

## STAFF CAPTAIN W. E. ARCHDEACON, R.N. 1839-1893

William Edwin Archdeacon, a leading naval cartographer, moved to Tenby in the 1880s, taking a house in Heywood Mount. In 1886 he rented no3 Lexden Terrace at £ 50 per annum. In 1891 he was living there with wife, daughter, son-in law (GE Hamnett, an army captain), granddaughter (Nina); another naval staff commander and his wife were visiting and they had two servants and a nursemaid. Archdeacon died on 23rd January 1893 and was buried in Tenby.

Born in Gosport in 1839, the son of a naval instructor, Archdeacon entered the Navy in 1854, serving in *H.M.S. Dauntless* in the Baltic and the Black Sea during the Crimean war. He joined the surveying service in 1857 and was made a navigating lieutenant in 1865. In 1866 he joined the Cape-of-Good-Hope survey taking charge at the end of 1867. This survey was concluded in 1872 when Archdeacon and his party were transferred to Western Australia to begin the survey of its coasts. In February 1880, the schooner *Meda*, built and equipped conjointly by the Imperial and colonial Governments, was ready, and Archdeacon sailed her out to arrive at the Swan River some six months later.



The vessel is the *Meda*, the one the family came to West Australia on in 1880, the same vessel had just been t

Archdeacon, promoted to staff commander in 1875, returned home in 1882 and assumed command of the west coast of England survey, using the hired vessel *Knight Errant*. He surveyed in the Bristol Channel, Carmarthen and Cardigan Bays, in Ireland, Cork, Lough Foyle, and Dublin Bay; and in Scotland, the Firth of Clyde, Lamlash Harbour, and Campbeltown Loch. In 1887 his surveys included the Goodwin Sands and Heligoland. He was promoted to staff captain in 1892, but his death came early the next year, upon which it was commented that it had been brought

about by his devotion to duty in Insisting on superintending surveying operations while very ill.

His grand-daughter, Nina Hamnett, was a gifted artist born in 3 Lexden Terrace, Tenby, on Valentine's Day in 1890. She died in 1956 after a career as the legendary queen of bohemia in London and Paris. Her circle included Sickert, Wyndham Lewis, the Sitwells, and the Bloomsbury Group. She was a close friend of Modigliani and had love affairs with Gaudier-Brzeska and Roger Fry. Her work is in the National Portrait Gallery and the Tenby Museum. She described her grandfather as follows:

*My Grandfather was a remarkable man and if he had only lived, he died in 1893, we would all not have got into so much trouble. Any artistic talent that I have I inherited from him. He 'was a naval officer and did all the surveying in the 'seven ties of Heligoland, Western Wales, and Western Australia. He drew all the maps himself with beautiful drawings of islands and little landscapes. I believe that they are still in use at the Admiralty. In those days naval officers took their wives and families with them when they went abroad. They sailed to Australia in a sailing ship with two masts; this took three months, Perth was then a convict settlement and all the servants were convicts. My Grandfather bought for a few hundred pounds land that is now the main street of Perth; he sold it; for a few thousand pounds. When they sailed back there was a terrible storm and one mast was washed overboard and they knelt down and said their prayers; a shark followed the ship and the second mate went mad and jumped overboard. They got home safely, however. My Grandmother was a Canadian and was one of three very beautiful sisters; she met my Grandfather when he was in Canada with his ship and married him. One of her ancestors was Joseph Howe, who federated the Canadian States and had a dispute with Mr. Gladstone, who was forced to apologize (Dictionary of National Biography), She had many ancestors; in fact there was no end to the ancestors who came over on that very overcrowded ship, the Mayflower. She was what the Americans would describe as "dumb".*

Sources: Census, Bill Kitson, Nina Hamnett's biography (Laughing Torso – Hamnett; fp1932; Kessinger Publishing 2004).