Charles Frohman

MAY - JULY 1915

Charles Frohman, a leading theatrical manager of his day produced plays in London and New York, including Peter Pan. He spent a lot of time in Marlow before the war and loved the town. Being on a passenger on the ill fated Lusitania, Charles sadly perished when the ship went down in May 1915.

Theatrical Manager

Charles Frohman [July 15th 1856 to May 7th 1915] was the leading theatrical manager of his day. Although a Jewish American of German heritage he became a true Anglophile.

For more that 20 years he produced plays and musicals on Broadway and in London's West End. His most famous was Peter Pan, by J M Barrie.

Visits to Marlow

His first visit to Marlow was in the late 1890's. Artistic and theatrical people were attracted to towns along the Thames to escape London at weekends. He was brought here by an Australian playwright, Haddon Chambers. Haddon was a good friend of Jerome K Jerome who moved into Goulds Grove, a house above Wallingford in 1895. Charles knew Jerome as he had produced his plays and it seems certain that that is why Haddon brought Charles to this area.

His business and home were in New York but he crossed the Atlantic for the first part of each year producing plays in London and finding new ones for America. When in England he would always spend as much time as he could in and around Marlow. Charles told everyone that it was not just his favourite place in England but in the whole world. He said he hoped he could be buried in All Saints Churchyard because you couldn't have a better backdrop for eternity.
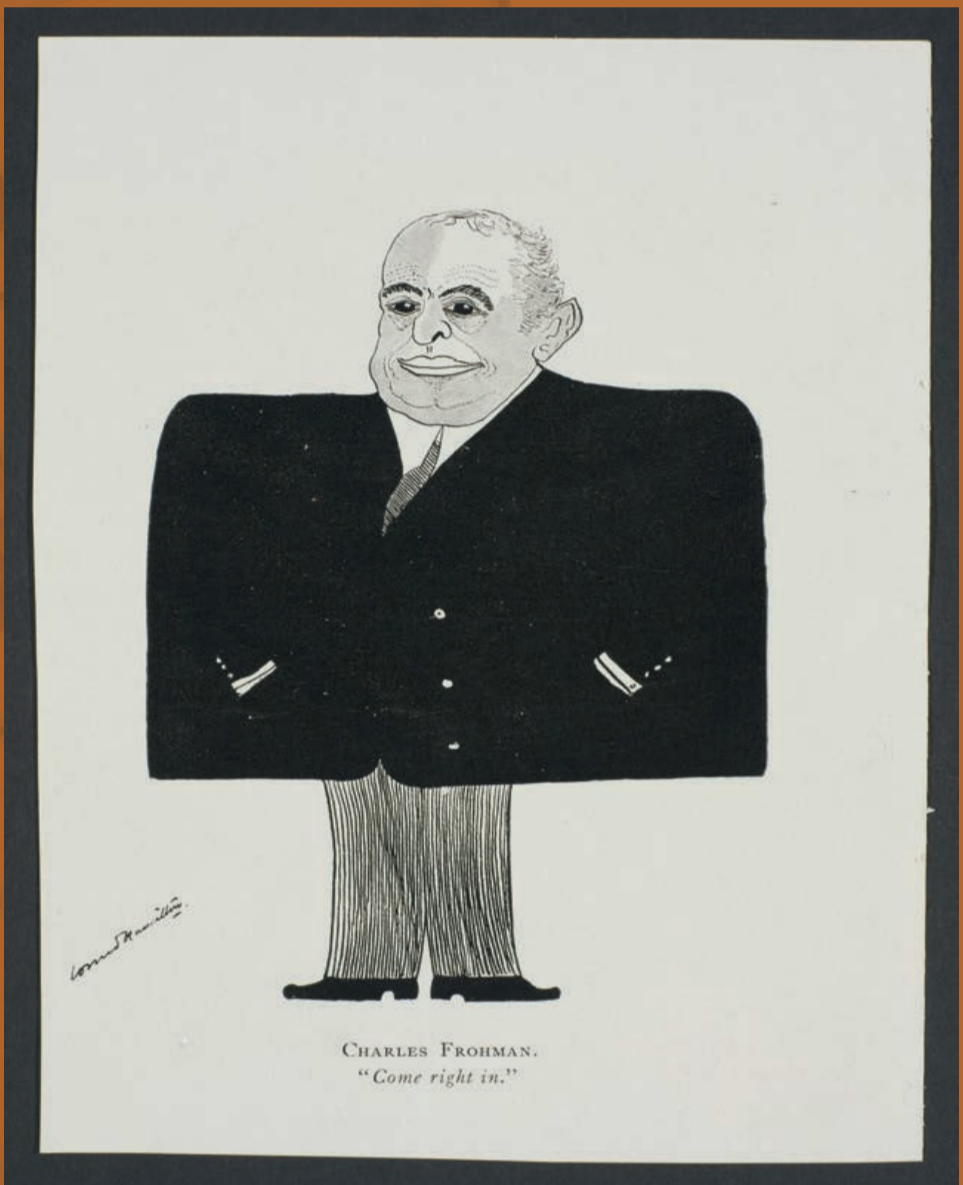

The Lusitania

In 1915 he sailed from New York on the RMS Lusitania. As a British ship it was at risk of attack from the German navy and on 7th May 1915, eight miles off the Irish coast it was torpedoed by a U Boat and Charles died, along with 1198 passengers and crew.

Jerome wrote in his autobiography:
"On a sunny afternoon, one often found Charles sitting on his own grave in Marlow churchyard — or rather on the spot he hoped would one day be his grave:
a pleasant six foot into four of English soil, under the great willow that overhangs the river. He was still in negotiation for it the last time that I talked to him there. He went down in the Lusitania, the year following". The irony was that even if his plan had been finalised, his brother Daniel had Charles' body returned to New York for burial within the Jewish faith. The crowds who turned out for his funeral were so great that the police had to close Fifth Avenue. Charles was destined not get his wish to be buried as an English gentleman.
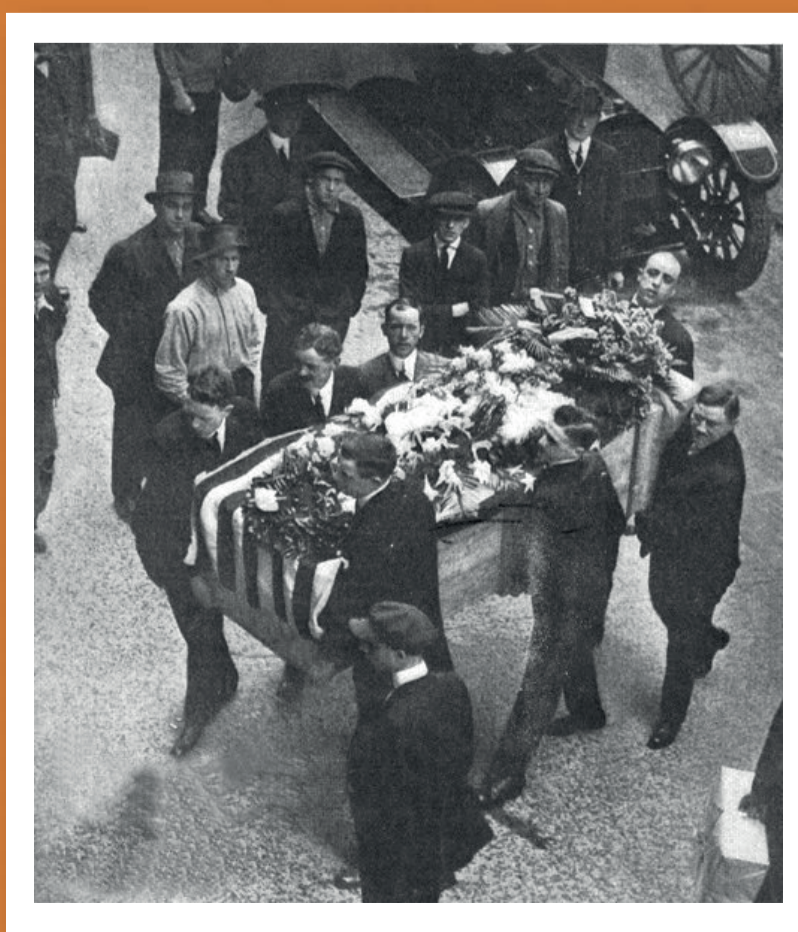
William Henry Nottingham

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William was born in 1874, the eldest of six children and lived in Bovingdon Green. Having left the family home sometime before the war started, he joined up in December 1914 and was sent to France, where he died on 1 May 1915 at Ypres. His grand niece, Pamela Johnson has kindly lent some of his memorabilia to support this display.

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Early life

William Nottingham, known as Wim, was born in Marlow in 1874, the eldest child of Reuben and Eliza. According to the 1881 Census William, aged six, and his two year old sister were living with their parents in Bovingdon Green at the time. Reuben was an agricultural labourer and Eliza was a lace-maker. William's uncle, George and his sister, Annie were also part of the household.

Sadly, William's mother died shortly after the birth of her third child, Frederick, in 1883. Some time after this Reuben moved to Queens Road, Marlow and by the time of the 1891 was working as a Drayman with only Frederick living with him. William appears to have left the family home by this time.

A professional soldier

William was a wanderer and something of a mystery, having limited contact with the family. He enlisted in the South Wales Borderers in 1899 and fought in the South African Wars.

When the First World War broke out, William signed up with the 1st Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment in December 1914 and embarked for France the same month to serve on the Western Front.

In April 1915, the opposing German armies launched an attack to capture the strategically important Belgian town of Ypres. William's regiment was part of the defending Allied forces in what became known as the Second Battle of Ypres. The battle was infamous because it involved the first use of gas during the War.
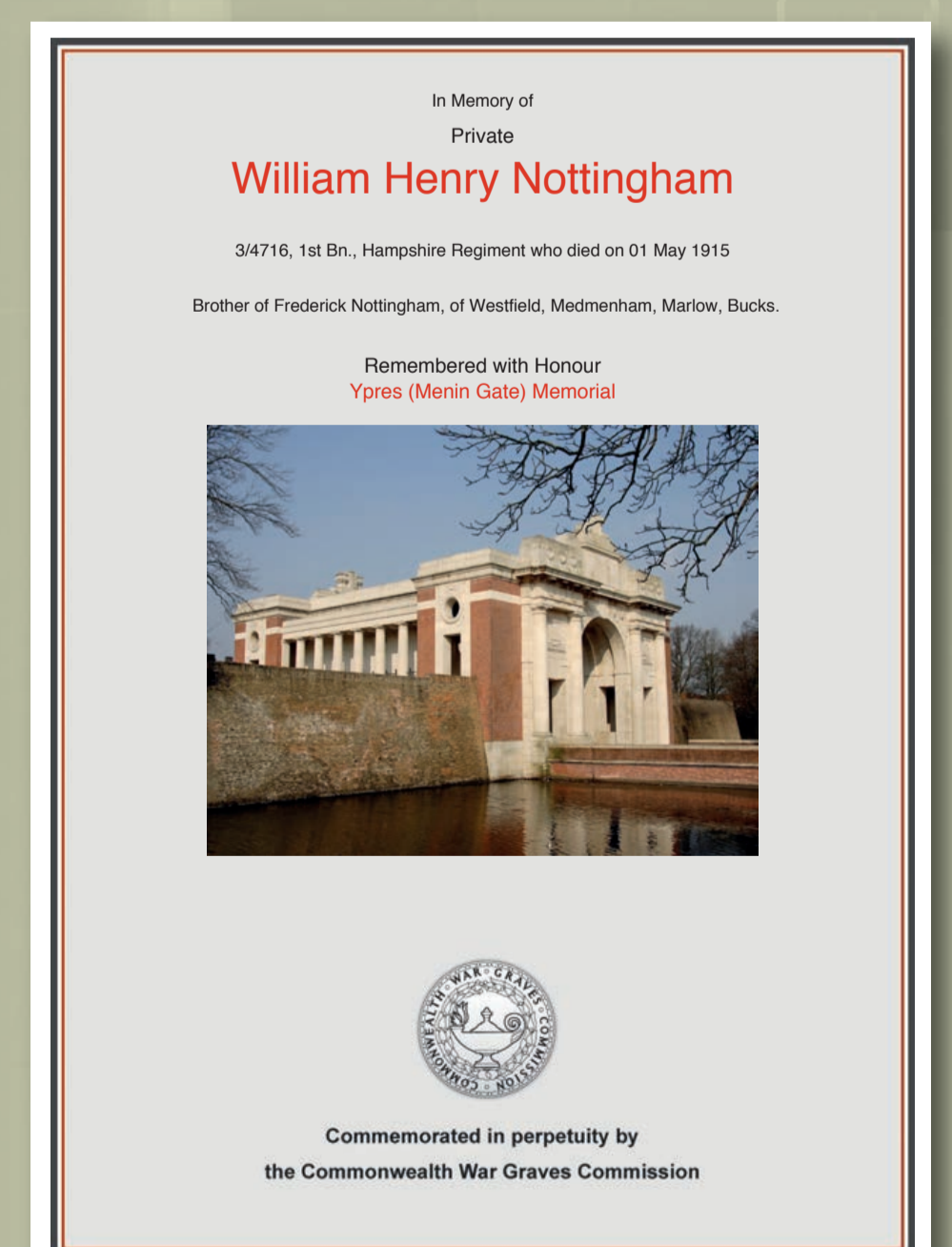
William was one of two soldiers killed on 1 May when, according to the regimental diary, the British troops came under "fairly heavy shelling" from the Germans. He was 40 years old when he died. His body was not recovered for burial but he is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial in Belgium as well as on the memorial in All Saints' Church, Marlow.

Next of kin

William listed his brother, Frederick as his next of kin as he appears to have had no further contact with his father. It was Frederick therefore who received the commemorative 'black penny' and war medals after William's death. Frederick's grand daughter, Pamela Johnson, who lives locally has access to this memorabilia and has generously agreed to allow it to be displayed to accompany this display. Although he was reported missing on 1 November 1914 it wasn't until July 1916 that he was officially declared dead.

William Henry Nottingham

In Memory of
Private
William Henry Nottingham
3/4716, 1st Bn., Hampshire Regiment who died on 01 May 1915
Brother of Frederick Nottingham, of Westfield, Medmenham, Marlow, Bucks.
Remembered with Honour
Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Certificate

The Sinking of the Lusitania
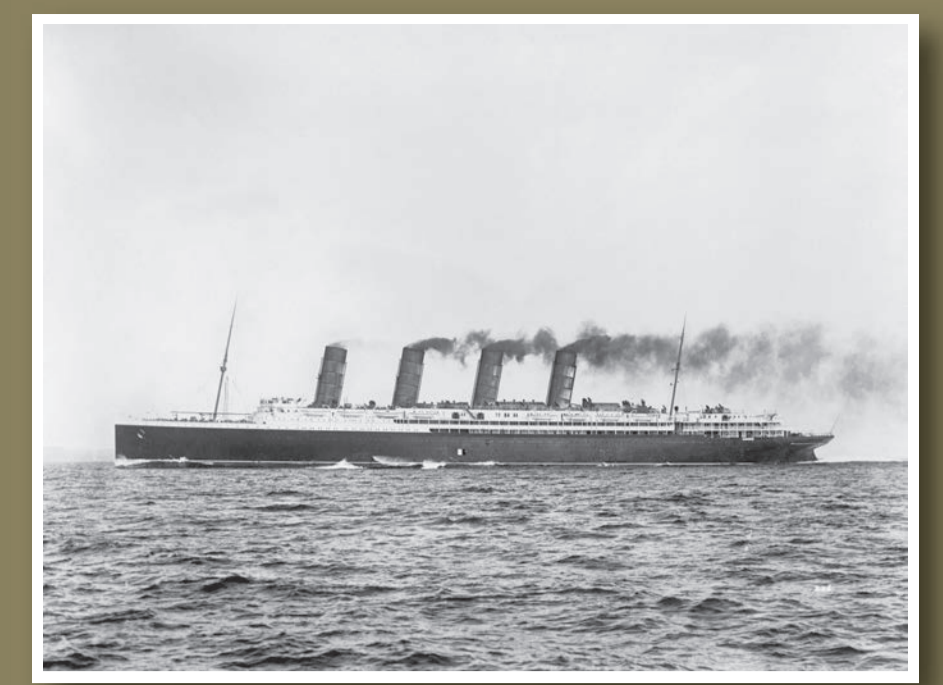
RMS Lusitania
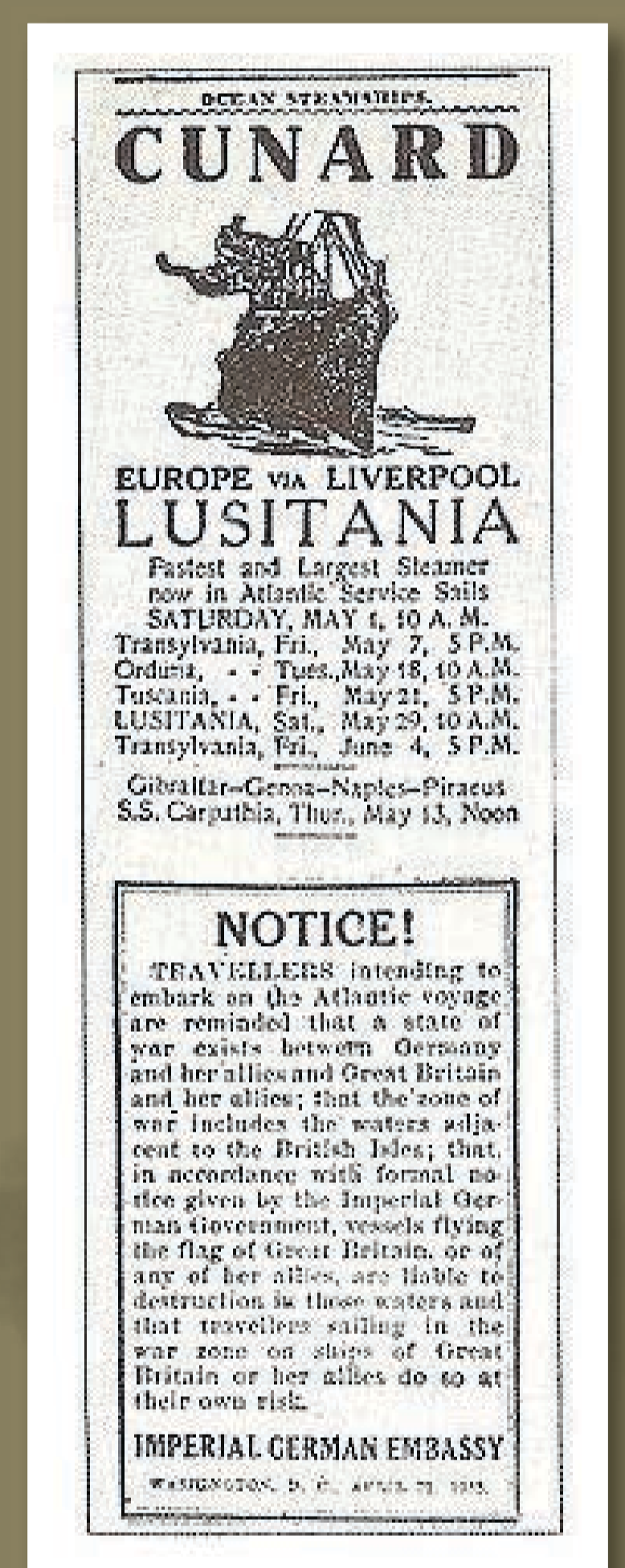Image supplied by the Imperial War Museum

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The Lusitania was a luxury British liner which was sunk by a German torpedo in May 1915 despite agreements having been made by the two sides that non-military ships would be safeguarded. American public opinion began to turn against Germany as a result and towards joining the war on the Allies side.

FRMS Lusitania was a luxury British ocean liner that was launched by the Cunard Line in 1906. It was briefly the world's largest passenger ship and held the Blue Riband for crossing the Atlantic at record speed. It completed more than 200 crossings of the Atlantic before it was sunk in May 1915.

At the outbreak of the First World War in summer 1914, there were rules setting out how non-military ships were to be dealt with. However, these were severely tested as Britain and Germany fought to gain control of the seas and the traffic in supplies. In February 1915, Germany declared the seas around the British Isles a war zone so that from 18 February Allied ships in the area would be sunk without warning.

At the end of April, Lusitania was at port in New York. The German embassy in the USA placed an advertisement in 50 American newspapers warning about the dangers of crossing the Atlantic. This warning was printed adjacent to an advertisement for Lusitania's forthcoming voyage to Britain. Despite it, Lusitania left New York on 1 May.

Allies recruitment poster following the sinking of RMS Lusitania
Image supplied by the Imperial War Museum

On the evening of 6 May, Lusitania entered the waters south of Ireland that had been declared a war zone by Germany. It seems that the captain did not follow the advice from the British Admiralty about location, speed and direction of travel to avoid German submarines that were known to be operating in the area.

On the afternoon of 7 May, Lusitania was spotted and torpedoed by the German submarine U-Boat 20. The liner sank in just 18 minutes with the loss of almost 1,200 passengers and crew.

The sinking caused a storm of protest in the USA, as 128 Americans were among the dead. It was widely seen as beginning to shift American public opinion against Germany and towards the USA later joining the war on the side of the Allies. The ship's sinking also provided Britain with a propaganda opportunity which it used to encourage more men to enlist to fight in the War.