

Captain Ernest Stevenson, OBE, RN
1874-1925

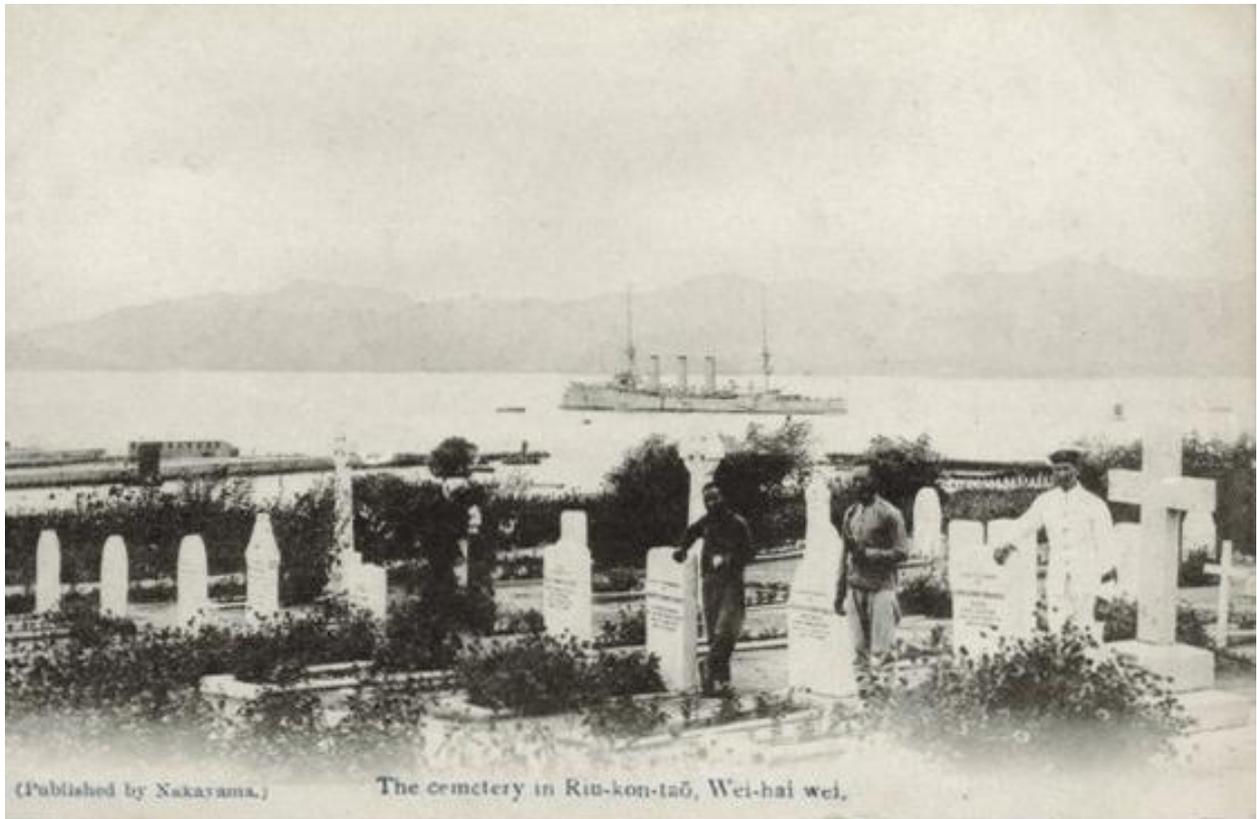
A forgotten man in our family history- compiled by Thomas Kelly



In the Royal Naval Cemetery located on the island of Liu-kung-tao now called Liugong in the northern part of China, close to the region of Wei Hai Wei is the grave of Captain Ernest Stevenson, OBE, RN. Unconfirmed reports state that the cemetery has been destroyed. He

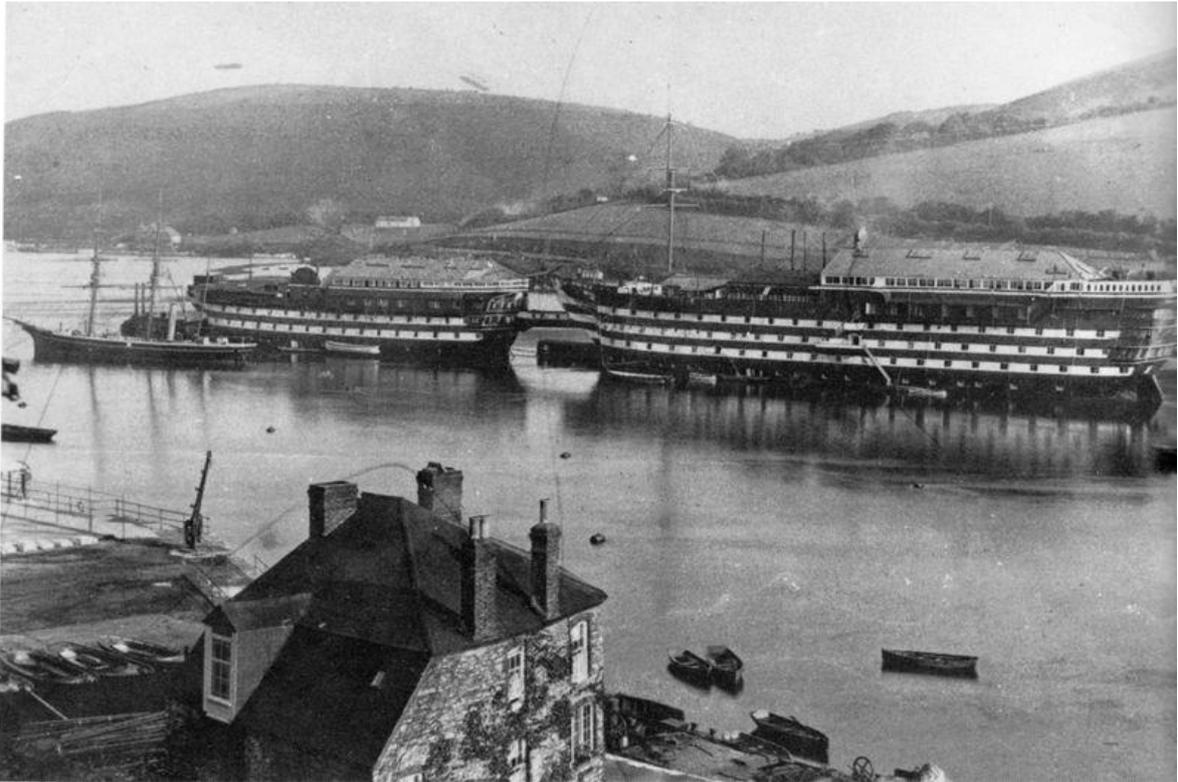
had lived a comparatively short but active naval life and died aged just 51 in 1925, leaving his wife Evelyn Flora St. Aubyn Stevenson nee Angove, a widow for almost 50 years.

His story is one of travel, empire and selfless dedicated service from Aden to the Zambezi, the Cape of Good Hope to the China Station, and most points in between.



Ernest Stevenson was born on the 17th August 1874 in London and grew up at 25 Binfield Road in Stockwell. He had two brothers, Frederick and Harry, and sisters Nelly and Ruby. His father James was a merchant who died in 1881; his mother was Helen Jane Gann.

Little is known of his early life and what became of his siblings, though direct descendants from them seem to have moved to Australia. However, he was destined to the Royal Navy and on the 15th of January 1889 at the age of 15 he joined the training ship HMS Britannia which was under the command of Captain Noel Stephen Fox Digby. The picture shows on the left side the training ship Hindostan that provided accommodation for the cadets on Britannia and was connected by a bridge.



Almost two years later in December 1891 he graduated and continued as a Naval Cadet into the China Station on HMS Impérieuse under Vice Admiral Sir Roderick Richards.

His service record states that his conduct was very good and that he was suited for gunnery, was temperate and zealous. His career had started and his next posts and ships and commands represented the scope and reach of the British Empire at its height in those days.

Ship	Rank	Date of appointment	Date of Discharge	Station
Britannia	Naval Cadet	15/1/1889	14/1/1891	Home
Duke of Wellington	Naval Cadet	15/1/1891	9/2/1891	China
Imperieuse	Naval Cadet	10/2/1891	14/3/1891	China
	Midshipman	15/3/1891	10/3/1893	China
Victory	Midshipman	11/3/1893	17/4/1893	Mediterranean
Trafalgar	Midshipman	18/4/1893	14/9/1894	Mediterranean
College	Act Sub-Lieutenant			Cape
Vernon	Act Sub-Lieutenant			Cape
Excellent	Act Sub-Lieutenant			Cape

Victory	Act Sub-Lieutenant		18/12/1895	Cape
Edgar	Sub-Lieutenant	3/1/1896	5/5/1896	China
Grafton	Sub-Lieutenant	7/5/1896	31/3/1897	China
Peacock	Lieutenant	1/4/1897	20/10/1897	China
Linnet	Lieutenant	21/10/1897	14/6/1899	China
ON LEAVE	Lieutenant			
Collingwood	Lieutenant	25/6/1900	4/3/1901	Reserve Ship
Gibraltar	Lieutenant	5/3/1901	24/4/1901	Cape

However, his special aptitude for his destroyer work marked him out within the Navy, noting they had every confidence in him as a Senior Officer of the Flotilla. He is well regarded and his papers also indicate that he was a good musician.

On his return to the Cape, he was serving on the HMS Gibraltar which was the Flagship of the Cape of Good Hope Station.

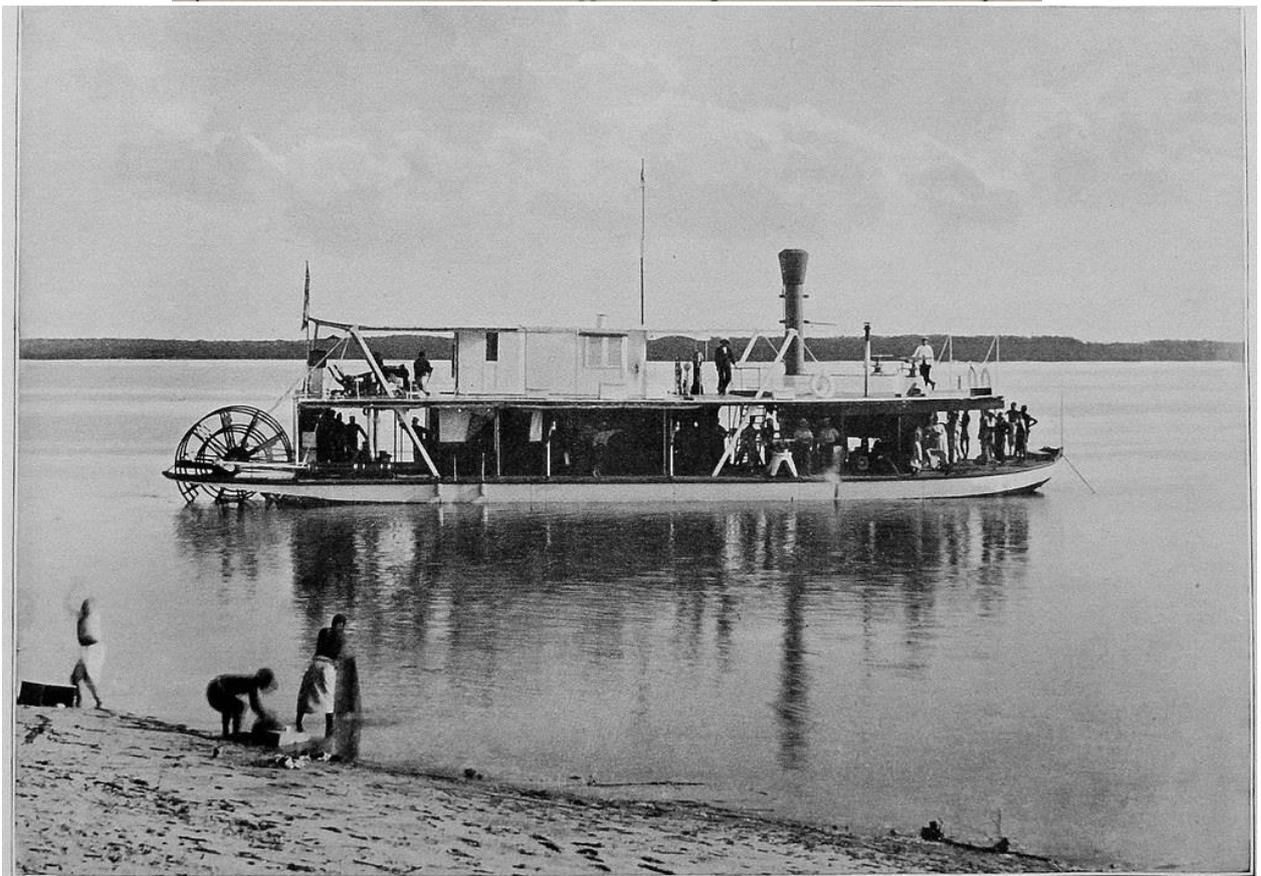


In 1901 he was appointed in command of two gunboats, HMS Mosquito and then HMS Herald. These two boats were attached to the Cape Fleet for service on the Zambezi River in what is now Mozambique. It is clear that he served most of the time on Mosquito.

Quite why the British Government decided to invest in protecting an area of Central African hinterland seems odd today. However, these

vessels were constructed in England and transported to the port of Quelimane. Here we can see Mosquito on sea trials in the River Thames in 1890. They were built in sections in 25 days and the Admiralty were amazed to see them being re-assembled in just six hours, ready for steaming.

Remaining.	Remaining
P.M.	
12.20 Willie: Ord: Carp Mte DN 163615, fell overboard and was drowned, boats away searching for body.	
H.O. Wening Q. r. s. boats returned unsuccessful.	



H.M.S. "MOSQUITO."

The "Mosquito" is a stern wheel shallow draught gunboat of 80 tons displacement built of steel. It was taken to Africa in sections, was put together and commissioned in the Zambesi river, where this photograph was taken for J. Welch & Sons.

From 1899 to 1902 the dangers of the Second Boer War ensured that his service off the African coast and on the rivers to prevent any smuggling and support to the enemy was of importance.

His first award was the Queen's South Africa medal awarded for his service between 1899 and 1902 and is inscribed Lieutenant Stevenson RN HMS Gibraltar.

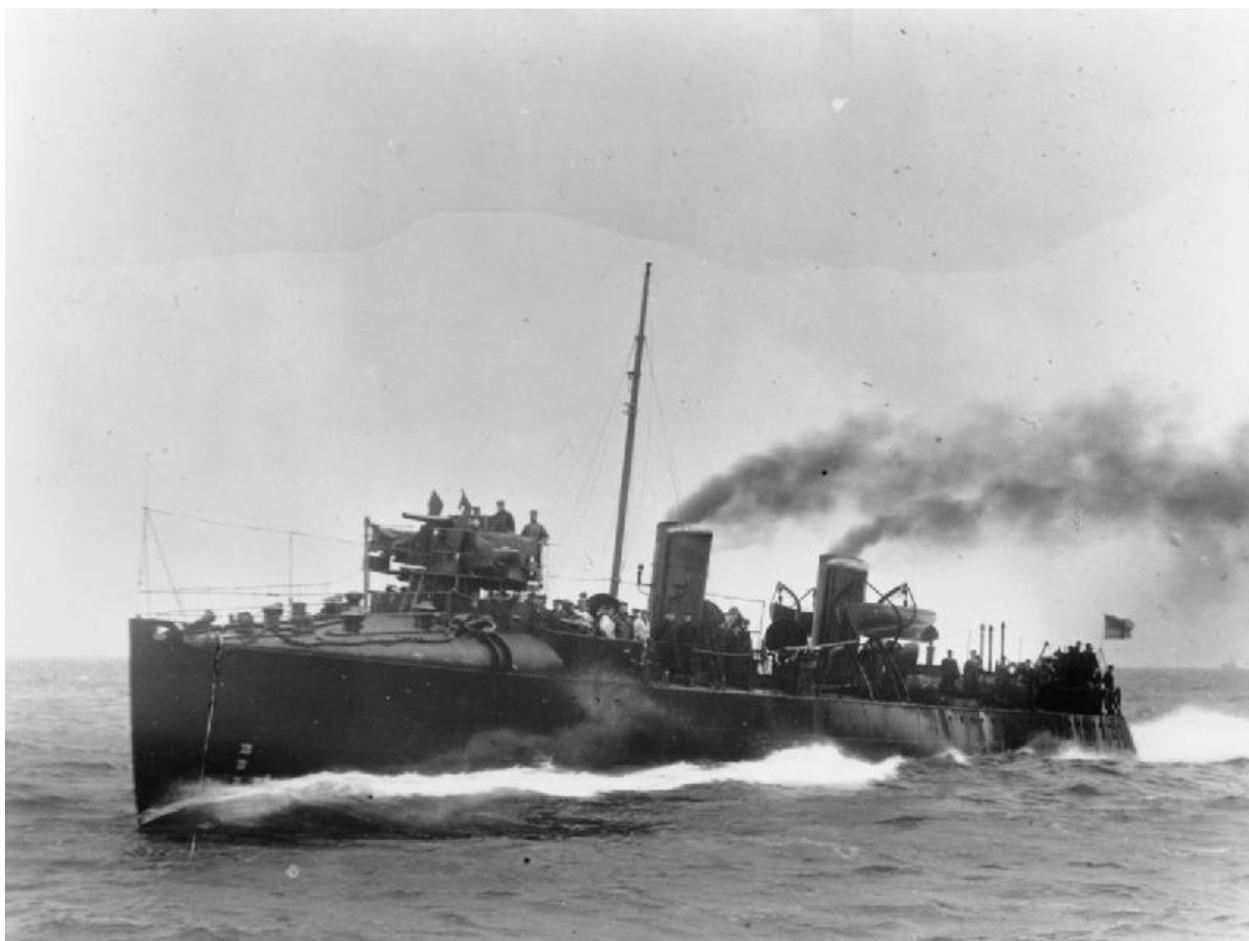
In June 1903 he was on the Duke of Wellington attached to the Home Fleet and on the 27th of August 1904 married Evelyn Angove at St. Peter's Church in South Kensington. The marriage was witnessed by Sir Walter Barttelot.

Ernest had given his address as the RN Barracks Portsmouth and hers as 83 Onslow Gardens.

His father James had died by this time.



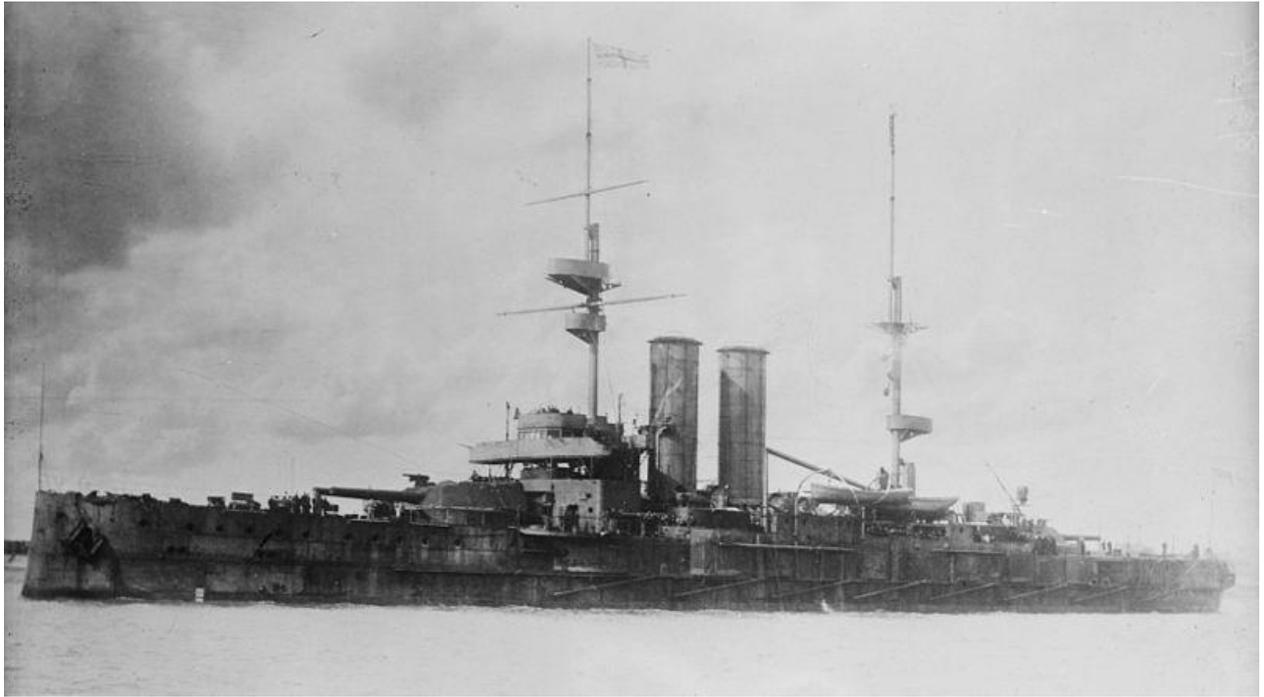
Home life was short and he was to assume duties in the East again. He took command of HMS Fame, a destroyer that was dedicated to that area. He undertook patrols throughout the China Sea, at some speed no doubt judging from this picture.



His reports at this time note that he had special aptitude for this work and he managed his destroyers in all ways to the Admiralty's satisfaction, was industrious and zealous in tactics and judgement. It further notes he had remarkable common sense and judgement and was very hard working.

Between 1906 and 1909 he commanded HMS Virago and was promoted to Commander in June 1908. In 1910 he took command of HMS Otter as the Senior Officer of the China Flotilla. It is clear that he was on a single posting with Evelyn remaining in England. But he was allowed back late in 1911 and until 1913 was attached to the Home Fleet serving on the Zealandia and in one of the few surviving diary notes from Evelyn, she writes:

"My husband, as being then the Commander of the Zealandia, Flagship of the Reserve Fleet, we had taken a small house in Scotland while they were on exercise in Scottish waters. I was thrilled at the news that the ship had been invited to attend the gathering at Oban along with the Flagship of the Channel Fleet".



Stevenson's next command on HMS Pelorus that took him to the Persian Gulf and it was in this arena he served during the First World War, being awarded a bar "Persian Gulf 1909-1914" on his Naval General Service Medal for suppression of arms traffic in the Arabian Sea. This is one of only 254 bars issued to Pelorus.

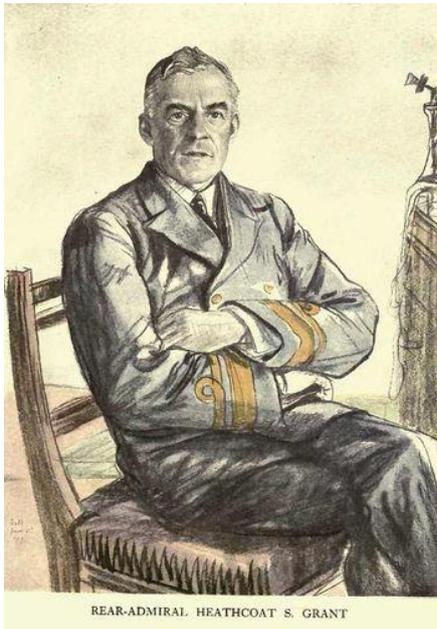
Most of the actions he undertook were on blockage duties around Ras Maldani and some of the log entries are interesting.

They describe escorting the RIMS Hardinge flying the flag of Lord Willingdon, Governor of Bombay and preparing his ship for battle. He cruised off Al Jashk, sighted the Jebel Akhdar and saluted the Sultan of Oman with a 21-gun salute. However, searching dhows for illegal weapons was one of the main tasks.

This is his picture of Pelorus noted by Evelyn as the 'smallest light cruiser in the British Navy'.



In December 1915 Stevenson was placed in command of HMS Cormorant and in January 1916 asked for command extra pay of 5/- a day. Cormorant was to be his last seagoing command and he had been at sea almost continuously for 28 years. The extra pay application however was refused in March 1916 and in December 1917 he was appointed Flag Captain to Rear Admiral Heathcoat Grant in Gibraltar.



REAR-ADMIRAL HEATHCOAT S. GRANT

Not much can be gleaned about his service there but suffice to say that in the July Honours list in the London Gazette he was awarded the OBE.

Commander (acting Captain) Ernest Stevenson, RN. For valuable service to the Senior Naval Officer, Gibraltar and Maintenance Captain of the Port".

London Gazette 17th July 1919.

In December 1919, he was awarded the Legion of Honour from the President of the Republic of France on the same day that this was awarded to Rear-Admiral Brian H F Barttelot, CB, MVO.

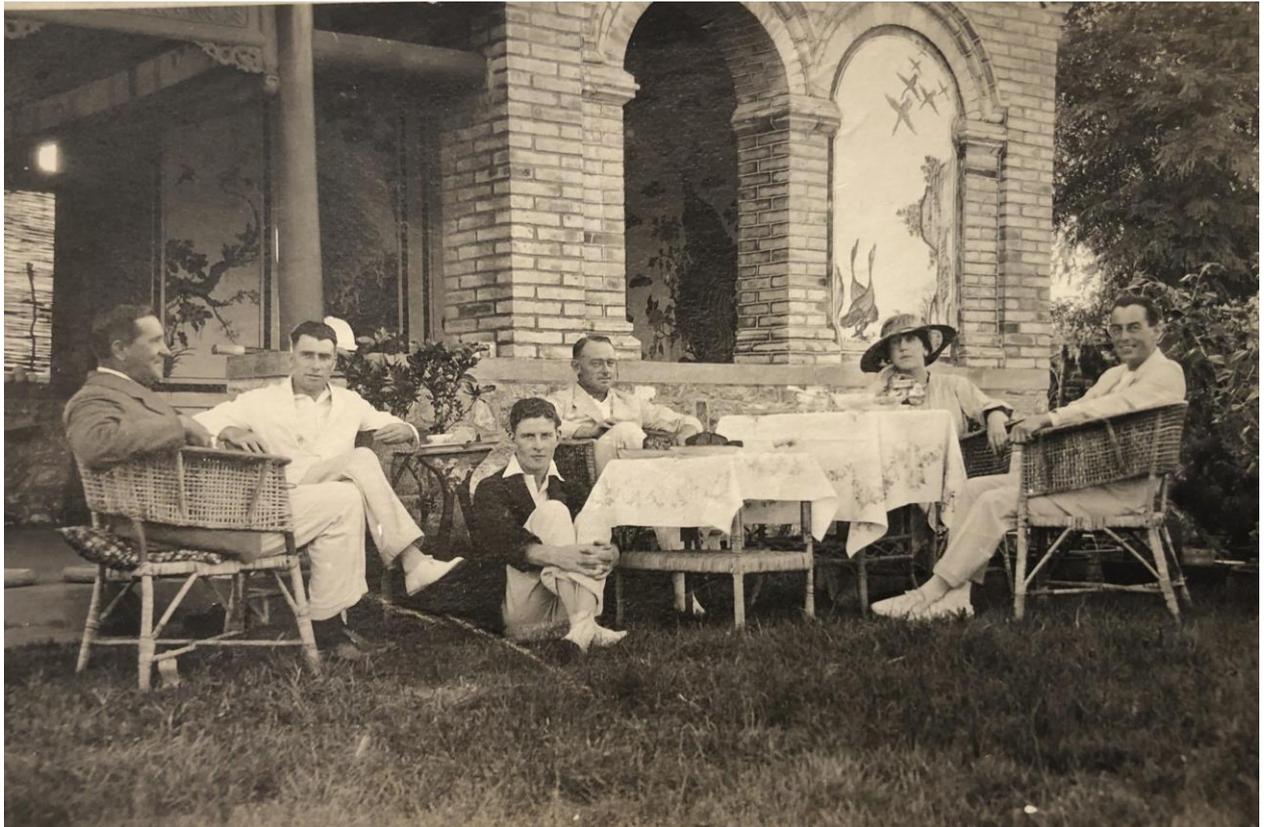
Between 1919 and 1920, despite being recommended for promotion his ill health dogged him probably due to his long service in the East. But he had recovered sufficiently on the 5th of April 1920 and was able to attend an

interview at the Admiralty. In June 1920 he was found to be fit and was offered the post of King's Harbour Master in the British leased territory of Wei Hai Wei.

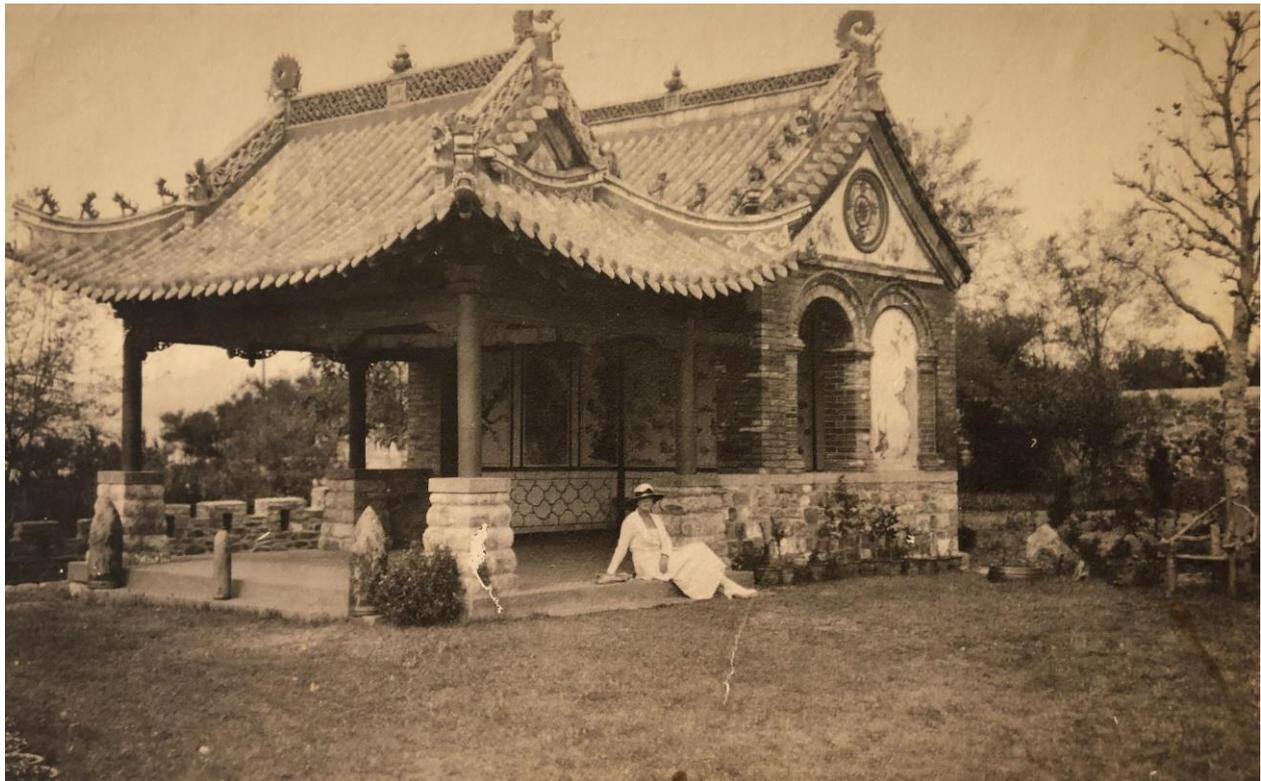
The Royal Navy used this port as a summer base away from the heat and monsoons of Hong Kong. This was a relatively stable time in Asia though the Chinese Government was hoping for the territory to be returned. That it was eventually in 1930 but due to the Japanese intentions the lease was renewed until 1940.

His posting was confirmed for three years till 1923 and it was here that his wife Evelyn was able to join him. This was a time often described as the 'end of Empire' with tennis parties, sailing and a convivial atmosphere among the British expatriates and serving officers. It was probably the happiest time she had known.

Evelyn notes on the back of the picture below that this was a tea party in their garden. On her left is Captain Kilgown of the HMS Alacrity, Ernest is on her right. However, all the men in the picture were fellow Naval officers.



In another picture taken in the same garden Evelyn is seen sitting at the base of the temple in her garden in Wei Hai Wei.



Little survives of his service there, except for he was seeking an extension of his service past January 1923. The Admiralty accepted this and kept his appointment till the 31st of March 1923, when he retired as a Captain from the Royal Navy. It is suspected that ill health precipitated this event which in light of his constant requests for an extension, was not his desire.

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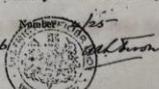
19 . DEATHS in the Colony of Weihaiwei.

No.	When and Where Died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank, Profession or Occupation.	Cause of Death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.
2	5th October 1924 R.N. Sick Quarters Weihaiwei.	Arthur J. Nash.	M.	30 30. 8 alt.	Stoker M.A. S. "Merkins"	Fracture of base of skull	Thos. C.H. Neil Surg. Lieut. R.N. Hospital Weihaiwei.	5th October 1924	F. Forsey
1	26th May 1925 Weihaiwei North China	Joe Romanow	M.	25 25. 5 alt. 10/24	Leading Seaman	Strained	A. Kelly Surg. Commander R.N. R.N. Sick Quarters Weihaiwei.	24th May 1925	F. Forsey
2	26th May 1925 Weihaiwei North China	Rignold Samuel Shepherd	M.	21 21. 2 alt. 10/24	Alte Seaman	Strained	A. Kelly Surg. Commander R.N. R.N. Sick Quarters Weihaiwei.	24th May 1925.	F. Forsey
3	31st May 24th 1925 R.N. Sick Quarters Weihaiwei	Thomas William Taylor	M.	30 30.	Stoker D.N.K. 13376	Abscess of brain.	A. Kelly Surg. Commander R.N.	24th May 1925	F. Forsey
4	June 29th 1925 Marlborough House 2nd Army Coy Weihaiwei	Ernest Stevenson	M.	51 50.	Captain R.N. Retired Lieut	Cirrhosis of liver	A. Kelly Surg. Commander R.N. R.N. Sick Quarters Weihaiwei	30th June 1925	F. Forsey

I, *Walter Lancel Tom* Senior District Officer and Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths in the Territory of Weihaiwei do hereby certify that this is a true copy of the entries of Deaths registered in my offices, from the entry of the Death of *Arthur J. Nash* to the entry of the Death of *Ernest Stevenson*

Number *2/24*

Witness my hand and seal this *12th* day of *July* 192*6*

Name: *W. L. Tom*


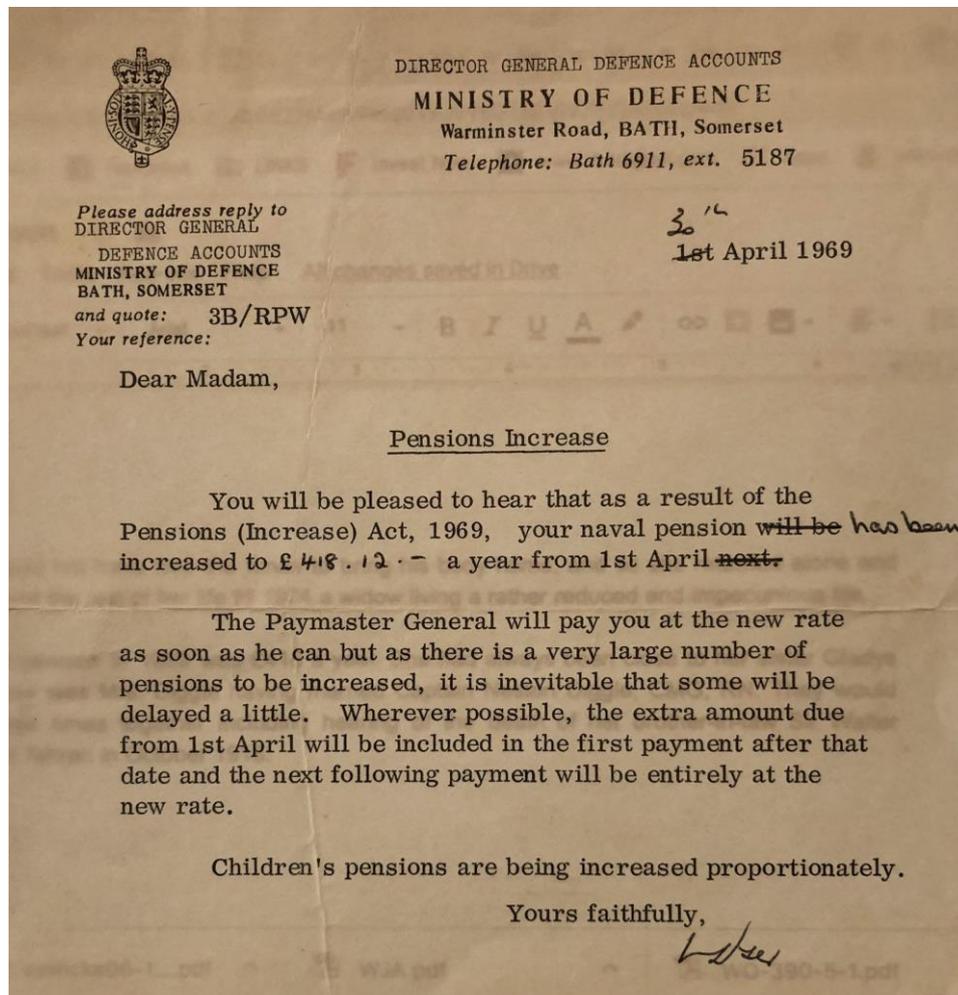

He and Evelyn stayed in Wei Hai Wei, with Ernest accepting a post in the Wei Hai Wei Agency of the Hong Kong Bank.

On June the 19th 1925 Ernest then died at Marlborough House in Wei Hai Wei, diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver.

Evelyn would not have had the funds to

bring his body home, and so she returned alone and was to spend the rest of her life till 1974 a widow living a rather reduced and impecunious life. She had always been close to her sister

Gladys who by now was Mrs. Diggle, having married Captain Neston Diggle, CMG, RN. They would have shared times together including hearing of the death of her brother-in-law Sir Walter Barttelot in Tehran in October 1918. She was remembered as the great-Aunt who always asked for a 'little more sugar and cream Billy dear' from my grandfather when the apple pie was served!



The last word comes from Captain Diggle, who at Tellisford House during the scare of invasion in 1940 was packing up and leaving for Scotland or Wales - a dash in fact anywhere.

Aunt Evie asked if there was any room for her to come as well to which this now famous reply was given.

"You must make your own arrangements".

