

A Dinton visitor who did not return

In the early 1930s a young schoolboy born in Kennington, London ran away from his home in Kennington and cycled some 40 miles to Dinton. His name was Leonard Stanley Cooke and his reason to run away was that he disliked London and wanted to stay with our family as long as my father would allow him to. My parents were married in Kennington and had left London to come back to live in Dinton in 1930. Len knew them well. My father would send him back home after a few days to preserve the family peace with Len's parents, but at every conceivable opportunity Len would be back in Dinton. He was our cousin, he loved Dinton, his cousins and the freedom to roam the fields and woods, climb trees in the Biggin spinney and the peace of village life. As the years progressed he never stopped coming. Dinton life was so very much different from London. Len had virtually become another member of our family and we loved him as such.



When war came in 1939 Len was called up for service and he joined the Royal Navy based in Chatham, Kent and after initial training Len was posted to a group called DEMS.(Defensibly Equipped Merchant Ships). Normally merchant ships were not armed but as the war started these ships were being attacked so each ship was equipped with one gun and a Royal naval seaman who had been trained to use the gun when necessary and that was Len's job.

After the war started we saw very little of him in Dinton but he did write to my parents occasionally and in 1941 he informed us that he had been courting a young lady (Kathleen Connaught) and they were to be married in the coming early summer of 1941. My two sisters attended the marriage which took place in London as arranged.



During the wedding reception the police arrived with Admiralty orders for Len to return to his ship the S.S. Bangalore immediately. He was forced to say his goodbyes to his parents, friends, relatives and his new bride and he was escorted by the police back to his ship. Within hours of his return the ship sailed from England.

Above Len as a teenager
and with Kathleen his bride

A few weeks later we received news from his parents which would shock and devastate us all. On the 20th July 1941 off the coast of Brazil at night the S.S. Bangalore had collided with another ship, the Richmond Castle, causing great damage to Len's ship.



Most of the ship's crew were rescued and the Bangalore was scuttled when daylight arrived as it would have been a hazard to other shipping. Four men were missing, three merchant seamen and one Royal naval seaman, Leonard Cooke.

We received the news with great disbelief and sorrow as we all expected Len to have been picked up safely but eventually we had to accept what had happened. Some weeks after these news were received a letter from Len arrived in the post to my parents which gave us great hope again but this letter had been posted in Trinidad dated some time prior to the accident.

Len had gone aged 22 years with no known grave and never to return to Dinton again.

Gordon Weedon

**In Memory of
C/JX 178101 Able Seaman LEONARD STANLEY COOKE
S.S. Bangalore, Royal Navy
who died age 22
on 20 July 1941
Son of Stanley William and Letitia L. L. Cooke, of Kennington,
London; husband of Kathleen Cooke.
Remembered with honour
CHATHAM NAVAL MEMORIAL**