



DEATH AND SERVICE NEWSLETTER

Spring has definitely arrived here in Somerset: bulbs are blooming, and the sky is showing hints of blue (albeit not necessarily on consecutive days).

I am buried deep in research around the 1917 Chatham Air Raid at the moment, and, it has to be said, I am really enjoying the process. There are some fascinating stories behind the event, and I am excited to develop the project.

Two recent trips have guided the content of this month's newsletter. On a trip to London, I stopped by the Tower Hill Memorial, commemorating the losses suffered by the Merchant Navy in both world wars.

Closer to home, I also visited Frome to record some Video Diaries for the [YouTube Channel](#), and re-visited the Vallis Road Cemetery, also known as the Dissenters' Cemetery. This is a fascinating place, with plenty of tales to tell.

Until next time.

Richard

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DISSENTERS' CEMETERY, FROME

The fallen of the First World War can be found in four of Frome's burial grounds. Three of these are churchyards – St John the Baptist, Holy Trinity and Christ Church – but the fourth is a cemetery on Vallis Road, a few minutes from the town centre, on the way to Radstock.

By the mid-19th century, Frome had developed into a thriving and densely populated town, and its existing churchyards were becoming overcrowded. In response to this growing concern, representatives of the town's "Free Churches" came together to seek a practical solution. These churches—operating independently of the established Church of England—agreed to purchase a plot of land on Vallis Road. In September 1851, the first burial took place there, marking the beginning of what would become known as the Dissenters' Cemetery.



The term referred to those who did not conform to the doctrines or practices of the Church of England, which was the state church at the time. Dissenters—also known as Nonconformists—included groups such as Baptists, Congregationalists, and Methodists, among others. Historically, they often faced legal and social restrictions, particularly before the early 19th century, and were sometimes excluded from being buried in parish churchyards unless certain Anglican rites were observed. As a result, separate burial grounds like this one were established to serve their communities and reflect their distinct religious identities.

Although the cemetery was originally intended for these nonconformist congregations, its role gradually broadened. Over time, it came to serve as a final resting place for people from a wide range of Christian traditions, reflecting both the changing religious landscape and the more inclusive attitudes that developed in later years.

The size of the burial ground is deceptive: from the road most of the narrow plot is hidden by the chapel. It is nearly two acres in size, however, and there are thought to be more than 6000 burials within its grounds.



Photo from Facebook

Vallis Road has a dozen Commonwealth War Graves, and is the last resting place of ten from the First World War, and two from the World War II.

You can learn more about the Vallis Road burial ground on the cemetery's website:

<https://www.fromedissenterscemetery.org/index.htm>

GRAVE OF THE MONTH



Grave Location:
St Minver Church
Menefreda Way
St Minver
PL27 6QJ

Name: MacIver, Angus

Rank: Sailor

Regiment: Mercantile Marine

Date of death: 16th May 1918

Age at time of death: 31

Cause of death: Killed in action

Angus MacIver was born in 1887 in the isolated hamlet of Geshader (Geisiadar), on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland. His parents were Murdo and Marion MacIver, and he was one of seven children.

Detail of Angus' early life are a challenge to uncover. It would seem that he worked with boats when he completed whatever schooling he undertook. Given Geshader's proximity to the coast, it is likely that Murdo was a fisherman, and that his three sons - Angus included - followed suit.

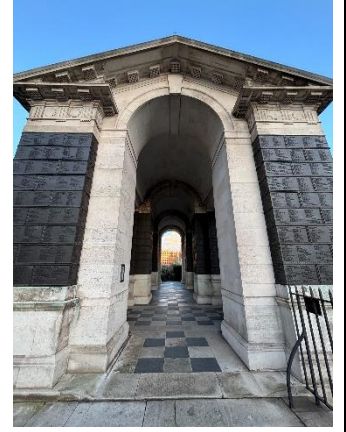
By the time war broke out in 1914, Angus had joined the Canadian Merchant Navy. He held the rank of Sailor: records suggest that he would have been an Able Seaman, had he been in the Royal Navy.

In the spring of 1918, Sailor MacIver was serving on board the SS Tagona, a Canadian steamer, ferrying goods across the Atlantic. The ship was en route for Glasgow, having sailed from Bilbao, Spain, and, on 16th May she was passing close to the North Cornish coast. Five miles (8km) from Trevoze Head, Tagona was torpedoed by the German submarine U-55, and sank. Eight crew members, including Angus, drowned. He was 31 years of age.

The body of Sailor Angus MacIver washed ashore in the Camel Estuary: the remains were identifiable, but his family were unable to bring him back to Lewis. Instead, he was laid to rest in the peaceful graveyard of St Menefreda's Church in St Minver, Cornwall.

Did you know?

The network of British civilian ships was originally known as the Mercantile Marine, or the Merchant Service. To honour the sacrifice that merchant seamen made during the First World War, King George V bestowed the title Merchant Navy on shipping fleets.



TOWER HILL MEMORIAL

Opposite the Tower of London, in the busy heart of London, is a structure than many walk past without realising its importance. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, the Tower Hill Memorial commemorates 12,155 merchant seaman who sacrificed their all during the First World War. These are men who have no known grave, whose bodies were lost of buried at sea. Unveiled by Queen Mary in 1928, the memorial remembers more than 3300 merchant ships that were sunk, taking their crews with them.

When a new war loomed, the merchant fleet were put to task again, and, during the Second World War, close to 24,000 men were lost. After peace had returned, the Tower Hill Memorial was extended, and the new section was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II in November 1955.

