

# Valentine Charles MITCHELL

Leading Seaman 3176A, SS "Hansley", Royal Naval Reserve

Died April 9<sup>th</sup> 1917, aged 25

Commemorated on Plymouth Naval Memorial

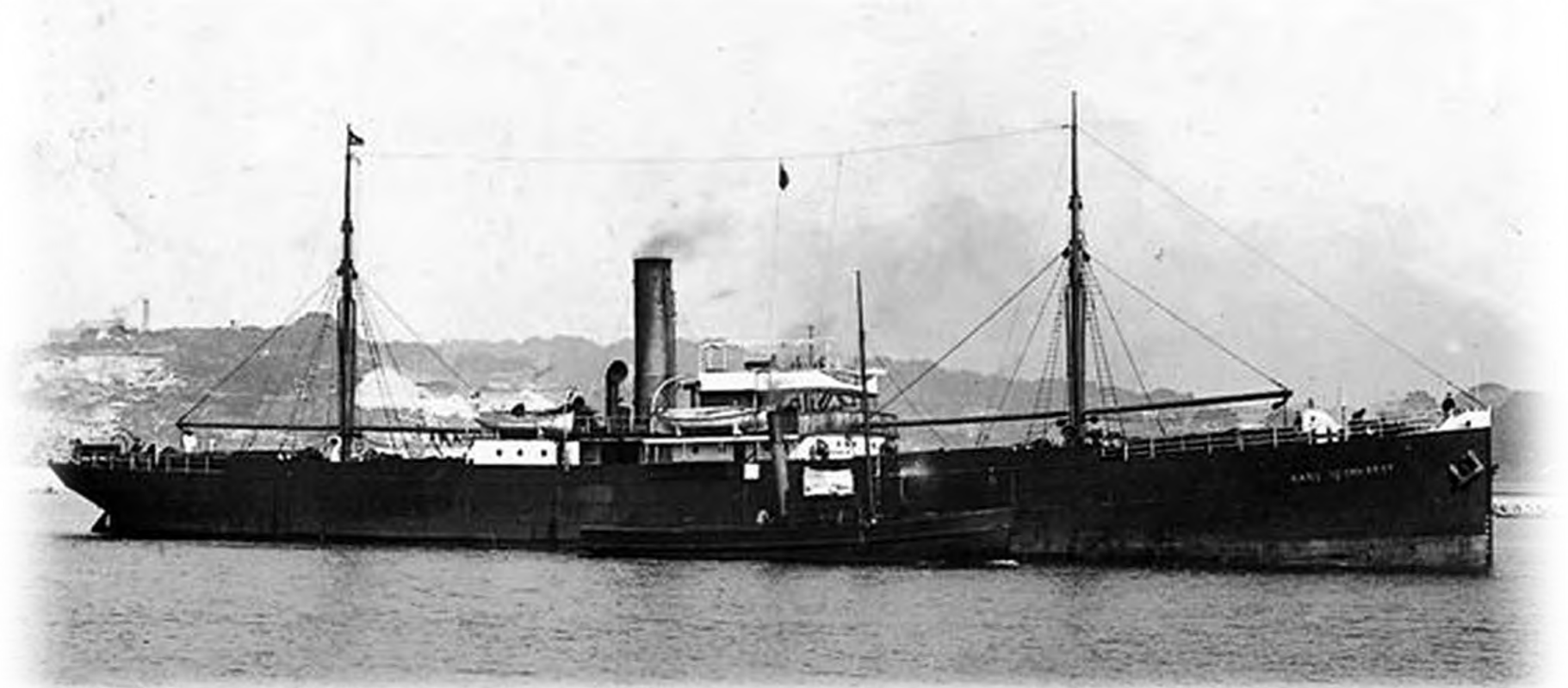
Valentine Charles Mitchell was born in 1891 to Valentine and Margaret Mitchell in Port Isaac. In the 1901 census, Valentine senior (48), a mariner, and Margaret (46) are with five of their children; Harriet (15), Margaret (14), Steven (12), Valentine (9) and Phillis (6). The 1891 census shows he had three other siblings; Amanda (born c1877), Mabel (born c1881) and Walter (born c1884) who had presumably moved out of the family home by 1901. The 1911 census shows 19 year old Valentine had joined the navy and was on HMS Victorious at Torquay. Oddly enough, he is on two census forms that night, as there is also a 19 year old V C Richards from HMS Victorious recorded at the Sailors' Rest boarding house in Victoria Parade, Torquay.

Valentine died in 1917 serving on the merchant vessel SS Hansley. This was built in 1904 in Lubeck and was owned by Leonhardt and Blumberg from Hamburg. It was a steamer of 1,273 tons, originally known as the SS Angelica Zum Bach, but was renamed SS Hans Leonardt in 1909. In July 1914 it was sold to the Russian government, but was in London a few weeks later on August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914 still under a German flag. There it was seized by the Admiralty and renamed SS Hansley. In 1915 the sale to Russia was acknowledged and the ship was freed. It then became the SS Ganslei and was used to supply materials to the Russian Government from the Tyne to Murmansk.

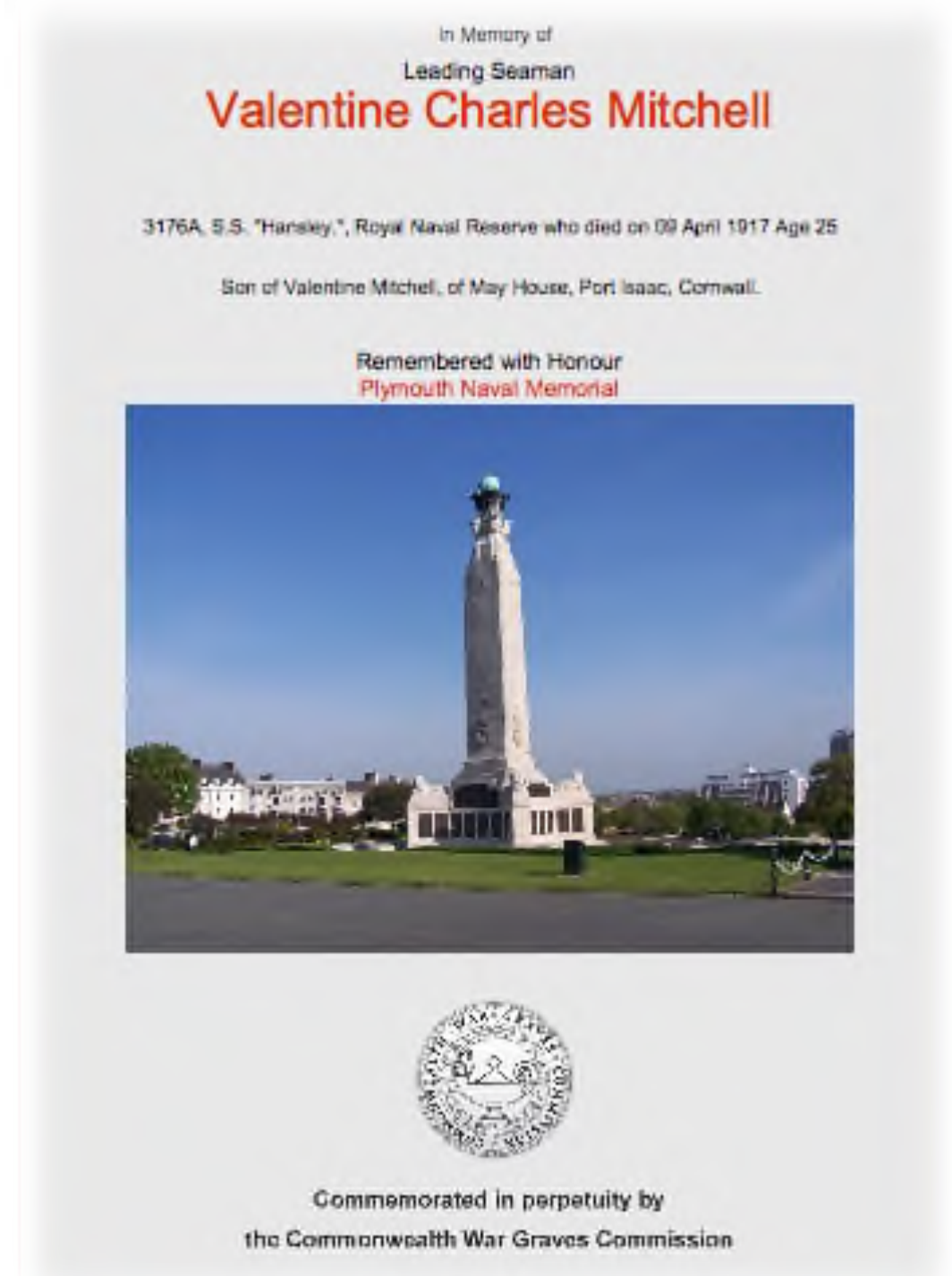
When war broke out, Valentine's ship HMS Victorious was assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Battle Squadron stationed at the Humber, being transferred to the Tyne as a guard ship in December 1914. As one of the oldest and least effective battleships in the navy, she was laid up on the Tyne between February and September 1915, which seems the most likely time Valentine was transferred to the Ganslei/Hansley to assist in its Russian runs to Murmansk.

Murmansk was founded in 1915 and was the last city to be founded within the Russian Empire. Its purpose was as a new location to which essential war supplies could be shipped directly from the UK to Russia. It quickly grew to become a big city with a port, naval base, and a large population, all connected to inland Russia by the new railway extension from Petrozavodsk. From the UK, this new port could only be reached via the hazardous route going round the North Cape, inside the Arctic Circle. The perils of the Second World War arctic convoys have been well documented, but clearly these dangerous journeys were undertaken several decades earlier. At the time Valentine was on the Ganslei there were no convoys, and the only protection merchant vessels had from U-boats was the installation of a stern gun. Almost 3,000 such armed merchant vessels were on the seas by February 1917, often with experienced naval seaman to man those guns. On April 9<sup>th</sup> 1917 SS Ganslei was in Kola Bay approaching Murmansk when she was torpedoed by the German Submarine U-75 and sunk. This far north in April, there are only a few hours of sunlight, and it could well have still been dark when the attack took place. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission database records a second seaman on the Ganslei, Able Seaman Arthur Price. Both seaman died that day, as presumably did the merchant crew, in bitter waters where survival is measured in minutes.

Leading Seaman Valentine Charles Mitchell and Able Seaman Arthur Price are both commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial on Plymouth Hoe.



*SS Hansley (as SS Hans Leonardt)*



## Sources

HMS Victorious: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS\\_Victorious\\_\(1895\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Victorious_(1895))

SS Hansley: <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?144310> and <http://warsailors.com/forum/read.php?1,37576,37587>

Murmansk: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murmansk>

Armed Merchant Vessels: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defensively\\_Equipped\\_Merchant\\_Ships#World\\_War\\_I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defensively_Equipped_Merchant_Ships#World_War_I)