

# The Tawney Family of Gosport

By - Colin Smith- July 2013

My mothers maiden name was Tawney, which is quite an unusual name so I decided to research the family history.



I traced them back to 16th century Gloucestershire finding that there had been quite a mixture of occupations - agricultural labourer, tollgate keeper, blacksmith, a couple of police officers, a couple who went to prison for being on the other side of the law, and one who fought

through the whole of the Peninsular War.

Over time, various Tawneys left the Gloucestershire area to South Wales, Kent and Sussex, and it is from the Sussex branch that the Gosport Tawneys originate.

My Great Grandfather, Daniel, was a policeman in Sussex having moved there from Gloucestershire. There were three children from the marriage, Mary the eldest, Stephen Dan, my grandfather and Lizzie the youngest who died aged thirteen.

Stephen Dan, who I shall refer to as 'Pop' was born in Cuckfield in 1877 and his only recorded job was as a Milkboy. This is the occupation stated on his Service Certificate when he joined the Royal Navy in 1892.

He served in such ships as HMS Royal Sovereign, Intrepid, Duke of Wellington, Hannibal and HMS Active, which was the last Square Rigger to leave Portsmouth Harbour under sail.

In 1895 he met and married Lily Elizabeth Thompson of Portsmouth and soon after they moved to rented accommodation in Burnham's Place in Gosport. Pop had specialised as a Telegraphist in the Navy, and in 1901 he joined HMS Victory, which at that time was still afloat in Portsmouth Harbour. Lily, always known as Nanny Tawney, used to do laundry for some of the officers of the ship in order to help make ends meet.

In 1903 Pop was mess caterer when some monies were unaccounted for, and he was subsequently Court-Martialled on board Victory, Most unusually, especially for those times, Nanny T. was allowed to address the Court

in his defence! Whether this had any effect or not is unrecorded, but she was a formidable lady when angry. Pop was cleared!

In 1903 Pop was invalided from the Navy, but remained on the Reserve List, and in 1915 was recalled to the colours as a result of the World War. In 1918 he was serving on HMS Partridge II an armed trawler, which was on escort duties in the Mediterranean. An Italian cruiser (allies at that time) narrowly missed being torpedoed, and Pop's ship was involved in the chase and sinking of U-Boat 64 Pop, who was known to elaborate at times, used to tell the story that he was the one who spotted the torpedo tracks and who signalled the Cruiser to alter course. The truth may never be known, but in 1922 he was belatedly awarded the Italian Bronze Medal for Valour and Diplomacy After he left the Navy in 1903 he had got a job in the Telephone Exchange in Portsmouth Dockyard. He went back to this job after WWI and retired after 37 years service, and having been awarded the Imperial Service Medal.



During World War II he and Lily together with some other family members were evacuated to Calne in Wiltshire, where he was a Cinema Commissionaire for a while.

He died peacefully in 1961 after a family celebration of his birthday. Lily lived on until 1970, in what had been their family home since the war ended, in Alma Street Gosport.

There were eight children from the marriage, four boys and four girls. I shall talk about the girls first who all married and were therefore no longer Tawneys. This is a problem when tracing families because unless you know the marriage details you can't know who you are looking for. In this case however the details are known.

The eldest daughter was my mother Annette, who married James Edward Smith a Yorkshire man from Halifax, in

1929. He was a private in The Duke of Wellington's regiment stationed at that time at St George's Barracks in the town. He continued his Army career, retiring in 1952 with the rank Captain in the Royal Artillery.

Next came Winifred, who married Nathaniel Seal in 1928. He was in the Royal Air Force stationed at Grange which is now the site of HMS Sultan. One of their sons served in the RAF for many years, a lot of them on the Queen's Flight He was rewarded by the presentation of the Royal Victorian Medal by Her Majesty the Queen at an investiture at Buckingham Palace Ivy also married a soldier from the 'Dukes', Cecil Rhodes. They divorced after a few years and she re-married Fred Daniels.

Finally there was Phyllis, who like her two sisters married a 'Duke, George Pearce. He unfortunately died as a result of being hit on the head by a cricket ball. Phyllis was brutally attacked and stabbed to death in 1963 outside the Post Office in San Diego Road, Gosport. This led to the biggest murder hunt in Gosport's history and ended in the conviction of a local man who lived in Welch Road.



The fifth HMS Nottingham (above) distinguished herself in First World War battles.

## MAJORITY ESCAPE AS WW1 CRUISER REFUSES TO SINK

PREVIOUS Royal Navy ship to bear the name Nottingham, fifth in the line, was a light cruiser of 5,440 tons, commissioned in April 1914 under Capt. Charles Miller.

She was promptly adopted by the City of Nottingham, whose citizens kept her ship's company of 400 supplied with newspapers and other comforts during her war service.

HMS Nottingham first saw action in the battles of Heligoland in 1914, where she engaged German coastal forces. On January 23 1915 the Germans sent four battle cruisers, including the Blucher, across the Dogger Bank in the hope of detecting British light forces. The Nottingham took full part in the ensuing action.

Sea, she was hit by torpedoes fired from U52. But she took more than an hour to sink and only 38 lives were lost.

Fourth HMS Nottingham (1796-99), a river barge of 67 tons armed with three guns, helped defend the Thames against invasion. Third ship of the name (1745-73) gained six battle honours in her illustrious career.

Jumping back to 1703 we find the first HMS Nottingham, a 924 ton, 60 gun, fourth rate cruiser, built in Deptford.

### Battle honours

Gibraltar 1704 Veix Malaga 1704 Marbella 1705 Finisterre 1747 Ushant 1747 Megranime 1748 Louisburg 1758 Martinique 1762 Havana 1762 Heligoland 1914 Dogger Bank 1915 Jutland 1916.

POSTCARDS of Ships of the Royal Navy are obtainable at 60p each (minimum order £1.00) from Navy News, HMS Nelson, Portsmouth PO1 3HT. An order for 12

prove life changing for him. He was serving in the cruiser HMS Nottingham, which having survived the carnage of Jutland a few months earlier, was torpedoed in the North Sea. Archie was one of the lucky ones - 38 crewmen died. The survivors were eventually sent to Belfast, to 'stand by' HMS Glorious which was being built there.

Gallaghers Cigarettes organised a dance for the crew, and it was there that he met and subsequently married Rose Mohan, although he was obliged to convert to catholicism to do so Rose and he set up home in Gosport where their first child was born in 1920. There was a married accompanied posting to Malta, and when his time expired they moved back to Gosport.

He worked in various Admiralty establishments until World War II saw him recalled to the colours as was his father.

In 1944 he was serving aboard the Canadian Aircraft Carrier, HMCS Nabob, which was torpedoed in the North Atlantic by U354. Although badly damaged, she was able to make her way back to Scapa Flow, listing badly, and was never serviceable again.

His son, also Archie, was on another ship anchored at Scapa Flow, and seeing the Nabob arrive back in such a damaged state, got his CO to send a signal asking about his father. The reply was "all OK, see you on the jetty 1930hrs, and they celebrated accordingly.

Cyril Vernon Tawney, was born in Gosport in 1901. At the age of fourteen he got his mother to sign papers so that he could join the Royal Marines Light Infantry at Forton Barracks (Now St Vincent College) On completing his training he was posted to the Light Cruiser HMS Black Prince at Scapa Flow. Very shortly afterwards, the British and German Fleets met at the Battle of Jutland. In the confusion, HMS Black Prince became detached from the rest of her squadron, and shortly after that met with a force of German ships and was sunk with all hands.

Cyril was just fifteen years and one month old, making him very probably the youngest British fatal casualty of the Battle, and maybe in the whole War. If you go to the War Memorial Hospital, there is a plaque and book of remembrance in the main passageway. For some time now the book has been open at the page bearing his name. He was educated at the old Clarence School in Gosport which is no longer there. However, the bronze plaque commemorating the school's War dead is on the side of a building at Northcote House, Bury Hall Lane.

Clarence was the next brother. He also joined the Royal Marines Light Infantry and went on to serve in both Wars. His rank on retirement was Colour Sergeant and like his brother Archie, he served in various Admiralty establishments for the rest of his working life. He died in 1971. His only child was Eileen so the Tawney line stopped there.

H.M.S. Black Prince  
66 G. P.O.  
London

Dear Ma  
Just a few lines before  
you are in the heat of battle  
as it leaves me at present  
I am sending on some cards  
as it has been my only  
chance since your birthday.  
I am also enclosing my photo  
which which was taken  
while I was ~~at~~ scrubbing  
a hammock. Tell Phil that  
when we lose our money  
I will send her another few  
headed cigarette cards, but  
we keep on going to sea and  
I have to catch the mail.  
Tell Ma I don't think I have  
any more to say as I have  
sent on one letter but not  
close with love  
I remain  
your loving son.  
Cyril

The eldest son, Archibald, was born in 1896 and like his father joined the Royal Navy, in 1912 also specialising in as a Telegraphist. He had a large growth on the back of his neck, and was known throughout his service as "Bunker" Tawney. His Naval Service took him all over the world, but The First World War was to

After the death of Cyril at Jutland, another son was born in 1918, David Roy. he too joined the Royal Marines as a musician, his instruments being the Saxophone and Violin. While serving at HMS Caledonia in Rosyth he met and married Margaret Bell. There were two daughters from the marriage. He was posted to HMS Hood and took part in the bombardment of the French fleet in order to stop it falling into the hands of the Germans.

Then Hood was involved in the chase to sink the German battle-cruiser Bismarck. It was Hood of course which was sunk, and David was not one of the three survivors. This gave my grandparents the dubious distinction of having their youngest sons killed in both World Wars.

The family lost touch with Margaret in Rosyth, but during my research into family history, I posted some details on the Hood website. I subsequently received a call from them, giving me a number to ring. This number turned out to be David's Daughter Rae, who he had never seen. There followed a reunion in Gosport at which she was able to meet some sixteen cousins of whom she had no knowledge, and who in turn hadn't known of her existence. Within a very short time, she and I married, and we live in Stubbington. Rae was lucky to have met the last survivor of the Hood, Ted Briggs, before he died in Fareham.

Rae had no children from her previous marriage, and her sister having married was no longer a Tawney, so the Scottish Clan of Tawneys ceased.

Like his brother Cyril, David was educated at Clarence School, and his name can also be found on the bronze plaques at Northcott House. Their names appear also on the memorial on Southsea Common.

The only male Gosport Tawney to produce male children was therefore Archie. His first also Archie as I said earlier was born in 1920 in Gosport and followed his father into the Royal Navy, shortly before WWII, although he became an ERA(Engine Room Artificer). He served throughout WWII mostly in minesweepers and small escort vessels. He was also at Dunkirk helping to evacuate the BEF. His ship was small enough to get close inshore, and he and another Petty Officer took turns in taking a motor boat to the beaches picking up as many troops as they could.

Later in the War his ship was being re-fitted in Manchester(via the ship canal) where he met and married Elsie. After the war he left the Navy and settled in Ashton-UnderLyne. Now at the age of 93 he lives in sheltered accommodation in Hyde, and each day at 1100hrs he drinks the health of the Queen with a substantial tot of Woods 100 Rum.

Archie senior's other son Cyril Tawney was born in 1930 in Gosport. As a small child he was evacuated to the village of Hambledon. Like his father and brother before

him he also joined the Royal Navy.



He developed an interest in Folk Songs, and based his style on the American singer Burl Ives.

He became quite successful, and at one time had the distinction of having his own half hour slot on Westward Television, whilst still a serving submariner! This brought him to the attention of the General Public and the Folk world at large. This in turn prompted him to purchase his discharge from the Navy and turn professional, a bit of a risk but it paid off, and at the time of his death he was the longest serving professional folk singer in the UK, over 40 years.

As I said it was a bit of a struggle at first, but eventually he became well known enough to tour the USA, Ireland and Australia. He was a prolific writer of songs, mainly with a Naval theme, with such titles as The Grey Funnel Line, Gosport Nancy, The Lean and Unwashed Ti, and many more.

He wrote a couple of books too, The Grey Funnel Line being the best known. This is a history of Naval songs and shanties, a subject on which Cyril was an acknowledged expert.

Various singers recorded songs written by Cyril, notably Judith Durham of the Seekers, Marianne Faithful and the legendary Bob Dylan.

Having been a submariner, he was in great demand at the Submariners Reunions at HMS Dolphin, and for many years performed at the Gosport Festival. He continued to tour in the UK at any and all of the Folk clubs that wanted him.

Cyril died in 2005 of a rare bacterial infection. His funeral in Exeter was attended by all of the Folk world. He and his wife, Rosemary had no children. Rosemary died in 2012. Cyril's CDs and books are still available through Amazon and possibly through his website.

Alas, as you can see, there are no longer any Gosport Tawneys. There are however many descendants, still in the Gosport area. The tradition of the forces has lasted too, and to my knowledge, since the end of WWII, they have served in Korea, Malaya, Cyprus, Kenya, Aden and Northern Ireland

There may also have been some representation in the other conflicts that have taken place. After the death of my mother, we decided to have a bench set up in the Ferry Gardens, commemorating not only her, but the Tawney family in general. Should you wish to see it, it is on the side near Camper and Nicolsons. At the last visit there wasn't too much graffiti, but the pigeons do find it a convenient place.

*A day to celebrate Cyril Tawney's life and work*  
**Saturday 14th April 2007**  
 Cecil Sharp House 2 Regent's Park Road London NW1 7AY

concert performances,  
 singarounds, video  
 and photographic  
 displays plus a  
 Westcountry Revel -  
 to raise funds for the  
 preservation of Cyril's  
 archive of writing,  
 field recordings and  
 folk memorabilia to  
 be housed in the  
 Vaughan Williams  
 Memorial Library

**Martin Carthy**  
**Norma Waterson**  
**Louis Killen**  
**Mike Waterson**  
**Shep Woolley**  
**Roy Harris**  
**Martyn Wyndham-Read &**  
**Iris Bishop**  
**Doc Rowe**  
**Roy Clinging**  
**Les Barker**  
**Tim Laycock**  
**Heather Wood**

with a large contingent from Devon including  
 the Dartmoor Pixie Band with Sarah Bazeley  
 Jim Causley, Tim van Eyken, Ed Rennie  
 Graham O'Callaghan The Claque, Hanging Johnny

Afternoon (1200 - 1830) £12  
 Evening Concert (2000 - 2300) £15  
 Combined Day ticket £25

Tickets on sale in October from  
 'Celebrating Cyril'

