

Walworth's Lost Boys

The Leysdown Tragedy Centenary ~ 4 August 1912 ~ 4 August 2012

On 4th August 1912 nine boys were drowned in a tragic accident at Leysdown when their boat was overturned. Eight were from the 2nd Walworth Scout troop and one from the Training Ship 'Arethusa'.

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On Saturday 4th August 2012 the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery, accompanied by local boy scouts and relatives of the drowned boys, commemorated this tragic anniversary.

A plaque was also unveiled to Bert Barnes, who did much to help uncover and preserve the memory of these boys.

More photographs of the event are at the bottom of the page.

The Story

The summer of 1912 had not been a good one when, on Saturday 3 August 1912, the 2nd Walworth Scout Troop of 5 adults and 24 young Scouts sailed from Waterloo Bridge down to Leysdown on the Isle of Sheppey on their cutter. Some would never return alive.

The new Scouting movement, founded in 1907 promoted fresh air and outdoor activities. Just the thing for lads from the overcrowded streets of Walworth on their second summer camp in Kent. They would have been excited as they arrived at Erith at 9pm but perhaps less so at sleeping overnight on board. At 4am they set off and were in sight of the camp when, 2 miles off the coast, a sudden gale caught them and the boat capsized. The local lifeboat was launched and found a shocking scene. Due to several acts of selfless heroism, especially by their Scoutmaster Sydney Marsh, many lives were saved. But 8 scouts and Frank Masters from the training ship Arethusa had drowned. The grim roll call was:

William Beckham	aged 12	Harry Gwynn
Albert Dack	aged 11	Percy Huxford
Noel Filmer	aged 14	James Skipsey
Thompson Filmer	aged 12	Edward Smith
And Frank Masters from the training ship	aged 14	Arethusa

The tragic loss of such young lives struck a chord with the nation and Winston Churchill MP, then First Lord of the Admiralty, with Scouting links, arranged for a destroyer to transport the bodies back to London. So they were carried up the Thames, from which their ill-fated journey had begun, to Rotherhithe. The coffins were then taken to St John's Larcom Street, off the Walworth Road, to which the troop were attached.

100,000 were reputed to have attended the lying in state of the boys and paid their respects. The terrible events had really touched peoples' hearts and the mass funeral almost resembled a state event. It took place on 10 August 1912 and contemporary photos show the streets lined with people and Scouts, 8 deep. There were commemorative issues of national newspapers and 1 million people watched as the coffins, draped in Union Jacks and Scouts staves entwined with flowers, passed by on their way to Nunhead Cemetery. It took an hour for them to arrive and there they were buried. However, Percy Huxford's body wasn't found until 13 August and he joined his fellow Scouts on 15 August.

A bronze Life-size Scout was erected in 1914 just before the start of the approaching carnage of the 1st World War. It was paid for by public donations and designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, but sadly it was stolen in 1969. In 1992, thanks to the generosity of Kellaways and Francis Chappell, a replacement memorial of a fine Carrara marble stone carved in the shape of a book was put in its place. There is also a memorial at Leysdown. The Scouts have never been forgotten.

(Grateful thanks to: The Leysdown Tragedy and [The Walworth Scouts](#) , Rex Batten, FONC Publications)

Photographs from the 100th Centenary Commemoration.

Click on the image below to see a slideshow of more images.

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The Friends of Nunhead Cemetery

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