IN MEMORY OF
JAMES THOMAS WALKER

DIED IN ACTION 1 NOVEMBER 1914

Lived at 2 Highfield Cottages
PLAQUE No. 17

James was born on 3 July 1883. The 1891 census shows the 7-year-old James living with his 8-year-old brother Reginald and 6-year-old brother George, at Binswood End in Harbury, with their mother, Mary.

Their father being dead, Mary worked as a bag-mender. There's something resilient about this portrait of a mother supporting her children singlehandedly, a task made more difficult by the physical labour needed to run a house prior to modern appliances.

In 1899 James joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Seaman, second class. Though he was only fifteen, he presumably had to leave home not only because his mother could not support three children alone, but also so he could send money back to her.

In 1901 he was signed up to serve for twelve years. From second class Boy Seaman he rose to become an Able Seaman in January 1903. His mother, still working as a bag mender and now living at Highfield Cottages, would doubtless have been proud of her son.

In July 1913 James' 12 year service ended, and he returned to civilian life, though did not leave the navy completely; his name remained on the Royal Navy Reserve list.

On 2 August 1914, he was recalled to active service to serve on the cruiser HMS Good Hope, and sent to the Pacific. That September the crew were filled with fear and restless energy, if the recently discovered four-page letter of one Frank (last name unknown) is anything to go by. Frank writes how, though they are fearful, he feels they are paving the way for 'a hundred years peace.'

HMS Good Hope, the huge vessel with four gleaming chimneys and towering masts, was sunk that November, off the coast of Chile during the Battle of Coronel. Both Frank and James, along with all 919 hands, went down with it. James was 31 years old, and had spent half his life in the Navy.

He left behind no wife, no child. He did, however, leave a family. His brothers and mother lost him to the ocean, never had the knowledge that his body was buried safe somewhere, that there was a stone marking his name. In memory of those men lost to the sea, a memorial service on the HMS Australia was later held where the Good Hope had sunk.

James is remembered with honour on the Portsmouth Naval memorial.