

## **"Goodbye, Mrs. Richards"**

*Richard Bond, July 2012*

Widowed Elizabeth Hocking, married daughter Emily Richards and her sons three-year-old William and ten-month-old George, daughter Ellen and son George were leaving Penzance forever to join Elizabeth's other sons in Akron, Ohio and Ellen's fiancé George Hambly of Schenectady, New York. Son George had travelled back to Cornwall to escort his mother, sisters and nephews to the New World. They were originally scheduled to travel to New York on the Oceania, but their travel arrangements had been changed and they were booked aboard the maiden voyage of the Titanic, due to sail from Southampton Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup>. They were travelling in relative luxury as second class passengers, their fares being £11.10s for George, £23.00 for Ellen and her mother, and £18.15s for Emily and the boys.

On the third night out, Ellen woke startled to hear the crowing of a rooster, a sign of impending disaster in Cornish folklore if heard at sea. No one else had heard it, and Ellen's new friends on the ship said it was all her imagination.

On the night of April 14<sup>th</sup> Emily was taking a turn on deck with her friend Addie Wells. They both commented on how very cold it was. Emily went back to her cabin and was undressing for bed when the ship shuddered. She was putting on her overcoat and slippers to investigate when her mother entered the cabin saying, "Something's gone wrong! There's surely danger!" The family had gathered in the hallway when a crew member told them to put on their life jackets. Up on the now sloping deck, they were escorted into lifeboat #4. The men climbed out of the boat to make room for the women and children. Elizabeth begged George to remain, but he said that as a man had given up his seat for his mother, the least he could do was the same for another man's mother. He then kissed her and stepped back onto the deck. As the boat was about to be lowered Mrs. John Chapman of St. Neot climbed back onto the deck of the Titanic as well. When Emily begged her to get back into the lifeboat she said, "It's goodbye, Mrs. Richards, if John can't go, I won't go either." The lifeboat pulled away. After eight hours in the water they were rescued by the Carpathia, arriving in New York where they were met by their menfolk in pouring rain and suffering badly from exposure. Emily had 5 pennies in her pocket.

George had, with the other identified Cornishmen on board, gone down with the ship. His body was never recovered. Sid Blake, who ran a hotel for Cornish people in New York said "Not one single Cornishman was saved. They all died like heroes."

Epilogue: Ellen went with her mother and fiancé to Schenectedy where she married. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1914, two years to the day that the Titanic sank, Elizabeth was crossing the road when she was hit by a streetcar and killed. Emily and her family returned to Cornwall and lived at Paul, near Penzance. She died there aged 85 in 1972.

The Hockings were my maternal grandfather James Hocking's cousins. My mother had told me about the family when I was little and I met Emily when I was 13, but none of the story meant much to me at the time.

There is a brass plaque in memory of George and his friend Harry Cottrill at the St. John the Baptist church on Trewartha Terrace in Penzance.

*Note: The memorial plaque referred to in Richard's narrative that admonishes us to "Quit Ye Like Men (be manly)" has a double connection to his story. It is both a Biblical reference: Corinthians 16 v13 "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong", and it was the motto of the Wellington Terrace School for Boys in Falmouth that Richard attended as a boy.*