

Sholto George Watson Douglas, 19th Earl of Morton and the Rector of Goldhanger

The Reverend Frederick Thomas Gardner was rector of St. Peter's Church, Goldhanger, 'A Beautiful Historic Essex Village' on the Blackwater Estuary, and All Saints Church, Little Totham from 1893 to 1936. He was the last rector to hold the Perpetual Advowson of the joint Goldhanger and Little Totham Benefice, and his family were prosperous enough to purchase the Rectory and the surrounding Glebe land in the village. . .

He suffered from motor neuron disease for much of his life but being wheelchair-bound did not preclude him and his wife from making numerous excursions abroad and to the far north of Scotland. He was one of the group of Goldhanger residents who went to Spitzbergen several times to prospect for minerals from 1904 onwards. He was a man of strong convictions, preaching from his wheelchair in St Peter's and writing in the parish magazine with great passion. He lost one of his sons in the Great War and was largely responsible for building what the East Anglian Daily Times referred to in 1939 as the impressive and noble war memorial at the front of St Peter's Church.

He harangues his parishioners through the magazine in October 1898 when one can sense his irritation. 'Where are the men on Sunday mornings? I need not ask. They shuffle in at the fag end of an idle day and think this is fitting to the Lord.' In September 1899, he wrote of the first signs of his illness: 'My dear people, I have been amongst you for nearly six years and for the first time within that period I am about to take a prolonged holiday, partly under doctor's orders after an acute attack of rheumatism, I am to go as the private chaplain to the Earl of Morton for eight weeks at the seat of Congalen Ardgour in N.W.Scotland.' From there he wrote telling his parishioners about the grandeur and the magnificence of the scenery, the people who attended the services and the highland games, all of which must have seemed part of another world to the people of Little Totham.

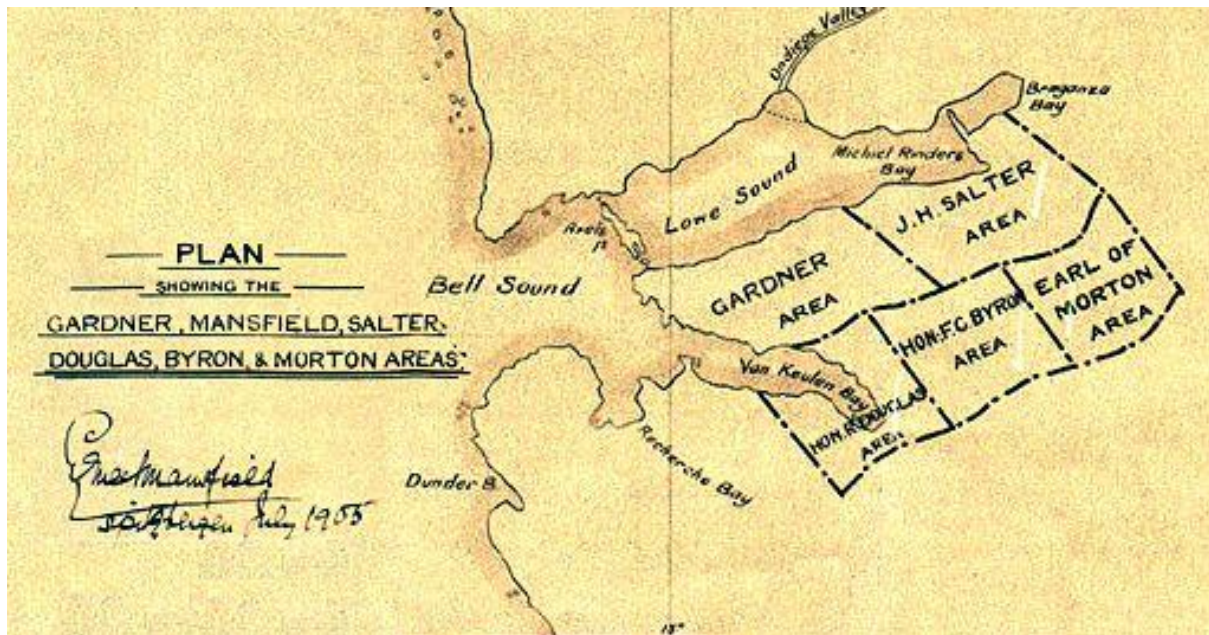
How Conaglen came to be Gardner's calling, I have not determined, but it appears to have been the start of an enduring friendship. In 1900, he returned to Scotland for a 'prolonged visit', presumably visiting Conaglen.

In 1902, he started a 'Coal Club' to support the poor of both villages and two years later visited Spitzbergen as a holiday, and was there again in 1905, by now clearly interested in the coal mining prospects, although he may have set out as a gold prospector - and did get involved in mining marble as well. Was 'holiday' just a ruse to appease his parishioners?

The map shows areas of Spitsbergen claimed by our great grandfather, the Rector, and their friends. More on Camp Morton can be found in the Douglas Archives, with the associated photograph album.

He may have been on The Nile at the same time as the Mortons were in Egypt.

The attached extract from the Times in 1936 shows that his Spitzbegen visits did not always go smoothly. It also opens a new porthole on our great grandfather's naval career.



Camp Morton, sometimes referred to as Camp Douglas, was to the north of Bell Sound. The story of the Douglas involvement in mineral mining in Spitzbergen should be the subject of another note.

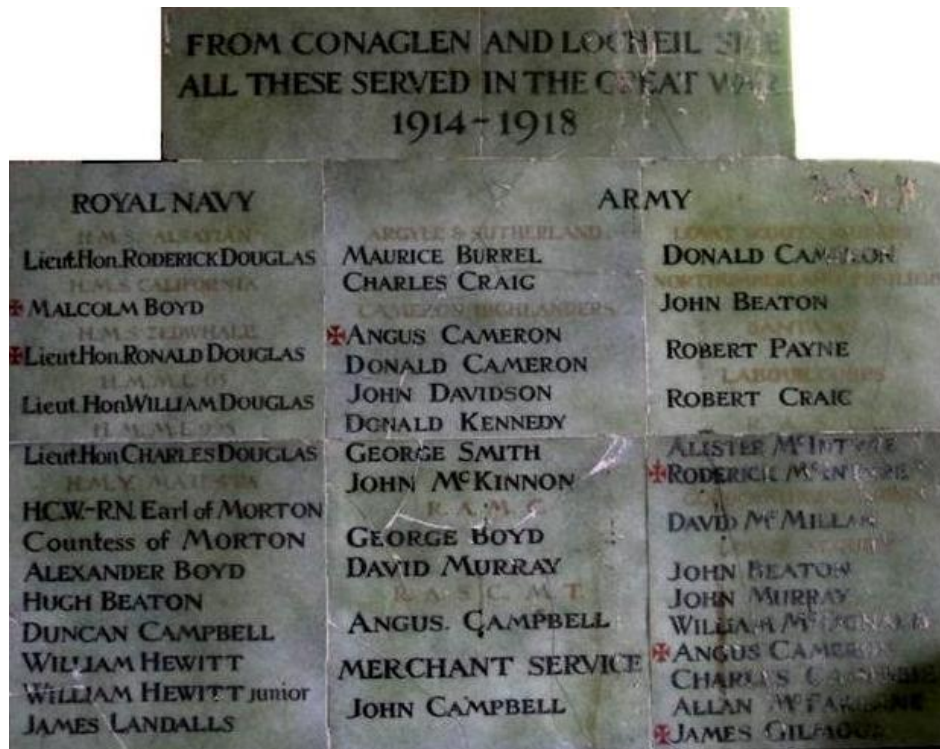
THE REV. F. T. GARDNER

The Rev. Frederick Thomas Gardner, who had been rector of Goldhanger and Little Totham, Essex, since 1893, died at his rectory on Friday at the age of 72.

He was the youngest son of the late Mr. Thomas Gardner, of Woodcote Manor, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, and was educated at Bromsgrove School and Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he graduated in 1888. During his time there he gained a Blue for throwing the hammer and played Rugby for the University, though a broken collar-bone prevented his appearing in the University match. He subsequently played Association football for Cambridgeshire. After preparation at Ely Theological College, he was ordained in 1889 to the curacy of St. Augustine's, Wisbech, and later removed to Kettering. He held the rectory of Goldhanger and Little Totham, Essex, for 43 years, covering with his predecessor a period of 89 years. In 1894 he married Ethel Mary, daughter of the late Mr. Samuel Pocock, of Wisbech.

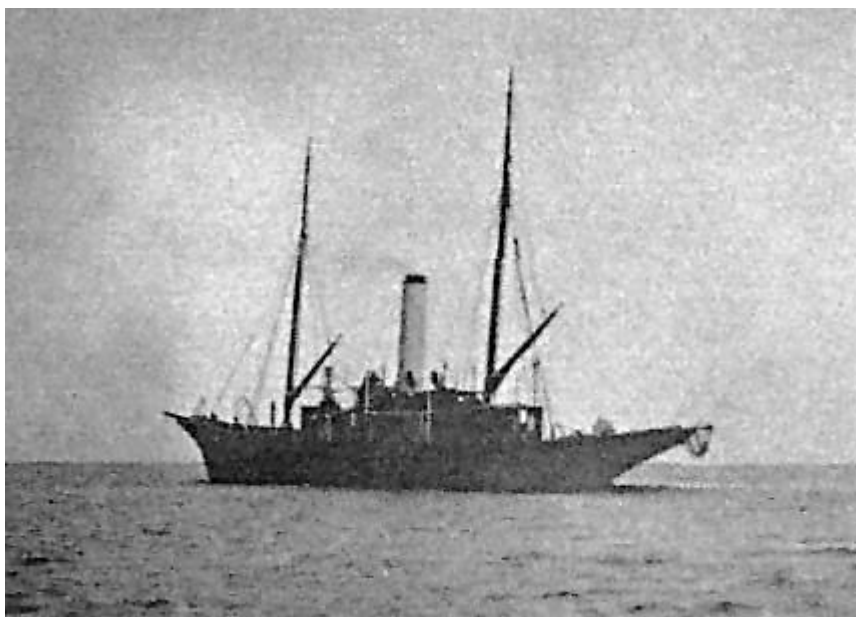
In the early years of the present century he conducted a series of expeditions to the Arctic, in which he was associated with the late Dr. J. H. Salter, of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, who gives some account of the venture in his "Diary and Reminiscences." On one occasion Mr. Gardner crossed the Arctic Ocean with one Englishman and two Norwegians in a 52ft. sailing boat which was wrecked on reaching Spitsbergen and all hands were rescued by an American whaler. His work there led to the formation of the Northern Exploration Company for the purpose of exploiting the great resources of Spitsbergen, but early expectations were never realized. He suffered many privations there which largely contributed to his lameness in later life. During the War he joined the late Lord Morton's yacht in a mine-sweeping expedition operating on the west coast of Scotland. His second son was commissioned to the Grenadier Guards in 1915, and was killed in action the following year. During the last years of his life he travelled extensively in many parts of the world. His widow, one son, and two daughters survive him.

Once a regular worshipper in the Ardgour Kirk, regular but not frequent, I sat in the family pew opposite the Conaglen war memorial and noted the inscription under the heading 'HMY Majesta': 'HCW-RN Earl of Morton', and below that: 'Countess of Morton'. Over the years, I have wondered idly what HCW-RN might mean.



The memorial once was on the walls of the Conaglen chapel, where The Reverend Gardner would have led the worship. My father was involved in the deconsecrating process, and I recall the candelabra and a brass eagle lectern being in our home in Murrayfield, Edinburgh, before being placed in St Mary's, Dalmahoy.

I was aware that Lord Morton and his sons had served in the navy in the Great War, and knew something of the younger generation's activities, including those of my grandfather. Recently, I learnt from a genealogist that Lord Morton was a Lieutenant in the Midlothian Yeomanry and that he was Head Coast Watcher, Royal Navy at sea between 1914 and 1916.



Majesta, when named John Fell

Majesta was a 170-ton steam yacht built in 1899 as the SY Ziska. After time as a fishery cruiser, she was re-fitted as a steam yacht and re-named. Majesta was purchased from Montague Grahame-White and others by Lord Morton in August 1913. He was designated managing owner of the Majesta between 1913 and 1927 when it was sold to James Napier.

She was requisitioned in March 1940 and was converted for use as a Harbour Defence Patrol boat in the Nore Command with an armament of 12-pounders. In July 1941 she was reallocated for use as a Mobile Mark VI Balloon Base at Aultbea, but in March 1943 was converted for use as an accommodation ship for rescue-tug personnel at Campbeltown.

It is unlikely that, as reported in Gardner's obituary, Majesta was employed as a 'minesweeper' but it seems she was used by Lord Morton for his Coastal Watch duties. I am aware that the Irish had a formal Coastal Watch organisation during the war, but have not found records on Britain having similar. I also wonder what duties Lady Morton, Hon. Helen Ponsonby, daughter of Baron de Mauley, performed on board, though I believe that she was a trained nurse. Was The Reverend Gardner on a day trip? Or did the crew require spiritual support for their arduous duties?

There is still a lot to learn about my great grandfather's naval career, and I would welcome any contributions.

A Naval Family

Also commemorated on the Conaglen memorial:

- Hon. Charles William Sholto Douglas was the 2nd son of Sholto George Watson Douglas, 19th Earl of Morton.

He served as a Lieutenant in the 4th Battalion Oxfordshire Light Infantry (Second Lieutenant. Dated 7th December, 1898) and was a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in World War I.

- Hon. Archibald Roderick Sholto Douglas was the 3rd son. (Was he known as Rory?)

He was a Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, late Leicestershire Imperial Yeomanry and Lovat's Scouts, (1883-1971); Commissioned Second Lieutenant, Leicestershire Imperial Yeomanry, 9.11.1901; Lieutenant, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, 9.8.1916. He is listed on the Conaglen memorial as serving on HMS Alsation.

- Hon. William Sholto Douglas, my grandfather, was the 4th son. He served as a Lieutenant in the navy during the war, mostly serving on M.L. (Motor Launch) boats in the Firth of Forth. He reputedly was responsible for sinking a submarine, perhaps by using a 'Q-boat'.

- Hon. Ronald John Sholto Douglas was the youngest son.

He served in the First World War as a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. He was invested as an Officer, Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.).



HMML65 commanded by William



HMS Meg was renamed Zedwhale and commanded by Ronald.

On 15th November 1918, Zedwhale, commanded by Lt Ronald Douglas, accompanied HMML 65, commanded by his brother, William, was ordered to collect Admiral Meurer, Commander of the German High Seas Fleet, and take him to Admiral Beatty on HMS Queen Elizabeth to arrange the surrender. Zedwhale may also have been involved in 'Q-boat' activities.

William Douglas
12 November 2020