



# Robert William Clayborn

## 14 Bromley Street

Robert wasn't living in the area in 1918 so didn't appear on our original list of men away fighting but in 2014 his granddaughter contacted us with his story. She knew that he served with the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve on a ship called *SS Waimate* and at the beginning of the war he lived at 14 Bromley Street.

Based on this information we began our research. Census returns showed that Robert had lived with his widowed mother, Hephzibah and two sisters at 14 Bromley Street in 1911. Robert, then aged 32, was single and worked as a builder. The Register of Electors showed that they lived in this house from about 1909.

Looking further back at the 1901 census we know that Hephzibah and Robert, her husband, had five children all of whom survived to adulthood. Robert (sen) was a Railway Porter, born in Cambridge, and Hephzibah was from Olney, Bucks. In 1901 the family lived at 102 Arthur Street; in the previous 1891 census they were living in nearby Henry Street.

Robert was born in Derby on 1 April 1879; his older sister Elizabeth was born 4 years earlier in London but both were christened at St Alkmund's Church on 29 November 1888 along with their younger siblings Herbert (born 1881), Florence (born 1885) and Margaret born 21 October 1888.

Late in 1911 Robert married Caroline (Carrie) Davies who originated from the Potteries in Staffordshire. She came to Derby to train as a nurse and they met whilst Robert was visiting his mother in hospital. Their daughter Joan was born early in 1913 and son, Robert, in 1914.

In about 1915 Robert and Carrie moved, with their young family, to become Licensees of *The Greyhound* public house on Friargate. Perhaps there was a decline in the building trade at the beginning of the war that meant Robert had to look for alternative work. He probably didn't anticipate that conscription would be introduced in 1916. We don't know how Carrie managed the business whilst he was away.

In July 1916 he was drafted to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and started his training, probably at Crystal Palace in London, which was used as a training centre for the RNVR throughout the war.



Members of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve on parade at the football ground of Crystal Palace, September 1914.  
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## continued

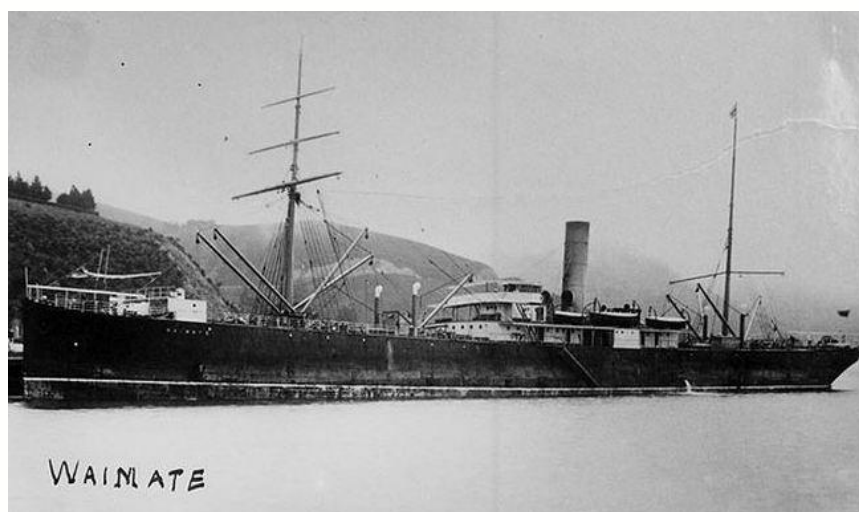


Rows of hammocks in the sleeping quarters of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve at Crystal Palace, September 1914. © IWM (Q 53295)

While his naval record survives it does not make clear which ships he served on during the course of the war. We know that by November 1916 he had been promoted from “Ordinary Seaman” to “Able Seaman” and spent a short while aboard *HMS Wildfire* which was docked at Sheerness as a training vessel.

In August 1917 he became a Seaman Gunner attached to a “Defensively Armed Merchant Ship” and he remained in this role as part of a ship’s gun crew until he was demobilised in 1919. His family know that he served aboard “*SS Waimate*”, a merchant cargo steamer owned by the New Zealand Shipping Company.

The ship was built in 1896 on Tyneside and made regular journeys between London and New Zealand with passengers and cargo – including refrigerated goods. She was requisitioned in August 1917 by the British Navy for the war effort.



*SS Waimate*. Photograph from the collection of the Otago Early Settlers Museum and reproduced with the consent of the New Zealand Shipping Company Association

On 5 February 1919 Robert returned to civilian life and his pre-war job as a builder. His family now lived in Chellaston – for a while they lived on High Street but by the late 1920s Roberts’s building business was so successful he was able to build a large five bedroom house in extensive grounds on Derby Road, Chellaston – he called the house “Waimate”.

Robert continued to live here until his death in 1956 aged 77. He died a wealthy man leaving £25,032 in his will.