

# *WW2* - All Saints memorial - **John Wethered**

The second article in my series about the five civilian names on our war memorial concerns a Wethered, with only a very short personal involvement in the brewery business, although his father served as a director and chairman of the company over a period of about 20 years at the start of the 20th century. Francis John Wethered (known to all as "John") was born in Bisham on 27th April 1918 to Lieutenant Colonel Francis Owen and his second wife Margaret. The house where he was born is shown on the birth certificate as "Meadside, Bisham Road" but, in spite of intensive searches and discussions with knowledgeable colleagues, I have been totally stumped as to where this house stood.



John followed his father to Eton in the 1930s and went on to New College in Oxford from where he graduated in Philosophy, Politics and Economics in 1939. His parents were both dead by this stage and something took him to Zeals, a small village in Wiltshire, where he lived with his maternal uncle and became a scoutmaster with the local pack.

After the outbreak of war, he volunteered as an air raid warden in London and got a job with the British Council as

Regional Officer for the Middle East. A serious health problem in the Wethered family in these years was TB, and John was unable to join the armed forces because he had pulmonary tuberculosis which caused him intense shoulder pain.

A family story, impossible to corroborate, is that John was undertaking spying missions for the government using the British Council job as a cover. Certainly he regaled his young nephews with tales of how his desk blotting paper had to be destroyed at the end of the working day and that he had secret photos of Himmler taken in Berlin.

Whatever the truth of it, his job took him on a fateful journey on board ship to the Middle East in late 1942. The SS Ceramic left Liverpool on the morning of 25th November 1942 and joined a convoy of fifty ships heading out into the Atlantic, protected by their naval escorts.



After the convoy separated off the Azores with the now unprotected SS Ceramic turning south, the ship was torpedoed at about midnight on the 6th/7th December by the German U-boat U-515. In one of the worst maritime disasters of the war, 655 people including 377 passengers died that

night with only one crewman surviving, pulled roughly on board the U-boat. They died either on the ship in the terrible explosions that engulfed it or in the lifeboats in the early hours of the 7th, overwhelmed by the violent storms that followed the sinking.

John's short life was one of service to others, high ideals and boyish enthusiasm. His sense of fun made him popular with friends and family, and he always made light of his handicap.

In addition to his name on our war memorial, there is a stained glass window in All Saints Church dedicated to his memory.



In memory of  
Frank Ann Whitney  
born July 20, 1877  
died Feb. 10, 1924

Given in memory of  
20 April 1883 -  
2 October 1924

He is also remembered at the church in Stourton in Wiltshire and at the Traveller's Club in Pall Mall.

*Geoff Wood*