

Cenotaph: **WHITTAKER H**

Ashville Memorial Hall: Harold Whittaker, Wireless Operator

1921 Roll of Honour: Whittaker H, so presumably commemorated on original Clock Memorial

Date and place of birth: 28th January, 1900 at Royton, nr Oldham, Lancashire

War: Harold was in the Merchant Navy. In 1918 he was serving as a Marconi Operator on the Steamship Mercedes de Larrinaga which had been requisitioned as a troopship. In spite of its name, the Mercedes de Larrinaga was British. It was built in Glasgow in 1900 and registered to the Miguel de Larrinaga Steamship Company in Liverpool. At the time of the 1911 Census, the head of the company was Teodoro de Larrinaga and he lived in a mansion in Liverpool with his family and a retinue of servants. His eldest daughter, born in 1900, was called Mercedes and presumably the ship was named after her. She died a spinster in Liverpool in 1984.

Six years earlier two Marconi Operators, Jack Phillips & Harold Bride, became world famous for the part they played when the Titanic sank. They were employed by the Marconi Wireless Company rather than the White Star Line. So the fact that Harold's Gravestone is inscribed Marconi Operator rather than Wireless Operator may mean the same applied to him. He was not to become world famous as he drowned accidentally on 6th August 1918. They recovered his body and he is buried in Italy in the Cemetery at Civitavecchia, a harbour town near Rome.



Family Life: Harold's parents were Herbert Whittaker & Emma Lowe. Harold was born on 28th January 1900 and baptised two months later in the parish church at Royton.

The 1901 Census return gave Harold's father's occupation as "Cotton Mill Secretary". By the 1911 Census Harold had two younger brothers – Sydney (7 years younger) and Henry (9 years younger). His father then gave his occupation as "Cotton Yarn Salesman". They had one live-in servant and were living in a 7 room house, still in Ryton.

Harold's father died in Ryton on 27th July 1922 aged only 48 and left an estate worth £6753 (worth about £314k today). His Mother died in August 1928 aged only 56. They have a joint grave in Ryton Cemetery and it bears an inscription in memory of Harold:-

Harold, the dearly loved son of
Herbert & Emma Whittaker
who was accidently drowned on August 6th 1918 at
Civita Vecchia, Italy, whilst serving as a Wireless Operator
during the Great War, aged 18 years

I can make no connection to Methodism and Harold does not appear on the Great War Roll of Honour for those who attended Ryton Methodist Church. His parents' wedding and his own baptism were both Church of England ceremonies. If he attended Elmfield College from age 11 to 16 he would have been there from 1911 to 1916.

David Redhead, April 2018