

Edward Robert Chaplin

Stoker 1st Class, 223109 (RFR/CH/B/6421) HMS Aboukir

Edward Robert Chaplin was born on February 3rd, 1887 in Bircham Newton. He was baptised on May 15th of the same year. (Norfolk Parish Baptisms, 1887). His parents were Samuel Chaplin (born 1845, Brooke, Norfolk) and Harriet (nee Parker, born 1849, Woodton, Norfolk). According to the 1891 census return, Samuel was a Groom Domestic. At this time Edward had three older sisters and a younger brother and the family were living in Bircham Newton. In the 1901 census, the family were recorded as living in Docking Road, Bircham Newton. The father, Samuel, was a Yardman on Farm and Edward, now 14 years old, was an Agricultural Labourer.

On February 3rd, 1905, as an 18 year old, Edward joined the navy. He signed on for 12 years. He was described as 5 foot 7 and a half inches tall, with black hair, grey eyes and a ruddy complexion. This information comes from Document 223109 (Chatham), British Royal Navy Seamen 1899 - 1924 (National Archives). He served until the 11th February 1910 at which point the document states 'Shore by purchase'. In other words, he bought himself out of the navy. However on the following day he joined the Royal Fleet Reserve (RFR).

In 1911, Edward was shown on the Census returns as living as a boarder at 43, Cotleigh Road, West Hampstead, N W London. His occupation was recorded as Police Constable and he was listed as being 'Single'. The 'Register for Leavers from the Metropolitan Police' gives his warrant number as 98164 and states that he joined on 4th April, 1910 and left on 10th October 1914. Even though he was in the Police, as he was also a member of the Royal Fleet Reserve, he was assigned to HMS Aboukir when war broke out in August 1914. (Document 223109 (Chatham) National Archives).

In the early hours of the morning of 22 September, HMS Aboukir along with HMS Cressy and HMS Hogue were on patrol in the North Sea. These were old Cressy class armoured cruisers and when they were at sea they were supposed to maintain a speed of 12 to 13 knots and zigzag. These old cruisers could not maintain that speed and the zigzagging order was often ignored. The patrol was spotted by the German submarine U9 commanded by Otto Weddigen. In the ensuing engagement which lasted just over one hour, all three ships were sunk by torpedoes. A total of 837 men were rescued but the loss of life was 1459, many of whom were reservists and cadets. A transcript from De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour reads 'Chaplin, Edward Robert, Stoker R.F.R. B6421, 223109 HMS Aboukir, lost in action in the North Sea, 22 September 1914.'

Edward Robert Chaplin's body was never recovered for burial and he is commemorated on Chatham Naval Memorial, Panel 4. (CWGC archive documents record him as being the husband of Ellen E Tree (formerly Chaplin). England and Wales Marriages, 1837-2005 record that Robert Edward Chaplin married Ellen E Blackford in 1912 in Battle, Sussex.)

