

TAPPIN FAMILY GENEALOGY

From Workhouse to Trawlers

William Henry Tappin 1876 – 1973

William Henry, who was the son of Henry and Emma Tappin (nee Tickner), was born on the 2nd of Mar 1876 in Ripley, Surrey and was christened on the 2nd of Apr 1876 with the single Christian name of William; some time later the second name of Henry was added. His father was a Shoemaker and his mother, a Domestic Servant, had before her marriage briefly been an inmate of the Epsom Workhouse; they had at least two other children, Alice Maria and Harry.

William's mother, Emma (also at times shown as Emily), was born on the 23 August 1850 in Wisley Surrey and was christened there just 5 weeks later. It is known that she was a Servant when she went into the Workhouse in March 1870, she stayed there for six weeks and gave birth to an illegitimate child, Elizabeth. The Workhouse records show that, on the same day as the birth of her daughter, she was discharged at her own request to the parish of Chobham, presumably she must have had some connection to the Parish at that time. Three years later she married William Henry in the Guildford Register Office however, in 1879, she died just twelve days after the birth of her son Harry. Her death certificate shows the cause of death to be a combination of the confinement, having been attended by the Midwife for 11 days, pneumonia (2 days) and delivering 4 days! The child survived.

In 1889 their son William Henry was himself admitted as an inmate of the Guildford Workhouse, the reason for his admission is not yet known but a possible cause is the break-up of the family following the death of his father, this has still to be researched. The Workhouse was typical of those built following the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act - *An Act for the Amendment and Better Administration of the Laws Relating to the Poor*. This act swept away an accumulation of poor laws going back hundreds of years and replaced them with a national system for dealing with poverty and its relief based around the Union Workhouse. At the time of William Henry's admission the Workhouse was entered through a central archway with a Porter's lodge and a chapel on either side leading to the main three-storey accommodation block containing wards and utility rooms; there was also an infirmary and a school. In common with many of these establishments the buildings became a hospital in the 1930s and were later transferred to the newly created National Health Service in 1948. The entrance, and indeed many of the buildings, would have been recognisable as being the same style as those on the site of the old Scartho Road Workhouse and Hospital here in Grimsby although it was built much later than Guildford.

Few records survive so it is not actually known when William Henry was admitted to the Workhouse, the family were still shown as together in the 1881 census of Ripley with his father and stepmother. However, by 1889 he was in the Workhouse; further research has established that his younger brother, Harry, was also resident in the Workhouse and subsequently he was boarded out on 8th Sep 1888 to William Jelley of Shere Surrey but on the 10th Nov 1888 he was re-admitted. The reason for Harry's re-admittance was not recorded in the Board of Guardian's Minutes Books but there is a clue in the mention of his health, so his re-admission was most probably because of ill-health. On the 2nd Nov 1889, William Henry at the age of 13 was taken to Grimsby along with two other boys, to be apprenticed for seven years to the Great Grimsby Ice Company as a fisherman. The Minute Books record the transfer to Grimsby but give his age as 12, the subsequent apprenticeship Indenture shows his correct date of birth. This Indenture also gives a physical description of William Henry as being five foot tall with light coloured hair and blue eyes. No other instance of the surname Tappin has been found in Grimsby at the time of his arrival and to date all the current Tappins in the town are related.



Grimsby as a fishing port was flourishing following on from the build up of both the Railway and the Docks and because of this the trawler owners needed more and more crews; in 1889, the year William Henry arrived, there were 730 sailing and 33 steam driven trawlers registered from Grimsby. There were about 1000 apprentices serving and this system was essential to maintain the flow of

manpower, by far the best source at this time was from public bodies such as Workhouses, charitable institutions, Reformatories and even straight off the streets. In 1889 there were 348 apprentices taken on and of these 201 were directly from just such public bodies.

The life of an apprentice was not easy, in William Henry's case he had to lodge at 83 Orwell Street which, together with number 85, formed lodgings for apprentice fishermen managed under the watchful eye of the Master employed by the Grimsby Ice Company. The 1891 census shows the Master, his wife and daughter, six servants and a total of 31 apprentices living in the boarding houses. The oldest of the lads was 19 and the youngest 14, there would have been many others lodging there who like William Henry would presumably have been at sea when the census was taken. Discipline was tight both on and off the boat and of course the work on the boats was physically demanding and very harsh particularly during the winter months, the usual starting age of an apprentice was 14, some like William Henry were younger, and no doubt most were initially in very poor physical condition. Discipline was rigidly maintained and there are numerous mentions in the Indenture ledgers of misdemeanours with punishments of fines, there were many absconders for which, if caught, the usual result was prison. Drunkenness could also cost an apprentice a few days in jail, in 1882 there were 121 Grimsby apprentices serving in HM Prison Hull. Also in 1889, 31 apprentices from Grimsby were lost or died at sea.

William Henry appears to have been able to keep out of trouble, he had received mostly very good annual reports and, after 6½ years, on the 1st Apr 1896, his apprenticeship was cancelled by mutual consent. He was known to be in possession of three "shifts" (changes) of clothes but, probably more importantly to him, he was handed his saving book containing the princely sum of twelve shillings and three pence.

In 1899 he married Lily Eliza King, the daughter of James Bernard and Eliza Ann King (nee Everitt) at St John's Church Grimsby, at this time they were living at 6 Tunnard St Grimsby. On his marriage William Henry had stated that his Father's profession was "Soldier", I am sure he would have been well aware that this was incorrect so this seems to have been just a bit of fantasy. William Henry has not been found in the Grimsby census of 1901; this would presumably have been because, as in 1891, he was away fishing at the time these were taken.

Lily was recorded in the 1901 census as living as a lodger at 27 Castle Street.

They had six children all born in Grimsby:

Florence Ethel	11 Dec 1899
Ethel Ruby	14 Aug 1901
Sydney Charles	8 Sep 1903
Daisy Mabel	8 Oct 1905
Harry	4 Nov 1906
Rose Ena	6 Jan 1908

One event that William Henry would certainly have been aware of, and may well have had first-hand involvement with, was the "Great Grimsby Lock Out of 1901". This was a very acrimonious industrial dispute involving the Trawler Owners Federation and, in the main the Engineers and Fireman who crewed the boats, but involved all crewmen and others concerned with the fishing trade. The dispute began steadily as a result of Owners wanting to cut costs, and therefore increase profits, progressed to crews refusing to sign-on and resulted in virtually all Grimsby boats being tied up in Port. Depicted here on a Postcard of the time is the vast number of Steam Trawlers laid up in the Docks. There was widespread hardship affecting up to 10,000 in the town leading to



civil unrest with Police and troops being drafted into Grimsby. After considerable damage had been caused, the Riot Act was famously read out in Riby Square; in particular the actions of the Sheffield Police, described as brutal and swift, caused resentment in the town for many years to come. After dragging on for some months the stalemate was finally and rather swiftly broken by the intervention of the Earl of Yarborough who proposed to both sides that he would oversee binding independent arbitration. The men had an honourable return to work but in reality gained very little from the dispute.

On the 4 Aug 1914 war was declared with Germany and a number of Grimsby fishermen, on boats in German ports, became amongst the very first to become Prisoners of War. The docks soon began to fill up with trawlers returning from the fishing grounds as enemy operations quickly made it very dangerous for these boats to stay out; attacks were recorded on Grimsby vessels in the first few days of the war. Work was urgently needed for both the men and the boats and the Town Clerk set off for London to lobby the Government for employment. However, even before he got to London, representatives from the Admiralty arrived in Grimsby to requisition boats for war work. It was apparent that plans had been made some time before the outbreak of war to use the fishing boats for various support roles, the most important one of these being minesweeping work. Indeed, Grimsby boats are recorded as sailing under Navy control within hours of the declaration of war; it is well recognised that that these trawlers operated by local fishermen crews proved to be essential to Naval operations in the very vulnerable east coast waters. Boats were not confined to the east coast, there were Grimsby trawlers operating as part of the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign.

Grimsby was a significant contributor to the overall sea war effort as the following shows:

430 vessels were supplied to the Navy of which 60 were lost.

519 fishermen lost their lives in Navy service resulting in 313 widows with 480 children losing their fathers.

A total of 5875 Grimsby men joined the Royal Navy, Royal Naval Reserve or the Auxiliary Service.

Civilian fisherman continued to fish under extremely dangerous conditions to maintain important food supplies, a further 156 boats with 553 men were lost whilst fishing as a result of enemy action.

On the 16 Oct 1914 William Henry was himself "called up" for active service in the Royal Naval Reserve; it seems very likely that an "adjustment" was made to his date of birth to enable his enlistment. According to Navy records he was just one week short of the maximum age of 38 when he enlisted whereas his actual age was 38 and 7 months, whether this "adjustment" of his age was by mutual consent will never be known.

His first unit was HMS Pekin which was the wartime established base in Grimsby specifically formed to make use of the skills of the trawlermen operating from here; similar establishments were formed at many of the east coast fishing ports. There then followed short periods on various requisitioned trawlers until his demobilisation on 14 Feb 1919. The vessels he served on are known, but what is not yet known is just what type of work they were engaged upon, only one is described as being on harbour service. One, the Sardijs, which he served on for 20 months, was later lost on Admiralty service in Feb 1918, it is not known if there was loss of life.

For his wartime service he was awarded the 1914/15 Star, the Victory Medal and the British War Medal, he then returned to his peacetime occupation of fisherman.

William Henry may well have had a particularly hardy up-bringing, the death of his mother when he was not yet 3 years old, a probable early family break-up, time in a Workhouse, being sent away to an apprenticeship on trawlers from the young age of 13 leading almost certainly to estrangement from his family, wartime service and then back to the demanding profession of fisherman. Additionally, his first child Florence died tragically aged just 15 months following a fall from a high-chair into a fire; she died after nineteen days in Scartho Road Hospital, furthermore his daughter Daisy Mabel died of tuberculosis age 13 months in 1906. It is also known that at some time he and his wife separated and remained so until Lily Eliza died of heart failure aged 60 in

1941. His third child Sydney died at the relatively early age of 44 in 1947. In spite of all this he himself lived to be 96 before dying in Littlecoates House (Residential Home) Grimsby on the 8 Jan 1973 following a stroke.

Sources:

Workhouse Information from www.workhouses.org.uk compiled by Peter Higginbotham.

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Grimsby War Work – An Account of the Borough's Effort During the Great War 1914 /19 - Grimsby Reference Library.

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