



Leslie Charles Kirby P/KX 81656 (1913-1941) and HMS Barham

Leslie Kirby (Les) was born and raised in Newport, Isle of Wight. He joined the Navy in the early 1930s; at the time of his marriage to Patricia Squires Johnson, in February 1940, he was a Leading Stoker:

560197

CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY OF MARRIAGE. Pursuant to the Marriage Acts, 1811 to 1934.

Registration District

Marriage Solemnized at *St John Church* in the County of *Isle of Wight* in the Parish of *Carisbrooke*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| When Married | Name and Particulars | Age | Condition | Rank or Profession | Residence at time of Marriage | Father's Name and Profession | State or Profession of Birth |
| <i>February 17th 1940</i> | <i>Leslie Charles Kirby</i> | <i>26</i> | <i>Bachelor</i> | <i>Leading Stoker</i> | <i>14 Albert Street Newport Is.</i> | <i>Albert Wilson Kirby</i> | <i>Labourer</i> |
| | <i>Patricia Squires Johnson</i> | <i>24</i> | <i>Spinster</i> | | <i>87 Hunghill Carisbrooke Is.</i> | <i>Herbert Charles Johnson</i> | <i>Deceased</i> |

Married in the *Parish Church* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Book of Common Prayer* by *License* or after... by me

This Marriage solemnized between us, *Leslie Charles Kirby* in the Presence of us, *J. L. Johnson* and *A. C. Kirby* by *W. H. Mackinnon* Vicar.

I, *W. H. Mackinnon* Vicar of *St John Church* solemnize in the County of *Isle of Wight* the copy of the Entry No. *169* in the Register Book of Marriages of the said Church.

WITNESS MY HAND this *17th* day of *February* 19*40*.

W. H. Mackinnon Vicar
State - Rector, Vicar, or Curate.

Figure 1: Marriage Certificate of Leslie Charles KIRBY and Patricia Squires JOHNSON

He served on HMS Barham, a battleship that had been built in 1913. He was one of a crew of 1,258 men, who were under the command of Captain Geoffrey Clement Cooke.

By November 1941, he had been promoted to Stoker Petty Officer (a grade equivalent to Sergeant in other armed forces); he would have worked in the Engine Room in the bowels of the ship. On the afternoon of 25 November, the Barham was 62 miles north of Sidi Barrani, off the coast of Egypt, when it was hit by four torpedoes fired from a U-Boat. The battleship keeled over and sank within about 15 minutes. Les was one of the 841¹ men who perished - including the Captain, who went down with his ship. There were 396 survivors.

The German U-Boat was U-331, under the command of Oberleutnant zur See Hans Diedrich von Tiesenhausen. When news of the sinking became public in late January 1942, von Tiesenhausen was immediately awarded a Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, the highest German military award during WW2.

¹ It is known that 841 men lost their lives but the figure of 862 is often quoted because 396 men survived (and the crew complement was officially 1258 men). The true figure may never be known.

Because the loss of life had been so great, and so quick, the British government did not wish to publicise what had happened. Relatives were eventually notified by letter in December 1941, but were instructed *not* to talk about their bereavement. This death notice was published in the local paper:

Petty Officer Stoker Leslie Charles Kirby. His wife (formerly Miss Patricia Johnson), of 87 Hunnyhill, Newport, received the official news this week. He was the youngest son of the late Mr. A. E. Kirby, of 14 Albert-street, Newport, and had been in the Royal Navy for 10 years. He was last home 18 months ago.

Figure 2: Isle of Wight County Press, 13 December 1941

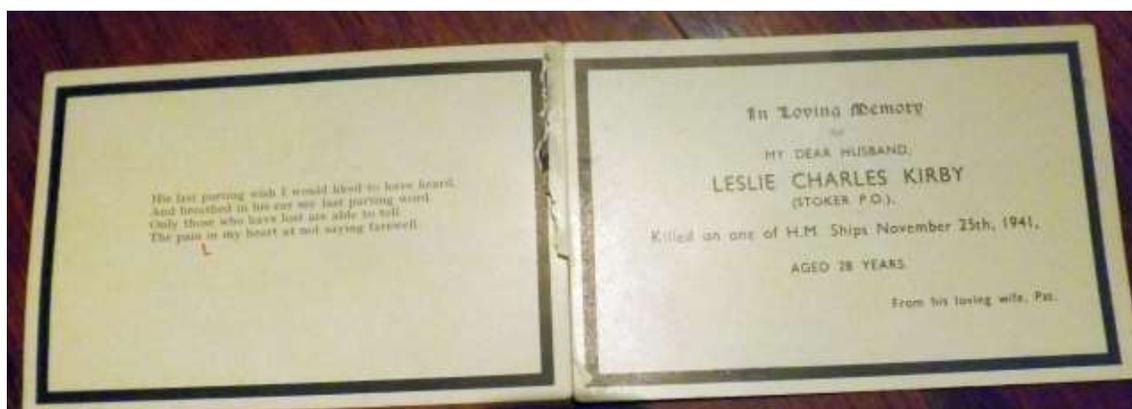


Figure 3: Memorial Card to Leslie Charles KIRBY

The loss of the Barham was made public on 27 January 1942.

Captain Cooke's widow, Connie, did as much as she could for the welfare of the many bereaved families. She also set her heart on a lasting memorial to all who had perished in the sinking. Through her efforts, money was raised for a book of remembrance and for four tall candlesticks at Westminster Abbey. They were dedicated at the Abbey after Evensong on Wednesday 10 February 1942. Les's widow, Pat, attended the service.

In June 1946, Pat married again – her second husband was himself a widower - and became Patricia Squires COOKE. In late March 1947, she gave birth to a son, and a daughter followed in September 1953. Pat's second marriage lasted for 48 years.

In the early 1950s, Pat finally received the medals granted to her late husband – the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Africa Star, and the War Medal 1939-45:



Figure 4: Medals awarded to Leslie Charles KIRBY 1913-1941

References

Marriage Certificate of Leslie Charles KIRBY and Patricia Squires JOHNSON, 17 February 1941
Memorial Card

Cutting from *Isle of Wight County Press*, 13 December 1941, accessed via IWFHS website.

CWGC: Leslie Charles KIRBY 1913-1941: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2370135/KIRBY,%20LESLIE%20CHARLES>

CWGC: Geoffrey Clement COOKE 1890-1941: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2369753/COOKE,%20GEOFFREY%20CLEMENT>

Captain Cooke was posthumously Mentioned in Despatches. See *Supplement to The London Gazette*, 30 January 1942, p554.

HMS Barham Association includes a great deal of information, including photographs and scans of articles and letters: <http://www.hmsbarham.com/index.php>

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Barham_\(04\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Barham_(04))

Oberleutnant zur See Hans-Diedrich von Tieshenausen 1913-2002: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans-Diedrich_von_Tiesenhausen

Acknowledgments

1. The Isle of Wight Family History Society, for the newspaper snippet from December 1941.
2. Pat was my mother-in-law. I am heavily indebted to her for telling me about HMS Barham. After she died in 2003, we found the mementoes she had kept, including Les's medals, the photograph of their wedding day, and his picture in a locket. Pat was a wonderful lady who felt no bitterness, even though WW1 had deprived her of her father and WW2 of her young husband.

For the sad episode of the Barham, we could adapt the words of Binyon's famous poem "For The Fallen"²: "He grew not old, as she that was left grew old".

² Robert Laurence BINYON 1869-1943 "For the Fallen" includes the line: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:"