

## Watson the Yachtsman

This often unregarded monument, lying between the better known Douro and Sothern memorials, bears the inscription



**In Loving Memory of  
Sidney Clemens Watson  
who died**

**8th September 1892, aged 31 years.**

*By death I shall escape from death, and life eternal gain*

Well over 100 years old, this tomb is in immaculate condition, and appears to be made of the finest marble. It was not made locally, but by the prestigious monumental masons Caffin of Regent Street, London. Perhaps surprisingly, the only contents are the cremated remains of Sidney Watson, brought from Woking Crematorium and placed here on July 4th 1893.

The son of Manchester merchant Thomas C Watson and Mary (nee Davy) born in Paddington in 1861, Sidney Watson was unfortunate in one respect, his mother dying shortly after his birth. On the other hand both his parents' families were very rich, and as his father did not marry again, Sidney remained an only child. He appears to have

been brought up in the household of his grandmother Sarah Watson, widow of John Watson, carpet merchant from Kidderminster.

Sidney attended Oxford University - the 1881 census shows him as a 20-year-old undergraduate at Balliol College - where he obtained his BA in 1883, following this with the legal qualification of *bar-at-law* at Lincoln's Inn in 1885.

He married Ethel Mary Fowler, daughter of a well-off London solicitor, late in 1886.

Perhaps she already shared his love of sailing; at any rate they honeymooned in the Mediterranean aboard the *Sylvia* which he hired with its skipper, Captain C Willis.

In the next few years they owned several yachts. He bought the 89 ton yawl *Brunhilde* which he renamed *Lethe*; he sold this, and had a 159 ton yawl, also called *Lethe* built by Fay & Co of Northam, to the design of his famous namesake G.L. Watson of Glasgow. His daughter Lilian was born at Sidney Lodge in Hamble in 1887, and he had a smaller 9 ton cutter built by Summers and named after her. Then the 5 ton cutter *Chipmunk* by Luke & Co in 1888. Finally he had a small day-boat, the 2 ton 16 ft lugger *Lilliput* built by Summers in 1892. The 1891 census shows the couple on their yacht *Lethe* (with a crew of 14 men), while daughter Lilian was staying with her Fowler grandparents in London. By 1892 Sidney Watson was a member of no fewer than ten yacht clubs, so it was no wonder that an obituary noted that "Mr Watson was a most enthusiastic and liberal yachtsman, and his generosity to the Royal Southern and Castle Yacht Clubs is well known".

Yet this fabulous lifestyle was to end quite suddenly, near the end of the 1892 season.

He had been sailing *Lethe* in company with Mr G.L. Watson the designer, and had landed on Ryde Pier when he was overcome by a haemorrhage of the lungs (another newspaper described it as a broken blood vessel) and was taken to the Esplanade Hotel. Later he moved to Buckingham Villa, a house owned by his friend Captain Robert Daubuz, and was treated by Sir Andrew Clark, after which he seemed to improve. After a day when he could sit up and read, he relapsed the following night, and finally died in the afternoon of Thursday September 8th, at the age of 31.

Funeral arrangements were controlled by his brother-in-law Archibald Fowler, who had a polished oak coffin made by Purnells of Ryde. A special boat was used to take his remains to Portsmouth and thence by train to Woking, to England's first Crematorium which had only been in operation a few years. In addition a special train was engaged to take relatives and friends from Waterloo to Woking. Sidney Watson was cremated on September 12th, and his ashes remained at Woking while his tomb was being made. It was nearly a year later, on 4th July 1893, that his cremated remains were placed in the beautiful new tomb in Southampton Old Cemetery. Why our cemetery was chosen to have his tomb is not known - possibly he might have requested this in his will, but although he had close ties with Southampton there is no evidence that he or his widow ever had a permanent address here.

Mrs Watson retained ownership of *Lethe* and *Lilliput*, until she married again in 1897.

Her husband was an Army Officer Thomas Kennedy, who was known as Colonel Watson-Kennedy when he fought with distinction at the Battle of Omdurman, and

gained further renown in the Boer War. He was the owner of *Lethe* from 1897 until 1912, when he and his wife moved to an estate in Norfolk.

Tailpiece: did I mention that Sidney Watson was a rich man? His will in fact breaks the record for our cemetery, the final value of his estate being given in August 1894 as £284,667, beating the hitherto highest known figure held by Charles Day, who incidentally had also died in 1892.

**Dave Jacobs, May 2007**