

## H.M.V.S. Cerberus



## The Soup Tureen Mystery

**THE MYSTERY OF THE**

***CERBERUS* SILVER SOUP TUREEN.**

**A SEQUEL TO THE FATAL ACCIDENT TO A BOAT'S  
CREW OF THE *CERBERUS* AT QUEENSCLIFF,  
BY THE EXPLOSION OF A TORPEDO ON  
SATURDAY, THE 5th. MARCH 1881.**

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# A SEQUEL TO THE FATAL ACCIDENT TO A BOAT'S CREW OF THE CERBERUS AT QUEENSCLIFF, BY THE EXPLOSION OF A TORPEDO ON SATURDAY, 5TH. MARCH, 1881.

(For an account of the accident read pages 6 to 13 of "A RECORD OF SOME EVENTS WHICH OCCURRED ON HMVS CERBERUS", VOL. I, which is available at the Sandringham and District Historical Society, Waltham Street, Sandringham).

## THE SEQUEL.

On the 16th. November, 1881 a silver soup tureen was presented to James Arthur Thompson by Captain Mandeville, and the crew of *HMVS Cerberus* and the electricians who lectured on Torpedo Subjects to members of the crew of *HMVS Cerberus*.

The inscription on the silver soup tureen reads –

*H.M.V.S. CERBERUS*  
16TH. NOVEMBER, 1881.

PRESENTED TO J.A. THOMPSON  
AS A MARK OF ESTEEM FROM

C.T. MANDEVILLE	K.L. MURRAY
O. RICHARDS	J. BREAKS
J.D. DOYLE	J. TUBB
W.A. HOLMES	A. MAHLER
R.M. COLLINS	E.J. HAYSMANS
R. MALCOLMSON	J. FROGLEY
A. HARROW	J. NELSON
T.J. BEATTY	H. SCHREIBER
A.M. HOUSTON	

RECORDED BELOW IS A SUMMARY OF THE EVENTS THAT PRECEDED THE PRESENTATION OF THE SILVER SOUP TUREEN TO JAMES ARTHUR THOMPSON.

**23RD. MARCH, 1881.** A Government Enquiry commenced –

"A Board was appointed to enquire into the circumstances connected with, and to discover the cause of the fatal accident to a Boat's Crew of the *Cerberus* at Queenscliff, by the explosion of a Torpedo". (The term "torpedoes" as used in 1881, would be referred to in 1998 as electrically detonated mines). (See pages 37 to 85 of "A Record of Some Events Which Occurred on *HMVS Cerberus*", Vol. I).

Members of the Board of Enquiry –

Joseph Bosisto, Esq., M.L.A., in the Chair.  
R.L.J. Ellery, Esq., F.R.S.,  
S.W. McGowan, Esq.,  
J. Cosmo Newbery, Esq.,  
Captain James Phelan.

The following witnesses gave evidence before the Board : –

COLLINS, LIEUTENANT R., R.N.  
DOYLE, MR. JAMES DRUMMOND.  
DUFRESSE, M.A. AUGEY.  
HOLMES, MR. WILLIAM ALFRED.  
HOUSTON, MR. ALEXANDER MUIR.  
JASPER, JAMES.  
MANDEVILLE, CAPTAIN C.T.  
MURRAY, MR. K.L.  
RICHARDS, MR. O.  
TUBB, JAMES.  
WAGEMANN, CAPTAIN.  
WHITE, JOHN.

**28TH. MARCH, 1881.** Mr. Kynaston L. Murray of the Torpedo Corps, gave evidence before the board of Enquiry, and produced a syllabus of the present quarter's work relating to the Papers that were read during the lectures on batteries and circuits.

The Subjects of the Papers were listed, also the names of those who read the Papers, : –

MR. MURRAY.  
MR. DOYLE.  
MR. MAHLER.  
MR. SCHRIEBER.  
MR. BEATTY.  
MR. HAYSMANS.  
MR. HOUSTON.  
MR. GROVES.  
MR. HOLMES.

WHEN THE LIST OF NAMES OF THOSE WHO GAVE EVIDENCE AND THE LIST OF NAMES OF THOSE WHO READ PAPERS TO THE ELECTRICIANS IN THE TORPEDO CORPS ARE STUDIED, IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT MOST OF THE NAMES THAT APPEAR ON THE SILVER SOUP TUREEN APPEAR ON THE AFORE-MENTIONED LISTS.

Therefore, it is believed that members of the crew of *HMVS Cerberus* and members of the Torpedo Corp who were involved in the fatal torpedo explosion at Queenscliff presented the silver soup tureen to James Arthur Thompson.

The next question to be answered is – **WHAT ROLE DID MR. JAMES ARTHUR THOMPSON PLAY IN THE LIVES OF THOSE WHOSE NAMES APPEAR ON THE SILVER SOUP TUREEN?**

The answer to this riddle appears on page 60 of "A Record of Some Events Which Occurred on *HMVS Cerberus*", Vol. I.

**29TH. MARCH, 1881.** Mr. Kynaston L. Murray, Head of the Torpedo Corps, was further examined by the Board.

Mr. Murray was asked under whose instruction he boarded the Cerberus prior to sailing to Queenscliff. He replied – "It was by request of Captain Mandeville under a written instruction from the paymaster and secretary of the department".

The next question was – "Signed by whom?"

Mr. Murray replied – "**BY MR. THOMPSON, THE PAYMASTER, WHO ACTS AS CAPTAIN'S SECRETARY**".

**The conclusion is that Mr. James Arthur Thompson, who had a reputation for helping anyone in need, and was the Captain's Secretary, must have assisted Captain Mandeville, the Crew of the Cerberus, and the Torpedo Corps, through the traumatic experience of giving evidence before the Board of Enquiry into the deaths of 5 men as a result of the accidental torpedo explosion. It is most likely that, as a consequence of the help given by Mr. James Arthur Thompson, the Cerberus Crew and Torpedo Corps expressed their gratitude by presenting Mr. Thompson with an inscribed silver soup tureen.**

## **WHY WAS THE HISTORY OF THE SILVER SOUP TUREEN A MYSTERY?**

In October, 1998, the Grand–daughter of James Arthur Thompson – Mrs. Di. Barnott of Hampton, Victoria, mentioned to Graeme Disney, also of Hampton, that her family had in its possession a silver soup tureen with the afore–mentioned inscription on it, however, they had no idea why the silver soup tureen had been presented to her Grand–father.

Graeme Disney, in turn, spoke to members of the Joy family of Sandringham who had photo–copied the 1881 Government Enquiry into the torpedo explosion at Queenscliff.

Members of the Joy family were able to research the 1881 Government enquiry document to find the names which appeared on the silver soup tureen.

When Mrs. Di. Barnott visited members of the Joy family at their home on Saturday, 23rd. October, 1998, she kindly gave permission for the silver soup tureen to be photographed and also provided data and references which revealed the important position held by her Grand–father at the turn of the century.

Mr. James Arthur Thompson was a native of London, England, and arrived in Williamstown, Victoria in 1864, at which time he was 17 years of age. He worked on small vessels in the bay until he joined the Railway Department, from which he transferred to the Defence Department.

He became associated with the clerical division of the Victorian Naval Forces, occupying a post of pay officer in H.M. Victoria and Cerberus, and later the Permanent Naval Forces, until ultimately, (when the Commonwealth Government assumed sole control of the Defence Department), he became Chief Pay Master.

In 1905, James Arthur Thompson was a Member of the First Military Board of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Some twelve months prior to the death of James Arthur Thompson, the King of England – Edward VII, awarded him the Imperial Service Order (I.S.O.), as a mark of merit for services rendered in connection with the Colonial Forces.

The honour was emphasised at Williamstown by the Town Council, Williamstown Cricket Club, Williamstown Football Club, Williamstown Baseball Club and other associations when an illuminated address, in book form, was presented to him.

James Arthur Thompson, aged 62 years, died on the 22nd. December, 1909, as the result of the bursting of a blood vessel on the brain. For over 45 years he had been a resident of Williamstown, and most intimately identified with the town, mainly in the direction of athletic sport, chiefly cricket. During the last two to three years of his life he had exhibited a pronounced enthusiasm for baseball.

He was a resident of The Strand, Williamstown at the time of his death, and was survived by his wife Kate Marion Thompson, née Dobbin, and seven children.

His burial service was conducted by Revs. G.S. Cross and H.A. Brooksbank of the Anglican Church and the pall bearers were Commonwealth Naval Commandant Creswell C.M.G.; Commander Tickell; State Commandant, Colonel Stanley; Colonels Wallach and Legge; the Mayor of Williamstown, (Cr. Wymark); Fleet Engineer Breaks; and Mr. J. Davies, late Manager Australian Bank. The funeral was of a semi-naval character, the coffin being conveyed to the Williamstown Cemetery on a gun carriage drawn by the men of the Williamstown Naval Depot.

**THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXTRACT FROM "MEMORIES" BY PHYLLIS SKENE, NEE THOMPSON – DAUGHTER OF JAMES ARTHUR THOMPSON AND HIS WIFE KATE MARION THOMPSON, NEE DOBBIN.**

Phyllis Skene, née Thompson, was born 6th. April, 1901 and died in 1985.

This reference refers to the day prior to the death of her father – James Arthur Thompson, the day of his death, and the funeral.

"When father died after a stroke lasting one day, Kitty and myself were sent into the Breakes Family next door to stay the night. I got up next morn. and saw their flag at half mast, and said "Oh! Daddy died", to Kit.

Mrs. Breakes would not let Kit and self watch the huge funeral with gun-carriage, sailors and mounted soldiers etc., but we saw a bit and heard everything. (Coffin covered with Union Jack)".

END OF EXTRACT

**Noteworthy is the fact that the surname "Breaks" appears regularly in matters relating to the Cerberus.**

**James Breaks, then about 20 years of age, was one of the three junior engineers aboard the Cerberus when it sailed from England to Australia in 1870/1871.**

**Fleet Engineer Breaks was a pall bearer at the funeral of James Arthur Thompson in 1909.**

**IT WAS SUSEQUENTLY LEARNED THAT THE  
SILVER SOUP TUREEN WAS PRESENTED TO  
JAMES ARTHUR THOMPSON BY THE H.M.V.S.  
CERBERUS PERSONNEL ASSOCIATED WITH THE  
FATAL ACCIDENT AT QUEENSCLIFF ON THE  
DAY JAMES ARTHUR THOMPSON MARRIED  
KATE MARION DOBBIN – THE 16th. NOVEMBER, 1881.**

**THE FOLLOWING PAGE CONTAINS A COPY OF  
THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE OF JAMES ARTHUR  
THOMPSON AND KATE MARION DOBBIN.**

**NOTE: THE OCCUPATION OF JAMES ARTHUR  
THOMPSON IS RECORDED ON THE MARRIAGE  
CERTIFICATE – "PAYMASTER *CERBERUS* V.R.N."**

224	St. John's Church Williamstown	James Arthur Thompson	Bachelor	—	London, England
	November 16 <sup>th</sup> 1881	Kate Marion Dobbin	Spinster	—	Williamstown

I, Thomas W. Benjamin B.A., being Officiarius in Ministerio  
do hereby certify that I have, this day, at St. John's Church, Williamstown duly  
celebrated Marriage between James Arthur Thompson, of Williamstown  
and Kate Marion Dobbin, of Williamstown after Notice  
and Declaration duly made and published, as by law required (and with the written consent of—)

Dated this sixteenth day of November 1881  
Signature of Minister, Registrar, or other Officer Thomas W. Benjamin B.A.

Bymaster, Convent, S. R. D.	34	Williamstown	Williamstown	Clarke Thompson	Gentleman
—	22	Williamstown	Williamstown	Martha Ann Pope William Dobbin Anne Agnes Holland	Book-keeper

Marriage, by license, was solemnized between us { James Arthur Thompson  
according to the rites of the Church of England { Kate Marion Dobbin  
Witnesses { Charles Leonard Dobbin  
Robert Milledale Collins





The silver soup tureen presented to J. A. Thompson as a mark of esteem by men associated with H.M.V.S. *Cerberus*, 16th, November, 1881.





The names of those who presented the silver soup tureen to J. A. Thompson are inscribed on the lid of the tureen.





Above: Illuminated address presented to J. A. Thompson by the Councillors of the Town of Williamstown on being awarded the Imperial Service Order, 1908.

Below: Silver Soup Tureen presented to J. A. Thompson by the men of H.M.V.S. *Cerberus*, 16th, November, 1881.





Above: Illuminated address presented to J. A. Thompson by the Officers, Petty Officers and the Men of the Victorian Division of the Commonwealth Naval Forces, 1908.

Below: J.A. Thompson was a member of the Commonwealth of Australia First Military Board, 1905. J. A. Thompson – Front row, extreme right.





Above: James Arthur Thompson

Below: Kate Marion Thompson and her husband James Arthur Thompson.

