

## **Cdr. DAVID MARK FELL RN (1886-1948)**

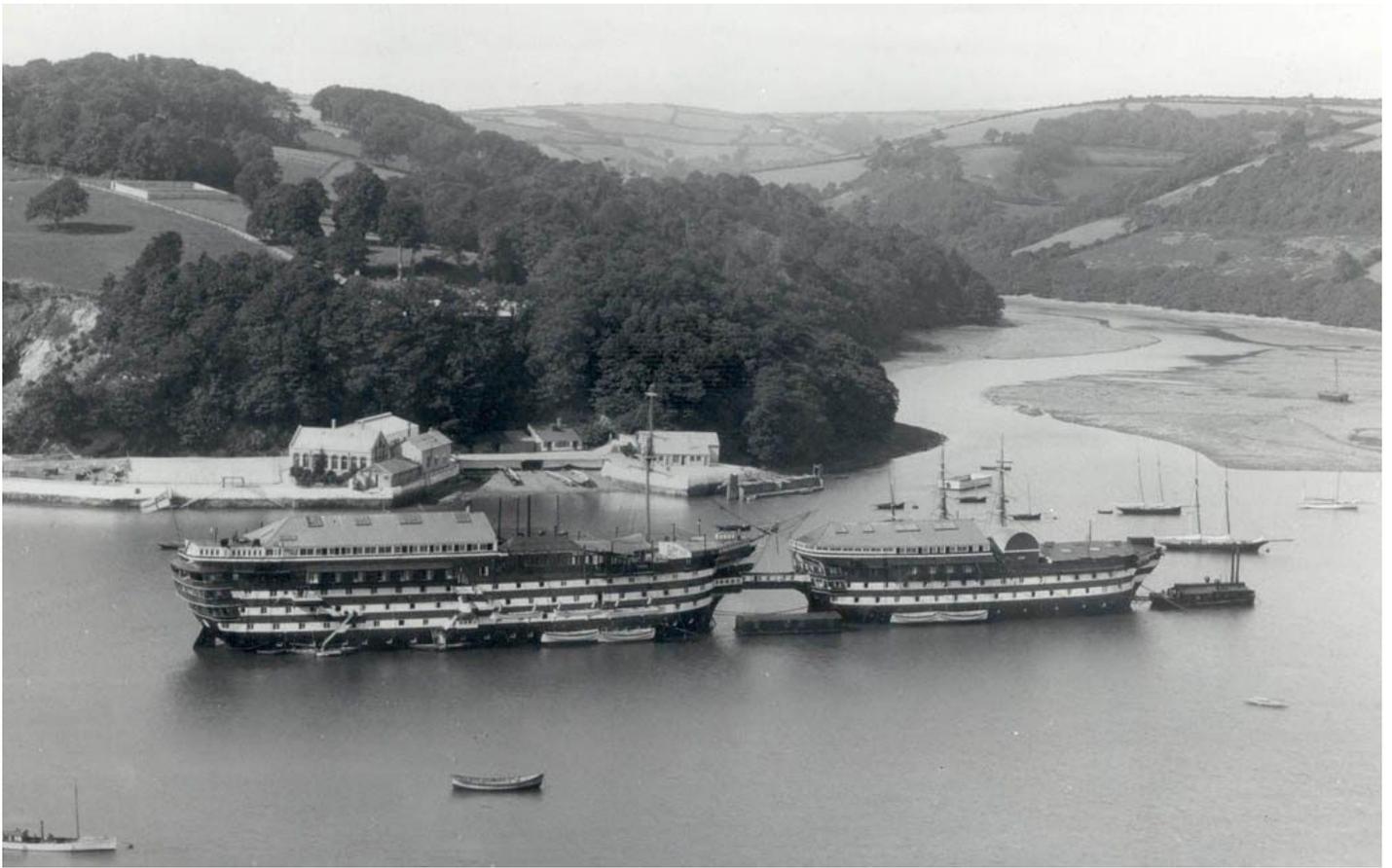
*June 2020*

'We are indebted to **Dick Cobbold (1939) #622** on the web family tree, his siblings and many of Mark's cousins for this biography produced during, and perhaps partially because of, the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown of 2020. The participation of every contributor across four continents is applauded and appreciated.

**David Mark Fell (1886-1948) #3964**, or Mark as he was better known lived in interesting times. Born the year before Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in London he survived two World Wars seeing action as a submariner in the Mediterranean in the first, and as a Staff Officer H M Submarine Service at the Admiralty in Whitehall, London, in the second.

At age 13 Mark embarked on his naval career, albeit one can surmise this was much to the chagrin and disapproval of his father, **Sir Arthur (1850-1934) #4583**, who is on record decrying the military life as too much time wasted and laying about idle, albeit perhaps this was in reference to the Army, since there is a picture of Mark age 4 or so in a sailor suit.

Mark enrolled as a cadet in Dartmouth, in "a training ship" in 1899 or 1900. We know this was HMS Britannia, the RN officer training establishment in the 1800s to 1905. This Britannia (ex-HMS Prince of Wales), a wooden 3-deck ship-of-the-line was the fourth such ship to bear this name, having served as a battleship in the early-1800s. She was retired as a training ship in Portsmouth in 1864 before being moved first to Portland and then finally to Dartmouth, until in turn being retired in 1905 and the **Britannia Royal Naval College** then being sited ashore. The training syllabus focused on mathematics and seamanship, although other topics were included and varied over time, with the training lasting typically for two years. As we know from naval training, the syllabus would also have included navigation, both celestial and pilotage. Another ship from 1864 onward, a 2-decker "Hindustan" was moored end-to-end with HMS Britannia with a gangway to provide accommodation for the cadets. RN officer training course was 2 years, so it is assumed that Mark graduated from HMS Britannia as a midshipman at age 15 in 1902. Subsequent training of RN officers was then at the Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth, that we know today.



*Britannia and Hindotan, Dartmouth, c. 1900*

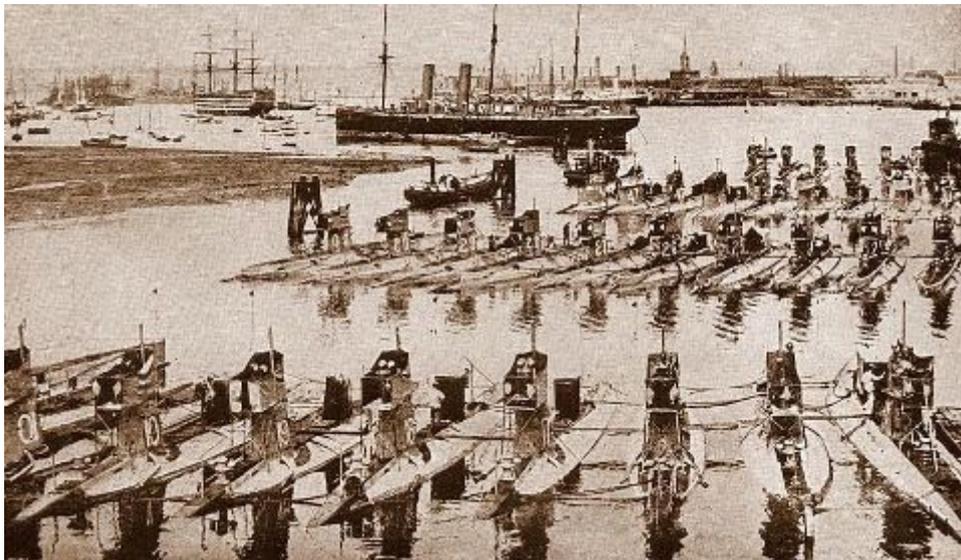
It is thought that Mark joined the RN submarine service around 1911 with a spell on HMS Mercury for submarine training. His first child, **Phoebe (1912-1997) #489** was born 19 July 1912 in Southsea, adjacent to Portsmouth, where Gosport is the submarine base. It is known he served in submarines in Scotland and research documents provided his progression through the officer ranks. He spent several years at sea in surface ships and even major warships gaining experience and expertise in navigation, watch keeping, seamanship, communications, mines and leadership skills. His record of service shows:

Midshipman	1903 HMS Cornwallis- Battleship
Sub Lieutenant	1905 HMS Roxburgh- Cruiser
Lieutenant	1909 HMS Talbot- Cruiser 1911 HMS Mercury- Depot Ship Submarine training- Portsmouth
Lieutenant	1913 submarine A12- Ardrossan 1915 H-Class (H-2)- Canada/Italy
Lieutenant Commander (promoted 29 Aug 1917)	1915-1917 sub Flotilla- Brindisi 1918/19? E31- Harwich 1919/24 Chatham & L7- Portsmouth

Retired	1925/26- Tauranga, New Zealand
Commander	1939 (exact date?) London
Retired	1944- Gobions, Essex

Mark is listed among the officers in HMS Mercury 2 April 1911, located in Portsmouth harbour. (See picture with more than 20 submarines nearby and Admiral Lord Nelson's HMS Victory in left background). HMS Mercury was a Submarine Depot Ship, reclassified from previous service as an IRIS 2<sup>nd</sup> class cruiser.

His whereabouts post war before leaving for New Zealand are sketchy. The information above shows his post war commands and Chatham dockyard postings but exact dates are not known. There are pictures of Mark and family in Dedham, Essex with **Peter (1921-1979) #6922** about 2 years old, putting the picture about 1923. Dedham is 12 miles west of Harwich so it is possible Mark was in command E31 in Harwich at the time. It is possible he was elsewhere and only in early post war days was in Dedham, commuting on weekends from Portsmouth or Chatham.



*HMS Mercury, Portsmouth, c.1911*

Another documented early career record of Mark is in "The Disposition of RN Submarines at the outbreak of War, 4 August 1914", JD Perkins. This listing shows Lt. David Mark Fell HMS Pactolus, Ardrossan (9<sup>th</sup> Flotilla), in command submarine A12. Ardrossan is approximately 25 miles SW of Glasgow on the Scottish west coast. So, we know he had risen through officer ranks to Lieutenant by 1909 and was probably fairly senior in the rank of Lt. at the time of assuming command A12 in 1913. Mark is shown as a Lieutenant Commander in 1915/16 while operating in the Adriatic and Dardanelles campaign, while research shows his official promotion date in 1917.

In 1915 the Royal Navy initiated its H-Boat Submarine Project with the first keel being laid down in Canada on 11<sup>th</sup> January. Despite the very 'Colonial Autocratic' behaviour of the British Government the project was a big success, with the first 2 boats H-1 (Lt Wilfred Pirie) and H-2 (Mark Fell) finished first on budget and

on-time, with commissioning in Quebec City on 25 May 1915 and H-3 and H-4 following a month later....wow, compare that to today's cost and schedule overruns on modern weapon systems! Another 6 H-boats were built for the Royal Navy in the contracted batch of 10, and 8 more were built in rapid succession and delivered to the Italian navy in 1916.

Mark Fell sailed from St. Johns Newfoundland in command of H-2, crossed the Atlantic to Gibraltar, in what is deemed the first crossing west to east of the Atlantic by a submarine. His wife, **Clare (1891-1981) #3965** was in Teignmouth, Devon, England in 1915 but made a trip to see Mark, arriving in July in Gibraltar and departing in September. It looks like their second son, **Dick (1916-1977) #6921**, was conceived on this visit. Mark then operated out of Brindisi, and in 1916 was appointed flotilla commander and promoted Lieutenant Commander during tenure at Brindisi. Clare and the young Fell family, augmented with the arrival of "Uncle Dick" in 1916, resided in Italy, Venice and then Rome, until the end of the war when Mark and family returned to England in the period 1918-25. Mark's exploits and nickname "mad Mark Fell" from escapades in the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign 1916-17 require additional research. Mark in Italy was knighted by **King Vittorio Emanuele III** in 1918 before the return to England. The original citation/scroll (dated 15 Feb 1918) in Italian is in the possession of **Jeannie Cobbold (1940) #3088**.

1918 has Mark back in England having been promoted Lieutenant Commander. He saw service in H2 (400 tons), E31 in the North Sea around the time of the German surrender and then in the latest class submarine the L7 out of Gosport.

Mark, with Clare and his 4 children left Southampton 4 April 1926 in SS Ruapehu of the New Zealand Shipping Company Ltd. Various brief written comments about Mark's time in Tauranga mention his farm and prize-winning cows. In 1931 Mark, Clare and Phoebe, before her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, left New Zealand for a 6 month visit to England (April – September) to present Phoebe at court (**King George V and Queen Mary**). They enjoyed 3 summers that year, two in New Zealand and one in England! Mark's sister **Winifred Fell (1883-1978) #8512** was married to **Jim Whitehead (1880-1955) #8514**, Assistant Commissioner London Police. Phoebe's uncle Jim led the parade of cars to Buckingham Palace, with Phoebe's car immediately behind Jim mounted in full dress uniform on his splendid white horse.

Not a lot is known about Mark and his family's time at Bureta Farm. Phoebe married **Temple Cobbold (1904-1983) #488**, 31 December 1932 (they were 2<sup>nd</sup> cousins), with her brother **Tony (1914-1998) #4389** attending as best man. Tony apparently left Bureta about then in hot pursuit of a female called "Bubbles" and two years later sailed for England in 1934, arriving 20 Jan 1935 at the Port of London, age 20. He married **Dorothy June Ada Warwick (1911-2007) #4390** in 1938. **Philippa (1933) #619** was born in Mark's Bureta farm 1 November 1933 with Clare's sister **Louise (1870-1951) #6892** also present during one of her visits to New Zealand. Louise left for England the next day.

Mark, Clare and Peter left Bureta and New Zealand behind, arriving Southampton on SS Mataroa, 29 April 1939. Dick apparently left earlier to join the RN in the gathering storm days of WW2. Mark and family lived in Long Sutton, Somerset on a small farm, where the record for pre-war registration for rationing and other purposes appears. Philippa has recollections of "granny" Clare selling milk from a horse and cart and ladling milk from a churn before eventually moving to Essex. From memories and photos, it seems Mark, lived in or near Woodham Ferris in 1941, as he is seen here as a full Commander (3 stripes) with son Dick as a Lieutenant (2 stripes). Dick was in the RN Fleet Air Arm during the war, retired as a Commander and

continued with his golf prowess. Mark commuted to the Admiralty, Whitehall, London during the war years where he was a senior staff officer, submarines. Somewhere in the 1940-45 period he bought Gobions farm and retired there in August 1944 towards the end of the war (VE Day May 1945).

Gobions is recorded as a very old historic farm located 4 miles south of Billericay, Essex. As mentioned previously, Mark and family lived in the northern part of Essex in the 1920s during his days in command E31. Mark and Clare, post WWI and WW2 lived in 3 homes in Essex and indeed along with Suffolk, this part of East Anglia clearly features prominently in the many homes of Mark and Clare, and later Clare after Mark's death. Mark was an active dairy farmer at Gobions with a small herd of short horns and a pair of Jersey cows.

Phoebe and her 4 children, now living at Takapuna beach near Auckland after a break up in her marriage, left New Zealand in 1945. They sailed on a converted troop ship SS Rangitoto, 25 September from Wellington, transiting via the Panama Canal, arriving Southampton 5th November, 1945. The family was met by Mark who had arrived by train from Essex to welcome his daughter and family.

Mark and Clare left Gobions behind (about 1946) and lived briefly first at Woodbridge, Suffolk and then settled at 5 Wentworth Terrace directly across the road from a typical North Sea shingle beach and ¼ mile north of the Moot Hall, in Aldeburgh, Suffolk. Mark died very shortly and granny Clare stayed on for a few years, then briefly in Kensington before buying, living in, upgrading and reselling a succession of houses in Suffolk before settling in Bungay, Suffolk, with a brief interregnum in Hertfordshire to run a girls' finishing school with Phoebe. Phoebe also had a succession of houses in Suffolk, settled finally in Bungay, where she lived for many years, before succumbing to a stroke, while visiting her daughter **Ann (1935) #620** who had converted an old farmhouse into a delightful home, in Normandy, France. Ann moved back to England and lives today in the same Bungay house owned by her mother.

Mark clearly enjoyed a successful navy career and survived the perilous occupation and early formative years of submarine service. He was a proud family man with 4 children and enjoyed a varied life at sea, and adapted his livelihood to being a successful farmer in both New Zealand and England. Anyone who served during WWI, commanded several submarines in the dangerous German submarine infested waters of the Atlantic, Mediterranean, Dardanelles and North Sea, clearly had both the skill and the "luck of the Fells" in so doing.



*Lt Dick Fell, left and Cdr Mark Fell, right.*

