

19. Crabtree J

Born 1863
Jarrow,
Durham

James Joshua Crabtree

Killed in action
18th July 1915
Aged 52
At Sea - 2.5
miles SE of
Southwold
Lighthouse,
Suffolk

Mercantile Marine
SS 'Batoum' (Swansea)

Fireman

James came from an engineering family, his father George Frederick Crabtree was originally from Rotherhithe in East London. He married Charlotte Hooker from Harwich in 1860 and quickly moved to Jarrow, Durham where he worked as an engine driver on a steam ship. The couple's first child Charlotte was born in 1862 but died shortly afterwards. James was born in Newcastle in 1863; he was given Joshua as a middle name after his paternal grandfather & engineer.

The couple returned to Ipswich and James's mother died there in 1870. His father re-married Emily Garrod from Chelmondiston in Suffolk in 1871.

The family then moved to Harwich and by 1881 James is also an engine fireman on board the 'Matin', a cargo steamer working out of the port. Ten years on and his father is working as an engine driver on the railway, whilst James continued working as a fireman on the local steamships of the time. Alice Emily Rush was born in Ipswich and worked for a while as a Mothers help. It is not clear how she met James but they married in Ipswich in 1893.

Their first son William James was born the year after. The couple then moved to Mistley where their second son Gladstone Hosea A. Crabtree was born in 1898.

At the time of the 1901 census Alice (33 years) was head of the household, presumably as James was away at sea. The family were living in Barnfield off New Road. She is looking after the two young boys, with her younger sister Lily & 2 year old nephew Rupert, also resident with her.

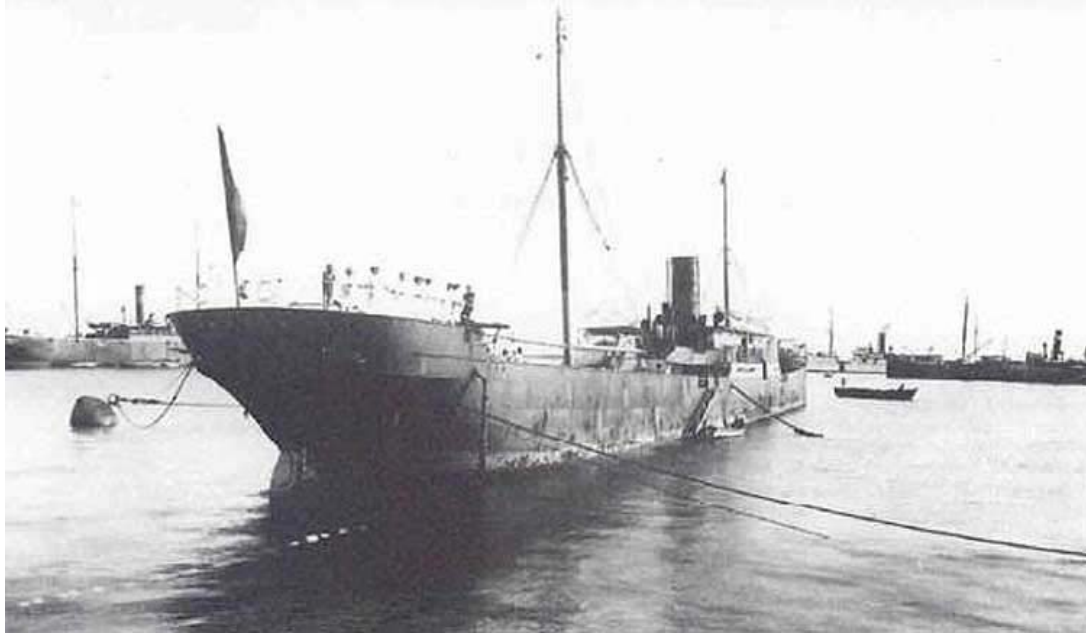
By 1911 the family are doing well and have moved into a larger seven room property known as Cliff House, St. James Terrace, Mistley, on the corner of Harwich road and what is now Beckford road, giving them pleasant views over the Stour estuary. James was by then 46 years old and having given up the sea he is working on one of the local stationary steam engines. His eldest son William (aged 16 by then) was already working on the Railway. James's mother Emily had died earlier in the year and his father George at 72 years, was also with them, living off a pension from his time as a railway engine driver down the line at Ramsey. There was room enough for three

other lodgers in the house, one working in the Maltings, one a local signalman.



Due to the demands of the war James went back to the merchant navy and was signed aboard the Associated Oil Carriers Petroleum Tanker the SS 'Batoum'. Built in 1893 by James Laing of Sunderland the 4,000 ton ship had been armed and was crewed by a number of locals. At this point in time the U-boat war was becoming even more daring and on 18th July 1915 the merchant tanker was hit by a torpedo whilst only a couple of miles south east of Southwold, on its way back to Harwich from the Humber. The attack by Captain by Ralph Wenninger in command of UB -17, was only partially successful and the crew managed to beach ship on the Outer Shoal where it was later refloated & repaired. But six men including James lost their lives, two of the others, Robert Versey & Arthur Pond came from Harwich. The body of Samuel Hawkins from Gt Oakley was recovered and buried at Dovercourt.

The unlucky ship the SS 'Batoum' was torpedoed again on the 19th June 1917 whilst on its way to Ireland, this time by UB-61. It was sunk six miles off the Fastnet Rock, fortunately an American destroyer the USS Jarvis, was on hand that time to rescue all but one of the crew.



SS Batoum 1

At 52 years James was the oldest of the local men lost to the war. Like many he has no known grave and is commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial in London. His wife Alice moved back to Ipswich with the family where she died in 1921. His eldest son William James Crabtree followed his father into the merchant navy and survived the war, later married and had a family in Ipswich before moving to Bedford where he died in 1983.

Gladstone died in Ipswich in 1962.

