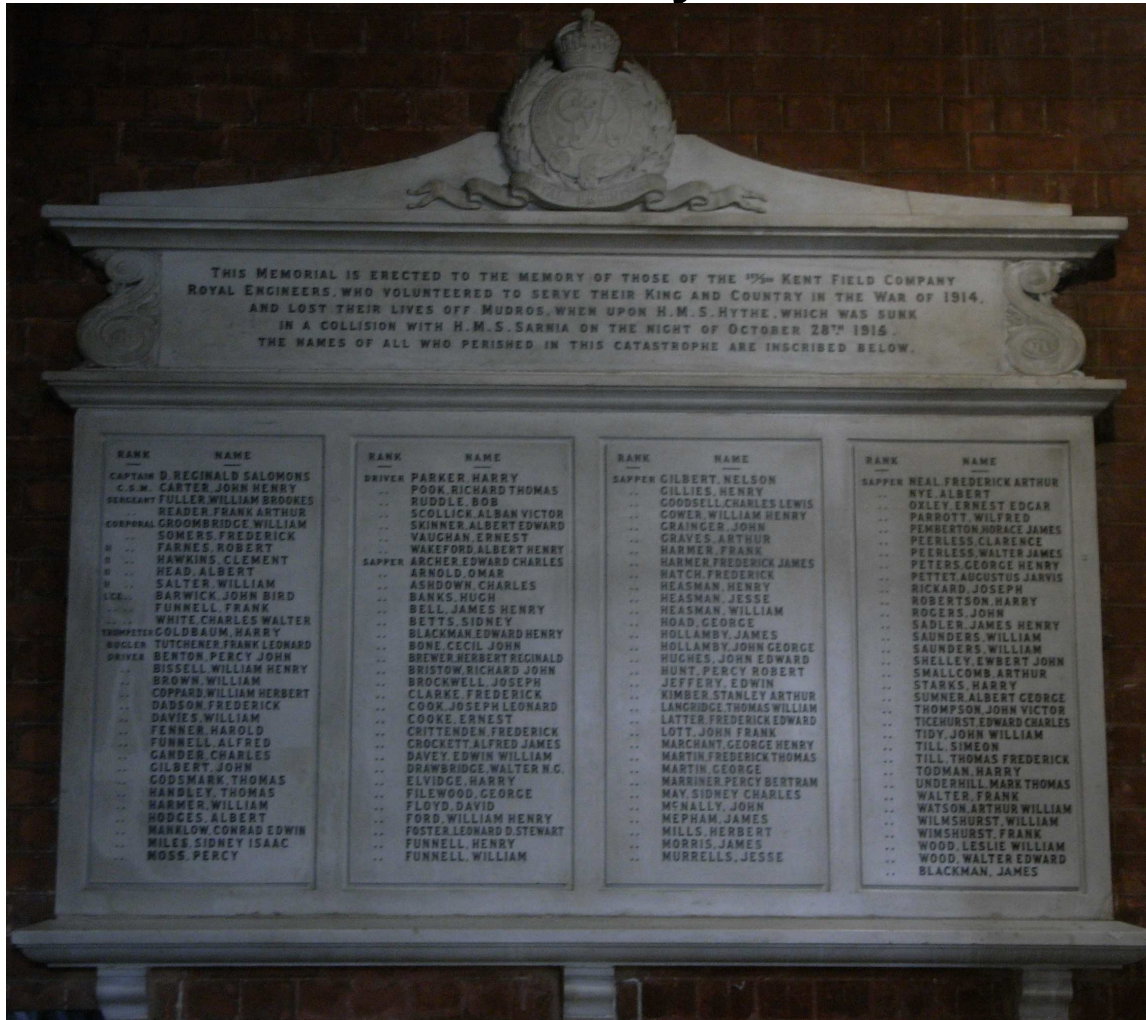


H.M.S. Hythe



The H.M.S. Hythe Memorial Plaque as shown above, in the photograph by Susan F. was unveiled by Sir David Solomans on Saturday 28 October 1916. Originally erected in the former Southborough Drill Hall, Speldhurst Road, Southborough, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent, the plaque is now located in St. Matthew's parish church Gordon Road, High Brooms, Royal Tunbridge Wells.

THIS MEMORIAL IS ERECTED TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE OF THE
1ST/3RD KENT FIELD COMPANY, ROYAL ENGINEERS, WHO
VOLUNTEERED TO SERVE THEIR KING AND COUNTRY IN THE WAR
OF 1914 AND LOST THEIR LIVES IN MUDROS, WHEN UPON H.M.S.
HYTHE, WHICH WAS SUNK IN A COLLISION WITH H.M.S. SARNIA ON
THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 28TH 1916 THE NAMES OF ALL WHO
PERISHED IN THIS CATASTROPHE ARE INSCRIBED BELOW

In view of the consistently high number of monthly hits which the original H.M.S. Hythe information always generates on this website, Susan F. who is a prolific contributor of the west Kent area photographs on the site, very kindly photographed the memorial plaque in St. Matthew's parish church High Brooms, for inclusion here. Unfortunately at the time of posting this H.M.S. Hythe update, Patrick Scullion who is carrying out the transcriptions, and additional details on the men commemorated on the plaque, has not been able to complete his work, primarily due to his current schooling, part time work and Kent Army Cadet Force commitments. Rather than wait for a few more months until the transcriptions have been completed, it seemed sensible to add Susan's photograph now, and also this brief information about the future update of the H.M.S. Hythe information when time permits. By adding the photograph now, it will of course at least allow people to view the names of all those commemorated on the H.M.S. Hythe memorial plaque.

On Sunday 10 October 1915 the British War Cabinet had taken the decision to stop sending more troops to Gallipoli, where to put it mildly operations had not strictly gone to plan. That important decision notwithstanding, the following day 231 men of the 1st/3rd (Kent) Field Company, Royal Engineers sailed from Devonport Docks heading for the eastern Mediterranean and Gallipoli. The voyage out to the eastern Mediterranean was fortunately uneventful. At Mudros Bay, Turkey, most of the Field Company transferred to smaller ships to actually take them to Helles. H.M.S. Hythe, a former cross-channel paddle-driven ferry, with a displacement of 509 tons. She had been built in 1905 for the South Eastern and Chatham Railway to work the Dover-Calais route. Requisitioned at the outbreak of war she had been transformed into a minesweeper and armed with a couple of twelve pounder guns. In 1915, she was sent to work on troop movements in the Dardanelles. H.M.S. Hythe left Mudros Bay at about 1600 hours on Thursday 28 October 1915 at which time she was grossly overloaded, including men who were packed on the decks, many huddling under an awning that had been rigged up to give at least some form of relief from rain and spray. At about 2000 hours, as the vessel neared its destination, men made preparations for embarking putting on their kit, whilst drivers went to their respective vehicles, and the H.M.S. Hythe doused all her lights. Of significance it was a rough and squally day which had resulted in a great number of the men aboard the ship being seasick. With their discomfort of those onboard the ship almost at an end, having almost reached its destination and the soldiers preparing for disembarking, when suddenly a large vessel loomed out of the darkness and in spite of all efforts to avoid a collision it ran into H.M.S. Hythe, cutting deep into her port bow and bringing down the foremast. In ten minutes the vessel sank, leaving numbers struggling in the water or hanging on to spars and other floating matter. The boats of the H.M.S. Sarnia, the ship which had hit John's vessel did all they could and picked up many

survivors, but sadly all too few, for approximately 130 men drowned. H.M.S. Sarnia was also a requisitioned ferry which had been built in 1910 for the London and South Western Railway. In war service she became an armed boarding steamer, with a displacement of 1498 tons and a top speed of 20.5 knots, H.M.S. Sarnia was a much larger and more powerful vessel than H.M.S. Hythe, which had a maximum speed of only 12 knots. Subsequent enquiries following the tragic loss of H.M.S. Hythe revealed that both vessels made at least one change of course, but it seems that neither slowed down. The H.M.S. Sarnia struck the port side of H.M.S. Hythe with such force that its bows cut halfway through the ship. That brought the H.M.S. Hythe to a dead stop and caused its mast to collapse on the awning. Numerous deaths were caused instantly by the bows of H.M.S. Sarnia and the collapsing mast, but those remaining fared little better. The massive damage caused H.M.S. Hythe to sink rapidly. It was all over in approximately ten minutes. Many soldiers were drowned trapped under the awning, or in the cabs of their vehicles. Most of the others had little or no time to gain the ships railings and throw off their kit before they were in the sea. Panic reigned as soldiers scrambled for the few life-jackets that could be grabbed before the ship sank. Most of those who jumped overboard were drowned in the chaos that followed, and sadly only a lucky few were able to scramble from one vessel to the other without even getting their feet wet.

