

Boys lost at Sea: October 1914.

Charles Albert Victor Spooner is listed on both Manningtree and Mistley memorials, this may be due to the impact his young death early in the war had on the local population. Not much is known about his early life or his father. Charles was actually born on the south coast in Brighton on the 26th June 1897; his father was Ernest Albert Spooner and his mother Emily Kate Shotter. She was born in Heston in Hertfordshire, the couple married in Brighton in early 1897, not long before Charles was born.

At three years of age Charles moved into Park View house in Guilford, to live with this grandmother Catherine Shotter, who worked as a private nurse, and his maiden Aunt, Kate Ethel Shotter. This may have been due to the working demands on his parents, his mother working as a live-in servant a few miles away in Albury, his father perhaps also a servant at a public house in Eastbourne.

A few years later and Charles was shifted over to live with John and Elizabeth Amos who lived in South Street, Manningtree. They were both in their early sixties so may have found Charles a handful, John was working at the Xylonite factory as a 'Colour man', Having married in about 1870, they had had their own family with one surviving daughter Jessie. Having come from London to work in the late 1880's they first lived in Brantham before moving over to Lawford. It is not absolutely clear how they were related to Charles, who is however designated as their 'Nephew'.

From South Street at a young age Charles joined the Royal navy and started his training down the river at Ganges, Shotley on the 29th August 1913 as a 'Boy' 2nd class. He progressed to 'Boy' 1st class J.26754 on the 14th April 1914. The next day he was posted to HMS Hawke, a British Cruiser, joined at some stage by another local boy, Harold Ainger from Horsley Cross.

Harold Ainger

Born on the 17th November 1897, by the turn of the century Harold was about 3 years of age living with his family in Horsley Cross, a very rural part of Mistley. His father Charles was a Horseman on a local Farm, his mother Annie caring for the family which included his older brother Wilfred and younger brother Herbert. Harold had some education at St John's the small local school. By 1911 the family had expanded with further siblings Edwin (aged 9), Claude

(aged 7), Alfred (aged 5), Frederick (aged 1) and sister Doris (aged 3). Harold by then was working on one of the local farms, though not for long. At just fifteen years of age he signed up with



Harold Ainger

the Royal Navy and entered HMS Ganges, Shotley, on 15th September 1913 to train as a 'Boy' sailor, No. 76363. A big change from life in the country, but with a growing number of mouths to feed, perhaps one of the few options available to him and his family.

The Royal Navy, had a long tradition of having 'boys' serve from the age of 15, their ranks starting as a 'Boy 3rd Class', progressing to Boy 1st Class after 16 to 18 months, once they had demonstrated sufficient proficiency in seamanship and accumulated one good conduct badge. Extra pay was given on promotion.

By April 1914 Harold had moved up to a 'Boy 1st Class' and along with Charles Spooner was transferred to

HMS Hawke at Chatham in August 1914 just as the war started, along with many new crew members.



HMS Hawke

By 1914 she was primarily used for training and many of the crew were cadets. She became part of the 10th Cruiser Squadron, attached to the Third Fleet, operating on blockade duties between the Shetland Islands and Norway. Under the command of Captain Hugh Williams, on the 15th October 1914 she was in the North Sea off the east coast of Scotland, meeting up with HMS Endymion to transfer mail.

At about 11.00 am she was hit by a torpedo fired by SM-U9 and sunk within only a few minutes. The torpedo appears to have hit one of the ships magazines, causing a large explosion giving little chance for the crew to escape. Nearly 500 of the 600 crew were lost or died later, some having been many hours in the water before being found. Three officers, together with 49 men of the crew, were picked up by a Norwegian steamer and landed the next day at Aberdeen by a local trawler. As was the order of the day, other Naval ships waited until it was clear the submarine had left the area before trying to pick up survivors. An account of the sinking was later given by crewmen from the submarine.

Neither Charles or Harold's bodies were found and both are commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial in Kent, killed in action whilst only 16 years of age. There was concern expressed in the national newspapers at the time about the use of young cadets on front line naval ships.

Harold's older Brother Wilfred Ainger was one of those who went to Palestine with the Essex 5th Battalion, died in March 1917 aged 21 years and is buried at Gaza. The brothers are commemorated on a plaque inside St Lawrence Church, Bradfield, placed there after the church in Horsley Cross was closed.

Thanks to Mrs P Sullivan for providing photos and information on her relatives from the Ainger family.