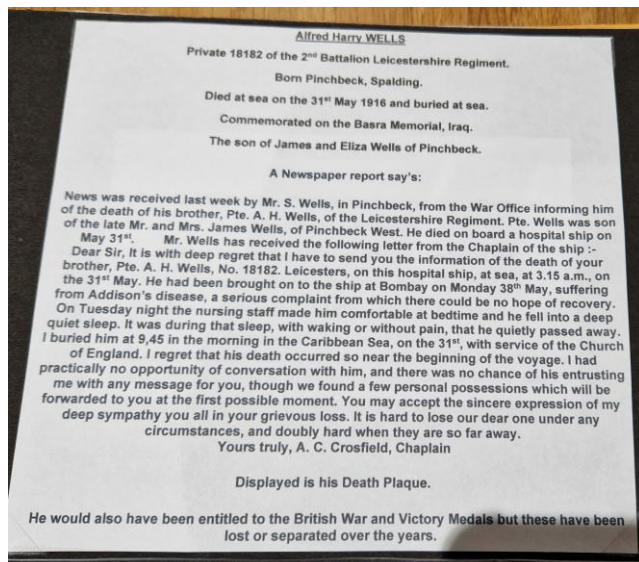Fellow PMHG member Roger Negus, showed me a death plaque recently in his possession, with an accompanying card containing information about the recipient, Private Alfred Harry Wells, 2nd Leicestershire Regiment, who lived in Pinchbeck, Lincolnshire. What was particularly interesting was that the card stated Private Wells was buried at sea, but then went on to give some seriously incorrect information which supposedly came from a newspaper report published shortly after the time of his death.

The details on the card (below), state that Pte. Wells died on board a hospital ship on 31st May 1916. That may well be true as the CWGC confirm his date of death. There is then a 'typo' as the card says that he was brought on board the ship at Bombay on Monday 38th May (*this was actually Monday 29th May, I also discovered which hospital ship he was on, H.M.H.S. VITA, see below*). The card goes on to say he then fell into a deep sleep on the Tuesday night (30th), and died and was buried at sea the next day which would have been Wednesday the 31st.

What I don't understand is the reference to the Caribbean Sea. A quick check shows that the route by sea from Bombay (now Mumbai), to Basra, took ships across the *Arabian* Sea, this must be where the error has occurred, with Caribbean erroneously inserted instead. I am not sure if the newspaper story was wrong or if someone copied it down wrong.

The information below is from H.M.H.S. VITA on the royalnavyresearcharchive.org website.

On her arrival at Bombay on completion of her Quarantine period, [the passenger/troopship] VITA, was chosen for conversion into a Hospital Ship. Her transformation appears to be rudimentary, possibly carried out at the Royal Indian Marine Dockyard at Bombay. She emerged with a capacity to accommodate 405 wounded and sick in patients in 10 wards. Including 32 officers, 16 British and 16 Indian, 9 Warrant Officers, and 364 other ranks in cots and berths.

H.M.H.S. VITA

VITA was an "Indian" Hospital Ship under the military command of the Indian [Army] Medical Service (I.M.S.). The ship continued to be manned by her B.I.S.N. [British India Steam Navigation Company] crew and the hospital was staffed by a mix of army units under Major S. H. Lee Abbott, I.M.S. as senior medical officer also Officer Commanding Troops. She carried a large Indian staff along with the British one. There would have been as many as 100 Indian staff members on board filling a variety of roles such as sub-assistant surgeons, dispensers, Hindu and "Mohammedan" cooks, tailor, sweepers, dhobis, ward orderlies and servants. Doctors and Surgeons were drawn from both the RAMC and I.M.S. In addition to their medical duties, these men also filled administrative duties, for example the roles of Adjutant, Surgical & Medical Stores officer, C.O. RAMC, and C.O. Indian Personnel.

A small Female nursing staff of Ward Sisters, Staff Nurses and probationary Nurses included women from the Australian Army Nursing Service (A.A.N.S.), the Queen Alexandra's Military Nursing Service, India (Q.A.M.N.S.I.), Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve (Q.A.I.M.N.S.R.), and the South African Military Nursing Service (S.A.M.N.S.); they came under the command of an on-board Matron and a Sister-in-Charge. Her medical personnel joined her at Bombay prior to sailing for Basra, Iraq, at the head of the Persian Gulf to begin operations in May 1916, arriving at Basra on May 21st. At Basra she [embarked] 17 Officers and 341 other ranks for passage to Bombay, arriving back on the 29th. While at Bombay she embarked the personnel of No 33 British General Hospital (BCH) 33 Officers and 187 other ranks for passage to Basra. On arrival there on June 11th No 33 BGH was established ashore in a tented camp at Tanoumah on the right bank of the Shatt-al-Arab River.

The above highlighted section tells us all we need to know. VITA arrived in Bombay on the 29th May 1916, she embarked the No. 33 British General Hospital which included 187 other ranks, one of whom had to be Private Wells. She sailed from Bombay to Basra, arriving there on the 11th June. Two days into this voyage, Private Wells died and was buried at sea.

Private Wells is commemorated on the Basra Memorial, Panel 12, in Iraq, which holds the names of 40,500 members of the Commonwealth Forces who died on operations in Mesopotamia from the Autumn of 1914 to the end of August 1921, and whose graves are not known.

Below, map showing route across the Arabian Sea from Bombay (Mumbai), to Basra, Iraq. (This is by air, but you get the idea!)