

Owen Deane Brownfield

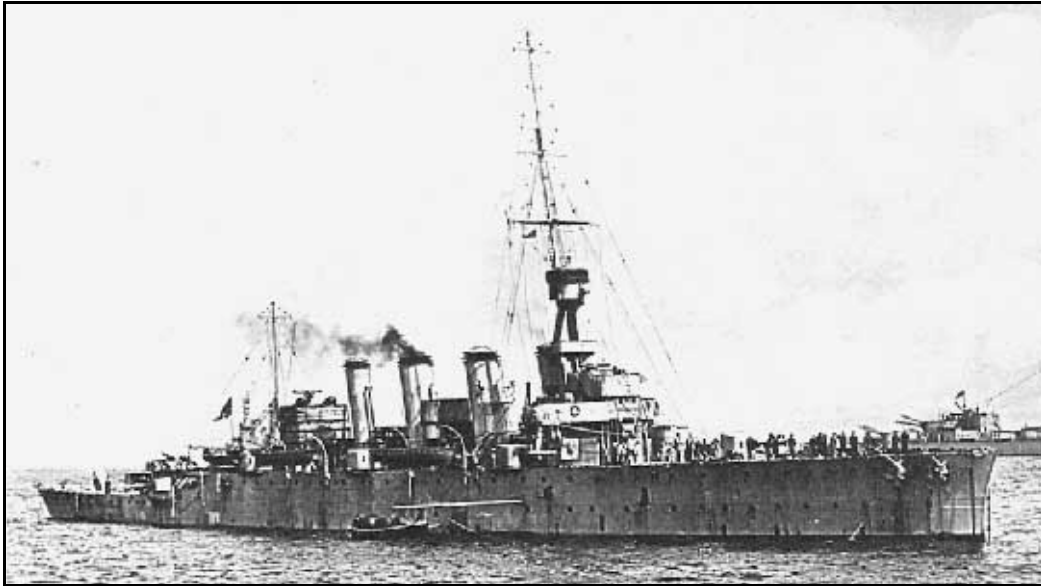


8. I. OWEN DEANE BROWNFIELD was born on 22nd February 1891 at College Street, Petersfield.¹ He was educated at Epsom College and qualified as a doctor at St Thomas' Hospital, London². He joined the Royal Navy in 1914 with a temporary commission but remained in the Navy and served throughout both the 1914-18 and 1939-45 wars.

Owen had only passed his L.R.C.P. on 24th September 1914³. In fact, the qualification was a war time one, as: *'at a special meeting of the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons on 24th, candidates who had passed the Special War Examinations were admitted members of the College and at a meeting of the Royal College of Physicians of London on the same day they had licences to practise physic granted to them.'*⁴ This was presumably an easier examination introduced so that doctors could serve in the armed forces and Owen was not to be awarded his M.B.,B.S. until 17th December 1919.⁵

Owen joined H.M.S. Chester on the 9th April 1916;⁶ the ship commissioned in Liverpool on 2nd May and proceeded straight to Scapa Flow to join the fleet with a minimum of 'working up' exercises⁷. The other doctor on board was Staff Surgeon Robert R. Farson MB, who had also joined the ship on the 9th April⁸. The ship carried out battle practice on May 30, 1916 returning to Scapa Flow and anchoring at 14.25hrs. However the German Fleet had been reported to be at sea and so at 2110hrs. they left harbour again and steered southeast at 19 knots. At 1516hrs. the following day May 31st, the hands were piped to battle stations. Contact with the enemy was made at about 1600hrs. This was subsequently found to be a group German cruisers and after sustaining several direct hits, which did considerable damage to the upper deck and caused numerous casualties, but which had not affected the engine room, the Chester, outnumbered four to one, took evasive action, zig zagging at high speed, turning towards

the splashes caused by the fall of the shells and thus confusing the enemy gunners. They managed to get out of range, without suffering further major damage and took station on the starboard bow of the 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron at 1804hrs.⁹ Two officers and 33 men were killed and 3 Officers and 39 men were wounded on board the Chester during the Battle of Jutland. Among them was John Travers Cornwall who was put ashore and taken to Grimsby Hospital on June 2nd with "acute abdominal symptoms from a penetrating shell wound" He was operated on immediately but died the same afternoon.¹⁰ He was awarded a Posthumous V.C.



H.M.S. Chester (1917)

From a contemporary account by one of the first aid party:

“Below decks the first-aid parties were battened down in the store-room to keep them safe, but they remained ready to carry out their task of ministering to the many wounded when called upon to do so. There was about six of us including a young surgeon named Lieutenant Bloomfield(sic), a brilliant Doctor. The first shot put all our lights out and we were in total darkness. After a lull in the fighting we were let out to the upper deck and what a sight – which will remain in my memory forever. An officer was lying dead with both legs severed in sea boots. I stepped over a body that had been disembowelled. I had to hold a seaman’s foot while the Doctor cut it off as it was just hanging. We laid the bodies side by side and were told to turn them over on their stomachs.”

Officers Steward 1st Class Reginald Gulliver, HMS Chester, attached 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron.¹¹

Donald Cooper writes:

“On May 31st 1916, he was serving as a Surgeon Lieutenant on board the cruiser HMS Chester at the Battle of Jutland. HMS Chester was part of the 3rd battle cruiser squadron under Rear Admiral Hood. At 1730 Admiral Hood saw flashes and heard the sound of gunfire in the distance and sent the Chester ahead to investigate. Although the light was fairly good, a mist was rising in the distance and out of this the German fleet was approaching. Thus the German ships were difficult to see whilst the Chester was outlined to them in the western sky; suddenly three or four enemy light cruisers engaged the Chester. A fierce battle commenced and lasted for twenty minutes before the enemy was beaten off, and Chester rejoined the squadron. She had suffered severe damage and sustained many casualties.

The wounded were carried below and tended by the ship's two doctors (Book "Jack Cornwall"). Amongst them was Boy First Class Jack Cornwall aged 16½ who later died in hospital at Grimsby. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in standing by his gun "awaiting orders" although mortally wounded. Jack Cornwall was a Boy Scout and they honoured his memory by introducing the Cornwall badge for courage. Captain Lawson and the officers of the Chester

presented Surgeon Lieutenant Brownfield with a silver salver engraved with their signatures in recognition of his services that day. He was also awarded the OBE at the end of the war.

Captain George Hayne told me that the senior medical officer on board was an Irish Lieutenant Commander who was incapable through drink. Thus the burden devolved on Owen Brownfield. He obviously rose to the occasion in an outstanding manner.”



While he was still serving in H.M.S.Chester, Owen married MARY (Molly) AGNES SUTHERLAND McKENZIE HUGHES on June 16, 1916 in St Jude's Church Southsea. The Right Reverend Bishop Ingham married them. Molly was the youngest daughter of Colonel E.W. McKenzie-Hughes of Priory Court, Hampstead; he had served in India.

In February 1936, Owen was serving in HMS Ramillies and gave evidence at the coroner's inquest on the death of Engineer Lieutenant Commander A.A.Hogg who had been found dead in his cabin apparently having fallen onto a tumbler which had broken and pierced his jugular vein. The jury found the death to be due to an accident.¹²





**Surgeon Rear Admiral O.D. Brownfield C.B., O.B.E., M.B.,B.S.,
M.R.C.S.,L.R.C.P., K.H.P.**

Owen's other appointments included:

- 1937 Medical Officer in Charge; Cadets' Sick quarters, R.N. College, Dartmouth;
- 1940 HMS Vita – Surgeon Captain in Charge.
- 1945 Combined Services Hospital, Trincomalee, Ceylon;
- 1947 Medical Officer in charge of RN Hospital, Malta.¹³

An interesting article about Bighi Hospital, which mentions Owen receiving Princess Elizabeth on 23rd December 1949 at the Hospital is at:

<http://www.geocities.com/hotsprings/2615/medhist/hospital5.htm>

Owen's last appointment was as Surgeon Rear Admiral in charge of the Naval Hospital at Bighi, Malta from 1947 until 1950 when he retired to Petersfield; here he built a house called "Little Deane" in Sussex Road.

Following his retirement from the Royal Navy, He took up an appointment as a medical examiner for the Department of Social Security in Portsmouth. He was riding his bicycle to the station to attend this part-time work, when he developed chest pain and was taken into the nearby cottage of Mrs. Perry, who had been a young maid at the Old College, when he was a boy. He died in the cottage in Petersfield on March 30, 1955¹⁴.

After Owen's death, his widow "Molly" remarried a Major Forteath who had been a friend before she had met Owen.

Donald Cooper writes:

"Major Forteath was in his late 80's when I first met him. He and his wife Molly (widow of Rear Admiral Owen Brownfield) had a very nice apartment in Waverley Abbey House, Farnham, Surrey, which was an up-market retirement home.

Major Forteath came from a family of soldiers. His uncle had commanded a squadron of the Scots Greys in the Heavy Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava. His

grandfather's brother had been at Waterloo and Corunna. Both were long lived and he had known them as a boy. Major Forteath followed the drum himself and served in the Boer War in an infantry regiment – I believe the Warwicks or the Worcesters. He told me that their tactics were very poor at the beginning. For example, they would make a frontal ascent up a Kopje which had Boers entrenched on the top, incurring heavy casualties. The subalterns quickly realised this was highly dangerous and usually unsuccessful, but dared not question their orders. Then came Lord Roberts, VC, of Kandahar fame. He changed the tactics to one of outflanking the Boers by going around such positions. The Boers then abandoned their positions and made off on their horses.

Forteath had a brother who was a Medical Officer, to the Scots Greys I believe, in this war. After one engagement the British force galloped off in pursuit of the Boers leaving Dr. Forteath to tend the wounded. Whilst so engaged a small party of Boers came up and said, "there is a reineck (redneck) - lets shoot him". Just then a Boer officer arrived and said "no, can't you see that this man has been tending our wounded as well as the British ones?" Years later he found out that this officer was Jan Smuts, later Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa.

Some time after the war Forteath transferred to the Indian Army, joining the Bengal Lancers. He served with them in India until 1914 when they went to France, being constantly held in readiness to exploit the big break through expected after each great attack. In France he had a very large and fierce charger whom only he rode. A French officer, who swore he could ride it, pestered him and eventually Forteath gave him the chance, but he was thrown and died from a broken neck.

Forteath was then sent to India to run a re-mount depot and later went to the Middle East where he took part in Allenby's campaign against the Turks.

Leaving the Indian Army after the war (about 1922 I believe) he returned to South Africa and ran a farm of oranges and ostriches. The farm was near the site of the Battle of Islandwana. One of the old Zulus on his land had fought in this battle and took Forteath to see the battlefield. He explained that the Zulus had suffered heavy losses in successive charges and had decided to call it a day when they realised that the firing of the British troops was dying down. Believing they were running short of ammunition (as was apparently the case) they decided on one last charge, which won the day for them. (I do not believe this story appears in any histories of the battle).

Forteath retired to Jersey in the late 1930's but returned to England after the outbreak of WW2. In 1942 when the RAF Regiment was formed for airfield defence, he joined and became a Squadron Leader. Later he served at the Air Ministry.

When he had left Jersey he had left his car with his local garage to be looked after. When he returned in 1945 he found that the Germans had commandeered it, but had not paid the garage for the servicing. He paid up - he said he couldn't let the garage be out of pocket."

He remained in good health into old age still driving his car and playing nine holes of golf well after his 90th birthday.

Sources

Owen Deane Brownfield

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