

Archibald Mitchell Hay



Stoker Second Class K./44847, Archibald Mitchell Hay, listed as aged 18, was the only son of Archibald Hay – described as a Carter in the 1901 Census – and Elizabeth Hay, nee Clapperton, of 15 Rossie Place, Edinburgh. His parents placed a death notice in the BMD columns of *The Evening News* of Edinburgh on the 7th September, page 3. The following day, Esther Melkejohn, describing herself as a beloved friend, placed her own notice in memory of him, also on page 3.

He was buried at Woodlands Road Cemetery, reference 6.309. His father lived on until May 1940, days before the Nazis unleashed their attack on France and the Low Countries; and his mother until 1953. He

also had a younger sister called Jemima (1902-1999) who later married Richard Grant Steel and they had a daughter called Elizabeth Hay Grant, who upon marriage became Mrs Fraser.

Archibald's niece is still living and currently resides at Grangemouth, Stirlingshire. I had the honour to speak to her on the phone on the 14th November 2007 and, after explaining to her how I came to discover her uncle had died in the Chatham Raid, she modestly stated that she had little she could tell me and then kept me spellbound for the next 40 minutes! Mrs Fraser began by saying that her mother never talked about her older brother. She could remember her doing so on only one occasion. Her mother had been asked if she was an only child. She had replied that she had not been and that she had had an older brother, who had been killed in an air raid in Chatham in 1917.

Nevertheless, she clearly loved her brother and deeply mourned his loss, because she carried a small photograph of him in her purse, which went everywhere with her, right up until the day she died. Mrs Fraser now has the photograph in her possession.

Mrs Fraser then went on to tell of a family tale concerning her 'Uncle Archie'. When he left school, he began work as a delivery boy and, being tall for his age, he was often mistaken for being older than he actually was. Aged just 16, he had been working along Princes Street, Edinburgh, when a woman approached him and – thinking he was much older and, therefore, shirking his patriotic duty to King and Scotland – had handed him a white feather. Mortified at this public humiliation, he ran away from home and, lying about his age, joined the Navy; he was then sent to Chatham for training. His mother, frantic with worry, could not find him and his father, who served in the Army during the Great War, was either home on leave or obtained special leave (Mrs Fraser was not sure which was the case) with the purpose of locating his errant son. After some time (again Mrs Fraser was not sure how long this was) he discovered that Archie had joined the Navy and was training at Chatham. Plans were being made for him to travel down to Kent to retrieve his underage son, when the family received news that there had been a raid on Chatham and their son had been one of the victims.

Mrs Fraser stressed that she was not entirely sure of the time frame and that some time might have elapsed between his receiving the feather and his running away. His headstone at Gillingham states his age as 18. Checking through my files on the Raid, I looked at the copy of his birth certificate I had obtained earlier from George MacLeod of the Lothians Family History Society and this states that he was born on the 7th February 1900 and so would have been 17.5 at his death. It is, of course, quite possible that he received the feather while he was still 16, say in January 1917 and that he mulled that over before running away, say at the end of May, and that his father needed time to obtain leave to begin his search for his son and that he might only have located him towards the end of August, with the raid taking place on the 3rd September. This is, of course, all conjecture. Perhaps his sister might have been able to give a clearer picture but, sadly, she passed away on the 13th December 1999.

Taken from The Chatham Air Raid 3rd September 1917: The connection with Scotland, written by Marcus Bedingfield