

Local Sawtry Man Dies Aboard The Luisitania

By Marilyn Townsend Gautreaux

As the anniversary of the Sinking of the Luisitania in World War One on May 7th 1915 has just passed, I thought I would post an article I wrote in 2015 to commemorate 100 years since the sinking about a Sawtry relative I came across whilst researching my Family Tree.

Thomas Rueben Rowell

Tom Rowell was born in Sawtry in 1883. He was the son of William and Catherine Rowell and a second cousin to my grandfather Herbert Rowell. Tom's mother Catherine's maiden name was Levis. Tom's grandmother Lydia Levis was a Stapleton before she was married and her youngest sister Mary Stapleton was married to Robert Rowell, first cousin of William and Herbert. Robert and Mary Rowell had several children, one of which was Stanley "Linnet" Rowell.

The 1901 census shows Tom Rowell at 17 as a lodger with William and Henrietta Olive in Beckenham. William Olive's occupation at that time was a coachman and Tom's occupation was listed as a page, domestic which indicates he was working in a large, well to do house somewhere in the London area. On the 15th September 1907 Tom went to America on the ship "The Camania". He is shown on the passenger manifest as age 23 and occupation as servant which seems to indicate that he got a job with a family living in America. They had possibly travelled to Britain to hire Tom or whilst in England, had come across him during a visit to the house where Tom was employed. Tom travelled to America on his own to take up his new post.

In 1908 a young woman named Ethel Ann Powley went to America on the ship "The Luisitania". Ethel was born in Ipswich in 1889. Ethel's occupation shows her as a ladies maid on the Luisitania's passenger manifest so she was either going to take up a post or she was travelling back to America with a family she already worked for.

A marriage record for 27th February 1910 shows Tom and Ethel being married in Manhattan, New York City and also residing in Manhattan. On a US census of April 1910 it shows Tom Rowell as a servant in the household of a Samuel Valentine, a prominent lawyer living in New York but originally from Chicago Illinois. They had a son Patrick Anderson Valentine who was also a prominent lawyer and his client and best friend was Philip Armour, heir to a multi million dollar fortune and one of the richest men in America at that time, of the Armour Meat Produce and Packing Company, a company that is still going strong today.

When Philip Armour died suddenly Patrick Valentine married his best friend's widow, whilst looking after her financial interests as her lawyer.

On the 30th April 1910 Tom and Ethel Rowell travelled to Liverpool from New York on the SS Mauretania. Tom's occupation at that time was a valet. They sailed back on the Mauretania on 6th May 1910. There is a record of the two of them travelling to New York again from Britain on the Luisitania in December 1911 but I found no record of an outward journey to Britain in 1911. In April 1915 not long after the start of the First World War, Ethel travelled over to Britain separately from her husband. It is not known why they were travelling separately, maybe Tom's work delayed him or maybe he was coming home to join up and he sent Ethel before him whilst he dealt with matters in New York. Tom's passage was booked on the Luisitania. Both Tom and Ethel had travelled many times on several different ships so this was not unusual.

On Friday 7th May 1915 at 11.00 am the Lusitania was struck by a torpedo from a German U Boat in the Irish Sea as the ship was bound for Liverpool. It sank in 18 minutes.

THE DAILY MIRROR, Founded in 1846, No. 4, 1915

LUSITANIA TORPEDOED BY GERMAN PIRATE

The Daily Mirror

CERTIFIED CIRCULATION LARGER THAN ANY OTHER PICTURE PAPER IN THE WORLD

No. 3,600 Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper SATURDAY, MAY 8, 1915 16 PAGES One Halfpenny.

GIANT CUNARDER CROWDED WITH PASSENGERS CALLOUSLY SUNK WITHOUT WARNING OFF THE IRISH COAST.



Without warning the famous Cunarder Lusitania was torpedoed off the Irish coast yesterday. She sank in eight minutes, but it is believed many of the passengers have been saved. The United States is seething with anger at this crime against neutral passengers, including women and children. The picture charges the loss of Americans will undoubtedly compel President Wilson to take immediate and drastic action. Amongst the passengers were many famous Britons and Americans.

There were 1,959 passengers and crew aboard of which 1,195 lost their lives. Tom Rowell was one of those who died. He was buried in Queenstown, Ireland along with many other victims, Some others were buried at Kinsale. Ethel went back to live with her sister in North Eltham Suffolk after Tom's death and remained a widow for the rest of her life. Ethel Ann Rowell died in Suffolk in 1970 at the age of 81. Tom Rowell's employer Patrick Anderson Valentine died a year after Tom in 1916 leaving his wife a widow for the second time and an \$8,000,000 dollar fortune.