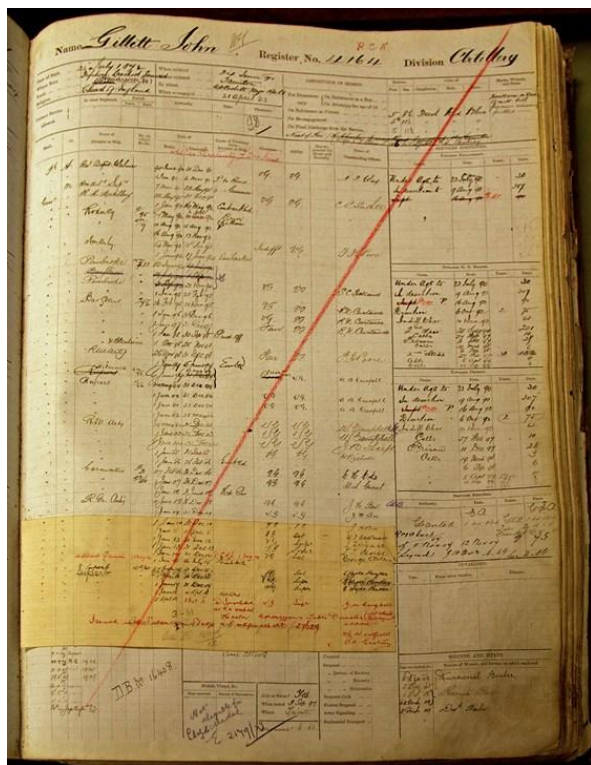


Gunner John Gillett

Date of Birth: 24/07/1872 - Date of Death: 18/10/1929

Royal Navy, Royal Marine Artillery - HMS Superb, Service #4164



John Gillett was a man from the West Country. He was baptised in the Norman font of the old church of the village of Fivehead in Somerset. In 1890 aged almost 18, he enlisted at Taunton in the Royal Marine Artillery (RMA). His service dossier records a considerable number of offences and punishments during the early part of his career. For example: 14 October 1891: 'Laughing in the Ranks whilst another man was being spoken to': 3 days confined to barracks 15 May 1898 (on HMS Barfleur): 'Fighting on the Mess deck': 7 days No 10A (A man given No 10A had to do his normal duty each day and spend the rest of his time on unpleasant tasks about the ship, eg scraping boilers. He also lost his daily rum ration and the right to smoke.) 27 August 1899 (on HMS Rupert): 'Found drunk on board at 11pm

and remained unfit for duty 9 hours': 3 days Cells. There are many such items on file. Even so, in 1903 his term of service was extended, so perhaps his record was considered no worse than that of many others. Or it may be that by then John Gillett was manifestly a reformed character. No misconduct is recorded later than 1901. In 1903 he married Ellen Devenish, who also came from the West Country. They lived the rest of their lives in Portsmouth, not far from the RMA's Eastney Barracks. For much of his time in the marines he functioned as a barber: trimming men's hair, or in the case of new recruits shearing them, and shaving senior officers. It is tricky work using a straight (aka cut-throat) razor in a battleship on a choppy sea. After his service with the RMA ended in 1918 he had a hairdressing business in Milton Market, near Eastney Barracks. At Jutland he was serving on the dreadnought HMS Superb. His daughter, my mother, always believed that her father had shaved Jellicoe, the British c-in-c, on the day of the battle. This seems to me unlikely. However, Superb was the flagship of Rear-Admiral Duff, second-in-command of the 4th Battle Squadron. Quite possibly John Gillett did shave the admiral on that morning when the British Grand Fleet was sailing confidently to battle across the North Sea.

Info from <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/7680030#timeline>