

WILLIAM HENRY HOPKINS

Rank/ No.: Pilot
Service: Lighthouse & Pilotage Authorities,
Trinity House Service



William Henry Hopkins was born in 1873, the son of Thomas Hopkins, a mariner, and his wife Jane (nee Payton) of Whitstable, Kent. His father qualified as a Master mariner before retiring from a life at sea to become a coal merchant. Census records reveal that at the age of 17 William had already followed in his father's footsteps and was employed as a mariner.

In 1899 William, now a Second Mate in the Mercantile Marine, married Fanny Edith Anderson of Faversham. Shortly afterwards their daughter, Ena Doris was born. William later qualified as a Trinity House Pilot and was employed within the London Division, based at Dover. By 1911 the couple had four children and were living at Godmersham Villa, on Crabble Hill.

During the First World War the pilots continued to assist ships navigating through the Straights of Dover at risk from mines and German Submarine attacks. Five Cinque Ports Pilots died during the conflict but William survived and was awarded the Mercantile Marine Medal and the British War Medal. After the war he continued to work as a pilot and the family moved to 'The Knoll', Archers Court, Whitfield.

At the age of 65, William found his navigational skills once more in demand in wartime and enemy mines were again laid in the Dover Strait and the Thames Estuary. On 19 December 1940, he was assigned to pilot the 8,024 ton tanker M.V. Arinia, carrying oil from Aruba, through the Strait to the Isle of Grain. Whilst waiting for the dock gates to open the First Officer instructed the engines to be shut down. With the engines off, the vessel's anti-magnetic system, which enabled the ship to avoid mines placed in the water, was simultaneously deactivated. The tanker had dropped anchor directly adjacent to a mine and when the engines were turned off, the mine exploded. Eyewitness accounts of the tragedy state that following the initial explosion, the tanker was quickly ablaze from stem to stern. William was killed along with 54 merchant seaman and 5 D.E.M.S. Gunners.

William is remembered on the Tower Hill Memorial in Trinity Square Gardens, close to the Tower of London, one of "The Twenty Four Thousand of the Merchant



Navy and Fishing Fleets whose names are honoured on the walls (who) gave their lives for their country and have no grave but the sea."