

Helen Bultz

We are very grateful to Frankie Hewett, grand-daughter of Helen Bultz, who has donated a life-saving medal awarded to her grandmother for our archives. With the wonders of the internet, we were able to find out the story behind the medal, and hope you find this interesting.

Helen was born in Paignton in 1895, and by 1910 she was making a name for herself as a very strong swimmer. The following are just a sample of the reports that appear in local newspapers of the day:

- August 1910 – Dartmouth Regatta – 100 yards Scratch Race for Ladies – 2nd Miss H Bultz
- August 1910 – Paignton Regatta – 110 yards Open Swimming Scratch Race – held off Paignton Pier – 2nd Miss H Bultz
- August 1913 – Paignton Regatta – 110 yards Open & Scratch Race for Ladies – winner Miss Helen Bultz

Indeed, her grand-daughter tells us Helen was considered for the Olympic swimming team, but Helen's strict Victorian father was very much against his daughter taking part. The 1916 Summer Olympics were due to be held in Berlin, but were cancelled due to the outbreak of World War 1, so Helen would not have been able to compete anyway.

The history of the medal was passed down the family, and it was told that Helen had rescued a swimmer off Paignton Pier, and the medal was awarded for this. However, we may have discovered a much more grizzly story.



A newspaper report in the Western Times dated Tuesday 16 August 1910 is headlined "Seaman's body washed ashore at Paignton" and goes on to record that J W Monger, aged 17, was a boy rating aboard HMS Leviathan. The ship had anchored in Torbay, and following an accident as he tried to climb back onboard the ship from a small boat, Monger had fallen into the water and drowned. Several days later, his body was washed ashore at

Goodrington Beach, Paignton. It was seen by Mr Motts and H Bultz, who waded out and brought it ashore.

A report in the Western Morning News of Wednesday, 17th August, 1910 records the Coroner's Inquest:

PAIGNTON - Naval Seaman's Body Recovered. - When the fleets were recently in Torbay a first class naval boy, aged 17, named WILLIAM JAMES MONGER, was drowned from H.M.S. Leviathan. The body was not recovered at the time, but last Sunday afternoon it was seen floating in the surf at Goodrington sands, and brought ashore. The Inquest was opened yesterday by Mr S. Hacker at Paignton. The Admiralty was represented by Lieut. A. H. J. Gye, H.M.S. Bellarophon. - The body was identified by deceased's father, THOMAS JAMES MONGER, tin-worker of Abertillery. - Dr Cosens who made a superficial examination, said the remains were extremely decomposed and had evidently been in the water some time. There was an extensive fracture across the back of the skull at the back of the left ear, but it was impossible to say whether caused before death or after. The fracture was sufficient to cause

death and was probably caused before death. - Mr Ernest N. Motts said that at 2.30 on Sunday he was with Messrs. Clyne and Dults [*presumably this is a reporting error which should read Bultz?*] at Goodrington, when he saw the body floating in the wash of the tide, and assisted in getting it ashore. - P.C. Abrahams said he took charge of the body, which was dressed in trousers, jumper and silk scarf marked "W. J. MONGER." The purse was marked with his name and mess number. - The Coroner, in the absence of material witnesses from the ship, said he should have to adjourn the Inquiry. - Lieut. Gye mentioned that the Leviathan was now cruising around the North of Scotland and the Coroner fixed the adjourned Inquest for Tuesday, September 6th. The funeral took place yesterday afternoon at Paignton Cemetery with full naval honours, a band and firing party from H.M.S. Bellarophon, which is in the bay and a gun-carriage party from the Dido attending. The funeral party was under the command of Lieut. Gye., R.N., and Mr Johnson, of the Coastguard Station, was also present. Rev. R. Tebb, Wesleyan Minister, conducted the service. Three volleys was fired at the close of the service and "The Last Post" was sounded.



This picture of the grave of Monger, which is in Paignton Cemetery, was found on the website Find A Grave

Later update reports on the Coroner's Inquest record:

PAIGNTON - The Inquest on WILLIAM JAMES MONGER, a seaman drowned from H.M.S. Leviathan on July 26th, in Torbay, which was opened at Paignton on August 16th, was adjourned until yesterday for witnesses from the ship to give evidence; but it was stated that the ship would not arrive in Torbay until Saturday, and the Inquiry was therefore further adjourned until Tuesday at three o'clock.

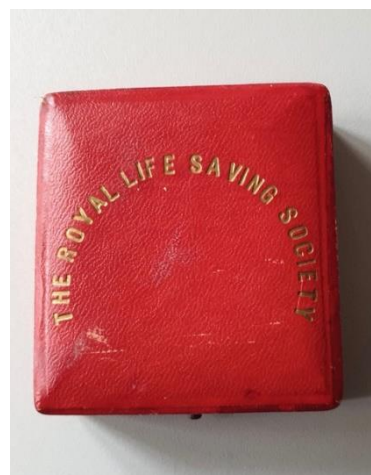
PAIGNTON - Drowned Naval Seaman. Inquest At Paignton. - The Inquest, which has been twice adjourned, on the body of WILLIAM JAMES MONGER, first class boy, R.N., who was drowned in Torbay on July 26th was concluded yesterday at Paignton by Mr Hacker. - James Egan, leading seaman in the Leviathan, said deceased was one of the crew of witness's boat. On the evening of Tuesday, July 26th, the Leviathan was in Torbay. He was waiting to get the boat hoisted, when he received orders to send the crew to supper. The crew climbed up the rope to get aboard. Three boys preceded deceased safely, but he slipped and fell into the boat, striking his head against the gunwale, and then fell into the water. Witness jumped overboard, but the boy sank and he could not recover him, although he had him between his feet for half a minute. There was a good deal of blood in the water. Several others dived in, but nothing was seen of deceased. He fell 24 feet before striking the gunwale. - Arthur W Turner said he was in the bow of the boat and saw deceased go up the rope, but, missing his grip at the davits, he fell with his head against the gunwale. Deceased had been up the rope several times before. - Saml. Malcolm, a boy, gave similar evidence. - An officer of the ship said there had never been a similar accident on board. The boys were taught this exercise in the training-ship and were quite used to it. - The Jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death,"

and attached no blame to anyone. They expressed their admiration of Egan's attempt to save the deceased.

Helen Bultz was awarded a medal by The Royal Life Saving Society for the part she played in bringing Monger's body in from the sea – it must have been a very grizzly and distressing sight for a young eighteen year old girl.



The Latin inscription appears to be “Quem cunque miserum videris hominem scias” which the internet translates to “Whatever miserable man you see, know him” (no responsibility taken for the accuracy of this translation!!). The inscription goes on to say “Awarded to Helen K S Bultz – Aug 1913”



HOWEVER! There is a PS to this story. A lovely member of our Society, who is now no longer with us, used to tell me amazing stories of Paignton, until one day his friend whispered to me “he loves to talk, and he never lets the truth spoil a good story”.

I contacted the Life Saving Awards Research Society who tell me: “the medal was issued by the Royal Life Saving Society and was awarded for swimming proficiency - it was not an award given for saving (or attempting to save) life.

The medal was awarded in 1913 and Helen Bultz would have needed to be an accomplished swimmer (as evidenced by the newspaper reports) to have been able to qualify for the award.”

Helen's father was also named “H Bultz” and it is likely that it was he who pulled the body of William Monger ashore at Goodrington.

Well – let's not waste a good story!!!

Researched by Karen Chapman & Lee Hayward

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