

ST JAMES CHURCH TAUNTON

WORLD WAR 1 MEMORIAL PROJECT

Cecil Frank Newbery

Name: Cecil Frank Newbery

Rank: Postal Wireless Operator

Service Number: Not known

Regiment: Merchant Navy

Battalion/Unit number: SS Mavisbrook

Date/year of Birth: Sep Q 1900

Place of Birth: High Bickington, Devon

Place of Residence: Not known

Date of Death: 17.5.1918

Place of Death: Mediterranean

Burial/Memorial: Tower Hill Memorial

C F Newbery was another of the slightly mysterious names on the war memorial where initially it was difficult to find a clear connection with the parish. The CWGC website has only one match, Cecil Frank Newbery, (there are no entries for Newberry or Newbury). Scrutiny of census returns for St James parish in 1911 found John Henry Newbery, a baker and confectioner living on East Reach, born in Bradford (on Tone), Somerset. Cecil Frank's father was also born in Bradford and John Newbery was his brother – and Cecil's uncle. Cecil's name is also recorded on the Roll of Honour so perhaps he lived in Taunton for a time.

Cecil was born in 1900, the youngest son of William Richard and Alice Newbery of The Village, High Bickington, Devon. He was a wireless operator serving on board the SS Mavisbrook, a cargo steamer built in 1912 with a crew of around 35. Cecil trained at the Marconi School in London, achieving a first class certificate. The first of its type in the world, the school provided practical training in using the Marconi wireless to students with backgrounds in engineering.

Demand for wireless operators was very high with a range of employment options open to those who qualified such as commercial shipping, broadcasting, police dispatching and of course many served during the war on battlefields.

The Mavisbrook was a cargo steamer built in 1912. On May 17th 1918, she was part of a convoy of 28 ships en route from Cardiff to Malta laden with coal when she was hit by a torpedo from the UB-50 and exploded. The ship sank very rapidly, leaving 18 dead and 15 survivors. Cecil was only 17 years old, a similar age to Edward Pring who died on HMS Defence at the Battle of Jutland.

The obituary in The Western Times of July 12th 1918, notes that this was Cecil's first voyage and adds the sad comment:

“Poignancy is added to the tragedy by the fact that the lad's mother, an invalid, and bedridden for two years, passed away on June 21st – soon after hearing of her boy's death”