



DEATH AND SERVICE NEWSLETTER

Time is passing very quickly, and it's time for the new edition of the newsletter.

A recent talk at the **Somerset Western Front Association** focused on one of the many war artists, Sir William Orpen. Paul Harris' presentation was passionate and enthusiastic, and has definitely sparked a new interest for me. While Orpen was known for his dramatic paintings, it was his more intimate, personal, sketches of soldiers serving on the Western Front that really drew me in. You can learn more later in this issue.

I have spent time in Kent over the last few weeks, photographing and researching the 1917 air raid on Chatham. I spent time exploring the town's naval memorial – which, ironically, doesn't include the names of any of those who perished on that fateful night. However, given that last month I looked at the [Tower Hill Memorial](#), commemorating those who died in the Merchant Navy, it made sense to explore this monument a little more. I was also fortunate enough to spend time at the Medway Archives Centre, details of which you can find in this edition.

Sticking with the naval theme, this month's grave is that of Stoker Sidney Goddard, who drowned in an incident in Glasgow.

By the time you read this, I will have embarked on my spring program of events, by giving a talk for the Friends of the Museum of Somerset. The next few weeks are busy, with further talks in [Minehead](#), [Pimperne](#) and [Othery](#) scheduled before the end of May.

Until next time.

Richard

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SIR WILLIAM ORPEN SKETCHES

Trying to encapsulate the life and output of a renowned war artist within the confines of a brief monthly newsletter is, in truth, an impossible task. Entire books, detailed studies, and carefully curated websites exist that explore this subject with far greater depth and nuance than I could ever achieve in a few paragraphs here.

During the period in question, the Ministry of Information granted only a select group of distinguished artists access to the Front Line. Even then, their role was far from unrestricted: they operated under strict guidelines that dictated not only what they were encouraged to portray, but – perhaps more significantly – what they were expressly forbidden from showing. This careful curation shaped both the art that emerged and the narrative presented to the public at home.

The first official war artist was Muirhead Bone, but by the spring of 1917, Irish-born Sir William Orpen had arrived at the Somme. He was a connected man, and would often use those connections – with Field Marshall Douglas Haig being one of them – to get what he wanted.

Orpen would go on to produce around 150 paintings during the conflict, from vivid landscapes to tender portraits, but it is the pencil drawings he sketched in the trenches that, to me, are the most emotive. These quickly-produced, delicate portraits show battle-hardened soldiers, but weariness and resignation are written across their faces.

The Manchesters, Arras (right) includes Orpen's comments "Just out of the trenches near Arras. Been through the battles of Ypres and Somme untouched. Going home to Sheffield to be married." The soldier's face shows how tired he is after going over the top, but also tells of the hope he has for his future happiness. Sadly, the soldier's trail was lost, and there is no evidence of whether he survived the conflict.



Like *The Manchesters, After a Fight* (left) also shows the fatigue of a young soldier's fatigue both his face and in his posture. However, this time there is no sign of hope, just a look of blank acceptance that the fight is not over, and he will have to do the same again, and soon.



On the other side of the coin, the subject of *A Soldier Resting: The Road to Arras* (right) appears tired, but fresher faced. To my mind, he does not yet seem to have encountered the horrors of battle yet, and is innocent of the trials yet to come.



In *North Irish Horse*, showing left, the soldier's story is unclear. Is he readying himself for battle, pausing for a moment before going over the top? Has he returned from the fray, looking across No Man's Land for a missing colleague?

Orpen produced some stunning and haunting paintings during the First World War, and is rightly celebrated for his artwork, both of the landscapes of the conflict and the portraits of those in the higher echelons of power.

For me, however, it is the access he was granted to the troops on the Front Line that say the most about the relentlessness of the conflict. The simple, ad hoc pencil sketches are the most emotive of his wartime art, capturing in the moment, the impact that the war had on the individuals fighting it.

Interestingly, while I have focused on Orpen's front line sketches in this article, one of his remits was to paint portraits of the key Allied figures. This he did with aplomb, and included the likes of Field Marshall Haig, Chief of Air Staff Major-General Hugh Trenchard and the full line-up of the 1919 Peace Conference in Versailles (a set of paintings that were controversial in themselves).

It is one of these official portraits – that of Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Lee – that underlines Orpen's professionalism during his tenure as an official war artist. Lee was the Censor in France, who oversaw all matters in relation to press and propaganda, his remit to oversee and vet the art that was created by Orpen and his like. They batted heads often, with the war artist refusing to bend to the censor's limiting code. Orpen often bypassed Lee, going straight to Haig to get what he wanted, this undermining doing nothing to smooth relations with Lee himself.

When the time came that Orpen was tasked with painting Lee's portrait, I can imagine that is it something that neither artist nor sitter wanted. However, objectivity prevailed, and the result shows a kindly man, something that was likely not seen during their fractious working relationship.



The **Medway Archives Centre** is a great unit set up to help people learn about the history of the area and discover more about the lives of those who lived there. Covering the towns of Strood, Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham, as well as the surrounding villages and the Hoo peninsula, it is a small but welcoming place, with a range of resources to help researchers.

Access is available by pre-booked appointment, and there is a warm and welcoming team to help you find the information you need.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.medway.gov.uk/archives>

GRAVE OF THE MONTH



Grave Location:
St Mary's Church,
Queen's Square
Saltford
BS31 3EL

Name: Goddard, Sidney

Rank: Stoker 1st Class

Regiment: Royal Navy

Date of death: 3rd November 1915

Age at time of death: 26

Cause of death: Drowned

Sidney Goddard was born on 2nd January 1889 in the village of Oldland Common, near Bristol. The youngest of three children, his parents were Albert and Frances Goddard. Albert was a shoemaker, but by the time of the 1911 census, he and Frances had set up home in Saltford, between Bristol and Bath, where he was recorded as being a bootmaker and innkeeper at the village's Jolly Sailor.

Sidney, by this time, had gone his own way. On 17th January 1917, he enlisted in the Royal Navy as a Stoker 2nd Class. His service records note that he had been working as a collier when he joined up, so it seemed that coal ran through him. The same records note that Sidney had dark brown hair, brown eyes and a fresh complexion. He was also recorded as being 5ft 5.5ins (1.66m) tall, and having a number of tattoos: a true lovers' knot on his left wrist, several dots on his left arm. He had three dots on his right arm, a scar on his back and another on the inside of his left shin.

Stoker Goddard was initially sent to HMS Vivid, the Royal Naval Dockyard in Devonport, for training. After a couple of months, he was assigned to the cruiser HMS Amphitrite. It is evident that Sidney showed promise, because he was promoted to Stoker 1st Class on 22nd April, just three months after he enlisted. He returned to Devonport in May, but this was only to change assignments: he boarded HMS Blake, another cruiser, a few days later.

Over the next eight years, Stoker 1st Class Goddard served on five further vessels, returning to HMS Vivid in between assignments. On 1st July 1915, he was assigned to the newly commissioned minesweeper HMS Larkspur. In November that year, she came into Merklands Wharf in Glasgow.

"[Sidney] met his death while assisting in docking his ship at Glasgow on the afternoon of Wednesday, November 3rd. By some mischance he was thrown into the dock, and in falling his head struck either on the boat's side or on the dock. It is believed that he was rendered unconscious by the blow, as otherwise, being a good swimmer, he would have been able to keep afloat till help came."

[Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette: Saturday 13th November 1915]

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Stoker 1st Class Sidney Goddard was just 26 years of age when he died. His body was brought back to Somerset for burial. He was laid to rest in the peaceful graveyard of St Mary's Church, Saltford, within walking distance from the Jolly Sailor, where his parents still lived.

Sidney has the dubious honour of being the only member of HMS Larkspur's crew to die during the First World War. His two older brothers also served in the conflict, Maurice in the Royal Marines and William, who was a Leading Seaman on board HMS Spitfire when he was killed during the Battle of Jutland.

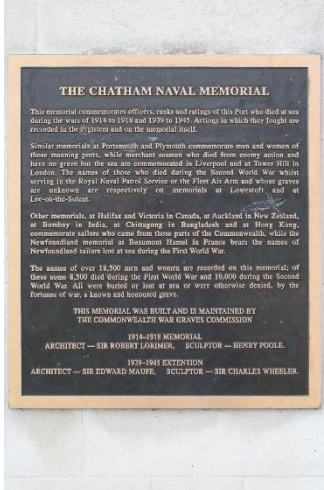


Did you know?

Chatham Naval Memorial includes the names of 18,654 servicemen, 8566 of whom lost their lives during the First World War.

The Portsmouth Naval Memorial commemorates 24,563 war dead, 9,700 of which perished during WW1.

The naval memorial in Plymouth includes the names of 23,240 servicemen who perished, a third of whom died during the 1914-18 conflict.



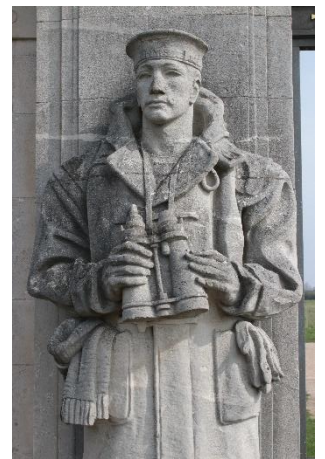
CHATHAM NAVAL MEMORIAL

Standing proud on the Great Lines, overlooking the Kent towns of Chatham and Rochester is the imposing Chatham Naval Memorial. Opened on 26th April 1924, it was designed by Sir Robert Lorimer to commemorate more than 8500 royal navy crew who died perished during the First World War. Its central obelisk is visible for miles, and around the base bronze plaques give the names and ranks of those who died, based on year and rank. Above these plaques are additional ones, commemorating the battles in which the maritime services were involved.

Chatham was one of three key ports during the war – the other two being Portsmouth and Plymouth – and all three have similar memorials. The names recorded on the plaques relate to those who had been based out of each dockyard – HMS Pembroke, Victory and Vivid.



In the wake of the Second World war, the decision was taken to extend the memorial, to commemorate the 10,100 servicemen who had died during the conflict. A new architect – Sir Edward Maufe – was brought on board, and he designed a crescent to the rear of the central obelisk, on which bronze plaques would be fixed. Most strikingly, however, were sculptures designed by Charles Wheeler and William McMillan, of life-size sailors from each aspect of the conflict.



UPCOMING EVENTS (CLICK ON THE POSTER TO LEARN MORE)

Death and Service:

The Commonwealth War Graves of Somerset

There are more than 800 First World War graves in over 240 cemeteries and churchyards across Somerset.

Each of the names on those gravestones has a story connected to it, a story of family and of tragedy, a story of life on the battlefield and of love on the home front.

The *Death and Service* series of books aim to shed light on the servicemen and women behind the names on these headstones, to bring the long-forgotten names to life again, more than a century after they were lost.

Wednesday 29th April 2026 7:30pm

Minchhead Conservation Society, URC Hall, Bancks Street, TA24 5DJ

Death and Service:

The Commonwealth War Graves of Dorset

There are almost 900 First World War graves in over 240 cemeteries and churchyards across Dorset.

Each of the names on those gravestones has a story connected to it, a story of family and of tragedy, a story of life on the battlefield and of love on the home front.

The talk aims to shed light on the servicemen and women behind the names on these headstones, to bring the long-forgotten names to life again, more than a century after they were lost.

Saturday 2nd May 2026, 2:30pm

Pimperne Village Hall, Newfield Road, DT11 8UZ

Death and Service:

The Chatham Air Raid of 1917

As the First World War progressed, air bombardment became ever more important to German plans for the defeat of Britain.

However, Allied defences meant that daytime raids by Zeppelins and aircraft were more readily intercepted.

On 3rd September 1917, a group of Gotha bombers set out from Belgium and delivered the first night time air raid on British soil.

In this presentation we will explore the raid, and the devastating impact it had on an undefended Kent town.

Somerset WFA, Othery Village Hall, TA7 0QU

Wednesday 13th May 2026, 7:30pm

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Thursday 11th June 2026 7:00pm

Clevedon Civic Society, St Andrew's Church Hall, BS21 7UE