

# Kent REEKS



W 2541	Kent Reeks	native of Sydney Australia found murdered at Bilston Staffs.	January 24 <sup>th</sup> 1914	24	John H. Mascoe (Curate)
	No. 2103				

A burial took place in the churchyard on 24 January **1914**. The Burials Register shows that **Kent** Reeks, aged 24, was laid to rest in grave W2541 and that he was a native of Sydney, Australia. Furthermore, it notes that he was found murdered at Bilston, Staffs. The simple inscription on the coffin read:

*"Kent Reeks died January 20th 1914 age 24"*

It was just two weeks after his birthday. Crime unresolved.

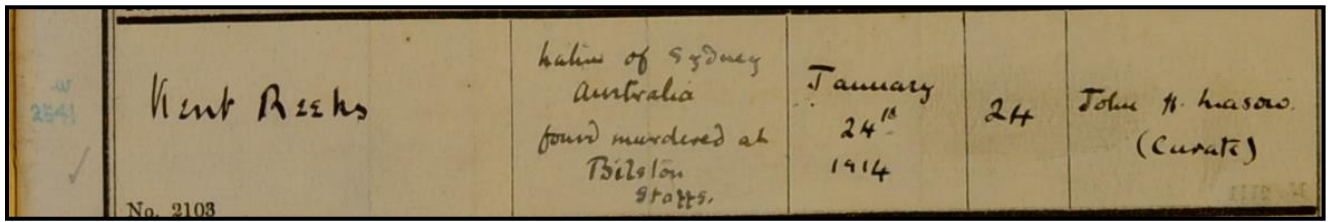
Born: 6 January 1890

Died: 20 January 1914

*MARINE ENGINEER  
MURDERED IN BILSTON, Staffs.*



## Kent REEKS



A burial took place in the churchyard on 24 January 1914. The Burials Register shows that **Kent** Reeks, aged 24, was laid to rest in grave W2541 and that he was a native of Sydney, Australia. Furthermore, it notes that he was found murdered at Bilston, Staffs. Grateful thanks are due to Graham Prince who first brought this to my attention, and then to Susan Tydd, whose research into his death has been recorded and is to be found on the internet. Her account of his life and death is transcribed below:

*January 20th marks the 100th anniversary of the unsolved murder of Kent Reeks whose body was discovered nearby an abandoned mineshaft in the village of Ettingshall, near Bilston, approximately two miles from Wolverhampton. He had been shot three times from a revolver at close range.*

*Reeks a young Marine Engineer had arrived several days earlier in Liverpool aboard 'The Empress of Ireland' from Boston, with the intention of studying at the Marine Academy of Stephenson and Parry, and sitting exams for the position of Chief Engineer. On the day of his arrival, having found lodgings at a Temperance Hotel on Lord Street, off London Road, **Reeks** embarked on a train journey to Swinton, a small town in the suburbs of Manchester, to visit his maternal grandmother and numerous other family members; it had been three years since his previous visit. He passed several hours amongst his family and by all accounts was jovial, indeed a cheerful lively man, delighted to renew the acquaintance with his kinsfolk. Regrettably, the family were unable to offer a bed to their caller. The young gent returned to his hotel later that Saturday evening.*

*On returning to the hotel, he became friendly with another gentleman guest who introduced himself as Mr. Ramsden. Indeed they seemed to devote much of Sunday in each other's company exploring Liverpool, and afterwards spent a comfortable evening reading in the hotel sitting room, and agreed to meet again the next day. The following morning, the gentleman left the hotel before **Reeks** had risen for breakfast. Disappointed, the young man visited the Marine Academy finalising arrangements for his forthcoming studies, arriving back at the hotel around 2pm. He collected a small parcel from his room along with a green wallet which possibly contained 500 dollars, and again ventured out, advising hotel staff he would be back at teatime. This was the final sighting of Reeks alive; his whereabouts until the body was uncovered remain unaccounted for.*

***Kent Reeks'** body was discovered late Tuesday morning, several people remarking beforehand of a man covered in an overcoat presumably sleeping off the effects of alcohol in a shallow ditch at the edge of a field beside the Millfield Road, 300 yards away from the train station, adjacent to Wrights Foundry and close to a disused Mineshaft. On arrival at the scene, the police established **Reeks** had been shot, robbery not appearing to be the motive. A wallet was found in **Reeks** possession containing £9, and he was wearing a gold Elgin watch, attached to a silver chain. Several photographs and a letter were retrieved from his pocket. Next to the body was a Green Brazilian Beetle pin which was later recognised as belonging to **Reeks**. The police also came across a Green English Beetle close by; it was suggested this second beetle belonged to a woman's hat pin. Numerous gun cartridges were unearthed*

*in the field, three of which proved to be the fatal shots fired. The letter found established **Reeks** had relatives in Swinton, who were contacted; his uncle formally identified the body. Information gathered from the family verified **Reeks** lodgings at the Temperance Hotel in Liverpool and the amount of American dollars the young man had been observed with a few days earlier. On searching his hotel room, the police noted his luggage was still there and other personal effects, letters, photographs and a piece of paper on the bed with the name J.G. Parsons written on it several times. The money however was missing.*

*The authorities launched an appeal for Mr. Ramsden to present himself for questioning as one of the last people to see **Reeks** alive, assuming he held vital information. People in Ettingshall, Bilston, guests at the Liverpool hotel, even family in Swinton and as far afield as Bournemouth and Australia were questioned, the disused mine shaft and field thoroughly searched. All avenues of detective work were pursued to locate and identify Ramsden, J.G. Parsons and whoever professed to being the owner of the Green English Beetle. Nothing new transpired from the investigations. The police were no nearer finding the murderer or murderers. There arose a great deal of speculation surrounding the killing. What was his business in Ettingshall? His family insisted he had no known reason to visit the area, no relations resided there, and he had no love concerns in the area. Did the slaughter take place in Ettingshall or elsewhere and the body driven to and discarded in the field alongside the busy road? Gang involvement, a woman scorned, a disagreement in Liverpool, mistaken identity, robbery. The case became known as the Green Beetle Mystery.*

***Kent Reek's** funeral took place the following Saturday. His body had remained under police guard in Staffordshire until Thursday then escorted by train to Swinton and delivered to an undertaker in nearby Pendlebury. The burial proceedings were kept quiet in an attempt to deter the public from attending and dissuade journalists reporting the occasion. The planning was fairly effective, only a minority of local people noticed the cortège depart the house of his grandmother, Sarah Kent, on Chorley Road. Neighbours who knew the family as tradition expected had their curtains drawn out of respect. The coffin placed in a glass-sided hearse made the short journey to St. Mark's church in Worsley, the church where the Kent family frequently worshipped. Here the body was interred. The simple inscription on the coffin read:*

*"Kent Reeks died January 20th 1914 age 24". It was just two weeks after his birthday.*

*Despite the vast amount of time and man power exercised by the police no person was ever arrested and convicted of this atrocious killing. As 1914 swiftly progressed into spring and summer, England began preparations for war and the unsolved Green Beetle Mystery was relegated to the annals of history.*

**Kent Reeks** was born 8<sup>th</sup> January **1890** in the family home of 'Blatchley', St. Leonards, a borough of Sydney, Australia, the eldest child of Walter Reeks and Mary Emma Kent. Mary Emma Kent was baptised at St. Mark's on 30 June **1861**, the daughter of James Kent (a coal agent) and Sarah.

His father, a native of Hampshire, emigrated to Sydney in **1885** after completing an apprenticeship as a naval architect. His principal employment focused on design commissions for wealthy yacht owners. In later life, Walter is best remembered for designing the Manly Ferries which were still operational until **1984**. For a while, during any spare time, he tried gold prospecting, although this was brought to a sudden halt with an outbreak of Typhoid. **Reeks'** mother hailed from Lancashire and arrived in the port of Sydney during October **1888**, a passenger on R.M.S. Austral. Walter and Mary Emma married in **1889** at Saint Andrews Cathedral, Sydney. In **1895**, shortly following the birth of their



second child, a daughter named Thelma, Mary died from Rheumatic Fever. Walter passed away in 1925. Thelma married a mere few weeks after the terrible demise of her brother; she named her eldest child Kent in tribute.



**Kent Reeks** as a young adult excelled in his preliminary engineering examinations in Australia before journeying to England for the first time in 1911. After a short stay and acquainting himself with family, he gained a berth aboard the *Lusitania* on 9 March 1912, making at least one trip between Liverpool and New York. Whilst in America, Reeks achieved employment with Elders and Fyffes, steamship owners. He was engaged as fourth engineer on the ship *Secolia*, a fruit vessel plying trade between Boston and the West Indies. His last voyage ended in Boston where he was healthily paid. Reeks travelled to Halifax in Nova Scotia procuring his final passage on the ship *The Empress of Ireland*, landing in Liverpool on 17 January 1914, just three days before meeting a tragic death.

(© Susan Tydd: 15 January 2014)

Name of Ship *Empress of Ireland* Port of Arrival *Liverpool* Date of Arrival *17 January 1914* P.M. 23.  
 Steamship Line *The Canadian Pacific Railway* Whence Arrived *Halifax N.S.*

**NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF BRITISH PASSENGERS.**

(1) Port of Embarkation	(2) Port at which Passengers have been landed	(3) NAMES OF PASSENGERS	(4) CLASS (Whether 1st, 2nd or 3rd)	(5) Profession, Occupation, or Calling of Passengers  <small>In the case of First Class Passengers this Column need not be filled up.</small>	(6) AGES OF PASSENGERS <small>Except for First Class Passengers state the exact birthday.</small>						(7) Country of Last Permanent Residence †	(8) Country of Intended Future Permanent Residence †				
					Adults of 15 yrs. and upwards		Children between 1 and 12		Infants.			England	Wales	Scotland	Ireland	British Possessions
						Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females					
		<i>Brought Forward</i>				58	77	27	4	5	13					
<i>Halifax N.S.</i>	<i>Liverpool</i>	<i>Kirby</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>Ship Musician</i>		49						<i>England</i>				
		<i>Sinclair</i>		<i>John Farmer</i>		57						<i>Canada</i>				
		<i>King</i>		<i>Ralph Picture Painter</i>		29						<i>USA</i>				
		<i>Smart</i>		<i>James Farmer</i>		30						<i>USA</i>				
		<i>Kelly</i>		<i>Joseph Merchant</i>		42						<i>USA</i>				
		<i>Reeks</i>		<i>Kent Engineer</i>		25						<i>USA</i>				
		<i>Wilkinson</i>		<i>Annie Domestic</i>			31					<i>USA</i>				
		<i>Skinnar</i>		<i>Larah Wife</i>			30					<i>Canada</i>				
				<i>Agnes Domestic</i>			18									
				<i>Edwards Child</i>				2								
				<i>Berence</i>					8							
				<i>Harold</i>				4								
				<i>Clarence</i>							5/2					
		<i>Parker</i>		<i>Hilda Domestic</i>			25									
<b>Total British</b>						88	83	51	5	7	14					
<b>Aliens</b>							7	1								
<b>2nd Class</b>						88	92	52	5	7	14					

