

## AN ITEM OF INTEREST FROM THE HERITAGE CENTRE

### **Capt. CHARLES ALGERNON FRYATT** **b 2 December 1871 – d 27 July 1916.**

This months 'OBJECT' is a Bench that normally sits in the Chapel of Rest garden at St Edmund's Chapel and has 'In Memory of Captain Fryatt' carved into the backrest.



CAPTAIN CHARLES A. FRYATT

Capt. Fryatt was born in Southampton, but then the family moved to Harwich in Essex, this is where he completed his schooling. He then joined the Mercantile Marine, serving on many ships before he joined the Great Eastern Railways as a Seaman. He rose through the ranks and got his first command on the S.S Colchester, followed in 1913 by being promoted to Master of S.S. Newmarket.

During this time he had married Ethel and was the Father of seven children no less.

By the time WW1 was approaching he was a most competent Master of these ships and had completed 140 passages across to Europe from England. But circumstances changed when war started. Already, in March 1915 a Mail ship had been sunk by U-boats, with much loss of life.

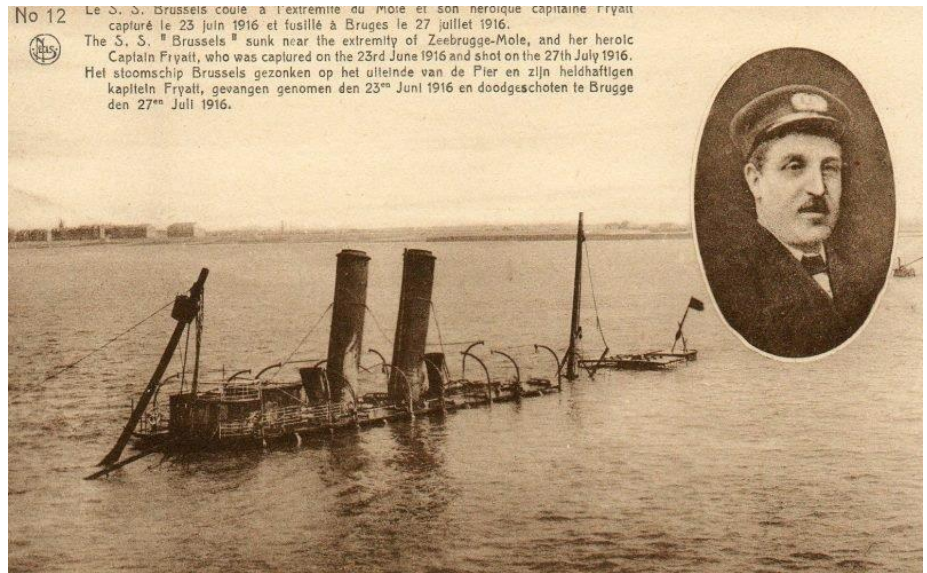
Capt. Fryatt had 2 encounters with German U-boats as they targeted Mail Ships. When Captain of the S.S. Wrexham, in March 1915 they were chased for the 40 miles to Rotterdam, by a U-boat. Fryatt had ordered his crew to exert themselves to reach a speed of 16 knots (the maximum limit was 14 knots). The S.S. Wrexham arrived safely but the Funnels were burnt and blistered, for this brave act Capt. Fryatt was awarded a Gold Watch by the Company and the crew were all commended for outstanding duty.

The second encounter at the end of March, Capt. Fryatt was in command of S.S. Brussels, a Passenger Ship. They were off the Dutch coast when they saw a surfaced German submarine, U-33 which ordered them to stop. Fearing it was preparing to fire a Torpedo and with the safety of the ship, crew and passengers in mind, Fryatt decided to attempt ramming the U-boat head on, forcing it to crash dive.

This succeeded and the S.S. Brussels was able to escape and made it safely to Port.

For this action of bravery, Fryatt was awarded another Gold watch but this time from the Admiralty together with a Certificate in Vellum from the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty and furthermore, was praised in the House of Commons.

Then sailing from the Hook of Holland the following year (23<sup>rd</sup> June 1916), some German Destroyers surrounded the S.S. Brussels and took possession of the ship, Fryatt and his crew and Passengers were taken prisoner and the ship was sailed to Zeebrugge and scuttled.



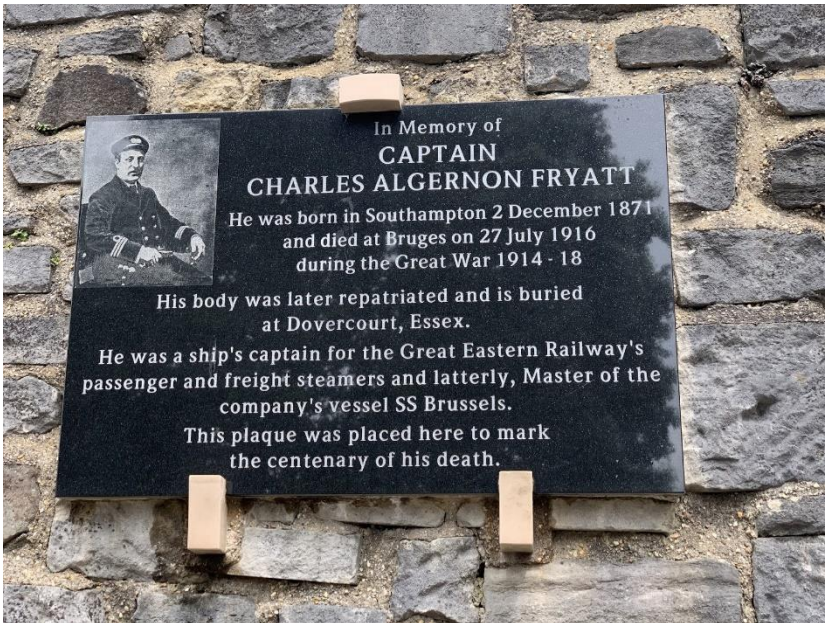
Capt Fryatt was intensely interrogated and was taken to the Town Hall at Bruges where he faced a Court Martial on charges of being a 'franc-tireur' - a civilian engaged in hostile Military activity and hence operating as an irregular soldier.

His Gold Watch from the Admiralty was used as evidence against him, and he was accused of sinking the German submarine U33, although it appears it was still seen in service at the time.

The Hearing, the sentencing to death and his execution by firing squad all took place on the same day – the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1916.

The Admiralty had issued an instruction that crews should try to ram U-boats in an attempt to get them to submerge, for a submerged U-boat could not use its Deck guns, was slower underwater and would be unable to get alongside a merchant ship to board it.

Furthermore, Torpedoes were neither very reliable nor accurate and so would be more likely to miss a beam view of a ship than a broadside view. Thus, attempted ramming of submarines by Merchant Ships was not uncommon.



*Plaque placed on the Merchant Navy's Memorial in Southampton*

When writing these articles there is always something new that even I learn, for instance:

After the war ended, Capt. Fryatt's remains were exhumed and brought back to England where he was given a state funeral with all due honours. He was reburied in the All Saints Church in Dovercourt. On his headstone is the following inscription:

"In memory of Captain Charles Algernon Fryatt, Master of the Great Eastern Steamship "Brussels", illegally executed by the Germans at Bruges on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1916".

That is all expected, but the next paragraph was certainly unknown to me.

When his remains arrived at Dover, a Railway Luggage Van (No 132) was waiting to transport the Coffin to its place of rest.

*"This Luggage Van is the same one that first transported in May 1919 Nurse Edith Cavell's exhumed remains after she too was executed by the Germans. Also, later, in November 1920 the Unknown Warrior's remains were taken to Westminster Abbey for reburial."*

*We included a report on Nurse Edith Cavell in our September Newsletter.*

*More information is available in our Filing Cabinet at the Heritage Centre should you wish to see it.*

***Researched and written up by Tony Armstrong, volunteer at the Heritage Centre.***

It is not known exactly why this bench was placed here in Norfolk, except that Capt. Charles Fryatt was regarded as a national Hero and is Remembered with Honour in so many places of the United Kingdom.



*Memorial at Liverpool Street Station*