

Commodore the Rt Hon H D King PC CD CBE DSO VD MP

The postcard (*reproduced right*) was probably published in 1910 when Douglas King, then 33 years old, stood unsuccessfully as the Unionist candidate in North Norfolk although he went on to win the seat in 1918 after a distinguished war career. His death, when the yacht he had hired sank in a storm off Fowey, made headlines in August 1930 amid criticisms of the Coastguard service.

He was born in 1877, the son of Captain Henry Welchman King, who sent him to Conway at Liverpool from 1891 to 1893. After that, he served in sailing ships until 1897 when he joined P&O. He proved his versatility when, within two years, he left the sea to take up farming, later studying law until he was called to the Bar in 1905.

He had been appointed a midshipman in the Royal Naval Reserve in 1893 and served until 1902, after which he spent two years in the Inns of Court Rifle Volunteers. He obviously still hankered after the sea because, in 1904, he was given a commission in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and it is in that uniform he is seen in the photograph, wearing the cuff stripes of a lieutenant. He was then serving in the London Division which he was to command from 1920.

When the Royal Naval Division was forming in August 1914, he was appointed to the Drake Battalion and was with it at the siege of Antwerp in October 1914. The following year - on 25th April - the battalion landed at Gallipoli and King stayed there until the evacuation on 9th January 1916. In the process, he earned a DSO in November 1915 and three Mentions in Despatches, as well as being wounded.

He commanded the battalion from June 1915 to July 1916 by which time it was in France. He was later afloat before being sent to serve with the Royal Naval siege guns in Flanders. His time on the Western Front earned him special promotion for distinguished service as well as a Croix de Guerre. He was made a CBE in 1919.





Conway History

After the war he returned to politics and was elected for North Norfolk. He feared - correctly as it turned out - that it would not be possible to keep the seat for the Conservatives in 1922. As a result, he stood for Paddington South - the wealthy constituency most famously represented by Lord Randolph Churchill during the latter part of his career - and won, despite the intervention of an unofficial Conservative candidate. He retained the seat until his death in 1930 and held various posts, including Conservative Whip, Financial Secretary at the War Office and Secretary to the Mines Department of the Board of Trade. He had also been an ADC to King George in 1922.

King's death was the result of a tragic episode off the Cornish coast on 20th August 1930 when the *Islander*, a cutter he had chartered from Lt-Col JN Diggle of the Royal Yacht Squadron, ran on to rocks three miles from Fowey. All six on board were lost, including two other RNVR officers, Surg Capt Arthur Robertson Brailey, senior medical officer of the London Division, and Cdr Sidney Searle, OBE, of Berwick-on-Tweed. Searle had also served under King in the London Division.

The *Islander* sank in what was said to be one of the most severe summer storms within memory. At about 9pm, terrific seas drove her onto rocks in Lansallos Cove in Lantive Bay, and rescue attempts from shore, including the use of rockets, all failed. Fowey lifeboat found it impossible to get close enough to be any help. Two bodies, including the commodore's, were recovered the following day.

Author and academic Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, the Royal Fowey Yacht Club Commodore whose house overlooked Fowey harbour, was reported as saying: 'This disaster proves the need for a stronger coastguard service. A few years ago, there was a Government economy campaign and the coastguard service was cut down. The trouble really started in Whitehall. Conditions were made such that the old divisional officers, who were drawn from the higher ranks of the Navy, were not attracted to the coastguard service. In addition, coast watching and patrolling were cut down to a minimum. As a result of this, a very large proportion of the vessels sighted in distress round the Cornish coast are first seen by farmers, farm labourers and the girls coming back from the milking of cows - men and women who go out to work at dawn - and the best they can do is warn the authorities as soon as possible.'

At the inquest, Sir Arthur, who was invited to sit near the coroner, gave evidence in support of these views, leading the coroner to say: 'It seems to me, and it may seem to the jury, that the look-out on the coast is not all that it should be, but whether the lack of efficiency there could possibly be described as criminal, I should very much doubt because apparently it was a matter of opinion only.'

The jury took this on board. Returning a verdict of accidental death by drowning, they added a rider that on this particular night, there was 'a laxity in the placing of watches'.

On 26th August 1930, *The Times* carried a number of tributes to Commodore King, one of them from Rear-Admiral Thomas N James, who wrote: 'The sea has claimed him as a sailor, not withstanding his safe passage through tremendous fighting at the Dardanelles and in France. (He) was undoubtedly a courageous and talented man. Who knows what he might have gone on to achieve had he lived.'