

## **MARITIME DISASTER 15 MARCH 1918**

### **THE COLLISION AND SINKING OF THE STEAM SHIP SHAD THAMES BY THE NORWEGIAN STEAM SHIP HORTENSE LEA**

RESULTING IN THE LOSS OF 8 LIVES - MISSING PRESUMED DROWNED

**(INCLUDING 4 CHANNEL ISLANDERS)**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1918 the SS Shad Thames was approximately 11 miles SW of Hartland Point en-route from Rouen to Newport (in ballast), when the larger SS Hortense Lea which was en-route from Cardiff to Rouen collided with her around 4.40 am. The SS Shad Thames foundered and sank very soon after the collision.

There were four survivors from the SS Shad Thames that had been off watch when the collision occurred; they were picked up by the SS Hortense Lea following the Shad Thames sinking. The crew from the SS Shad Thames that had been on watch were all unaccounted for including the Master and Chief Officer, who had both been on the bridge. The names of the survivors were not recorded but newspaper reports at the time and the subsequent findings of the Admiralty Court indicate they were a Second Mate, a seaman, a fireman and a gunner.

Based on the evidence and facts presented, it would seem the Admiralty Court did not believe the testimony given by the main witness from the SS Hortense Lea when it gave its judgement in 1919 and found the SS Hortense Lea solely responsible for the collision. One of the findings was that the SS Hortense Lea had ported after giving a starboarding signal. <sup>1</sup>

#### **THE NAMES OF THOSE THAT DIED**

**EMILE LEON ABRAHAM** (STEWARD SS SHAD THAMES) **CHANNEL ISLANDER**

**FRANK BIDEAU** (FIREMAN SS SHAD THAMES) **CHANNEL ISLANDER**

**JAMES JEREMIAH BUCKLEY** (MASTER SS SHAD THAMES) **CHANNEL ISLANDER**

**J. L. DONOVAN** (2<sup>nd</sup> ENGINEER SS SHAD THAMES)

**EDISON ALVA CHAMPION** (A.B. SS SHAD THAMES) **CHANNEL ISLANDER**

**GEORGE WILLIAM HUDSON** (ENGINEER SS SHAD THAMES)

**WILLIAM EPHRAIM STEVENS** (SS SHAD THAMES)

**JAMES HENRY WALLMAN** (1<sup>st</sup> MATE SS SHAD THAMES)

---

<sup>1</sup> Less than three months after the Admiralty Court judgement, on the 21<sup>st</sup> Sep 1919 at 5am the SS Hortense Lea foundered and sank off the Tyne in the North Sea during a storm with the loss of nine lives (including one civilian passenger)

## EMILE LEON ABRAHAM – Mercantile Marine

Born Nov 1870 St Lawrence, Jersey. Son of Jacques Adrian Abraham and Celeste Constance Malorey who married in Jersey in 1858 and were both from St Lo d'Ourville, Manche. He had seven siblings including two brothers who also served in the Mercantile Marine during WW1: Jean Pierre born 1873 and Alfred John Emile born 1894.

Emile married Leonie Josephine Victoria Ferrand at St Martins Jersey on the 30th March 1893 and they had at least 7 children. On his marriage record he is recorded as being resident in St Helier. The family were living in Jersey in the 1901 Census and Guernsey in the 1911 census. Surviving Mercantile records show Emile served as an able seaman from 6 Mar 1915 until 20 Dec 1915 aboard SS Aire (his brother John Peter Abraham was also on this ship at the same time). Records also show Emile was a cook/steward aboard SS Shad Thames in Dec 1915. Prior to serving on the SS Aire he had served on the ship Compass.

According to his death record his last place of residence before his death was in Guernsey at Mount Morin, St Sampsons.

He was a Steward aboard the SS Shad Thames when the SS Hortense Lea collided with her and she subsequently sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

He was supposed drowned and his body was never recovered.

No known memorial or commemoration found.

No Mercantile Marine Medal record found.

HIS SIGNATURE

Particulars of Deceased.					6. Name, Official Number, and Port of Registry of Ship.	7. Date, Place, and Cause of Death.	8. Remarks.	9. In cases of death in the Mercantile Marine.	10. Official Reference.
1. Surname and Christian Name.	2. Age.	3. Rank or Rating.	4. Nationality or Birthplace.	5. Last Place of Abode.					
Abraham, E.	47	Steward	Jersey	Mount Morin, St. Sampson's, Guernsey.	Shad Thames 115,906 London	15 Mar. 1918 At Sea Supposed drowned	Ship sunk in collision	—	C. & D.

## DEATH INDEX RECORD

## FRANK BIDEAU – Mercantile Marine



Francois Le Bideau (known as Frank Bideau) was born in France in 1872. His married Marie Louise Le Guen around 1893 and they had at least 8 children. Their eldest daughter was born in Guernsey and the other 7 children were born in Alderney. One child Henry died in infancy. The family were living at English Row, Bray, Alderney at the time of the 1911 census.

The surviving Mercantile Marine records show he was working as an able seaman with two of his sons Emile and Frank aboard the Ship Boaz in 1915.

Frank was a Fireman aboard the SS Shad Thames when the SS Hortense Lea collided with her and she subsequently sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

He was supposed drowned and his body was never recovered.

Frank Bideau is remembered on the Alderney WW1 War Memorial.

No Mercantile Medal records found.



**REMEMBERED ON THE  
ALDERNEY WW1 WAR  
MEMORIAL**

Particulars of Deceased.					6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Surname and Christian Name.	2. Age.	3. Rank or Rating.	4. Nationality or Birthplace.	5. Last Place of Abode.	Name, Official Number, and Port of Registry of Ship.	Date, Place, and Cause of Death.	Remarks.	<small>In giving names to be placed on this list, please mention last name first.</small>	Official Reference.
Bideau, F.	44	Fireman	French	English Row, Alderney.	Shad Thames 115,905 London	15 Mar. 1918 At Sea Supposed drowned	Ship sunk in collision <i>torpedoed.</i>		C. & D.

### DEATH INDEX RECORD

## JEREMIAH JAMES BUCKLEY – Mercantile Marine



MEMORIAL ON FAMILY GRAVE  
ST JOHN'S, GUERNSEY

HIS SIGNATURE

Jeremiah James Buckley was born in Crowan Trannack, Cornwall, England on 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1858. He was baptised at Camborne Cornwall on the 8th August 1858. His Catholic Irish born parents were Cornelius Buckley (a tin miner) and Mary Holland.

He first appears in the Guernsey records in the 1871 census along with his widowed mother and a number of siblings living in St Peter's Port. It is not certain when the family moved to Guernsey but the census records indicate that Jeremiah was a scholar born in Guernsey.

He married Mary Jane Bichard in Guernsey. They had 7 children (their eldest daughter Mary Jane died young)

In the 1911 census he was Master aboard the ship "Zenith" of London. Other Mercantile Marine records are sketchy.

He was the Master of the Shad Thames and was on the bridge with the First Officer when the SS Hortense Lea collided with her and she subsequently sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

He was supposed drowned and his body was never recovered.

He is remembered on the Family Memorial located in St John's Cemetery, St Peter's Port. Guernsey and on the Guernsey Bailwick Memorial in St Peter Port, (J. Buckley). No Mercantile Medal records found.

Particulars of Deceased.					6. Name, Official Number, and Port of Registry of Ship.	7. Date, Place, and Cause of Death.	8. Remarks.	9. By whose statement is this death being reported.	10. Official Reference.
1. Surname and Christian Name.	2. Age.	3. Rank or Rating.	4. Nationality or Birthplace.	5. Last Place of Abode.					
Buckley, J.	59	Master	Guernsey	Piette, Guernsey	London Shad Thames 115,906 London	Drowned 15 Mar. 1918 At Sea Supposed drowned	Ship sunk in collision		C. & D.

### DEATH INDEX RECORD

**EDISON ALVA CHAMPION – Mercantile Marine**



Born in 1892 St Helier Jersey, Channel Islands. Son of Frederick William Champion & Elizabeth Poingdestre. Last address 6 Mackworth Terrace, Swansea; previous resident of St Andrews, Guernsey. Brother of Corporal Edward Francis Champion (1896-1918) and Private Reginald John Champion.

He was an Able Seaman aboard the SS Shad Thames when the SS Hortense Lea collided with her and she subsequently sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

He was supposed drowned and his body was never recovered.

No memorial or Mercantile Medal records found.

HIS SIGNATURE

Particulars of Deceased.					6. Name, Official Number, and Port of Registry of Ship.	7. Date, Place, and Cause of Death.	8. Remarks.	9. In grave - church, or other place of burial.	10. Official Reference.
1. Surname and Christian Name.	2. Age.	3. Rank or Rating.	4. Nationality or Birthplace.	5. Last Place of Abode.					
Champion, E.	..	A.B.	..	6, Mackworth Terrace, Swansea	Shad Thames 118,906 London	15 Mar. 1918 .. At Sea Supposed drowned	Ship sunk in collision <i>Copy added</i>		C. & D.

**DEATH INDEX RECORD**

**J. L. DONOVAN – Mercantile Marine**

J. L. Donovan was the Second Engineer aboard the SS Shad Thames when the SS Hortense Lea collided with her and she subsequently sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

He was supposed drowned and his body was never recovered.

No memorial or Mercantile Medal records found.

**Unable to trace from details supplied on Death Index Record – no age, birth place/nationality. No one with these initials found in online Mercantile Records.**

**Last given address 83 Stacey Road Cardiff – no links found between this surname and address**

Particulars of Deceased.					6. Name, Official Number, and Port of Registry of Ship.	7. Date, Place, and Cause of Death.	8. Remarks.	9. <small>In place of name in this column has been recorded.</small>	10. Official Reference.
1. Surname and Christian Name.	2. Age.	3. Rank or Rating.	4. Nationality or Birthplace.	5. Last Place of Abode.					
Donovan, J. L.	..	— 2nd Engineer	— ..	83, Stacey Road, Cardiff.	Shad Thames 115,908 London	15 Mar. 1918 .. At Sea Supposed drowned	Ship sunk in collision	—	C. & D.  C. & D.

**DEATH INDEX RECORD**

## GEORGE WILLIAM HUDSON – Mercantile Marine



**REMEMBERED ON THE  
FAMILY MEMORIAL GRAVE  
IN GOOLE CEMETERY  
YORKSHIRE**

**“In loving memory of George  
William Hudson drowned at sea  
during the Great War March 15  
1918 aged 60 years”**

**HIS SIGNATURE**

Born in 1858 in Manchester, Lancashire. He moved to Goole, Yorkshire and married Ada Kassell in 1881 when he was aged 23. They had 9 children, three died young and son Ernest drowned aged 21 in a shipwreck at Lamelines, Newfoundland in 1907. His wife died in 1923.

He was an Engineer aboard the SS Shad Thames when the SS Hortense Lea collided with her and she subsequently sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

He was supposed drowned and his body was never recovered.

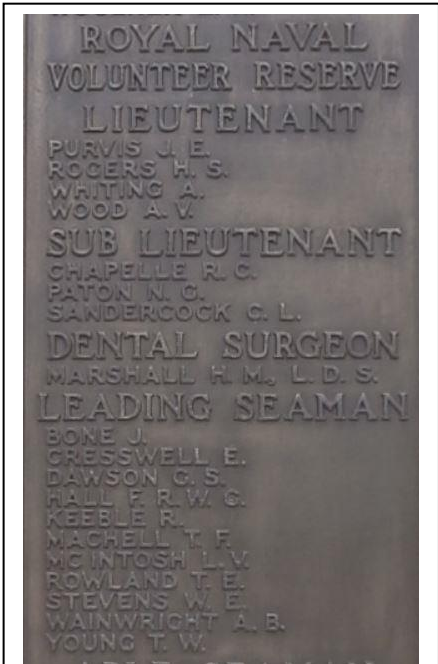
Remembered on the Family Memorial Grave in Goole Cemetery, Yorkshire.

No war memorial or Mercantile Medal records found.

Particulars of Deceased.					6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Surname and Christian Name.	2. Age.	3. Rank or Rating.	4. Nationality or Birthplace.	5. Last Place of Abode.	Name, Official Number, and Port of Registry of Ship.	Date, Place, and Cause of Death.	Remarks.	<small>In given column to be given in full Name of Ship.</small>	Official Reference.
Hudson, G. W.	59	Engineer	Manchester	74, Adeline Street, Goole.	Shad Thames 115,906 London	Supposed drowned 15 Mar. 1918 At Sea	Ship sunk in collision		C. & D.
Hudson, G.	58	Chief	Yorkshire			Supposed drowned	<i>submarine</i>		

### DEATH INDEX RECORD

**WILLIAM EPHRAIM STEVENS** - Acting Leading Seaman, (no. London Z/2634), in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.



NAMED ON THE CWGC  
NAVAL MEMORIAL AT  
CHATHAM

Official naval records state he was born 20 Sep 1897 in Greenwich, London. Son of Walter James Stevens and Mary Ann Stevens. His father was deceased but mother was living at 42, Mauritius Rd, East Greenwich, London, at time of her son's death.

**However** further research would suggest that his father was Walter William Stevens who died in Greenwich in 1905. Walter's wife was Mary Ann Baker who was born in Hatfield Hertfordshire and they were married in 1884 in Ticehurst Sussex. Their eldest son was Walter James Stevens born in Greenwich in 1885 (died serving with the London Irish Rifles in France in December 1917). Their second son William was born William John Stevens in September Qtr. 1899. This would mean that when William enlisted in 1915 he changed his middle name to Ephraim (his grandfather's name) and added two years on to his age. In the 1911 census he was listed as a student aged 14 living with his widowed mother and a sister in Greenwich. According to his naval records he enlisted 15 Jul 1915 into the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. The address given for his mother matches the address for William's older sister Rose Mary Stevens and her husband William Edward Harris in his military records. Mary Ann Stevens nee Baker died in Greenwich in 1923.

William was aboard the SS Shad Thames when the SS Hortense Lea collided with her and she subsequently sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918. It is uncertain what his role was on the SS Shad Thames, but he was an acting Leading Seaman, (no. London Z/2634), in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

He was supposed drowned and his body was never recovered.

He is commemorated on the CWGC Naval Memorial at Chatham.

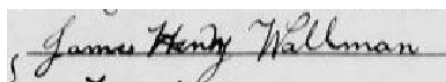
SEA SERVICE		No.	Service, / /
Name	WILLIAM EPHRAIM STEVENS		
Rate	17.08.15.	Sea of Kit	17.08.15.
Date of Entry	17.08.15.	Name	Walter James Stevens
Date of Birth	20.09.1897.	Address	42 MAURITIUS ROAD, EAST GREENWICH, LONDON, S.E. 18.
Place of Birth		Height	5'11"
Address	42, MAURITIUS ROAD, EAST GREENWICH, LONDON, S.E. 18.	Complexion	
Previous Service		Colour of Hair	Brown
Rank	17.08.15.	Colour of Eyes	Blue
Notes		Remarks	Wounded on 15.3.18. (See also 115.905 London)
Civil Employment	Student		

Particulars of Deceased.					6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Surname and Christian Name.	2. Age.	3. Rank or Rating.	4. Nationality or Birthplace.	5. Last Place of Abode.	Name, Official Number, and Port of Registry of Ship.	Date, Place, and Cause of Death.	Remarks.	In grave claimed by (Name of next of kin)	Official Reference.
Stevens, W. E.	21	Steward.	London	Road, Cardiff.	108.400 London Shad Thames 115.905 London	At Sea Supposed drowned 15 Mar. 1918 .. At Sea Supposed drowned	Ship sunk in collision		C. & D.

**DEATH INDEX RECORD**



## JAMES HENRY WALLMAN – Mercantile Marine



**HIS SIGNATURE**

According to his Naval Reserve record he was born in London 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1883 but was not able to provide details of his parents other than his mother's name was possibly Emily. In the 1891 census he was living with his uncle and aunt, Edwin Smallman & Harriet (nee Crew) in Bexley.

He married Ethel Jay in St John's Church, New Clee, Lincolnshire 13<sup>th</sup> April 1911 when he was 27. At the time of their marriage they were both living at 6 Weelsby St, (New Clee Parish) Grimsby (which matches the address on his death record). At the time of marriage his occupation was recorded as fisherman. James and Ethel had one child Phyllis Olga Wallman born in Grimsby in 1911.

It would seem he was called up and medically discharged from the Royal Navy Reserve in Aug 1914 (medical reasons not stated). He had previously received some training in 1904.

Surviving Mercantile Marine records show that in 1915 he was aboard the ship Northford as a Boatswain and again as a Seaman. He had previously served on the ship Taunton as a Boatswain and Lamp trimmer. He also served aboard the SS Shad Thames 18 Oct 1915 to 31 Dec 1915 as an Able Seaman. His signature on the ships' records match the signature on his wedding certificate.

He was 1<sup>st</sup> Mate aboard the SS Shad Thames when the SS Hortense Lea collided with her and she subsequently sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

He was supposed drowned and his body was never recovered.

No memorial or Mercantile Medal records found.

Particulars of Deceased.					6. Name, Official Number, and Port of Registry of Ship.	7. Date, Place, and Cause of Death.	8. Remarks.	9. In cases claimed to have occurred at sea.	10. Official Reference.
1. Surname and Christian Name.	2. Age.	3. Rank or Rating.	4. Nationality or Birthplace.	5. Last Place of Abode.					
Wallman, J.	34	1st Mate	London	6, Wellesley Street, Great Grimsby.	1st Mate Liverpool Shad Thames 115,906 London	15 Mar. 1918 .. At Sea Supposed drowned 15 Mar. 1918	Ship sunk in collision <i>torpedo</i> Ship sunk by enemy		C. & D. E. C. & D.

## DEATH INDEX RECORD

NEWS REPORT OF THE FINDINGS OF ACTION TAKEN IN THE ADMIRALTY COURT

30 JUNE 1919 - LIVERPOOL JOURNAL OF COMMERCE

(READ DOWN LEFT AND THEN RIGHT COLUMNS - 3 PAGES)

## COLLISION OFF CORNISH COAST.

Foreign Vessel Found Alone to Blame.

"INCREDIBLE STORY OF PORTING AFTER STARBOARDING SIGNAL."

Mr. Justice Horridge, in the Admiralty Court, heard an action arising out of a collision off the Cornish coast in the early morning of March 15 of last year as a result of which the London steamer Shad Thames foundered in a few minutes with all her crew of 12 hands except the second mate, a seaman, a fireman, and a gunner, who were off watch. With all the watch on deck lost, the plaintiffs, the owners of the Shad Thames, notified that they were necessarily at a disadvantage in setting forward the incidents preceding the collision.

Their action was brought against the owners of the steamship Hortense Lea, of Bergen, Norway, and the owners of that vessel counter-claimed.

was not considered dangerous to do so at that point. The Hortense Lea's case was that she was on a parallel opposite course, and when at a distance of 1,200 feet, or two cables, saw the green light of the Shad Thames two points on the starboard bow, and, as a matter of extra precaution, starboarded to give more room, but she saw the green getting finer and finer until just before the collision the red was opened, and the Shad Thames struck the Hortense Lea on her starboard bow, and then fell had been in collision. The first question he had to make up his mind about was whether the green light and the red light of the Shad Thames were burning at the time of the collision. The evidence from the other vessel was that they were certainly burning just before the collision. The next question was how long had they had they been exhibited? The witnesses from the Shad Thames were two. The second officer in charge of the watch between 12 and four said, "I put out both the green and the red lights, and both were burning brightly." The other witness said he saw the green light burning brightly before four o'clock, and that he was told by the first officer that he had put out the red light. The collision was said to have taken place at 4.40. His Lordship said he did not like the way in which the second officer of the Hortense Lea gave evidence. It was difficult to judge a witness speaking through an interpreter. He was prepared to hold as a fact that the green light and red light were not out and burning brightly a con-

The Shad Thames was 549 tons gross and 165 feet long, and carried two masts. She was proceeding up channel near Hartland Point, in ballast, bound from Rouen to Newport. The weather was very dark, though clear, and the wind easterly, light. The Shad Thames was making nine knots and had her side lights exhibited. Her master and chief officer, both of whom were drowned, were on the bridge. The Hortense Lea, it was said, showed no light before the collision. She struck the Shad Thames with her stem on the port side, cutting right into her and causing so much damage that she foundered in a few minutes. So pleading, the plaintiffs alleged against the other that she was wrongly navigating without lights and failed to keep clear of the lighted Shad Thames, and that she improperly starboarded and failed to ease or reverse.

The account of what happened given for the Hortense Lea 1,125 tons gross and 250 feet long—was that she was four miles north of Tintagel Head, going from Cardiff to Rouen,

light were put out and burning brightly a considerable time before the collision. If that was so, it followed that the lookout, both at the fore-castle head and of the second officer of the Hortense Lea, was a bad lookout, because they ought to have seen these lights very much sooner, and they ought to have put out their own lights much earlier than they did. In fact, they did not put them out or exhibit them at all, because, they said, there was not time before the collision, although they had been trying to get them out immediately before. Having disbelieved the second officer of the Hortense Lea on the question of lookout, he had to ask himself if he could accept their story of the porting of the Shad Thames, so as to make the Shad Thames also to blame? The story told him was this—that when the Hortense Lea saw the other a point and a half on the starboard bow the vessels could have passed easily and there would have been no danger of collision at all. But the Hortense Lea did not say "I starboarded my helm a little," but "I put my helm hard-astarboard." His Lordship did not believe she ever put her helm hard-astarboard, because she saw the Shad Thames on her starboard bow. It did not follow that the vessels were on parallel courses. His Lordship did not know what relative courses they were on, or how the Hortense Lea was heading. He

with patent fuel, when she saw, two cables off and bearing  $1\frac{1}{2}$  or 2 points on the starboard bow, the dim green light of the Shad Thames. By direction of the authorities her right side lights were screened with canvas, as was the masthead light, on deck. Her course was W.S.W. magnetic, her speed eight knots, and the flood tide setting eastward was of a force of one to two knots. When the dim green light of the Shad Thames was seen, the helm of the Hortense Lea was put hard-astarboard and two short blasts were sounded. The green light was started to be uncovered when the Shad Thames opened her red on the starboard bow, threatening collision. The engines of the Hortense Lea were thereupon stopped, but the Shad Thames, with her port side, at the fore part of the fore rigging, struck the stem of the Hortense Lea, doing her damage.

The Shad Thames, it was complained, failed properly to exhibit lights according to regulations, failed to pass starboard to starboard, wrongly maintained port helm, and failed to tell her course by the whistle or to ease in time.

Mr. Justice Horridge, giving judgment, said if necessary he could have gone into the exact position where the collision took place, but counsel on both sides agreed, for the purpose of trying the action, that they need not bother their heads about the exact longitude and latitude. The case for the Shad Thames was that at the time of the collision her side lights were both burning brightly, that the green light was first exhibited as the inshore light, and that later on, when they got in nearer home, the red light was exhibited because it

or how the Hortense Lea was heading. He disbelieved her story about the position of the two vessels. She said, "I sounded two short blasts to say 'I am directing my course to port.'" The other vessel must have heard that, and it was incredible, to his Lordship's mind, that the other vessel should then have gone under port helm. It was just possible that with the right hand propeller she might have reversed, and to that extent the result of reversing might have been to open her port light, but he did not accept the Hortense Lea's story, and it was not necessary for him to consider that. In his view it was quite incredible that the one vessel, in these circumstances, would have hard-astarboarded and the other vessel would have put herself under port helm directly she had heard the whistle of the Hortense Lea saying "I am directing my course to port." In the circumstances he could not believe the story told on behalf of the Hortense Lea, and therefore the whole matter was at large. They did not know how the collision happened. The fact that the stem of the Hortense Lea was sent over to port might have been owing to the motion of the Shad Thames

through the water when she struck her. It all depended on the angle at which she struck her and the direction from which she was coming, but, having disbelieved the story of the Hortense Lea, he could not speculate as to how the blow was given. He did not know what the heading of the Hortense Lea was when first she saw the Shad Thames, and he was satisfied that she had no effective lookout and did not see the other vessel when she ought to have done so, and he must find the Hortense Lea alone to blame for the collision.