Francis Frederick Fordham





Rank: - Able Seaman

Number: - C/JX 210100

Service: - Royal Navy H.M.S. Electra

Died: - sunk by Japanese War Ships off Java 27 February 1942 aged 21

Memorial: - Chatham Naval Memorial Panel 54 Column 1

Francis Frederick was born on 2 December 1920, the son of George Alfred and Elizabeth Fordham nee Nelson who had married on 12 Jun 1916 at St. Peters Church, Birstall. George Alfred was born in Middlesbrough in 1917 followed by Ronald 1919 in Birstall, Francis, and William H in 1922. The family lived at Nelson Street, Birstall

Francis attended Birstall National School and joined the Navy in May 1940 leaving his job as a night warehouseman at Messrs. Thomas Burnley and Sons, Gomersal Mills. He was last heard of from the destroyer HMS “Electra” in March 1942 but had been sent on 2 December 1941.

HMS *Electra* was a one of nine EE–class destroyers built for the Royal Navy during the 1930s. It was sunk in the Battle of the Java Sea, *Electra* was a witness to many naval battles, including the Battle of the Denmark Strait and the sinking of Prince of Wales and Repulse.

The first four months of 1941 saw *Electra* performing mostly convoy work around the British Isles and Bristol Channel, mostly in cold weather and heavy seas. In early May, the British Admiralty was on the alert that Bismarck might attempt to break out into the North Atlantic, as a consequence, *Electra* was ordered to Scapa Flow. Shortly after arriving at Scapa Flow, she was detailed to serve as Senior Escort for the first of Arctic convoys to the Soviet Union. On Monday, 20 October 1941, the crew of *Electra* got word that they, together with Express, would-be escorting HMS *Prince of Wales* to the Far East.



TWO BIRSTALL SAILOR BROTHERS REPORTED MISSING.

Parents Learn Sad News on Friday, the 13th.

Last Friday—the thirteenth—was an unlucky day for Mr. and Mrs. George A. Fordham, Bronte Road, Birstall, proud parents of three sailor sons.

In the morning they received a telegram saying that one of them, Able Seaman Francis Frederick Fordham (21), would have to be regarded missing as it was believed that his ship had been sunk in the sea battle a few days ago off Java.

Later in the day they received a telegram from Mrs. Ada Fordham, who resides near Middlesborough, saying that her husband, Marine George Alfred Fordham (25), another of Mr. and Mrs. Fordham's sons, was missing.

Francis Fordham.

Geo. Fordham.

Francis joined the Navy 21 months ago whilst a night watchouseman at Messrs. Thos. Burnley and Sons' General Mills. He attended Birstall National School. He was last heard of from the destroyer H.M.S. "Electra," for last Thursday his parents received a communication from him dated December 2nd—his birthday.

George Alfred joined the Navy shortly before Francis, whilst a plasterer at Middlesborough. He was on board the cruiser H.M.S. "Exeter," which gained undying fame during the River Plate Battle with the German pocket battleship, the Graf Von Spee.

Mr. and Mrs. Fordham's other serving son is Ronald, a Petty Officer aboard a minesweeper.

Mr. Fordham, senr., fought in the last war.

Batley News, 21 Mar 1942

The Japanese amphibious forces gathered to strike at Java, and on 27 February 1942, the main Allied naval force, under Doorman, sailed northeast from Surabaya to intercept a convoy of the Eastern Invasion Force approaching from the Makassar Strait. The Eastern Strike Force, as it was known, consisted of two heavy cruisers, three light cruisers and nine destroyers including HMS Electra., The fleets sighted each other at about 16:00 on 27 February and closed to firing range, opening fire at 16:16. Both sides exhibited poor gunnery and torpedo skills during this phase of the battle. *Electra who was* covering *Exeter* engaged in a duel with *Jintsū* and *Asagumo*, scoring several hits but suffering severe damage to her superstructure. After a serious fire started on *Electra* and her remaining turret ran out of ammunition, abandon ship was ordered.

His parents received notification that Francis was reported missing and later the same day they heard that their son George Alfred, who lived in Middlesbrough, was also missing. He was on board HMS *Exeter* which had also taken part in the Battle of the Java Sea. Petty Officer Ronald was on board a minesweeper.

Francis was awarded the 1939-45 Star; 1939-1945 War Medal

He is remembered with Honour at Batley and Birstall War Memorials.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group