

Village Echoes

William Stanley Drake

Following on from last month's Village Echo about the carving by Alfred Oliver Drake included in the new kitchen in Christ Church, Kilndown, it seems pertinent to write about his eldest son William Stanley Drake who had a brief mention in the article. Born on 4th August 1890 in Dagenham, William grew up in Kilndown after his parents moved there a few years later. He and his younger brother, Alfred Douglas Drake, both served in the army during the First World War. During the Second World War, William was a member of the Hong Kong Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, but he died as a prisoner of war of the Japanese in October 1942. After his name was recently noted as commemorated on his parents' grave in Kilndown churchyard, it was realised he is not included on the Kilndown war memorial.

During the First World War, William served mainly in the 3rd County of London Yeomanry and then in the Machine Gun Corps, attaining the rank of Corporal. Unfortunately, no service record for him has survived but it is believed he saw service in Egypt, Salonika and Gallipoli from 1915 until early 1918 when his unit moved to France. Following his discharge from the army in 1919, he initially seems to have joined the Royal Navy: a ship's passenger list in 1924 shows him arriving from Hong Kong and returning to the Royal Naval Base in Portsmouth.

Later he took employment as a salesman for Gordons Ltd, and passenger lists of the Blue Funnel Line show that during the 1920s he and his wife were regular travellers between the UK and Hong Kong where they were based. He was in Hong Kong at the outbreak of the Second World War (his wife was in England) and records show that he joined the Hong Kong RNVR on 25th October 1939 with the rank of Warrant Officer in the Mine Watching Branch. On 25th December 1941 he was captured and interned in the POW camp at Shamshuipo, Hong Kong.

On 27th September 1942 William Drake was among about 1,800 POWs on board the "Lisbon Maru" which left Hong Kong for Shanghai. It was torpedoed on 2nd October by a submarine, USS Grouper, whose crew did not realise it was a ship carrying prisoners of war. Although many were killed, some survived and were recaptured. There is considerable confusion in official records over the exact fate of William Drake: the CWGC indicates he died on that date, but official War Office records show variously that his fate was unknown or that he was buried at sea (as opposed to drowned), suggesting that he did at least survive the torpedoing. Furthermore, in 1946 the Colonial Office was informed that he had died on or about 8th October 1942 from diphtheria or some other illness when on board the "Shensi Maru" en route for Shanghai, and it issued a death certificate to that effect. Regardless of the circumstances, it is clear that William Drake had strong connections to Kilndown and that he died while serving in the armed forces.

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