



Frank and Albert Wright

44 Wheeldon Avenue

Frank and Bertha Wright moved to 44 Wheeldon Avenue between 1914 and 1918 from Kings Norton in Worcestershire, presumably for Frank’s job – he was a Clerk with the Midland Railway. They had three boys: Frank (born 1895), Albert (born 1897) and Arthur (born 1903).

The two oldest boys served with the Royal Navy but had very different experiences. In May 1916 Albert was assigned to serve with the RNAS – the Royal Naval Air Service. On close investigation his naval record showed a very interesting service history. Before the war Albert was an Analytical Chemist and this may have been why he was assigned to serve at the Navy’s Stratford Experimental Station in East London.

This team was led by Thomas Slater Price who was in charge of the research laboratory and the Prussic Acid and Smoke Mixture Producing Plants. Price’s work on chloro-sulphuric acid led to the production of the ‘artificial fog’ for the Zeebrugge Raid in April 1918, when artificial smoke screening was used in a raid which aimed to block the port to prevent German submarines from leaving the harbour. The plan to sink obsolete ships in the canal entrance was only partly successful and many lives were lost in the raid.

It may have been that Albert Wright was moved around the country to work – he certainly spent a short time based in Orkney

in Scotland.

The Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) was the air arm of the Royal Navy, under the direction of the Admiralty. On 1 April 1918 it was merged with the British Army’s Royal Flying Corps to form the RAF. However, the men of the Stratford laboratories remained with the Royal Navy.



Oblique aerial photograph of the British blockships HMS THETIS, HMS INTREPID and HMS IPHIGENIA in the mouth of the Bruge Canal at Zeebrugge . These ships were scuttled to try to block the canal which was used by German submarines to access the North Sea.
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Frank, the older brother, continued in his civilian job of “fitter” until he was enlisted in April 1917. We know he was an Engine Room Artificer (a fitter, turner or boilermaker trained in the workings of marine engines and boilers) from his records but don’t have much information on which ships he served.

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Frank and Albert Wright continued



HMS Collingwood

Frank Wright served aboard this battleship from December 1917 to August 1918. © IWM (Q 38493)

Men in the navy were often assigned to a nominal ship for administration purposes, for example their pay, and the actual ship they served with is not always recorded. While larger ships were accounting units in their own right, smaller vessels (destroyers, submarines and minesweepers) had a “depot ship” as an accounting base – often this was a land based building.

“Vivid I” and “Vivid II” which are mentioned on Frank’s naval record were sections of the accounting base at Devonport, Plymouth, and we know that “Vivid I” was the section at Devonport for the Seamanship, Signalling and Telegraphy School and “Vivid II” the Stokers and Engine Room Artificers School. One vessel is named on his record – “HMS Collingwood” which was a dreadnought

battleship built in 1908. In May 1916 she saw action in the Battle of Jutland, but while Frank was posted aboard her service consisted of routine patrols and training in the North Sea.

Frank was demobbed in February 1919, Albert in August 1919. We think they may have moved away from Derby shortly after their return – it is also possible that their parents moved to Derby after they enlisted and 44 Wheeldon Avenue was just their postal and voting address while they were away. Their parents continued to live at Wheeldon Avenue until the 1920s. Frank and Albert may have returned to their pre-war jobs but we don’t have any further information about them and have not been able to trace any family details.



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