CEMETERY EXETER.

ALSO OF ESTHER GARDNER

BELOVED WIFE OF

CHRISTOPHER GARDNER,

OF THIS PARISH.

WHO DIED AUGUST 14TH 1895 AGED 77 YEARS.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

LEUT CHARLES S. GARNSWORTHY R.N.R.

AGED 26 YEARS

BELOVED HUSBAND OF ETHEL

THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF W. H. GARDNER

WHO WAS LOST AT SEA FEB. 3RD 1915

IN H.M.S. CLAN McNAUGHTON

HE DIED A HERO FOR _____?

References for Charles Stanley Garnsworthy

With thanks to

David Garnsworthy for his help; All the staff of the Vestry House Museum and Local Studies Library; Mrs Josie Walledge of St. Margaret's Church, Topsham, for the photographs and research; Peter Dunscombe for his research on Topsham War Memorial;

Other references:- The Probate Office; The Imperial War Museum for "The Sea is Strong" autobiography of Dudley de Chair; John Williams's Report into the Loss of the Clan McNaughton 2nd February 1915; Brassey's Naval Annual.

Websites:- Forces War Records; National Archives, Kew; Ancestry; Free BMD; Wikipedia.