

## **BANKART Henry Percy**

these biographical notes were curated by John McAlpine,  
and they await confirmation/correction, and further detail/expansion from family descendants ...

**Henry Percy BANKART**, aged 17, son of **Howard BANKART** and **Catherine Adelaide MORGAN**, died in a boating accident, 26 December 1887, and was buried in **Saint Peter's Cemetery** on the 11 January 1888. The officiating priest was Rev W E Mulgan, Vicar of **Saint Peter's Church, Onehunga**.

(see the biography of **Howard BANKART**, **Catherine Adelaide MORGAN**  
and **Henry BANKART** on this website)

### **YACHTING DISASTER; FOUR LIVES LOST; A GALLANT SWIM FOR LIFE**

Auckland Star: 27 December 1887

Quite a gloom spread over the town to-day when a rumour was current that a yacht had capsized yesterday in Rangitoto Channel and that four lives had been lost. Enquiry showed that the rumour was only too true.

The facts of the case are as follows:

At 7.00 a.m. yesterday morning, Messrs John J Armstrong, Alfred Seymour Bankart, George John Harker, Richard Joshua Debney, Herbert Menary Hammond and **Henry Percy Bankart** left St George's Bay in the half-decked yacht *Truant*, with the intention of proceeding on a ten-day cruise to Matakana. The *Truant* is well known. She is a centre-board craft of three-and-three-quarter tons, and it had the reputation of being a very swift boat. Till lately she was the property of Mr J. Lecky, of Parnell, who a fortnight back sold her to H. M. Hammond, and he with some companions had been out, several times in her. When the yacht got into the channel yesterday morning, the weather was pretty rough and at Gull Point a sudden gust capsized the boat, which instantly filled, and it went down stern first. All the six occupants of the boat were good swimmers, and they struck out for the shore. Only two reached it, Messrs. George John Harker and Alfred Seymour Bankart. The other four dropped off, one after the other. Upon reaching the beach, Mr Harker at first thought he was the only survivor. He, however, saw Mr Bankart coming in behind him. The two were nearly spent, and they sat down on the rocks to rest a while, at the same time keeping a sharp look out to sea, in order to try and discover their comrades.

After a little while, some picnickers discovered the two survivors, who soon afterwards ascended the cliff, and made their way to the residence of Mr C. S. George, of *Hughes and George*, solicitors. Here they received every attention, and slept a little while, to recover from their exhaustion.

Subsequently, about 4 o'clock, Mr George drove the two survivors into Devonport, and they crossed over to town and conveyed the sad intelligence to the relatives of their deceased comrades. They estimate that the yacht was three miles from the shore, when it capsized. This would, of course, be a stiff swim with such a sea as was running yesterday. At all events, it is certain that the survivors were swimming for more than an hour.

### **MR HARKER'S NARRATIVE**

At 10.30 this morning one of our staff waited upon Mr George John Harker to obtain an account of the accident. Mr Harker courteously volunteered to supply all the information in his power. Apparently, this morning he is none the worse, physically, for his long swim, although he is naturally much distressed at

the sad fate of his companions. Mr Harker is well known in this city as a long-distance swimmer, and also in connection with musical matters, having been for years a member of the *Choral Society*.

Mr Harker states: "We left St George's Bay at seven o'clock yesterday morning, intending to get to Matakana. We were in the yacht *Truant*. She was well-ballasted as we had a lot of provisions and also about one-and-a-half tons of pig iron on board. The yacht belonged to young Hammond, and of course Debney and myself left the handling of her to the owner. I really don't know how the accident happened, but about twelve o'clock the yacht capsized when we were near Gull Point. I expect it must have been a sudden gust as it was very rough at the time. Young Armstrong was at the tiller. He either did not let the sail go when the squall struck her or else, if he did, the lines must have jammed. All I know is that in a second, we were all in the water. We sang out to each other to cling on to the bottom of the boat, but we had no chance to do so as she almost instantly went down stern first. In half a minute after the squall, she filled and went under. A very heavy broken sea was on at the time. It was hard work swimming, and it seemed to me as if we were all to die in the water. If I turned my head to look for the others, I was immediately swamped. The sea was so broken, that I could not rest at all, but was compelled to swim on my side against the heavy water the whole time. We were all good swimmers, and at once struck out for the shore. I think I was in the water about an hour. It was impossible to keep together in such a sea. Poor Debney went down first, and young Bankart next. At first, young Hammond was well ahead. He was the last one I passed. He shouted out to me, 'Mr Harker, I don't think I can do it.' I did my best to encourage him and said he ought to do it. A few minutes afterwards, I looked round, and he was gone. I landed somewhere beyond what is known as Donald McKay's Bay; that is beyond Spring Bay. At first, I thought I was the only one saved, but, presently, I saw what appeared to be a rock in the distance. I saw it move and soon discovered that it was Alfred Seymour Bankart. As he scrambled along the rock, I sang out to him. We laid down for a little while and kept watching the water to see if any of the others were coming in. At last, we gave up hope and climbed up the cliff and walked along between two and three miles to the residence of Mr C. S. George at Lake Takapuna. Here we rested for some time, after which he drove us into Devonport. When I was pretty well exhausted, I turned round and saw the four others in the distance. They appeared all right then, but they all gave up one after the other. I don't think there is the slightest hope of any of them being saved, as there was not another boat in the Channel. None of the party were married."

#### **MR BANKART'S STATEMENT**

**Mr Alfred Seymour Bankart** states:

"We got away from St. George's Bay between 6.30 and 7 o'clock yesterday morning with a fair westerly wind; but somewhat squally. This afterwards increased when we got into the channel and became rather heavy. About twelve o'clock we were between Rangitoto and Lake Takapuna. We intended to lunch at Mr C. S. George's at the Lake. We were about two miles out, and were tacking, just luffing, when a squall struck the vessel, and over she went on her side. She instantly filled and went down stern foremost. All the members of the party were able to swim, and we at once struck out for the shore.

Debney was the only one who had his boots on, and he sank first, when but a short distance from the spot where the accident occurred. Then my brother Percy began to give signs of distress. I kept with him for about a quarter-of-an-hour, swimming beside him and cheering him up. I also tried to help him by holding his trousers. He kept saying that he was going and then suddenly became silent appearing to have swooned. Immediately afterwards, he seemed to suddenly revive and crying out, 'I am going home to God' and went down. He did not rise, again. I was now well exhausted, but I kept on swimming and

succeeded in reaching the shore. Armstrong was the next to disappear. Then Hammond, when he was only about 100 yards from the shore gave up and went under. Harker had been swimming beside him, encouraging him. When I reached the shore, I thought that I was the only survivor as I could see no one about. I walked a short distance along the shore and came across Harker who had landed higher up. I could neither hear or see any signs of the others, and as there was no hope of saving them, we walked along towards the Lake and after traversing about two miles reached Mr George's house, where we were very kindly treated. Every possible care was taken of us. They administered stimulants to us and put us to bed. We remained here for three hours and were then driven into Devonport. We came across, and I was met by Dr Leger Erson, who drove me to his brother's house at Onehunga.

**Dr Erson states** that both the **Bankarts** stayed at his house on Christmas night, and he drove them down to St. George's Bay yesterday morning about six o'clock, where he left them on board the yacht *Truant*. An older brother of the deceased **Henry Percy Bankart** states that he and his two brothers and three sisters and parents resided in Onehunga. They arrived here on May 17th, 1887, from England. The brother who was saved is an electrical engineer and is at present engaged fitting up the electric light at the *Onehunga Woollen Mills*. The unfortunate brother, who was lost, was an artist. He had studied for three years at the *Royal Academy*, London, and two-and-a-half years at the *South Kensington School of Art*. He had recently acquired the whole of Mr Atkinson's collection of casts, etc., and was making arrangements to commence Art Education. He exhibited at the last exhibition of the Society of Arts in this city, where his picture 'A Howick Pensioner' attracted some attention. The two Bankarts, who were in the yacht, were twins.

**Joshua Armstrong**, another of the unfortunate young men drowned in the accident, was a son of Captain Armstrong, of the North Shore. He was a tall, dark young man of some 19 years of age, and worked at the warehouse of *Macky, Logan, Steen and Co.*, where he was a great favourite with all his companions. Armstrong was an old boy of the Church of England Grammar School, Parnell. He was a finished swimmer, but his strength, not being great, he was unable to keep up in the water for any length of time. At a late hour last evening Captain Armstrong, of Parnell, called at the Police Station and said that he feared it was his nephew who had been drowned, as he was going out yachting and intended to call at Mr George's at the Lake for lunch.

**Herbert Menary Hammond** was a son of Mr. W. H. Hammond, Registrar of the Native Lands Office. He was a popular young man of about nineteen years of age and was well known in athletic circles. He belonged to the *Gordon Football Club*, playing in the junior teams, and was also a member of the *Waitemata Bicycle Club*. The young man was also attached to St. Sepulchre's Sunday School, of which he had for some time acted as librarian. He resided with his father in Grafton Road, and was a clerk in *Messrs, Hughes and George's Office*.

**Richard Joshua Debney** was also a clerk in *Messrs Hughes and George's office*. Although about 35 years of age, he appeared much younger. He was well known in art circles as an enthusiastic amateur. He frequently exhibited at the Art Exhibitions of this city and was an energetic explorer of the ranges in the country. Invariably his holidays were passed with fellow artists away in hills, copying the beauties of nature. His untimely decease will be mourned by a large circle of friends.

## **THE SEARCH FOR THE BODIES**

The search for the bodies has been energetically commenced. Mr T. Henderson placed his yacht *Rita* at the disposal of Messrs C. Dacre and Biggs, who at once proceeded to the scene of the accident. Sergeant

Gillies has been despatched round the coast in case the bodies should be thrown up by the tide. As the tide was running out at the time of the accident, the chance of the bodies being recovered is somewhat slight. Sergeant Clarke of the Water Police also applied for the use of the Customs' launch to go out in search of the bodies of the unfortunate young men.