

Members' Stories

In May some of our members gave short talks about their researches into some of their forebears.

First up was **Charles Turner**, who spoke about his collection of family medals. These included his Grandfather's medals from WW2. He was the 1st Radio Officer on SS Benlomond which was torpedoed in 1942 with only one survivor, Poon Linn – who survived on a life raft for 133 days!

Charles' father served in the Royal Naval Patrol Service as a Radar Operator on HMT Indian Star during WW2.

His First Cousin once removed also served in the Royal Navy and was fortunate to serve on ships that never fired in anger.



The Peninsular War medal

Lastly Charles spoke about his 3x Great Grandfather who fought in the Peninsular War. He served from 1809-1816, completing his 7 years service. He received the Military General Service Medal with 9 bars for the battles he fought in. The medal was issued in 1848. He had to have survived his service and then apply for the medal in 1847 in order to receive it.

Charles' talk was followed by two sisters, **Jenny Mann and Pat Carter** (both née Chambers), who spoke about 'The Uncle We Never Knew'.

"Our Grandparents James William

Chambers and Hilda Gertrude Songer married in 1918 and they lived in Wolsey Cottages, Hog Hill, Yoxford.

Their first son William Robert was born in November 1919. Billy's siblings were Jonas, James (Jimmy - our Father), Amy, Peter and John.

We knew that Billy had died in WW2, a great shock to the family and especially to his mother. We saw family photos but wanted to look into what had happened to our Uncle. It was possible to find his war record showing that Billy aged 17 joined the Royal Marines at Deal on 16th March 1937 and then moved to Chatham, Devon.

Eventually, on 7th May 1938, having been described as a 'very good character' and 'superb ability', Billy joined HMS Cornwall. On 17th January 1939 Billy moved to HMS Repulse. By 17th September 1940 Billy had been made a temporary corporal and spent two months at the Royal Marines Reservists Depot.

On 19th January 1941 Billy, described as a Non Commissioned Officer, was on HMS Prince of Wales. In October the ship was travelling via South Africa and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to the Far East, arriving in Singapore on 2nd December 1941. On 10th December 1941 the Prince of Wales set off with HMS Repulse to intercept the Japanese invasion fleet in the South China Sea. The Battleship HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse were both sunk by the Japanese Navy on that day, three days after Pearl Harbour. Some crew were able to get onto HMS Express; 20 Officers, 280 Sailors and 27 Marines lost their lives. Our Uncle Billy stayed onboard and largely due to his "efforts and ability, coolness and example" the supply of ammunition to the guns continued, as mentioned in his citation for bravery. Also Billy continued closing down magazines and shell rooms in a final effort to keep the ship afloat. Sadly the ship turned over and sank, taking all those brave men.

Our Grandparents received Billy's citation and medals: The 1939 - 1945 Star including an oak leaf to represent "Mentioned in Dispatches" for his bravery. They also received the Atlantic Star and the Pacific Star. Corporal W.R.Chambers' name is on the Roll of Honour in Yoxford Church and is also remembered with honour on the Plymouth Naval Memorial."

Lastly **Maureen Botwright** stepped forward to tell us about her search for information about her grandfather, her dad's father Walter.

"Only having memories of my grandparents as an elderly couple and Walter being a quiet man who didn't join in conversations, I had become intrigued to find out about Walter's formative years and his past life.

Using my own and family members' memories, Walter's story was researched using family documents and photos and information from various public resources.

The resources gave a clear account of Walter's childhood growing up with his maternal grandparents and the whereabouts of his mother. However, the identity of Walter's father is unknown – but this was not where the story ended!

Having taken an AncestryDNA test in March 2021 and with help from others with more experience of working with DNA matches than myself, my search for, and confirmation of the identity of Walter's father continues...."



Maureen telling the audience about her elusive grandfather