

John Bett RNR, Fisherman of Cellardyke

John Bett was born in 1893, the only son of Annie Barclay and Henry Bett of Shore Street, Cellardyke.

Henry Bett's wooden steam drifter, *The Alices* KY 210, was built in 1907. At this time, John was aged 14 and had three sisters: Lizzie, Alice and Annie. There was great excitement at the launch of their father's new fishing boat.

NEW DRIFTER.—The new steam drifter, *Alices*, built to the order of Messrs Bett, Cellardyke, and launched by Messrs Geddes, Portgorden, has been completed by Messrs Cooper and Greig, Dundee. After getting her gear on board at Anstruther this week, the vessel sailed for the fishing on Wednesday.

St Andrews Citizen 27 July 1907

1440 CRANS AT ABERDEEN.
 ABERDEEN, Thursday.—No boats had arrived at Point Law up to 11.30 this forenoon, but from that time onwards there was a steady arrival throughout the day. The majority of the drifters were well fished, and landed anything between 20 and 40 crans, the average for 60 boats being 24 crans. The highest price was 50s per cran, while the other extreme was 5s per cran, with a general rate of about 11s per cran. Most of the boats were fishing the grounds 80 miles south-east to 90 miles east by north of the port. Among the leading shots were—Boy Charles (LT.), 120 crans; Mare (ME.) and Swifts (ME.), 80 each; Agnes Dixon (A.), 70; Faithful (BK.), Restant (LT.), and Rothesay Bay (KY.), 50 each; Capella (DE.), 45; Boy George, 40; Britannia (A), Reaper (LT.), and East Neuk, 35 each; Integrity (KY.), White Cross (KY.), White Queen (KY.), Daisy (KY.), Preston (KY.), and Pride o' Fife, 30 each; Cornoly Bank (A.), An Revour (LT.), St Ayles (KY.), and Jeannie Leask (PD.), 25 each; Breadwinner (BK.), Merganser (A.), Alice (KY.), Morning Star (KY.), and Lizzie Brown (A.), 20 each.

Aberdeen Press and Journal 26th June 1914



John Bett at Yarmouth



John Bett and some local friends at the start of WW1.

Back L-R: Unknown, David Boyter, John Bett.

Front L-R: David (Shirreff?), William Jack, Unknown.

In 1913, Cellardyke folk owned most of the 60 local steam drifters. With variable catches – the Winter Herring, Summer Fishing and Yarmouth – life was always challenging and busy in this close-knit fishing community.

In 1914, World War One brought devastating changes. Drifters were requisitioned and many young fishermen decided to serve their country, some as Royal Naval Reservists.

John was one such man. He was on patrol off the coast of Antrim on April 20th 1915, on *Coreopsis*, a requisitioned drifter from Anstruther, when tragedy struck.

The family story – handed down by word of mouth when they could bear to speak of him – told that he was ordered, with other men, to use a small boat to retrieve an anchor in the midst of a severe storm.

The crew knew that it was too dangerous, that they should not be sent on such a mission, but there was no choice but to obey the order. John was known for his strong swimming ability, so it was cruelly ironic that he was the only one to lose his life, aged just 22.



The crew searched and found John's body, which was brought home and buried at Kilrenny. His comrades laid their own 'Token of Esteem'.