

We return to our occasional *Story Behind The Postcard* feature with a look at a new book by amateur genealogist and PPM reader Helen Baggott. In 'Posted in the Past,' Helen investigates the stories behind dozens of cards, many with fascinating, unexpected twists.

Here Helen gives us an insight into her book by looking at two of the cards - one posted by a sailor who perished in the tragedy which also claimed the life of Field Marshal Kitchener in 1916; and another sent by a man who had emigrated to the USA to his soldier/brother who died in the same year.

# Posted in the Past



by Helen Baggott

**I'm an amateur genealogist and postcard collector and for me, researching the lives and times of the recipients of postcards sent more than 100 years ago is the perfect combination of hobbies.**

Beginning with just a name and address has led me on some wonderful journeys and those stories have been brought together in one book, *Posted in the Past*.

Some of the stories link to household names, events of international importance, and others open the door to the lives of ordinary people.

The first postcard (see the bottom of page 33) is probably the tattiest card in my collection. The image is interesting, but equally so is the story behind the man who sent it. It was sent in 1907 to May Harrison from her brother Edwin.

Edwin was a sailor in the Royal Navy and the postcard was sent from Portsmouth where he lived with his wife, Charlotte. May was a schoolgirl at this time.

During World War One, Edwin served on HMS *Hampshire* as first cook. The ship was present at the Battle of Jutland where it played a support role.

After the battle, on June 5, 1916, the *Hampshire* sailed for north Russia on a diplomatic mission. The ship struck a mine and an explosion caused catastrophic damage. It took barely 15 minutes for the ship to sink.

Only 12 members of the 735 crew and 14 passengers survived. Edwin was one of those who perished – alongside the Secretary of State for War, Field Marshal Lord Kitchener. Edwin's grave is in Lyness Royal Naval Cemetery, on Hoy in Orkney. Kitchener's body was never recovered.

Knowing the provenance of the card removes the distraction of its quality. May had kept the card, possibly adding it to a growing collection.

Today, despite its condition, it links us to the tragedy of HMS *Hampshire* and those who lost their lives in its sinking.

The second card was sent to the UK from Massachusetts in America. Addressed to a soldier, I was able to find Gilbert Freeman's details without difficulty. He was killed in 1916 and his name is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial in France.

Gilbert was born in Freshford, Somerset, and his father was the manager of a mill on the River Avon.

Gilbert's half-brother William was a gardener and he, with Gilbert and other half-siblings, moved to Saltash in Cornwall in the early 1900s where William ran a shop as a seed merchant.

The business did well and later relocated to a larger shop in Fore Street where it continued to trade as a general hardware store until relatively recently.

Before World War One, Charles Freeman, Gilbert's brother and the sender of the card, emigrated to America.

After the war, another brother would also emigrate and the brothers eventually became naturalised citizens.

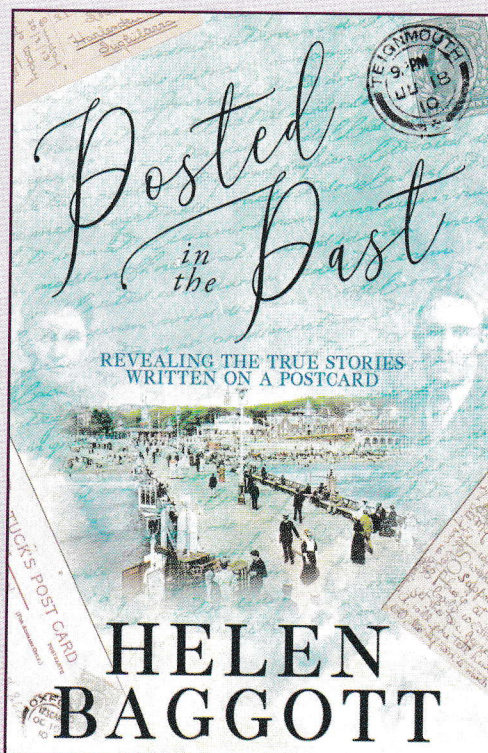
Gilbert appears on the war memorial in Saltash. He is also listed on the memorial in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire – where his family was originally from, and to where his parents eventually retired.

A village in Chalford, also in Gloucestershire, has claimed Gilbert and he is included on their memorial.

His link to the village appears tenuous. However a local lad sent home a letter to his family with a

group photograph, taken in the Chelsea Barracks, that mentions Gilbert.

Wallace Clissold was killed in 1914 and his service number was 16371 – Gilbert's was 16373. Clearly the two lads had enlisted at the same time. Although I could not prove it, I was hopeful that I had seen a photograph of Gilbert.



Gilbert's story goes beyond the facts of his death and when I uploaded a more detailed summary of my research to a blog, I was amazed that descendants of the two brothers in America found it within hours.

They knew they had an uncle who had died during World War One, but they didn't know about the time spent in Freshford and Saltash, or the mention on the Thiepval Memorial. And of course, they were able to confirm that the photograph I had seen was of their uncle, the young lad in the barracks.

A month after the American family members contacted me, the heritage centre in Saltash emailed to say that other family members had visited, trying to discover more about the Freemans.

My research had been copied to the centre at the same time I'd shared it online and it was thrilling to exchange emails with another branch of the family, seeing more images of Gilbert and his family, and to

connect them with the American cousins.

Gilbert's postcard (see images below) was the first ever that I researched. More than a hundred postcards later and I haven't finished – and why would I want to?

So often we only look at the condition of a postcard, the image, its theme or subject.

The stories included in *Posted in the Past* add a new dimension of interest. I've discovered connections to King Edward VII's doctor, even Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Some of the stories reveal tragedy aboard another ship, the RMS *Empress of Ireland*, the joy of a new child, a train delayed by the first national rail strike – and that's the appeal, I never know where a postcard will send me.

*Posted in the Past* is illustrated with black and white images of both sides of more than 100 postcards and they can be viewed in colour on a blog that accompanies the book – available from bookshops and Amazon. RRP £9.99.

