

## 'Illustrious Churchyard Occupant'

This heading was used when a descendant of the 'occupant' of a grave in All Saints' churchyard came to try and find that grave a number of years ago. When I was asked to help the gentleman, I naturally thought he was talking about Dante Gabriel Rossetti, but – "No not him!" It turned out to be a man called William Norman.

William Norman turned out to be a man from Upnor on the Medway estuary, whose father had been buried in our churchyard just eleven years earlier - in 1857. The grave we were trying to trace was that of **William Henry NORMAN**, who, the researcher assured me, was 'the Founder of the Australian Navy'. This turned out to be slightly wide of the mark. William Norman is credited with founding the State of Victoria Navy, as the Federation of the Australian States was not created until 1901, some years after Commander Norman died.

William Norman had joined the British Royal Navy as a 14 year old boy in 1826, and had shown great promise from the beginning. His father had been in the service of the Navy all his life, ending up as a shipwright. His son, however, was made a Commander and served his adopted country of Australia well, most of his working life. His story will be found under "NORMAN, the late Captain William" in our Museum Archives.

In Australia, he is held in such high esteem that there is a Town named after him – Normanton – in Carpentaria, Queensland. A River, a Bay, a Point and at least two Roads are also named after him. Finally, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a series of Mine-hunters now all bear his name. The latest of these Mine-hunters was launched by one of Commander Norman's great-granddaughters, Miss Agatha Grey-Wilson MBE in 1999. The Australian Naval Association tends the graves of Commander Norman's wife and several of his nine children who are also buried in Australia. However, when this authority was approached to help fund the restoration of the Commander's own grave in Birchington churchyard, the response was - 'No'.

When we went to locate the grave beside the north wall of the churchyard, almost overlooking the Powell Arms in 1999, it was lost in a mount of weeds and brambles. The cost of renovating the grave was beyond our own limited resources, although several attempts were made to clear the 'jungle' from around it.

The Australian Naval Association has also managed to buy some of Commander Norman's original Log Books and other memorabilia in an auction, which must make for fascinating reading. It would be interesting to know - has anyone transcribed these into a computer yet?

Unfortunately the wording on the grave is no longer readable. It would be wonderful if the Australian authorities could see fit to fund the re-lettering of the side slab.

In Memory of  
Commander William Henry NORMAN  
of the VICTORIA NAVY, AUSTRALIA,  
who died while on duty in England  
12 Dec 1869 aged 57 years

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Also in Memory of  
Thomas NORMAN late of Dover  
who died 27 Jun 1856 aged 87



Commander William Norman's grave – with its lid on at last- courtesy of Terry & friend – Oct 2015

In 2015 two stalwarts, Terry Wilson and his friend have toiled for about two months repairing and reinstating Commander Norman's grave – all for free!