

# Richard Henry HOCKING

306858, Leading Stoker, HM Torpedo Boat No. 4

Died May 26<sup>th</sup> 1917, aged 35

Memorial in Ramsgate Cemetery, Ramsgate

Richard Henry Hocking was born in Penzance to John and Elizabeth Hocking. In 1891, John (44) is recorded as a borough labourer, living in New Street Penzance with Elizabeth (46) and their four children; Mabel (17), Emily (13), John (11) and Richard (9). In 1901 John and Elizabeth, together with Emily and Richard, had moved to Devonport, and were living with Mabel and her husband John Rogers (32) in Northumberland Street, which had recently been built specifically for workers at the new Keyham dockyard extensions around Weston Mill Lake. John Rogers is recorded as a chain man there, and John Hocking is a navy, also working on the extension. Richard is shown as a 'barman', possibly meaning some kind of labourer rather than someone who serves drinks.

In 1905 Richard married Lizzie Durham Honey in Plymouth. Lizzie was born in Port Isaac c1884, the daughter of George and Mary Honey. George was drowned in the Great Blizzard of March 1891, leaving Mary to look after her 4 children; Elsie (12), Willie H (10), Lizzie D (7) and George (4). In 1901 Lizzie was living in Croydon as a domestic housemaid to a Tea Broker. In 1908 Richard and Lizzie had a son, Richard George Henry Hocking. The 1911 census has the three of them living in Johnston Terrace, Devonport, where Richard is now a navy Stoker 1st class. The records show some confusion over his age. The 1891 and 1901 censuses suggest he was born c1881. In the 1911 census, which Richard completed, he gave his age as 26, suggesting he was born c1885. His naval records actually give his date of birth as September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1883. The Penzance registration district has a birth of a Richard Henry Hocking in the last quarter of 1881, but none in 1883 or 1885. It would appear that Richard was actually born on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1881 with the birth registered a few weeks later in October, but that he was himself unsure of his exact age.

Richard had joined the navy on July 18<sup>th</sup> 1904 as a Stoker 2nd class. Apart from his time spent at the Devonport shore establishment, HMS Vivid, his naval service included almost three years between July 1905 and January 1909 on HMS Sapphire II (formerly HMS Imperious), a depot ship for destroyers at Portland, where he was promoted to Stoker 1st class. He then served just over two years on HMS Defiance, which was the Devonport torpedo and mining school ship. After joining HMS Devonshire in June 1911, he spent over 5 years on this armoured cruiser. Just before war broke out she was assigned to the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow, reinforcing patrols near the Shetland and Faeroe Islands and along the Norwegian coast, where she captured a German merchantman on August 6<sup>th</sup> 1914. She never saw combat, and in April 1916 was transferred to the Nore Command covering London, Sheerness, Harwich and the Humber.

Name and Period of C. S. Engagements.		Age	Height	Hair	Eyes	Complexion	Wounds, Scars, Marks, etc.
18 July 1904 - 18 Apr 1909		36	5' 8"	Brown	Blue	Fair	

No.	Ship	Rating	Sub-rating	From	To	Character	If Discharged, Whither, and for what Cause.
1	HMS Vivid	Stoker 2nd Class		18 July 1904	18 July 1904		
2	HMS Sapphire II	Stoker 1st Class		20 July 1905	19 Jan 1909		
3	HMS Defiance	Stoker 1st Class		20 July 1909	19 Jan 1911		
4	HMS Devonshire	Leading Stoker		19 Jan 1911	26 May 1917		



HMS Devonshire



HM Torpedo Boat 4

Richard's naval service record

In September 1916, Richard left HMS Devonshire and spent a few months at Devonport shore establishment. On January 31<sup>st</sup> 1917 he was transferred to HMS Attentive II (the Dover shore establishment for the Dover patrol auxiliary small craft) to act as Leading Stoker on HM Torpedo Boat 4. On the morning of May 26<sup>th</sup> 1917 she was moored at the Royal Harbour, Ramsgate. The crew were having breakfast when a huge blast ripped through the vessel as a torpedo accidentally exploded. Whilst the fire was still raging, firemen and sailors moved the bulk of the ammunition from the ship's magazine into the nearby fish market, although munitions were still exploding for several hours with shrapnel flying through the air. As a result of this quick action and incredible bravery, the damage to Ramsgate town was minimised. Nonetheless, Albert Street and Addington Street near the harbour were left in ruins. There were 200,000 windows smashed and every shop in the town centre was damaged. The demand for wood to close up all those windows far exceeded the available supply.

Casualties in the town were surprisingly light, with three killed and eighteen wounded. On HM Torpedo Boat 4, the position was dreadful, with 14 ratings killed, including Leading Stoker Richard Henry Hocking.

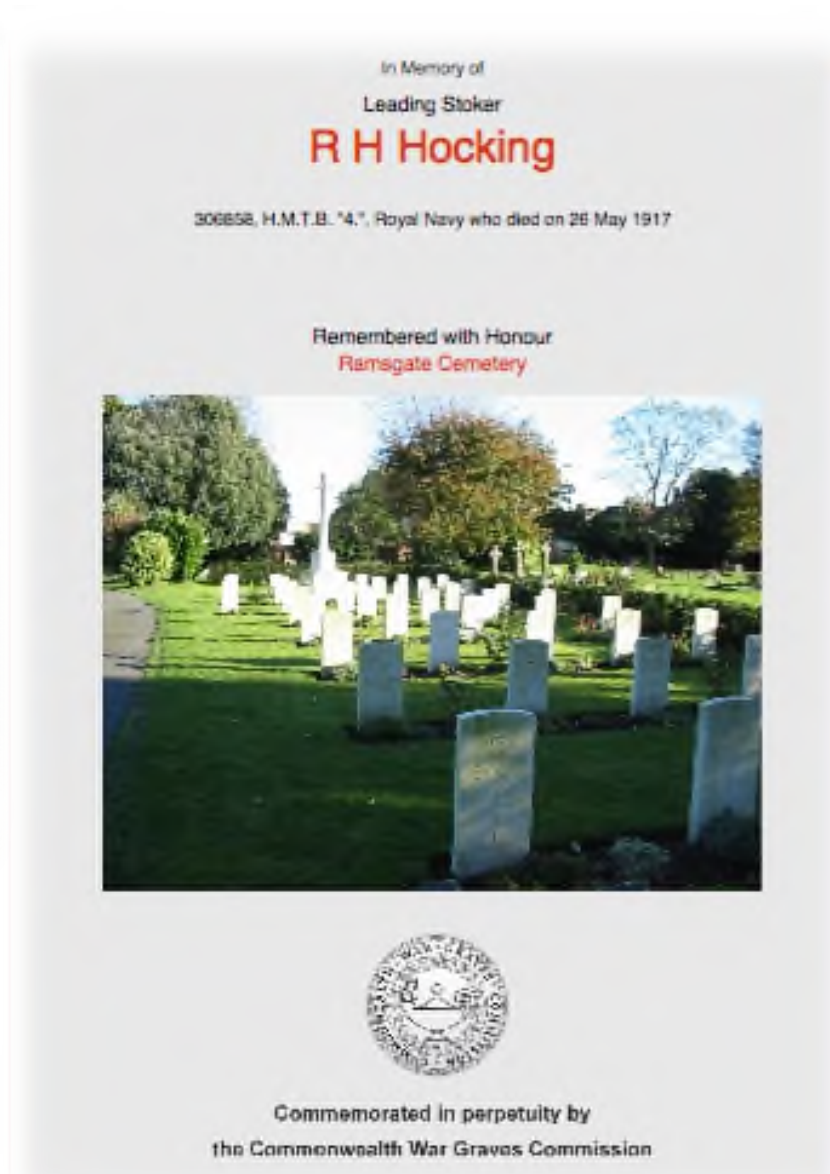
The funeral of the sailors at Ramsgate Cemetery was attended by thousands of townspeople. A subscription was raised, enabling a white marble cross to be placed over their grave.



Funeral Procession of Sailors from HM Torpedo Boat No 4



Marble Memorial over the grave of the men lost on Torpedo Boat No 4. Their names are recorded around the grave edging, with R H Hocking the second one along the right hand short edge.



After the loss of her husband, Lizzie returned to Port Isaac. In 1920 she married William John Lobb. Her wartime sacrifice was not over, as their son, Jim Lobb, was killed in World War Two, during the closing days of the North Africa campaign on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1943 and is commemorated on the Medjez-Ei-Bab Memorial in Tunisia. In later years Lizzie was always known as Gran Hocking Lobb. She was the grandmother of George Steer. As her birth registration record confirms, her name was Lizzie, and not Elizabeth. Only in the 1901 census record is she recorded as Elizabeth, no doubt as her Tea Broker employer considered this a vulgar abbreviation to be expected of a lowly housemaid.

## Sources

HMS Devonshire: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS\\_Devonshire\\_\(1904\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Devonshire_(1904))  
HM Torpedo Boat 4 image: <http://www.ramsgatehistory.com/forum/index.php?topic=75.30>  
Ramsgate Explosion: <http://www.millicentpress.co.uk/node/44>  
Funeral and Funeral Procession picture: <http://www.firstworldwarcentenary.co.uk/lost-but-not-forgotten/>  
Memorial Picture (Margate Local and Family History): <https://www.flickr.com/photos/16810493@N06/9400905585/in/set-72157624699271291>  
Thanks also to Annie Philp for providing information to identify the correct R Hocking on our War Memorial