

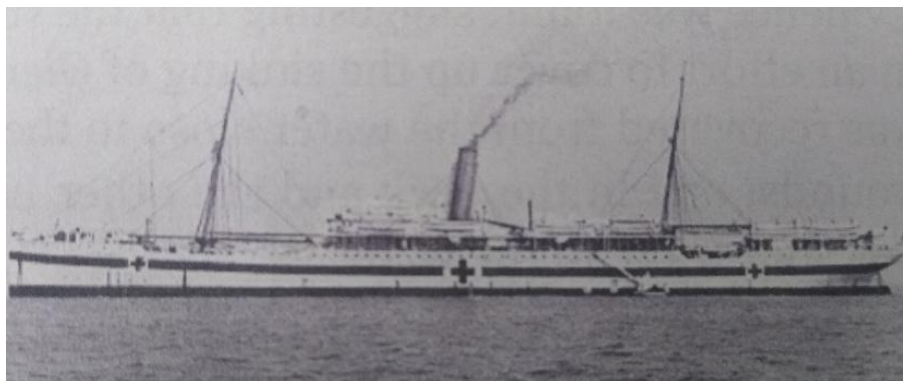
There are 113 names on the War Memorial in Park Avenue – all of them could tell a story - or two! One such name is Joseph Hector MacDonald Beavis, known as Hector, who was my Great Uncle. Here is his story:

Hector Beavis was the eighth child of Frank & Edith Beavis (nee Slaughter) then of Morey's Cottage, Steephill, Ventnor. (Frank was a gardener at Steephill Castle). By the start of the First World War, the family were living at 2 Wrekin Cottage, Lowther (later Lowtherville) Road, Upper Ventnor.

When Hector was 15 he enlisted in the Merchant Navy, joining the Union-Castle Line as an ordinary seaman. One of his first postings was on board the **Braemar Castle**, which, when serving as a Hospital Ship in the Mediterranean, was hit by a mine in the Aegean Sea. There were few casualties and she was repaired and returned to service. This was Hector's first taste of war, even though he was just a merchant sailor and not in the armed forces.

Two years later, Hector was a seaman on another hospital ship **HMHS Glenart Castle**. Glenart Castle began life as **Galician** and was launched from the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast for the newly-formed Union-Castle Line. In September 1914, Galician was requisitioned by the Admiralty for use as a hospital ship and re-named **Glenart Castle**. She was fitted with 453 beds and carried a full medical staff. She plied the Channel between France and England for over two years without incident.

On 26th February, 1918, however, en route from Newport, South Wales to Brest, France, to pick up more wounded, she was attacked by an enemy submarine near Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel. Since she was a hospital ship she was sailing with all her lights on, was painted white and had large red crosses on the hull. However, at about 4am she was hit midships on her starboard side by two torpedos fired from the German U-boat, UC-56. Power was lost and she was plunged into darkness making evacuation almost impossible, especially as a heavy sea was running. It took several hours for rescue vessels to arrive, by which time most of those on board had perished. Glenart Castle took less than eight minutes to sink and, of the 194 medical staff, officers and crew, only 32 survived. Unfortunately, 17 year-old Hector was not one of them. The disaster forms the worst on record in the Bristol Channel.



Later, the captain of the U-boat claimed that he had watched the hospital ship for one and a half hours and believed her to be an armed merchant cruiser.

In 2002, a memorial plinth was erected on the cliffs at Hartland Point in Devon and points West-North-West to the position where the Glenart Castle sank 20 miles away in 1918.

Joseph Hector MacDonald Beavis is commemorated at the Tower Hill Mercantile Marine War Memorial in London, the Isle of Wight County War Memorial and, of course, Ventnor's War Memorial in Park Avenue.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis – photographs from the author's collection