Commander H. Baynham OBE RN

Henry Baynham was born in Bayswater, London, on 1 June 1847. He was educated at Southampton Grammar School and decided to join the Royal Navy. Due to his late stepfather’s rank and connections, he was able to secure a nomination and, early in 1862, he was enrolled at the Naval School at Southsea, one of the fashionable ‘crammers’ of that time whose sole aim was to successfully assist candidates through the entrance examination for a cadetship in the Royal Navy. However, he failed the entrance examination as the result of a serious accident in which he broke his arm and lost considerable school time. Through his father’s influence Baynham was able to secure a further nomination to enter the Royal Navy as a Navigating Cadet and, in December 1862, he joined H.M.S. Victory as a Masters Assistant. Over the next five years he underwent training in Her Majesty’s Ships Buzzard January 1863, Nile May 1863, Galatea May 1863, Orontes January 1866. On leaving the latter ship he was promoted to Navigating Midshipman on 4 January 1867. In this rank he was appointed to H.M.S. Phoebe, a steam frigate serving on the North American and West Indies Station, and on 9 December 1867 he was promoted to the recently introduced rank of Navigating Sub-Lieutenant. In May 1869 Baynham was appointed to H.M.S. Dart, a steam gun vessel serving on the St Lawrence River and the Canadian Great Lakes. The autobiographical history of his life notes that in 1869, whilst serving as Navigating Officer on H.M.S. Dart, the ship embarked His Royal Highness Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, then a serving subaltern with the Royal Engineers, and transported him to Prince Edward Island. For this and other services his Royal Highness presented Henry with an inscribed silver telescope. On paying off from Dart Baynham was appointed in November 1870 to H.M.S. Glasgow, flagship of the East Indies Squadron, Rear Admiral Arthur Cunningham C.B. In November 1872 he was appointed to H.M.S. Lynx on the same station. On returning to England in September 1873, he studied for his Navigation Examination at Trinity House, and was awarded the following certificates: Pilotage 1st Class, Seamanship 3rd Class, and Navigation 3rd Class. On 9 January 1874, he was appointed Acting Navigation Lieutenant for ‘surveying duties’ aboard H.M.S. Aboukir, a 4,392 ton steam receiving ship at Jamaica in the West Indies. In October 1874 he returned to the North America and West Indies Squadron on appointment to the steam gun vessel H.M.S. Woodlark. He transferred to H.M.S. Spartan on the same station as Acting Navigating Lieutenant in November 1874 and then returned to H.M.S. Woodlark in February 1875. Six months later in July 1875 he returned to H.M.S. Aboukir having been promoted to Navigating Lieutenant on 10 May 1875. His next appointment in February 1877 was to the steam gun vessel H.M.S. Swallow, serving on the Cape of Good Hope and West Coast of Africa. During 1879 Swallow was moved to the South East Coast of America Station, and Henry remained as her Navigating Lieutenant. On paying off from Swallow in June 1881 Baynham was appointed on 30 September 1881, to H.M.S. President for ‘Study at the Royal Naval College Greenwich’. He failed to successfully complete all of his college examinations and was appointed, in August 1882, to the special service steamer H.M.S. Seahorse, serving on the Mediterranean Station. During service in Seahorse off the Egyptian coast in August 1882 he qualified for the Egyptian War Medal without Clasp and also the Khedive’s Star dated 1882. In July 1883 Baynham was appointed to the steam composite vessel H.M.S. Sphinx serving on the East Indies Station. Whilst in this vessel he undertook special surveying and buoy laying duties at the port of Suakin in the Red Sea in 1884 which supposedly qualified him for the clasp Suakin 1884. His autobiographical notes clearly state that he was on board Sphinx at Trinkitat, a port on the Red Sea situated some three miles from El-Teb, where the battle was fought on 29 February 1884, but was not awarded the clasp. The captain of H.M.S. Sphinx, Commander C. Crawford, R.N., however, is recorded as being present at the battle and received the El-Teb clasp. Baynham returned to England aboard H.M.S. Humber in September 1884 and, after a medical survey in December 1884, was declared medically unfit and placed on the Retired List after twenty-two years’ service. Following retirement from the Royal Navy, he sought employment in Cadet Training ships where his naval and navigation skills stood him in good stead. In 1888 he was appointed Chief Officer of the Mercantile Navy School Ship H.M.S. Conway at Liverpool. It is highly likely that he served at this school as a junior officer before being promoted Captain Superintendent of the Industrial School Ship Wellesley at North Shields on the River Tyne, near Newcastle. Following the outbreak of war with Germany in 1914, Baynham offered his services to the Admiralty. His offer was ‘officially noted’ but not acted upon. It was only after much determined and continuous pestering by him that the Admiralty agreed to accept his offer and in September 1915 he was appointed to the shore base H.M.S. Victory at Portsmouth, for duty at Haslar Training Camp. In mid-1916 he was promoted to temporary Lieutenant-Commander and in August appointed to H.M.S. Wallington, Immingham Depot. Throughout this period he was plagued with numerous illnesses which necessitated him entering hospital, but he refused all offers of a medical discharge on the ground of age. Early in 1917 he was officially notified that he was the oldest officer on the Active List and was blocking the way of junior officers. Notwithstanding this valid point he was promoted to Acting Commander in February 1917. In January 1918 Baynham was appointed to the Repair Ship H.M.S. Cyclops and was later transferred to the auxiliary small craft vessel H.M.S. Sandringham. He remained in this appointment until demobilised in June 1919, when he reverted to the Retired List. At this time Baynham was 72 years old. His war service was recognised by the award of the O.B.E. (Military), the recommendation for which stated that he ‘Worked at Haslar Training Camp and as Supervising Officer of the Auxiliary Patrol Depot at Immingham, and was Senior Naval Officer of the naval base at Swarbacks Minn in January 1918’. He also received the British War Medal. On 16 April 1920, he was awarded a Good Service Greenwich Hospital Pension of £50 per year which he retained for 13 years until his death at Ferndown, Dorset, on 11 June 1933, when aged 84 years. uniform.