

Widow of Titanic Officer visits Chorley

Chorley Guardian

Friday 18 July 1958

Seeks Family Crest

Motto - "Let your light shine"

By a coincidence, a visitor to Chorley this week was Mrs. Sylvia Lightoller, widow of the late Cdr. C. H. Lightoller, who is played by Kenneth More in the film *A Night To Remember* the serial of which begins in *The Chorley Guardian* this week.

The film concerns the sinking of the *Titanic* in April 1912, on which Cdr. Lightoller, then Lt. Cdr. was second officer.

Cdr. Lightoller was a member of a Chorley family, his grandfather having built the first mill in Chorley in Standish Street.

He was brought up at Yarrow House and went to the Old Chorley Grammar School. His mother before her marriage, was a Miss Widdows of Sandridge Avenue. She was accompanied by Mr. T. G. Widdows, also a cousin of the commander, of Cleveland, Ohio, who retired two years ago from an electrical business. He has boyhood recollections of Chorley, which he has only visited twice since he first went abroad at the age of 13, 60 years ago.

Mrs. Lightoller told *The Guardian* that she was consulted during the making of the film and that although she had met a number of survivors in London, she was practically the only person living who knew the inside story of the disaster.

"The film is really the truth and has not been embroidered, she told *The Guardian*.

A cable to remember

There was only one slight departure from the personal story so far as she was concerned and that was her farewell to her husband before the disaster. "I am supposed to have called him 'Bertie', she said. "I never did any such thing and certainly he would have been astounded, had I done so!"

Mrs. Lightoller said that the way in which the news of the disaster came through was something she would never forget. Her husband was really first officer, but to accommodate a senior officer on the first trip, the officers all stepped down one rank.

"The casualties and survivors were announced with ranks only - without names", she said. "I received 50 telegrams congratulating me because the second officer had survived and 50 telegrams of condolence because the first officer had been lost. The disaster occurred on a Sunday and it was not until the Friday that my husband's cable from New York reached me saying that 'he was safe' ".

The story of the disaster is described by Cdr. Lightoller in his book *The Titanic and Other Ships*. This book has been so well read in Chorley Library that it was impossible to repair it further. Mrs. Lightoller said she was trying to obtain another copy to present to Mr. Widdows.

Shock for Kenneth More

She recalled that Cdr. Lightoller was the only officer who went down with the ship. "The story of his miraculous escape is described faithfully in the film". she said.

Because of the assistance was giving in the production of the film, Mrs. Lightoller visited Pinewood Studios during the 'shooting' With a twinkle in her eye she told *The Guardian* that she approved the choice of Kenneth More to portray Cdr. Lightoller, "He was a smaller man like my husband". she said.

One day Kenneth More came to her on the set, kissed her and said "Are you my wife or my mother?" She told him "I am your wife" and pointing to two of her grown-up children, who towered above Kenneth More, "These are your children". She also added "You have nine grandchildren."

The three sons and two daughters of Cdr. and Mrs. Lightoller maintained the tradition of the family. Brian, the youngest son was killed on the first day of the war in command of a flight over Whillhemshaven. The eldest son Roger was killed in the last month of the war when serving as a lieutenant in the Navy. He had obtained the D.S.C. and was mentioned in despatches.

The other boy, Richard Trevor, a lieut.-col. in the Army, served with Montgomery throughout the war. The two daughters also served, Mavis in the F.A.N.Y.S. and Clare in Political Intelligence.

The sea always called Cdr. and Mrs. Lightoller, even though the commander had spent a lifetime on big ships. Some time after his retirement, they bought the yacht *Sundowner* in which Mrs. Lightoller lives during the summer, and makes trips to the Continent "We always took busmen's holidays." she said.

At Dunkirk

During the war Cdr. Lightoller accompanied by Roger sailed to Dunkirk and came back with 130 men. "We had always thought *Sundowner* was crowded with only 19 on board!" exclaimed Mrs. Lightoller.

The *Sundowner* became a war vessel (No. 7) for the remainder of the war and when Roger went into the Navy, was commanded by Cdr. Lightoller, who was mentioned in despatches.

Mrs. Lightoller was on her way to view the Lightoller plaque in the south isle of Chorley Parish Church when interviewed by the *Guardian*.

Courtesy of Brian Ticehurst

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