

## Able Seaman Thomas Henry Baynton

J/18988  
HMS Indefatigable  
Royal Navy  
died 31<sup>st</sup> May 1916



Thomas Henry Baynton, known as Henry, was born on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1896 in Kidderminster. He was the son of Stephen, born around 1871 in Kidderminster and Jane Magdalene, born around 1870 in Kinver.

Henry was the third of six children and his siblings were Emily Louise born 1893, Norman Alfred Augustus (1895), Annie Margaret (1900), Dennis Victor (1902) and Stephen (1908). Henry's mother died in 1908, probably in childbirth or soon afterwards, and by 1911 his aunt Ada was living with the family. The Bayntons were living at The Earls near Shenstone in 1901 but had moved to 5 St George's Terrace in Kidderminster by 1911. His father married Mary Meacham in June 1911 and by 1916 the family had moved to 27 Albert Road. In 1901 his father was listed as an agricultural labourer but by 1911 he was a gas stoker. Henry's two older siblings were cotton spinners and he was a doffer.<sup>2</sup> A doffer removes "doffs" - bobbins or spindles holding spun cotton - from a spinning frame and replaces them with empty ones.<sup>3</sup>

We know little about Thomas Henry's early years but by 1912 he had become a carpet creeler. A creel is a rack that holds spools of thread or yarn. A creeler tends to this piece of equipment to ensure there is a continuous supply of yarn for the scheduled production.<sup>4</sup> Then, on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1912 at the age of 16, he joined the Royal Navy in Devonport. Young men under the age of 18 became "Boys" in the Navy. Thomas Henry first became a Boy, 2<sup>nd</sup> class and later, in February 1913, a Boy, 1<sup>st</sup> class on HMS Impregnable, followed by HMS Gibraltar, HMS Vivid I and finally, in June 1913 he was posted to HMS Indefatigable on which he served for the rest of his career. His character was noted as "Very Good" throughout his service and his ability varied from "Moderate" to "Satisfactory".<sup>5</sup>

A Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> class was aged 15 to 17 on entry to a training ship of the Royal Navy. Such entry was conditional on a boy's adequate physical height, weight and medical fitness and evidence of being of 'good character'. The boy's parents would sign a declaration that the boy would serve in the navy for a minimum period (usually 12 years). A Boy 1<sup>st</sup> class was aged 16 to 18 who had

previously served for between 9 months and 18 months rated as Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> class, shown sufficient proficiency in seamanship and accumulated at least one good conduct badge (the requirements varied between training ships). His rate of pay was increased on being promoted.<sup>6</sup>

On his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1914, Thomas Henry officially enlisted for a period of 12 years, starting out as an Ordinary Seaman. He was promoted to Able Seaman on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1915. His enlistment record tells us that he was 5' 4¼" tall with a 33" chest, light brown hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion. He had a large scar on the small of his back and another on the outside of his left thigh. One wonders if these were the result of his work in the cotton mill which must have been dangerous.<sup>7</sup> According to his obituary in the Kidderminster Shuttle, he was doing very well in the Navy and had passed his first class gunner examinations with credit.<sup>8</sup>

HMS Indefatigable was a battlecruiser of the Royal Navy and the lead ship of her class. Her keel was laid down in 1909 and she was commissioned in 1911. When the First World War began, Indefatigable was serving in the Mediterranean, where she unsuccessfully pursued the battlecruiser Goeben and the light cruiser Breslau of the German Navy as they fled towards the Ottoman Empire. The ship bombarded Ottoman fortifications defending the Dardanelles on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1914 then, following a refit in Malta, returned to the United Kingdom in February 1915. It is possible that at this point Thomas Henry was granted some leave to visit his family but we cannot know for certain.



**HMS Indefatigable**

By May 1916, HMS Indefatigable was in Vice-Admiral Sir David Beatty's Battlecruiser Fleet which, at the end of that month took part in The Battle of Jutland, the largest naval battle of the Great War. This battle was fought off the coast of Denmark, and the Germans hoped to weaken the Royal Navy by launching an ambush on the British in the North Sea. The plan was to lure out first Admiral Sir David Beatty's Battlecruiser Force and then destroy this before Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's Grand Fleet arrived. However, good intelligence gathering meant the British were forewarned and were able to put both to sea early.

The Battle of Jutland involved 250 ships and around 100,000 men. It was a confused and bloody action made worse by the smoke and fog which resulted from so many vessels firing at the same time. When Beatty's force and the German High Seas Fleet first engaged on the afternoon of 31<sup>st</sup> May several ships were lost. Beatty then withdrew until Jellicoe arrived with the main fleet. The Germans, now outgunned, retreated but only after laying down a field of torpedoes. Anxious to avoid further losses, Jellicoe decided not to pursue them.

During this battle, the British lost 14 ships and over 6,000 men, but the fleet was not destroyed. The Germans lost 11 ships and over 2,500 men and also avoided complete destruction. They claimed victory but, in reality, this was a battle which no-one "won" and the Germans were no longer able to seriously challenge the British Navy which was, therefore, able to secure control of shipping lanes and allow Britain to blockade the Germany ports. This would, eventually, contribute to Germany's defeat in 1918.



**The Battle of Jutland**

HMS Indefatigable was one of the ships sunk on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1916 along with HMS Queen Mary: HMS Lion was also badly damaged. Thomas' ship was hit several times during the opening phase of the battlecruiser action just after 4.00pm; shells from the German battlecruiser Von der Tann hit the ammunition magazines causing an explosion which ripped a hole in her hull. Later, a second explosion hurled large pieces of the ship 200 feet in the air. Out of 1,019 crew, only two survived.



**HMS Indefatigable blowing up**



**HMS Indefatigable sinking<sup>9</sup>**

Thomas Henry's parents were officially informed about his death in June 1916. His step-mother was listed as his first next of kin and was informed on 6<sup>th</sup> June while his father was not notified until 8<sup>th</sup> June. Thomas had been allotting 2s of his salary to his step mother during his war service.<sup>10</sup>

However, his parents were not the first members of the family to know that something has happened; Thomas Henry's elder brother, Norman Alfred, had also joined the Navy at the age of 15 and was in a nearby ship. He saw his brother's ship sink.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas Henry Baynton is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial which is located on The Hoe looking directly towards Plymouth Sound. This is one of three identical memorials located in the three manning ports in Great Britain, Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth, and is specifically designed to be of unmistakable naval form - an obelisk - which serves as a leading mark for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer and the Plymouth memorial was unveiled by HRH Prince George on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1924. It commemorates 7,251 sailors of the First World War who have no known grave.



**The Plymouth Naval Memorial<sup>12</sup>**



**Close up of panel from The Plymouth Naval Memorial with Thomas Baynton's name<sup>13</sup>**

## **References**

Please note that these references refer to all information in the preceding paragraphs since the previous reference, not just to the immediate sentence in which the reference number appears.

1. Photo from The Kidderminster Shuttle, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1916
2. census documents: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doffer>
4. [http://www.ehow.com/list\\_6721570\\_duties-creeler](http://www.ehow.com/list_6721570_duties-creeler)
5. Royal Navy Service Records, The National Archive - ADM 188/684/18988
6. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boy\\_seaman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boy_seaman)
7. Royal Navy Service Records, The National Archive - ADM 188/684/18988
8. The Kidderminster Shuttle, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1916
9. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS\\_Indefatigable\\_\(1909\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Indefatigable_(1909))
10. HMS Indefatigable Casualty List, The National Archive - ADM 116/1533
11. The Kidderminster Shuttle, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1916
12. <http://www.cwgc.org/>
13. Panel photo from: <http://www.britishwargraves.co.uk/>