

THE GRAVE OF BOY 1ST CLASS A.A. KING d.1901

It is a prerequisite for reading this page that you should have first read this page

[GANGES AND SHOTLEY NAVAL BURIAL GROUND](#)

In referring to the link above, you will have already read about the extremely poor condition of this boys grave headstone, which has weathered the storms of the last 108 years and paid the price for doing so. Unlike all the other grave headstones in this cemetery which were made for the navy, paid for by the navy and erected by the navy, this one was erected and paid for by his grieving parents. It marks the start of the burial site for indeed he was the first boy to buried here after the arrival of Ganges, redeployed to Shotley from the West Country. Because of this historic fact, it is a very important grave and especially so for all who served in that ship/establishment from 1900 until 1976.

On finding this grave, I wanted to do something to restore it to how it might have looked when the headstone was first placed in 1901. To say the very least, its present state would be covered by those much used three letters of BER, meaning beyond economical repair. Above all else a new head stone would have to be a facsimile of the old both in dimensions and in the words used by the original stonemason, or at least, what remains legible, although instead of using sandstone which is rapidly flaking away, a more durable material would be used either marble or polished granite.

I set about fulfilling my aspiration by first seeking a cost, and I approached an undertaking company in my home town of Bury St Edmunds. The cost of manufacture and engraving plus transportation and erection was, as expected, quite high but within reach of my ballpark budget figure, so the next step was to seek the necessary permission.

My first approach was to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission [CWGC]. They [Mrs Julie Somay] very kindly pointed out that despite the grave being in a CWGC cemetery and maintained as such, the Commission only dealt with periods of the two world wars which they define as 4th August 1914 to 31st August 1921 and 3rd September 1939 to 31st December 1947 - meaning that they are not dealing with any of the casualties of later wars and in particular those of Iraq and Afghanistan. They have no jurisdiction over A.A. KING's grave and therefore they regretted that they could neither comment upon or assist with any suggestion about his grave. However, they were kind enough to refer me to the Services Personnel Veterans Agency at RAF

Innsworth in Gloucester where I communicated with one of their executives, a Miss Jeanette Gavin.

Miss Gavin stated that their department was responsible for deaths occurring from 1948 onwards [and thus those of later than WW2 wars]. From the days of the original Imperial War Graves Commission [which became the CWGC] i.e., 4th August 1914 to this very day, there has been continuity of caring for the dead, but before 1914 there was no such organisation. Moreover, she wasn't sure who dealt with the deaths in 1901 or prior to 1914. This was academic in this case for the following reason. Since it was the parents of A.A. KING who placed the original headstone above their sons grave, the matter is private and personal and totally outside the remit of any organisation notwithstanding its mandate or dates covered. I would need to seek-out the family of A.A. KING and thereafter [with their approval] make an application to the Bishop for permission to enter the churchyard to replace the stone which would almost certainly require a rededication blessing.

Although the engraving on the headstone tells me that the boy came from Felixstowe the name KING is just about as ubiquitous as is the name SMITH. It took me three whole days [each of eight hours] to conduct all kinds and types of searches and I will add that I am *au fait* with genealogy searches. It is an almost impossible task to find this family after over 100 years. The GRO and the BDM Indexes helped of course and I was able to get off to a good start with his birth certificate details [Born and registered in the HOE District which is in Norfolk in October 1883, certificate number 2a 637] and his death certificate details [registered in the Ipswich district of SAMFORD in March 1901 when aged 17, certificate number 4a 570]. However, his first mentioning would have been in the 1891 census and this is really when all the search problems started. By the time of this census Aaron would have been eight years old and there is no accurate mention of him or his family, at least that is, in the England census. It is possible that Aaron was an only child and that the family either died out or moved away from the East Anglia areas. Certainly there are far too many King's in the area to ask questions of them all.

So, sadly, it looks as though the grave stone will turn to dust and be lost for all posterity. Nothing can be done without his family's approval and acquiescence, and if there is no longer a family in being or there is but it is not traceable, time and the inevitable consequences of the weather will reduce the headstone in the very near future back to being a slab of sandstone [i.e., with no inscription] and eventually, though after a much longer period, to grit and rubble.

There I must leave the story which far from being forgotten , will be put on the back burner of my heart and my mind.

RIP Aaron and God Bless.