

Preston Wallace Gummow HOCKING



Born: 10th Oct 1884, St Columb Major, Cornwall
Occupation: Serving sailor
Enlisted: Devonport: 15th May 1901
Unit: HMS Monmouth
Rank/number: Leading Seaman: No.214603
Death: Killed in action, 1st November 1914
Detail: Preston was among 1,600 British sailors who perished when *Monmouth* and *Good Hope* were sunk by *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* off Coronel in Chile. The old out-gunned British cruisers, crewed largely by reservists, were no match for the modern German ships and their well-trained crews and, silhouetted against the dying sun, were easy prey.

Age at death: 30

Military info: Farm worker Preston Hocking joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Seaman at Devonport on 15th May 1901. He was 5ft 4ins tall, with a freckled face and ruddy complexion. He was aged 16. On 11th October 1903, he signed on as an Ordinary Seaman and spent the next 11 years serving on a variety of ships and shore establishments. On the outbreak of war Preston, by now an Able Seaman, was posted to *Monmouth*, an old obsolete armoured cruiser, which had been hastily recommissioned on the commencement of hostilities and crewed largely with raw reservists, three of them Coastguards from Padstow. Another Padstonian, serving seaman Alfred Williams, was also aboard. The ship soon sailed for the South Atlantic to join the 4th Cruiser Squadron in the hunt for the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, two fast German raiders. On 1st November these enemy marauders sunk both *Monmouth* and the equally ancient *Good Hope* with all hands off the Chilean coast at Coronel, Britain's first naval defeat in a century. But a month later both these enemy warships were destroyed by the British at the Falkland Islands. All 2,200 Germans sailors, including Admiral Von Spee and his two naval sons, died.

Grave/memorial: Preston's body was never found. He is commemorated on Plymouth Naval Memorial, at St Petroc's Church, Padstow and on Padstow War Memorial.

Family info: Father: Unknown. Mother: Mary Hocking, born Colan, a small village near St Columb Major, Cornwall in 1861. She had three children - Edward in 1880, when she was 19, Preston in 1884, and Janie in 1893. With no father on the scene all were given their mother's surname. Preston was born in Union Workhouse at St Columb Major. In 1895 Mary, now 34, married widower Joseph Dalley, 46, a naval pensioner and father of six from Chatham in Kent. The couple set up home just off Padstow docks in Commercial Terrace.



This information was researched by Peter Smith, who is currently writing a book about Padstow's part in the Great War. Anyone wishing to correct errors or supply additional information can write to him at 24 Mallard Drive, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5PW. Also phone 01825 762226 or email smithpeter24@gmail.com

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