

The life-voyage of a sailor to an unmarked Epsom grave

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Frank Howard [b. 1876 - d. 1912] was about 11yrs old when his father died and following that he was in and out of various workhouses, then away to sea and the record tells that he had “no settled home”. A life that involved revolving in and out of workhouses and the merchant navy ended in Ewell’s Epileptic Colony and burial in Epsom’s asylums’ “forgotten cemetery”. His story is told in the pages of www.hortoncemetery.org with highlights reprinted here with the Charity, The Friends of Horton Cemetery’s permission. There you will find many more fascinating life stories of the 9000 buried in the Cemetery beside Hook Road/Horton Lane.

In 1889 Frank, aged 13yrs, is admitted to St Mary’s infirmary as a pauper, he appears to remain there from Dec 89 - March 1890, brought in by his mother and discharged into her care. Later hospital admission records state that Frank’s Epileptic fits began when he was about 7yrs old although on these same records and on the 1911c it says he first developed Epilepsy at 26yrs.

Between Dec 1890 and Dec 1891 Frank 14yrs and Arthur 15yrs (brother/other relative?) are in the Workhouse twice ‘on remand’ and when discharged ‘taken by police.’

In the 1891c we find a Frank Howard 14yrs is an ‘inmate’ on the Training Ship ‘Torwell’ River Thames off Purfleet, Essex could this be an attempt to give Frank the opportunity of a fresh start in life? Later hospital records show that he became an Able Seaman, Engineer and fitter, in the RN which he left aged 21yrs and went on to join the Merchant Service, so the help he received did seem to make a difference.

From 1891 when Frank was on the training ship Torwell we have one possible sighting of him in 1898 when we find a Frank Howard, Seaman, aged 20yrs in the Stepney WH with Malarial Fever.

In the 1901c we definitely find our Frank Howard in the National District Hospital, Holborn, 25yrs Engineers Assistant born in Slough, with Epilepsy.

1902 sees Frank in and out of the Liverpool Road, St Mary’s and St John’s Road WH until on 20th February he is discharged to Canes Hill Asylum, Coulsdon, Surrey where he remains until at least 20th August 1903 when the register says he is “not improved” and he is transferred to the Ewell Epileptic Colony, Epsom.

On admittance his general condition is said to be fair, but he is having frequent attacks and is unable to do anything for himself. He is diagnosed with “Epileptic insanity with dementia and emotional instability”. It is noted that he is dull, weak minded, easily excited and prone to threaten violence,” He is generally known to be an “unreasonable grumbler”.

By summer 1911 he was noted variously as ‘unmanageable, confused and falling about’ he was still working but ‘not much use’.

In Feb 1912 he deteriorated rapidly and became ‘very feeble’ needing to be tube fed. He was having multiple seizures, ‘81 in the past 48 hours’ and on Feb 14th he was said to be ‘sinking fast’. Frank died at 11.15am on 14th February 1912.

His death certificate appears to give his death as Feb 14th, 1917, but all other documents including his notes state 1912, age 36yrs. His death certificate says that he died of Epilepsy with no unusual circumstances.

Frank HOWARD was buried at Horton Cemetery on 20th February 1912 in grave 1355b.