



Cross of Sacrifice at Simon's Town (Dido Valley) Cemetery, South Africa

COMMANDER STEPHEN BOWLE-EVANS ROYAL NAVY (HMS HYACINTH)

Stephen Bowle-Evans was born on 20 January 1876 to Isabella Sophia (née Harford) and John Bowle-Evans in Pembridge, Herefordshire. Stephen was baptised on 27 February in Cheltenham.

In 1881 the family were living at 6 Douro Villas, Cheltenham. It was a large household. Stephen had five brothers - Frederick, Charles, Henry, Montague and Wakefield - and two sisters Isabella and Anna. The older children were being home schooled by a live-in governess and the family had five servants. Stephen's father was a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Hereford.

By 1891 Stephen had joined the Royal Navy. He was on the First Class Training Ship for Naval Cadets HMS *Britannia* which was in Dartmouth Harbour.

In 1892 Stephen was a Midshipman. This rank was a senior Petty Officer, usually filled by young gentlemen with aspirations of becoming a commissioned officer. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in September 1898 and in 1902 he was appointed in command of HMS *Holland 2*. This was the second Royal Navy submarine to be built. It was commissioned on 1 August and Stephen was in command of the vessel until the end of that year.

In March 1904 he received the Royal Humane Society certificate on vellum for saving life at sea. In June 1911 he was promoted to the rank of Commander.

In June 1912 Stephen and Katherine Mary Cecily Lawrence were married in Northleach and the following report appeared in the *Cheltenham Examiner* on 13 June:

BOWLE-EVANS - LAWRENCE

At the village Church of Whittington on Thursday last, the marriage was solemnised of Commander S. Bowle-Evans, R.N., son of the late Mr J. Bowle Evans, D.L., and of Mrs. Bowle Evans, of 20, Lansdowne-place, Cheltenham, with Miss Katherine Mary Cecily Lawrence, daughter of the late Rev. A. C. Lawrence, of Whittington Rectory, and of Mrs. Lawrence, of Whittington Court. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. L. E. W. Thoroton, assisted by Rev. W. Warne and the Rev. Canon Goodwyn. The service was choral. The chancel of the church was decorated with white flowers. Given away by her uncle (Mr. C. W. Lawrence, of Sandywell Park), the bride was attired in a gown of ivory satin charmeuse, trimmed with crepe mousseline and old Flanders point lace, arranged to form an empire coat with deep collar the draped skirt was tied with a true lovers' knot of the same lace, and orange blossom: the long satin train being ornamented with horse-shoes of orange blossom and white heather. The lace veil was worn over a wreath of the same flowers. There were six bridesmaids. Their gowns were of ivory silk embroidered in a floral design in shades of blue and shell pink, their large picture hats being of ivory

COMMANDER STEPHEN BOWLE-EVANS

crinoline straw, underlined with ombre aeroplane in shaded pink and blue, the trimmings of hydrangeas, blush roses and black velvet. They wore gold and enamel naval crown brooches, the gifts from the bridegroom. The honeymoon will be spent in a motor trip, the car being kindly lent by Mr. M. Bowle Evans, who officiated as best man. The bride's going away costume was of blue ombre silk with a Leghorne hat, trimmed shaded aeroplane and pink rosebuds. Mrs. Lawrence, the bride's mother (who was gowned in grey charmeuse, with a toque to correspond in grey lace and mauve tulle trimmed with shaded grey plumes) held a reception in the evening for the villagers and farmers, concluding with a dance. The orchestra, both for the reception and dancing, was supplied by Messrs. Dale, Forty & Co. Ltd. The three-tier bridal cake supplied by Georges Ltd., was decorated with naval designs, crown and colours, anchors and cutlasses, also with the initials of the bride and bridegroom.

Stephen and Katherine had two children; John Lawrence born in 1914 and Stephanie Mary born in 1915.

During the entirety of the Great War, Stephen was in command of the Cape Dockyard at Simon's Town, South Africa. In that capacity he was responsible for taking in and out of the basin a very large number of ships. The part which Simon's Town and the ships of the Africa Station were called upon to play in this war was the elimination of all enemy ships, especially commerce raiders, from the waters around the southern end of Africa and the elimination of all the enemy bases within its sphere.

At the outbreak of war there was a number of German warships at large in all the oceans of the world; these included the *Emden*, the *Koningsberg* and Admiral von Spee's powerful squadron believed to be in the South Pacific. Until these ships were accounted for no protracted expedition by sea against the German colonies could be contemplated without a powerful escort of warships. The *Emden* was destroyed at Keeling Island, the *Koningsberg* in

the Ruffi River and von Spee's squadron at the Falkland Islands. With all hostile warships satisfactorily disposed of, operations against the two German colonies of South West Africa and Tanganyika could now go ahead.

For the remainder of the war Simon's Town spent a humdrum but busy and essential existence as a refuelling and refitting base for the escorts of the numerous troop convoys passing between Europe and Australasia, India and the Far East.

Commander Stephen Bowle-Evans died on 16 October 1918 in the Royal Naval Hospital in Simon's Town of pneumonia having suffered from influenza; he was 42 years of age.

The following article appeared in *South Africa Magazine* on 28 December:

SOUTH AFRICA'S INFLUENZA VICTIMS

We continue the sad toll of South Africa's terrible losses by the awful influenza scourge. The late Commander Stephen Bowle-Evans, R.N., who died at Cape Town, was in command of the Naval Yard for some years, and in that capacity he was responsible for taking in and out of the basin a very large number of ships. He was a member of the Committee of the United Service Institute, and also of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. He had the distinction of commissioning the first submarine, and he also served with the Prince of Wales in H.M.S. Hindustan. Whilst living in Simon's Town the deceased officer supported the Yacht, Turf, and Hunt Clubs in the Peninsula.

Stephen is buried in the Dido Valley Cemetery, Simon's Town, Naval Allotment Row B, Grave 2. He is remembered on the Christ Church Roll of Honour, Cheltenham War Memorial and is commemorated on the family grave in St Peter's churchyard, Leckhampton.

Stephen's sister Anna was Commandant of the St John VAD Hospital when the hospital opened and served in that capacity until June 1917 when she resigned to take up other war work.

Sources and acknowledgements:

Leaving all that was dear : Cheltenham and the Great War by J Devereux & G Sacker

Ancestry

www.ancestry.co.uk

Forces War Records

www.forces-war-records.co.uk

British Newspaper Archive

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

National Archives

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

www.cwgc.org

Simon's Town

www.simonstown.com

Find A Grave

www.findagrave.com

The Dreadnought Project

www.dreadnoughtproject.org

Find My Past

www.findmypast.co.uk