

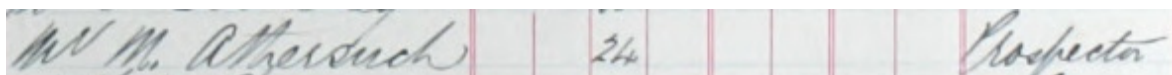
## **JESSE ATHERSYCH (a.k.a. JAMES ATHERSUCH), 1873 – 1930**

James Athersuch was born in Foleshill near Coventry in 1873 and was christened Jesse Athersych, son of James Potter Athersych and Elizabeth (nee Palmer). James Potter Athersych had like generations before him started work as a Loom Weaver but later had become a Policeman in Rugby where he is reputed to have been responsible for the last man ever to be put in stocks! By the time Jesse was born his father was a labourer but by 1881 was railway crossing keeper at Bedlam Crossing in Coventry where he remained until his death in 1905. James was a religious man and joined the Folehill Independent Chapel in 1869 where he was at one time involved with the running of the Sunday school. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1866 he married Elizabeth Palmer, a cotton winder, at St Lawrence Foleshill.

Jesse had an elder sister, Emma Jane (b.1867) and brother, Fred (b. 1870), and two younger sisters Sarah Elizabeth (b.1879) and Margaret Annie (b. 1880). The family at first lived in Bacon's Fields in Foleshill but had moved to Tinsley's Lane by 1881, and by 1891 to 1 Field View, Foleshill.

By 1891 Jesse was working as a fitter in a cycle factory possibly at the same factory as his brother Fred. Mass production of bicycles had only just begun and Coventry was for a time the centre of manufacture.

What Jesse did between 1891 and 1900 is not known for sure but there is a family story which my father told me that he "ran away to sea" when he was young and returned with riches which he poured onto the kitchen table. His exploits did not find favour with the family who could not believe he had acquired his wealth honestly. There may be some truth in this story as listed amongst the passengers on the Gaul arriving at Southampton from Cape Town on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1898 was a prospector by the name of Mr M Athersuch, aged 24. I know of no other male Athersuch's of this age with the initial M and I wonder if this could in fact be an incorrect record of Jesse returning home after some years of seeking his fortune. The South African Gold Rush had started in 1886 but continued up until the start of the second Boer War in October 1899.



**Is this Jesse Athersuch incorrectly listed as a prospector in the passenger records of The Gaul?**

If this is true this is the first record of Jesse using the name Athersuch which he did throughout his adult life. According to his niece, Grace Mary Athersych (interviewed 15.8.1973) he adopted the name Athersuch because "everybody spelt it that way".

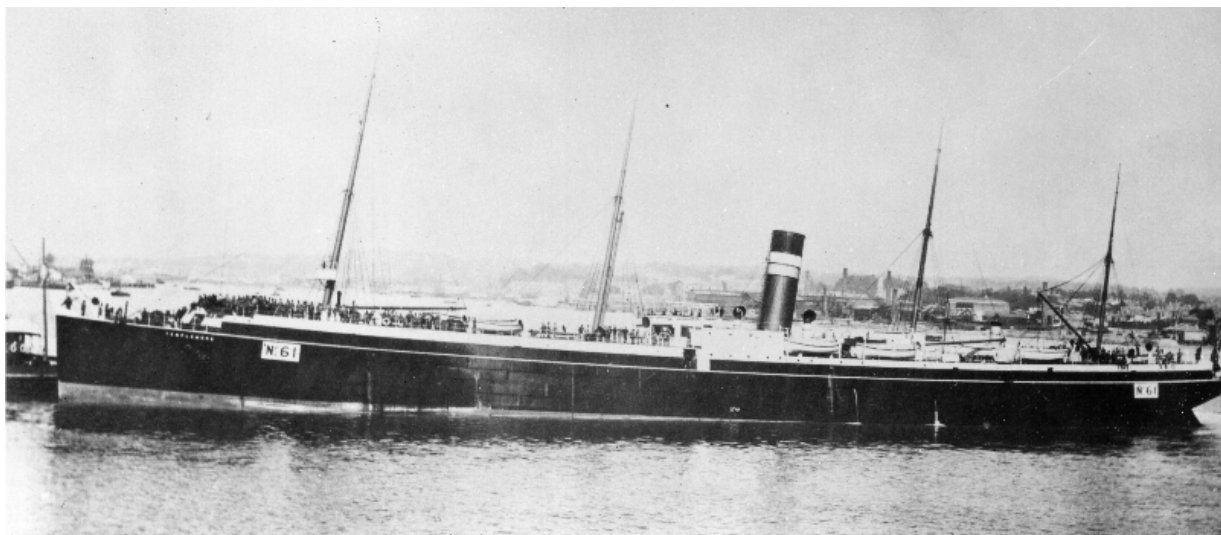
Whether he was the mystery prospector or not, for sure by September 1900, Jesse, now under the name James Athersuch, was working as a storekeeper, and later a purser, on board SS Templemore, so there is a possibility that he served on other vessels before this in order to work his way up to this position of responsibility. However, I have been unable to discover which ships these may have been.



**Southampton Docks c. 1906.**

This is how it would have been when James first sailed in the SS Templemore.

The SS Templemore was engaged in transporting troops between England, Australia and South Africa during the second Boer War during which she was also known as Troopship No.61.



**SS Templemore at an unknown location as troopship no. 61**

Postcard ex-Princeton University Library

Lloyds List and Gazette records each journey that was made, and brief descriptions of the troops carried on these voyages were also recorded in newspapers in London and South Africa. The following extract records the departure of The Templemore on James's first voyage on this ship.

**The Times 13/09/00** *The Templemore, from Albert Docks, embarked at Southampton yesterday 5 officers, 154 men and 30 horses. She sails from Southampton today for Queenstown to embark 1 officer, 116 men of the /Wiltshire Regt., and 60 remounts. Lt.-Col. J.F.M. Fawcett, 5th Lancers is in charge.*

An account of life on board the Templemore was written by one of the officers of the Queensland Imperial Bushmen during one journey in 1901 from Brisbane to The Cape. A synopsis of this diary has subsequently been published and an extract follows:

*The men joined the Troop Transport "Templemore" on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March and, after being paraded on the wharf and allocated their messes (13 to a mess) the horses were loaded and duties assigned for their care. On The 6<sup>th</sup> March the Governor inspected the men and the ship moved from the wharf. The diary reveals that the 5<sup>th</sup> Contingent was accompanied on the voyage by the Premier of Queensland, The Hon.R. Philp.*

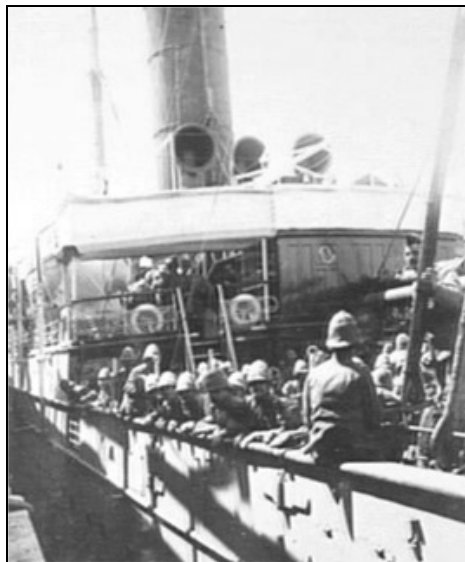
*Life on board the "Templemore" was probably like a holiday for most of the men, very few of whom would have been further afield than Brisbane from their hometowns before. The training, such as it was, continued during the voyage with deck drill and rifle practice shooting at floating objects. Much was made of the care and feeding of the horses. Each day permanent stable parties tended to the " eyes and feet " and reported condition. Other parties fed and watered the horses under the supervision of the Officers and the Veterinary Officer. Stables were cleaned daily and the horses groomed*

*The Cyclist Corps, not having any horses to look after seemed to be saddled... with permanent deck swabbing and sweeping duties.*

*...others were complaining that they were not getting enough meat to eat and the QuarterMaster was asked to investigate. It turned out that they were getting meat for Breakfast three days weekly, Porridge two days, Curry and Rice once and Fish on Friday. This was breakfast! Lunch was Soup followed by either Roast Beef or Roast Mutton. There was always Plum Pudding, Rice Pudding or Stewed Fruit. Perhaps there were some that wanted meat three times daily? There was always bread and jam for tea at 5 p.m. They were probably eating better than they would for many months to come.*

*The ship arrived at Capetown on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> March 1901 and after the men were medically inspected and the officer in charge of their disembarkation had boarded, the ship proceeded to Port Elizabeth.*

*On Monday 1 April 1901, the "Templemore" arrived at Port Elizabeth in Natal Province where they disembarked.*



**Soldiers on board a troopship, Capetown c. 1900**

A letter of recommendation signed by the Commander of the Templemore on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1901 shows that James left the ship at this time.



JOHNSTON LINE.



S.S. "Templemore" Southampton Aug 12<sup>th</sup> 1901

To Whom it may Concern

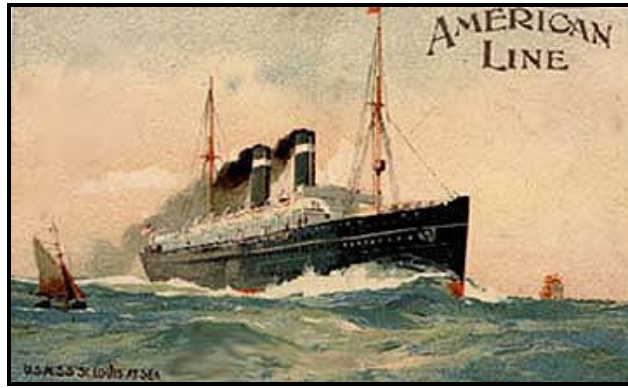
This Certifies that the bearer  
J. Ashersuch has served in the  
above Steamer under my Command  
while employed Loading for a period  
of Eleven months nine months in  
the Capacity of Purser & two months  
Storekeeper & can recommend him

as during the services of an  
energetic, strictly sober & in every  
way a competent servant.  
Mr Ashersuch leaves at his own  
request, & shall be glad at any time  
to reengage him. I am  
Commander

Letter of recommendation for Captain of SS Templemore

Subsequently, he worked aboard the American Line's SS St Louis which at this time was engaged as a passenger liner from Southampton to New York.





**SS St Louis**

**Note on the SS St Louis.**

*The SS St Louis was an 11,629 gross ship built by W. Cramp and Sons, Philadelphia in 1894 for the American Line. Her details were - length 535.5ft x beam 63ft., straight stem, two funnels, two masts, twin screw and a speed of 19 knots.*

A quasi-official report written by one of P&O's traveling inspectors on board the SS St Louis in 1902 from Southampton to New York gives a clear picture of live on board this trans-Atlantic liner.

*Left Southampton on 20th September, called at Cherbourg the same evening and embarked about thirty cabin and nearly a hundred steerage passengers, her total passenger list being:*

*1st Class--362 adults, 5 children*

*2d Class--156 adults, 8 children*

*Steerage--477 in all.*

*The ship has 351 berths 1st Class, 206 berths 2d class and is licensed to carry 649 persons in the steerage. The crew consists of 6 officers, 8 quarter masters, 43 deck hands, 30 Engineers Etc. 66 firemen, 21 oilmen, 48 stokers, and 125 in the purser's department. The ship's daily runs were respectively 300, 406, 398, 437, 431, 400, 444, and 236 miles. Arrived at New York on Sunday, 28th September, at 9 a.m.*

*Cabins: of the 170 staterooms, 1st Class, no less than 88 are inner ones, but all are well ventilated by an air trunk passing through with an opening in each cabin, the air begin exhausted in the usual way by fans. The majority of the cabins are four- berthed. On the promenade deck, there are 14 suites of bed-and-sitting rooms with bath and W.C. attached; the fares for these cabins vary, according to size and position from 80 to 115 pounds in the slack season and from 130 to 180 pounds in the full season.*

*I was told by the purser that they are always in great demand. The outer cabins are generally small, the inner ones being more roomy; no door curtains to any of the cabins, so that the doors must be invariably kept closed, which in hot weather would be very trying. The cabins were poorly supplied with cloak hooks, no chests of drawers or whatnots, but a small wardrobe in each.*

*The bunks are old-fashioned wooden ones, with wooden bottom- boards provided with an air bed only, no mattress. These are most uncomfortable for, after a time, the weight of the body forces the air to the sides and feet and one is lying with nothing but the bed tick over the hard boards! The switch of the electric light is so placed that one is within easy reach of every bunk, so that a passenger can turn the light on or off without rising.*

*A notice is posted in each cabin that the company is not responsible for money or valuables unless deposited with the purser; this is the only notice of any kind in the ship.*

*Enameled plates are affixed to the bulkheads at the foot of each companion, and in the alleyways, with the cabin numbers and arrows pointing in the direction. This is a very convenient direction and looks better than the cardboard notices used in our vessels. Saloon is large and plainly decorated in white and gold. It seats 370 people, double meals are unknown. !*

*Library, forward of saloon, furnished with six writing tables and comfortable lounges, well supplied with stationary. Smoking Room is very large. In the center there are tables with seats for four persons each, and settees all around, accommodating altogether 100 people with seats. The Bar is closed at 11 o'clock, lights extinguished at midnight. All transactions at the Smoking Room bar are in cash, the consumption of drinks enormous. Mineral waters are supplied in "splits" as well as the ordinary sized bottles. Two stewards are always 95 S in attendance in the Smoking Room. The Saloon, Smoking Room and passageways were all heated with steam-pipes.*

*Passengers are not allowed to use their own deck chairs, a stock of common folding chairs is kept on board and can be hired at one dollar for the voyage.*

*Baths etc: all on spar deck against the stoke-hold bulkhead, none on the ship's side. There are 10 ladies WC's and 16 for gentlemen; only 8 bath rooms, which are used indiscriminately by either sex. They are excessively cramped, hot and cold water is laid on but no shower, spray of another adjunct. Fresh water is not obtainable in bathrooms.*

*Servants were of all nationalities, mostly German, Swiss and Irish,. At table, one waiter is allowed for six passengers, all wore a numbered badge. The attendance was not particularly smart; the men were all very civil, but frequently engaged in conversation with the people they were waiting on; this appeared not to be considered improper. There were 8 stewardess's on the ship, of whom 2 were specially to look after ladies on deck; taking meals on deck was a very common practice.*

*Baggage: The American Line have a very good arrangement with the London Parcels Delivery Company for collecting baggage and forwarding to Southampton very similar to our own. The Baggage Master also attends at the railway station and takes delivery there of any package brought down by passengers the day previous to sailing. The ship (under American Law) is liable for loss or damage to baggage up to a limit of 20 pounds. All heavy packages and those not marked cabin are stowed in the hold, and cannot be got at on the voyage under any circumstances. (Weekly visit to the baggage room as the climate changed were a fixed routine on all P&O steamers of the period. Ed.) The trip being of such short duration there is no difficulty in passengers taking everything required in their cabin.*

*On arrival at New York, the Customs official came on board at the Quarantine Station, bringing declaration forms, which have to be filled in, signed, and sworn in their presence. This is done before the vessel gets to the wharf. Immediately she is along side, the baggage is discharged into the sheds and sorted alphabetically (labels for the purpose are supplied with the passage ticket), every pack age has to be opened for examination, but the landing and examination is most expeditiously performed.*

*Messing: The meal hours are: Breakfast, 8-10 a.m.; Lunch 1 p.m.; Dinner, 7p.m.; Childrens' meals in the saloon an hour earlier. 2d class: Breakfast, 8:30 a.m.; dinner, 1 p.m.; Tea, 5 p.m.; Supper 9 p.m. At eleven o'clock each morning, trays of sandwiches are handed 'round. Sandwiches of various kinds are kept on a sideboard in the Smoking Room all day.*

*A lavish table was kept, the menus in the usual American style, a curious mixture of dishes. All meals were served a la carte. The cooking, as a rule, good. The quality of the provisions, good, the oilmen's stores etc supplied by well-known English firms, Crosse & Blackwell, Huntley & Palmer, Moir, etc. The meat was of best quality but on more than one occasion, had been cooked without being properly thawed. The bread was good, rolls and great variety of fancy breads excellent & pastry poor. Fruit plentifully supplied, but of poor quality and often unripe. Tea and coffee fair. Ice wastefully used at meals and all other times. I am sending (per dispatch box) copies of the daily menu cards for your Superintendent Purser's inspection. Glass finger bowls supplied. Second Class accommodations were nearly all four-berth cabins, very plain and poorly furnished. Only three bathrooms. Seats at table for 200 persons. The officers's cabins were all on the bridge deck, they had a separate mess room and at no times mixed with the passengers!*

In April 1902 James joined the Union Castle Line's Carisbrook Castle in Southampton as an Assistant Bedroom Steward. Like the Templemore this vessel was being used as a troopship in support of the Boer War.

The following are extracts from contemporary accounts in The Times giving details of troops returning from South Africa after the war had finished in May that year.

**25/09/02**

*The Carisbrook Castle left for England Sept. 17, with the following on passage home:*

1/L.N. Lancs. - Lt.-Col. P. Palmes, Maj. G.A. Norcott, G.A. Faulder, Capts. M.A. Humphreys, R.R. Feilden, C.E.A. Jourdain, W.R. Lloyd, G.H. Wilde-Browne, T.H. O'Brien, F.J. Braithwaite, F.W. Woodward, E.C. Halton, Lts. A. McC. Webster, L.K. Darcy, R.T.C. Mace, R. Howard-Vyse, W.R. Goodwin, G.T. Body, 2/Lts. W.D. Hill, L.T. Allason, Capt. & Qm. H.J. Gill and 502 men

**08/12/02**

The Carisbrook Castle arrived Southampton from the Cape Saturday with about 160 troops.

James stuck at this job for less than a year and there is an entry in the ship's crew list that he was finally discharged on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1903 in Cape Town.

*Ship Carisbrook Castle*

## CERTIFICATES

Or Indorsements made by Consuls or by Officers in British Possessions Abroad.

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*Artistic departed on the 17<sup>th</sup> Jan: 1903  
and this day returned on charges  
reported in Amd.*

*17<sup>th</sup> Jan: 1903*

*Shipping Master*

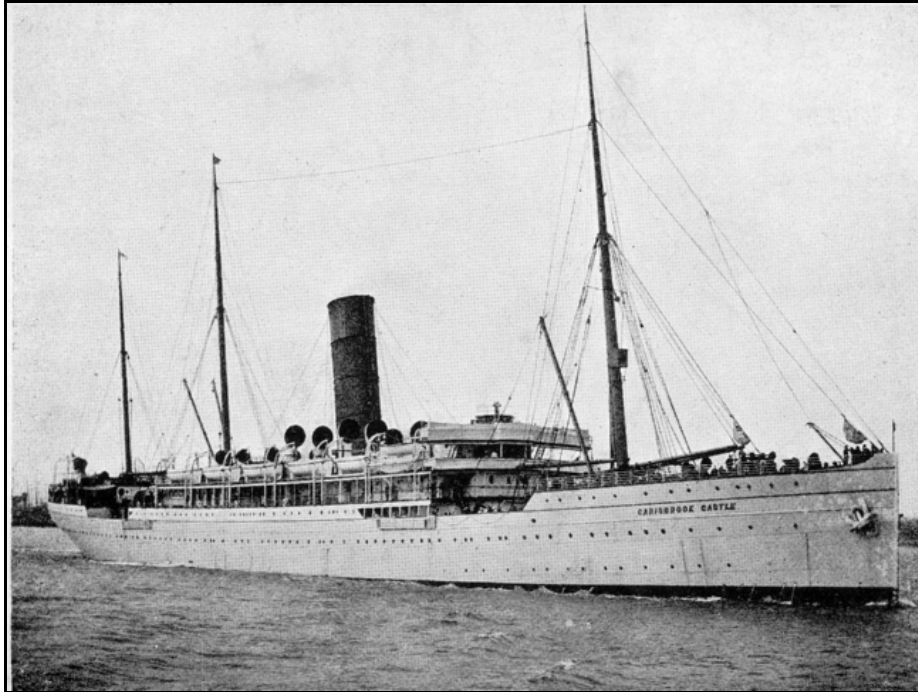
*Capetown 21<sup>st</sup> January 1903*

I certify that I have sanctioned  
the discharge of *J. M. Bailey (Asst Stew)*  
& *Hopkins (Stew)* *James Athersuch*  
(Asst Stew) *J. A. Innes (Stew)* by  
Inclusion of *Wages* *paid* *in my presence*  
also the *engagement* of *John*  
*Dowden* *Cook* *after terms of written*  
*agreement which he under-*  
*stands has signed in my presence*

*Shipping Master*

Agreement and Account of Crew for the Carisbrook Castle 21<sup>st</sup> January 1903 showing the Discharge of James Athersuch at Capetown.





**SS Carisbrook Castle – early 1900's**  
 "She was never a popular ship and rolled badly."  
 (From a postcard)

Shortly after this he appeared in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) working as a valet for Major Maurice Heany an American who had interests in gold mining in the country. How James met his employer is not known but maybe it was on one of his voyages to/from Southampton and The Cape. If the theory about him having been a prospector is true this may have added to his qualifications for the job.

There are numerous photographs of his life and times in Rhodesia which are now deposited in the Rhodes Library in Oxford. Amongst these is one of ships in Table Bay. Maybe this was taken by James on his arrival there in 1903. Some other photos are dated 1904 and there is a photograph of a partly completed Victoria Falls Bridge dated 1905.



**Table Bay, South Africa, probably c.1903**  
 (Photo taken by James Athersuch ; Rhodes Library, Oxford)



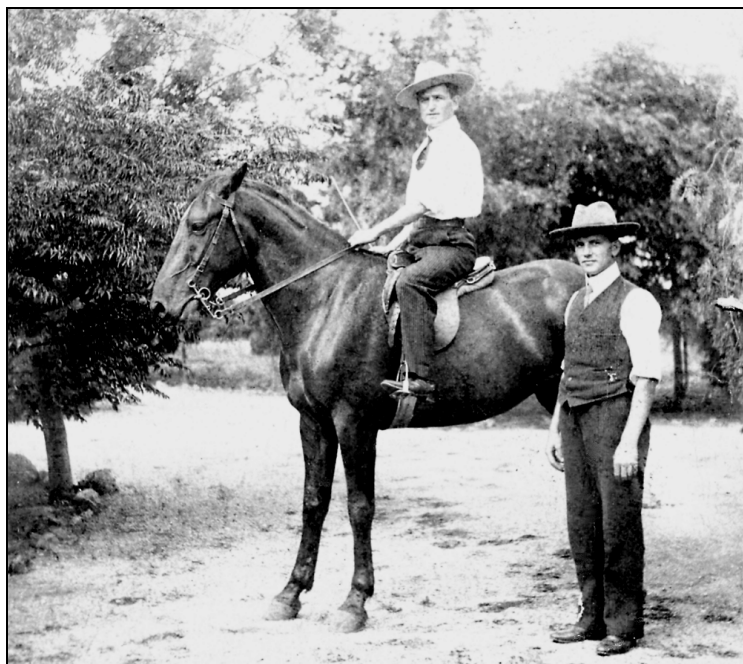
**Victoria Falls Bridge under construction, 1905.**

(Photo taken by James Athersuch; Rhodes Library, Oxford)



**James Athersuch (2<sup>nd</sup> from right) in Rhodesia c. 1905**

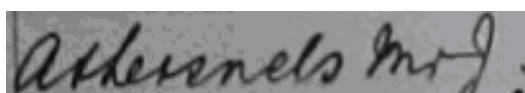
(Rhodes Library, Oxford)



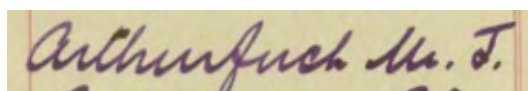
**One of the postcards sent by James to Nellie in 1904 showing James in the saddle.**

(Rhodes Library, Oxford)

The family story is that James traveled the world with Major looking for a cure for an eye problem. Certainly there is evidence from passenger lists that they traveled frequently together between Cape Town and Southampton. Their first recorded trip was in 1903 when they were passengers on the Kildonnan Castle arriving in Southampton on 26<sup>th</sup> December less than a year since James' discharge from the Carisbrook Castle. James's entry in the ships passenger list is barely recognisable as it is spelt Athersnells! (Spelling errors of the Athersuch surname are frequent today and James also appears to have suffered from the same problem; in 1907 a passenger list records him as Arthurfuch!). Heany always traveled 1<sup>st</sup> class while James made do with 2<sup>nd</sup> class. Not bad really as the majority of passengers traveled third class.



**James' name in the passenger list of the Kildonnan Castle bound for Southampton from The Cape 26th December 1903.**



**James' name in the passenger list of the Kenilworth Castle bound for The Cape from Southampton on 9th November 1907.**

It was probably during this trip that they visited Woolpits, a large house on the outskirts of Nutfield, Surrey occupied at that time by Henry Thomas and Eleanor, Maurice Heany's younger brother and sister. It was here that James met Nellie Shephard who was then in service as a housemaid.

Nellie's parental home was nearby at no. 1 Coombe's Cottages where the family lived between 1893 and 1912, having previously been in a cottage in Nutfield High Street (now no. 44) since 1891 and in Hall Lands cottage before that from 1888. Her father



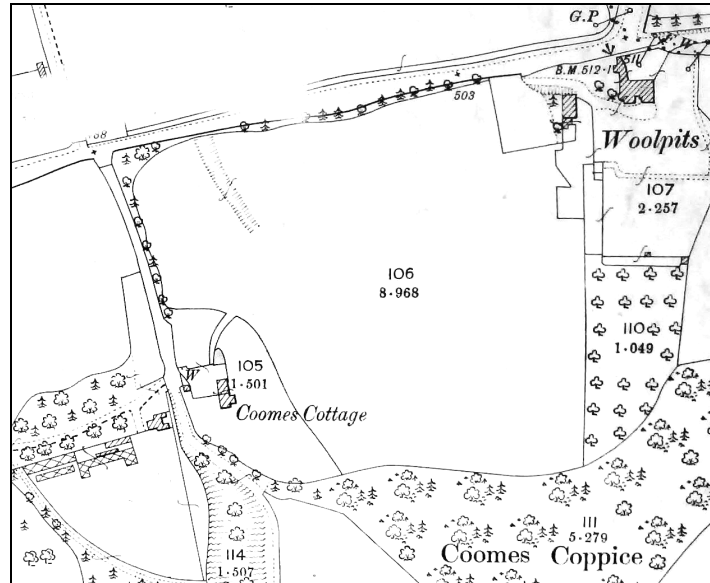
James and brother Frederick were employed on one of the local estates as gardener and groom, respectively.



Nutfield High Street c. 1905 where Nellie grew up

Woolpits	1			Henry L. Heany	Head
				Eleanor	Sister
				Sarah Griffith	Servant
				Nellie Shepherd	"
				Edith Brown	"
				Kate Robert	"
1 Coombe's Cottages	1			James Shepherd	Head
				<del>Eleanor</del>	Wife
				Eleanor	Wife
				Freddie	Son
				Gertrude	Son
				Florence	"
				Rupert	Son
Total of Schedules of					

Extract from the census 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901 recording Nellie as a servant at Woolpits (home of Henry Thomas Hean) and the other members of her family at home at 1 Coombe's Cottages



**OS map of 1895 showing Coomes (or Coomb's) Cottages home of the Shephard family and Woolpits, home of Henry Thomas Heany where James met Nellie**



**Woolpits (top right) with Nutfield Mill and Bletchingley Golf course in 1909**

James returned to Rhodesia on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1904 with Mr and Mrs Heany on board The Norman, but he had promised Nellie that he would come back for her. She said later that she didn't believe him.

James made several other trips back to England; in 1907 he accompanied Mr Heany on the Kinfauns Castle arriving Southampton 20<sup>th</sup> July and returning to The Cape aboard the Kenilworth Castle on 9<sup>th</sup> November. James and the Major arrived in Southampton from New York on 3rd May 1909 and from Cape Town aboard the Edinburgh Castle on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1910. It is almost certain that James took the opportunity to visit Nellie during these trips.

James and Nellie corresponded while he was abroad and some postcards which he sent to her have survived. On the cards they refer to each other as Nell and Jim. Cards dated 1905-1908 are from Rhodesia but others dated August 1911 are from Biarritz and San Sebastian, the latter recording that James attended a bullfight while he was

there. In Biarritz he appears to have been staying in the Hotel des Falaises Miramar which was at that time a centre for thallassotherapy, a treatment which promotes the healing and revitalising virtues of the sea. Maybe he was here accompanying the Major while he "took the cure".

Thomas and Eleanor Heany had left Woolpits by 1905 and Nellie had to find work elsewhere. Her brother Henry (b.1881) was by this time a footman for John Capel Hanbury an industrialist of Pontypool Park in Monmouthshire and by 1905 she also had obtained a position in the Hanbury household. Between 1905 and 1908 postcards sent by James were addressed to 3 Great Stanhope Street, the Hanbury's London address and sometimes forwarded to Pontypool Park indicating that Nellie traveled with the family to their country seat in Monmouthshire.



**Great Stanhope Street, early 1900s, London home of the Hanbury family for whom Nellie worked between 1905 and 1908**



**Pontypool Park c. 1910, home to the Hanbury Family for whom Nellie Shephard worked between 1905 and 1908**

The Great Stanhope Street address was bombed in WWII but at Pontypool the house survives as the St Alban's RC High School while the grounds are owned by Torfaen County Borough Council and known as the People's Park.





**John Capel Hanbury, owner of Pontypool Park until 1912**

In 1908 the Hanbury's leased Gordonstoun House in Morayshire (now the home of the famous public school) and from then on spent the summers almost entirely in Scotland and the winters in London although they retained ownership of Pontypool Park and paid occasional short visits there. The household servants from Pontypool transferred to Gordonstoun. A photograph of servants at Gordonstoun taken in 1908 shows a servant who could be Nellie, but there is no independent evidence that she actually went to Scotland. There is no record of Nellie in the English population census for 1911 suggesting that she may have been in Wales or Scotland at that time possibly with the Hanbury family. However, postcards sent by Jesse in 1911 were addressed c/o Mrs Schloss at Ardfield, Paignton, Devon which suggests that Nellie was either traveling with her employer or had changed positions again. At this time Ardfield was owned by the novelist and composer Fred Whishaw, so Mrs Schloss may have been the housekeeper to whom mail forwarded to servants would have been sent. Ardfield became the Amber House Hotel c.1983 and is located at 6 Roundham Road, Paignton.



**Ardfield (now the Amber House Hotel), Paignton where Nellie spent some time in 1911**

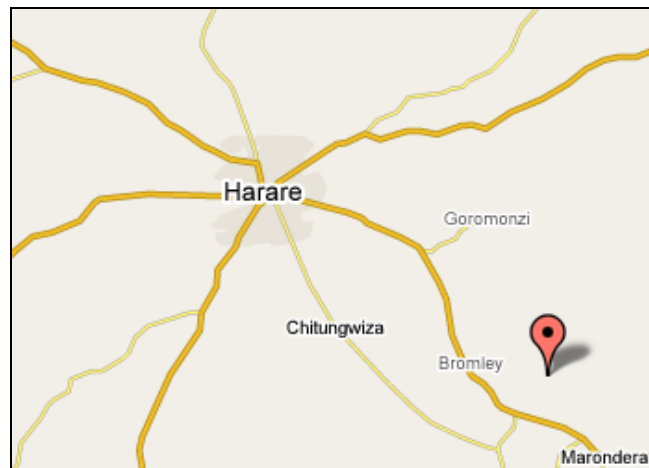
On leaving Heany's employment in 1912 James received an inscribed gold watch which is still working and in my possession. He returned (third class) from Cape Town aboard the Walmer Castle arriving in Southampton on 11<sup>th</sup> May.



**18 carat gold watch presented to James Athersuch by Major Maurice Heany in 1912**

**Note on Maurice David Heany (1853-1927).**

Captain (or Major as he was called in S Africa) Maurice Heany was an Irish American from Virginia. Cousin to Edgar Allan Poe, was six feet tall, had a fine head, auburn hair, was shy, sensitive, refined, quiet in speech, deliberate in manner, a remarkable man, smoked 10 to 12 long mild cigars a day. He was a West Point graduate and once a lieutenant in the United States Army but in about 1878 he went to S.Africa as a member of Carrington's Horse in Sir Charles Warren's expedition to Bechuanaland (now Botswana) in 1884. He became a trooper in the Bechuanaland Border Police and commanded 'A' Troop in the British South Africa Company's Pioneer Column in 1890 during the march to occupy Matabeleland which ended in the founding of the capital, Salisbury. After the disbandment of the Pioneer Corps, Heany along with Frank Johnson and Henry Borrow became actively engaged in land and mining development in Mashonaland. Cecil Rhodes himself later invested in their company, the Bechuanaland Trading Company, of which Heany was the general manager. Heany took a distinguished part in the Matabele War (1893) and was involved in the Jameson Raid (1895/6) as a result of which he was taken prisoner and deported to London but was released because of his American citizenship. He married in 1896 and returned to his native USA for a while before continuing his mining interests in S Africa throughout the early 1900s. He died in Bulawayo Memorial Hospital on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1927 and is buried in the main cemetery (Pioneer/Police/Military) in Bulawayo. In 1936 the



**Modern map showing location of Essexdale, Heany's estate**

Heany Memorial Hall was built in his honour at Essexdale which is the name Heany gave to his estate. Heany railway junction and Heany airforce base in Rhodesia are both named after him.



**Major Maurice Heany while he was in the Pioneer Corps**

James wasted no time on his return and he and Nellie were married on 15<sup>th</sup> May at the Register Office in Poole, Dorset. The reception was held at "Foleshill", his sister Margaret's house in Branksome, near Bournemouth. The house was named after the village north of Coventry where both Jesse and Margaret were born and grew up. It was this clue that prompted my search for my ancestors in the 1970's.



**Wedding invitation for the marriage of James Athersuch and Nellie Shephard**





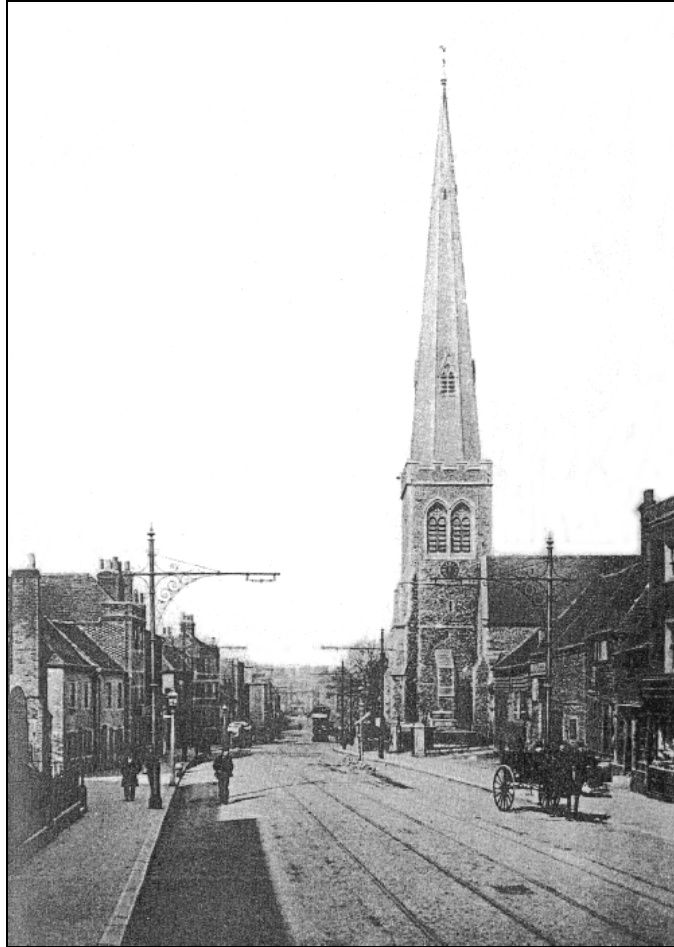
**Nellie Shephard on her wedding day**

It is said that they had a full year's honeymoon traveling about and staying in hotels and he bought her anything she wanted but this must be an exaggeration as James was listed in the Reading Petty Sessions records as the licensee of The Red Lion at 34 Southampton Street in Reading from July 1912. This was only two months after his return from Africa.

The pub is still there, opposite St Giles' church where his sons Maurice James Palmer (my father) and Douglas (my uncle) were christened in 1913 and 1919, respectively. Maurice appears to have been named after Maurice Heaney who was one of his Godparents. Douglas was named after Earl Haig Commander in Chief of the British Army during WWI because he was born on armistice day.



**The Red Lion, 34 Southampton Street c.1995 seen from St Gile's churchyard**



**St Giles Church, Southampton Street, Reading, 1905.**

The Red Lion is the building opposite with the prominent chimney stack.



**James Athersuch in Royal Naval Reserve uniform (c.1917, aged 44 years)**

Note: the cap badge and buttons feature a crown over a fouled anchor

James joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve in 1916, and in March 1917 he served as an Officer's Steward (third class) at HMS Vivid I, the naval barracks at Devonport. Between October 1917 and July 1918 he served on HMS Vanquisher as an Officer's Steward (second class). His service record shows that at all times his character was described as "Very Good" and his ability "Superior".



**HMS Vivid I, Devonport**

There is a family story that he saw active service in the North Atlantic on the convoys to Murmansk and was eventually torpedoed. However, there is no evidence to support this. The Vanquisher was a minelayer, newly built in 1917. During the time James was serving on her she was deployed as an escort for convoys in home waters between Dover and Scapa Flow. There were a couple of encounters with enemy ships during this time but she seems not to have been attacked. By July 1918 James was back at HMS Vivid as an Officer's Steward but was invalided out the following month reported as suffering from epelisy (=epilepsy). Because of this illness he received a War Gratuity.



**HMS Vanquisher on which Jesse Athersuch served as an Officers Steward in WWI**

His WWI service record describes him as being only 5'2¾", chest measurement of 34", grey hair and grey eyes with a fresh complexion. He had a scar over his left eye and another on his right calf, and flags tattooed on his left arm. His date and place of birth were both erroneously recorded as 1878 in Birmingham! Whether the date was a clerical error or the age James claimed to be is impossible to say. However, it is

possible that being of small stature he had claimed to be younger than he actually was in order to pass as a "boy". Subsequently, he always recorded his birth year to be 1874. He later always recorded his birth place as Birmingham which suggests he wanted to disassociate himself from Coventry for some reason.

During his period of naval service Nellie and her sister Gertrude ran The Red Lion. The family lived over the pub until early in 1922 then moved briefly to 38 Baker Street, Reading.



**38 Baker Street (2<sup>nd</sup> from corner), Reading, 2006 briefly home of the Athersuch family in 1922**

In the same year James moved alone to Southampton where he lived first at 57 Bridge Road and later that year 51 Hillside Ave., Bitterne Park and by 1923 he was 49 Bridge Road. Nellie and the two boys probably moved to Southampton by 1923 by 1926 they were all living at 19 Carlton Crescent and finally, by 1930, had moved to 5 Howard Road.





**19 Carlton Crescent (centre), Southampton in 2005 home of James Athersuch in 1926**

From April 26<sup>th</sup> 1922 James served aboard the White Star Line's luxury cruise liner Homeric initially as a "Steward" and later as an "Hors d'Oeuvres Steward" in the first class dining room. The latter position earned him the sum of £9.5s.0d per month.

C.R. 1. *Dead 21-4-50 for 9M09*

*or*

Surname *ATHERSUCH* *Homeric*  
 [in CAPITALS]  
 Christian Name *James* *146573*

Birth: Year *1874* Place *Birmingham*

Dis. A. No. *122587* Rating *Hors d'oeuvres* R.V. *240* *19430*

Certificate (if any) *None* Grade *1st* *6443*

Health Insce. No. *242389* Unemployment Insce. No. *55657*

Height *5-4* Colour Eyes *Grey* Hair *Brown*

Complexion *Fair* Distinguishing marks *American*  
*English flags on*  
*left arm*

[M014] 15422/083 50m 9/22/1941 G & S 151 2 [TURN OVER.]

**Seaman's ticket for James Athersuch**

A physical description on his merchant seaman's ticket differs from his WWI navy record and records that he was taller at 5' 4" and had brown hair. The tattoos on his left arm are described as portraying the American and English flags. This distinguishing mark presumably reflected James' allegiance to his previous employer. Rather curiously, on his merchant seaman's card his birth date is recorded as 1874 (not 1873) and his birthplace as Birmingham (instead of Coventry)! Further physical

descriptions are provided by the U.S. manifest of aliens for each trip. James' weight is recorded as between about 9 and 10 stone and his height variously between 5'3" and 5'6"!

The Homeric regularly sailed between Southampton and New York via Cherbourg. Lloyd's List and Gazette reported that on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1928 while dinner was being served the ship struck a 40 foot whale at full speed!



**Southampton docks c.1930 with SS Olympic in distance**

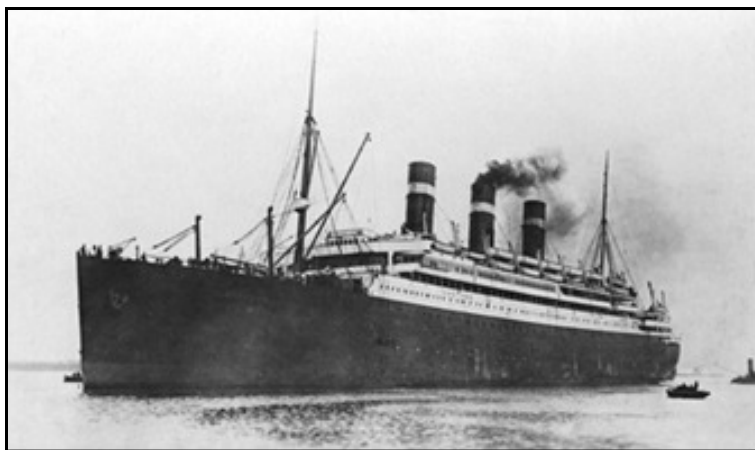
While the Homeric was undergoing a refit between October 1923 and March 1924, James worked aboard another White Star liner, the Olympic and as a Waiter on the Red Star's Belgenland. These vessels also made trans-Atlantic journeys.



**SS Homeric (Peabody Essex Collection)**

**Note on the SS Homeric**

*Built: 1922, F. Schichau, Danzig, Funnels: 2 Tonnage: 34,351 GRT, Dimensions: 236.0 x 25.1m, Crew: 730. The Homeric was originally launched as Columbus for Norddeutscher Lloyd on December 17, 1913. In August 1914 following the outbreak of war, construction was halted on the 80 percent completed ship. In 1920 she was surrendered to Britain. In June 1920 the White Star Line, Liverpool, bought the new ship and renamed her Homeric. Building continued under British supervision. On January 21, 1922 the Homeric arrived in Southampton following completion and trials. On February 15, 1922 she made her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York. In October 1923 she was refit by Harland & Wolff, lasting until March, 1924. Refit included changing to oil-firing and improvements to her engines. Her new service speed was 19.5 kn. Passenger accommodation was changed to 523-1st Class, 841-Cabin Class, 314-3rd Class. On June 1, 1932 she made her last voyage on the North Atlantic and from thereafter she was used for cruising and broken up in 1936.*



**SS Belgenland (Richard Faber Collection)**

**Note on the SS Belgenland**

*Dimensions: 212.3 x 23.9 m,p Passengers: 500-1st Class, 600-2nd Class, 1,500-3rd Class. The Belgenland was launched on December 31, 1914, but was then laid up incomplete. In 1917 the British government decided to have the ship completed as a cargo carrier and she was delivered to the White Star Line, as Belgic without passenger accommodation. In 1918 she was fitted out as a troop transport at New York, with accommodation for approximately 3,000 troops. Then in March 1922 she went to the Harland & Wolff yard at Belfast to be refitted out as a passenger ship and converted to oil-firing. On March 17, 1923 she was completed as Belgenland for the Red Star Line. Liverpool remained the ship's home port. On April 4, 1923 she made her maiden voyage as the Belgenland from Antwerp-Southampton-New York. She was often employed on cruising. Scrapped in 1936.*



**SS Olympic (www.greatships.net)**

**Note on SS Olympic**

*Built: 1911, Harland & Wolff, Belfast, Tonnage: 46,439 GRT, Crew: 860 SS Olympic was launched on October 20, 1910 and made her maiden voyage on June 14, 1911 from Southampton to New York. She was the biggest ship in the world until 1912/13. After a collision she was rebuilt by Harland & Wolff during the winter of 1912-1913. Safety measures such as bulkheads were improved in the light of the Titanic disaster. During the WWI she was used as a troop transport. On August 12, 1919 she returned to Belfast for overhaul. She was converted to oil-firing and her passenger accommodation was changed to 750-1st Class, 500-2nd Class, 1,150-3rd Class. On July 21, 1920 she made her first post-war voyage from Southampton to New York. She was eventually scrapped in 1937.*





**5 Howard Road, Southampton in 2007**

James was discharged from the Homeric at Southampton on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1930 and never returned to sea. He died of tuberculosis at home at 5 Howard Road on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1930 and was buried in Hollybrook Cemetery, Southampton on 24<sup>th</sup> July. There was no memorial headstone but the grave (B03, no.307) is now marked by a numbered peg. The cost of the funeral was £19 15s.0d including the use of horse-drawn funeral car and carriage and the corporation burial fees.

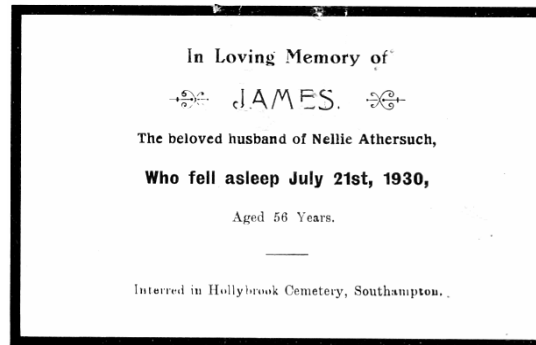


**Grave of James Athersuch, Hollybrook Cemetery, Southampton in 2004**

Times must have been hard for a widow with two young children so Nellie who continued to live in Howard Road took a lodger, Mr Haswell from a shipping company to help make ends meet. In about 1940 the house was bombed and Nellie moved to stay with her sister Gertrude in Godstone. After the war Nellie was effectively homeless and spent her time between Godstone and some old family friends, the Davis



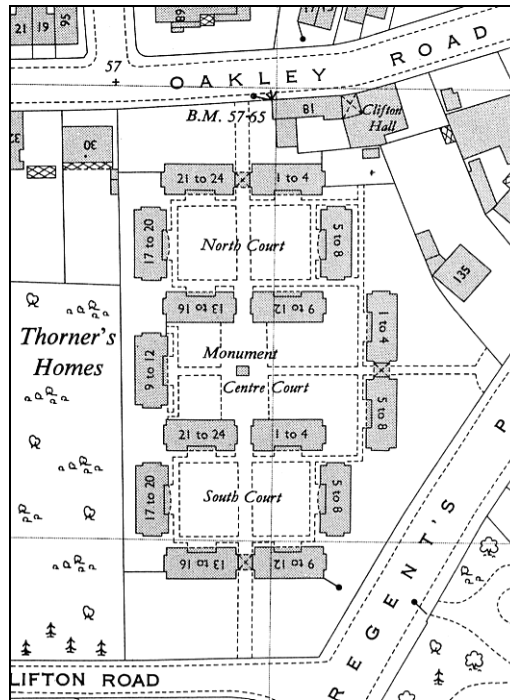
family, in Carlton Road, Southampton, just around the corner from Howard Road. My father had gone to school with Vernon Davis and they remained life long friends.



In 1951 she found a place in Thorner's Homes between Oakley Road and Regent's Park Road, Shirley, Southampton. Thorner's is a charitable trust set up in 1793 which until this day provides "for the maintenance of poor widows". The Regent's Park site was developed after some of the existing almshouses were demolished to make way for the new Civic Centre in 1930. Nellie lived at No.8 North Court a ground floor flat and the warden or "matron" as she was known was a Miss McGowan. I remember the sitting room and bedroom were separated by a curtain but not what the kitchen or bathroom were like. Heating was provided by coal fires and I remember being fascinated by the coalhole in the wall. I clearly recall cycling to visit her and scrumping small yellow apples from the lawn behind her flat.



**Centre Court of Thorner's Homes, Regents Park**



**Map of Thorner's Homes where Nellie Athersuch lived from 1951 – 1972**

Nellie continued to live there until her untimely death on 30<sup>th</sup> Mar 1972 at the age of 90 in a tragic road accident at the Sun Arch in Romsey in which her son, Douglas (my Uncle) was killed and my cousin, Roger and another relative were seriously injured.