

The Hera



The History of the Hera

The Hera was built in a German yard in 1886, but when she was launched she was named Richard Wagner. She was sold to a German company, Rhederei Aktien Gesellschaft of Hamburg, to replace its Pindos. This was another four-masted sailing ship that had been lost when she sank near Coverack in February, 1912.

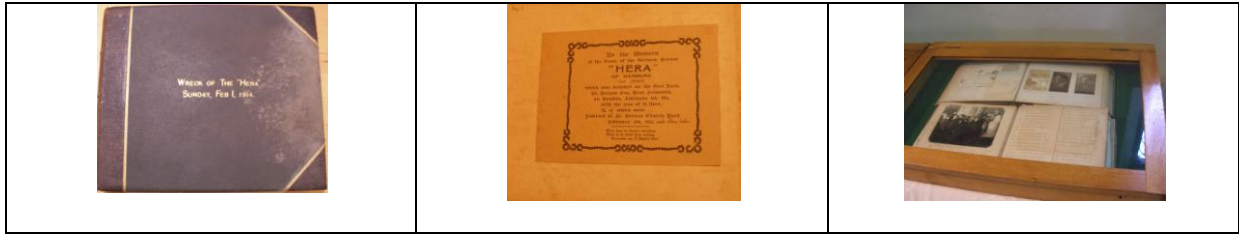
She was used for transporting cargoes between the Americas and Cornwall, South Wales and Newcastle. She had left Pisagua in Chile some three months previously, loaded with nitrates, and was heading for Falmouth for orders.

The Events of 31 January 1914 - 1 February 1914

She had had a good passage, taking 912 days, but ran into "thick and dirty" weather off the Lizard. The chronometer had failed, the ship's clock was an hour slow, the sun had not been visible for three days, and the crew were consequently unable to take bearings. The captain, relying on dead reckoning, was unsure of her true position. They had taken soundings and "found 45 fathoms of water". There was an increasingly thick mist. The order was given to "shorten sail" in order to reduce Hera's speed, in the hope that she would reach Falmouth and pick up St Anthony light. The weather worsened and no lights could be seen. Breakers were sighted, indicating rocks nearby. The Captain ordered "put about" but Hera's speed was too slow to make the turn and she struck the outer stones of the Gull Rock. Immediately the crew sent up distress rockets and fired flares and guns. By this time there was ten feet of water in the hold and the pumps could no longer cope. She took a strong list to starboard and the two starboard lifeboats were swamped and lost. The port lifeboat was eventually launched with most of the crew on board, leaving the captain and a few seamen on board the Hera. Suddenly however, she "disappeared beneath the waves" leaving only a part of her jigger-foremast above the water. The captain and the other men left on board were lost at once. The lifeboat was swamped and the men were thrown into the sea. Only nine of them reached the mast and clung to it, shouting and blowing the second mate's whistle. By the time the Falmouth lifeboat arrived some hours later, there were only five men remaining.



The Events on Shore- Dr Clover's account



Dr Clover (Veryan's Doctor at the time) and his wife had just gone to bed (about 11:30 on the night of 31 January) when he heard a noise outside his bedroom window. This turned out to be the village policeman PC Rogers who wanted Dr Clover to visit his neighbour in Veryan Green, an 85 year old former Falmouth Pilot Captain Vincent, who PC Rogers thought was dying. It was just before midnight when Dr Clover and PC Rogers made their way to Captain Vincent's house. Dr Clover's description of the weather: "It was a darkish night and what moon there was had set, the sky was for the most part overcast and a strong SouthWesterly wind was blowing, a very average sort of winter night without the feeling of any great coldness."

PC Rogers decided to stay outside the house in case Dr Clover needed to send any urgent messages. Having examined Captain Vincent, Dr Clover decided nothing further could be done and went outside to tell PC Rogers he could go home. It was during that conversation held at about 12:15 AM on 1st February that PC Rogers told Dr Clover "I've just seen some rockets and flares out to sea, I don't know whether it is a ship-wreck or something of the sort". As he finished saying this, two further rockets and a flare were seen. Almost immediately, gun fire and a loud report was heard from the South West. Dr Clover assumed that this was a response to the distress signals and the calling out of the Portscatho Rocket Brigade.

Dr Clover and PC Rogers decided to go and see if there was anything they could do. On the way they collected Dr Clover's car and his driver as well as Mr A C Webb who, as Dr Clover put it, "whom we knew had an intricate knowledge of the cliffs surrounding The Nare Head where we thought the disaster had taken place." By 12:40AM the group set off past Trist House towards Nare Head, equipped with hurricane lanterns and electric torches. "We lost no time on the way, the two miles taking us about five minutes to cover: It was a very dark night and a strong wind was blowing from the South West, the sky being for the most part overcast with cloud"



They left the car close to what is now the National Trust car park near Kiberick Cove. PC Rogers headed off towards the cove and soon shouted out "Here they are, shouting, they are not far off". Dr Clover left his car engine running and lights on so that they might be a guide to the position where help was needed. The group made their way towards the sound: "all the time we could hear the hideous shrieks and cries of the poor fellows in danger. It was a haunting sound to the last degree for we could see nothing, our only guide was the direction from where those cries came." Having got as close to sea level as they could, the group estimated that there were at that point about 12-15 voices coming from a more southerly direction. They also thought that there were two sources for the sounds with those coming from an easterly direction being less audible. As the group worked their way along the cliffs in a Southerly direction, "there was no diminution in the volume of sound coming out of the darkness". The group realised that there was little they could do to help: "we were by this time bitterly conscious of the fact that we were in the hopeless condition of being unable to render any practical assistance."

As the sky slightly lightened, the group became convinced that the ship had foundered somewhere between the rocks to the north of Gull Rock and the cliffs of Nare Head.

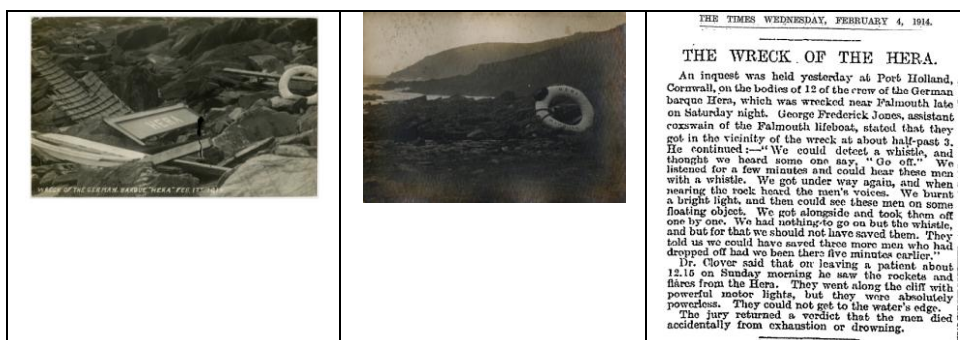
A little while later, the group came across Coastguard Wilkins and the Chief Station Officer of Portloe Coastguard. They had called through to St Anthony Coastguard at 12:20AM requesting the Falmouth lifeboat to be sent to a ship in distress two miles South West of Portloe. The Rocket Brigade had already left Portscatho and were making their way to the scene. The Coastguard at Mevagissey and the divisional Coastguard at Fowey had also been informed. Coastguard Wilkins thought that it would take the Falmouth lifeboat about two hours to reach the scene. By this time there were about 30 or 40 people at the scene, with a number of Portloe fishermen having walked around the cliffs to give assistance having found they were unable to launch their boats due to the sea conditions. The Portscatho Rocket Brigade arrived having made the seven mile journey in good time even though they had to man handle their equipment for part of the way before horses could be obtained to pull it. A decision was made to fire the rocket on the basis that if it fell short it would give the lifeboat, which by then would have been in sight of the rocket being launched, a better idea of where the ship had foundered. Three rockets were launched but each fell short. The rocket equipment was moved to a different position but further launches also proved futile.

At this point, the sound of shouting had ceased but a whistle started to be heard. After some time had passed, with only the sound of the whistle and the sea to be heard, a white flare went up from the lifeboat. A short time later this was followed by "a distant, but distinct cheer". It was decided that nothing further could be done from the shore until daylight. By this time the Rocket Brigade from Gorran had also attended to offer assistance. At first light, "there was not a sign of any wreck to be seen anywhere from the position we held all through the long hours of the past night!!"

The coastguard gave orders for the coastline to be searched and as people started to return home, some wreckage was seen.

At about 10:15AM on 1st February, Dr Clover received a message that "The Falmouth lifeboat had rescued five men from the wreck and landed them safely at Falmouth, but the remainder of the 'crew of 24 men' it was feared had all been drowned". About Noon, Dr Clover heard that bodies were being washed ashore at Portholland. The 12 bodies that had been recovered were placed in the schoolroom at Portholland where Dr Clover examined them before the Inquest. The five survivors were taken to the Royal Cornwall Sailors' Home in Falmouth where they were provided with warm food and clothing.

The Inquest and the Following Days



The Coroner, Mr E L Carlyon, held the inquest in the little chapel at East Portholland where twelve bodies lay "encased in plain wooden coffins". The principle witness was the Swedish helmsman, Alfred Johannsen. Foreman of the jury was Mr Charles Williams of Caerhays Castle, and the court was also attended by Mr Barclay Fox of Falmouth, German vice-consul. The verdict: "accidental death".

The Funeral



The funeral of the twelve seamen took place at Veryan church on 4th February. The mourners included the five survivors and Mr Barclay Fox. The choir sang "Jesu, lover of my soul" as the procession moved to the graveside, and the bells, which had been muffled, were rung. The names of the men are recorded in the Parish Register. The vicar, Canon James Arthur Kempe, wrote in his church log book: "I buried the twelve bodies of those men who were drowned in the wreck of the Hera at Gull Rock on Saturday morning Feb 1st and those bodies were washed in at Portholland beach. About 600 to 700 persons attended the funeral. It was a most solemn and impressive sight and service".

In the following days three more bodies were found, one of which had been identified as that of Captain Lorenz by Alfred Johannsen, who had remained in Cornwall to identify any further bodies. The four other survivors had travelled home from Plymouth to Bremen. The body of Captain Lorenz was sent from Falmouth to Germany for burial. The funeral of the other two men, Peter Illner and Hans Diebel, took place on 11th February and was also attended by a great many people. Many local families sent wreaths. An entry in Canon Kempe's log book for that day reads: "This afternoon I buried two more of the bodies that were drowned in the late wreck of the Hera at the Gull Rock". The diary includes a plan of the grave showing the location of each man's body.

The third and final burial took place at Veryan on March 3rd. Among the many wreaths was one simply inscribed "from a mother, Portloe". Three bodies were never recovered although there was a badly decomposed body washed up on Curgurrel beach and buried in Gerrans churchyard on 15 May 1914 that may have been one of the missing men.

Canon Kempe wrote to the local papers suggesting a permanent memorial to all the men who had lost their lives. A verse written by the Falmouth Seamen's Chaplain, J C Badger, was sent to the owners of the Hera. They "expressed their thanks and intend having it inscribed on a brass tablet to be erected over the graves at Veryan". The grave was marked with granite curb stones and a marble headstone, paid for by the ship's owners, was erected by W James of Penryn. It records the names of all the crew whose bodies are buried at Veryan, the captain, and the men whose bodies were never recovered.



The "valuable" contribution of the local coastguards and the Falmouth lifeboat committee and crew was publicly praised at a meeting of the Falmouth Harbour Board in late February 1914. The members agreed to write to the Admiralty emphasising the need for the coastguard service along the Cornish coast, "and rather than decrease it, it should be increased".

The Hera- Sequelae

In August 1914, Dr Martin Clover put together a second journal covering incidents that happened in the months following the wrecking of the "Hera". At the start of the journal he wrote: "Since the completion of the record containing the detailed account of the Wreck of the 'Hera' many little incidents have happened, and facts come to my knowledge in connection with the 'Hera' worthy of mention. That some of them may be more or less of a private nature is obvious, but on the other hand others may be of far reaching importance. Letters & photographs have come to hand that I wish to preserve. To record these subsequent additions, I have found it necessary for my own interest & possibly for the interest of others to commence another book under the name 'Sequelae'"

Wednesday March 11 1914

Dr Clover received a letter from Hans Muller of Hamburg (brother of Heinz Muller). The letter thanked Dr Clover and his family and asked "if you would be so kind as to give our thanks to the Reverend of the church at Veryan and to all the other people of the village who also showed their sympathy with the poor sailors and who helped to decorate the coffins and the graves. We are glad to know that the last resting place of our poor brother is such a nice place."

Dr Clover replied to the letter saying that he would try and obtain any postcards or photos as requested in the letter but that he was not sure that there were any that Hans Muller had not already seen.

Thursday March 19 1914

Dr Clover received a letter from Karl Sondermann of Lubeck (father of Felix Sondermann). Dr Clover says "he is a painter of art by profession, this I was told previously by Johannes Engel of Falmouth." In the letter, Karl Sondermann asks for details of a gardener in Veryan so that he could arrange for a wreath to be made and a ribbon to be sent to Dr Clover so that it could be laid on the grave with the wreath on Easter Sunday. He also says that he intended to visit Veryan in July.

Dr Clover writes that he immediately replied giving details of where Felix Sondermann was buried, suggestions regarding the wreath and stating that he would carry out any requests in his power.

"I advised his sending on the Dedication Ribbons with the least possible delay to insure their arrival before Easter Day, explaining that as we only had one post in the day & Good Friday intervening, a parcel might easily be delayed 24 or even 48 hours.

Saturday March 21 1914

Postcard from W. Hoffman.

"Very honoured Sir: (I have) here arrived in England, am going on to Swansea. With Remembrance W.Hoffman"

Sunday March 29 1914

Letter from Karl Sondermann. Asking for Dr Clover to deal with wreaths or cross as suggested by Dr Clover in his earlier reply. Also asking who was buried with Felix. In the letter, Mr Sondermann says that they are learning English at the Berlitz school so that they can talk about everything when they visit Veryan. The letter ends:

"For all your friendliness and troubles are you having with us, hearty thanking and with the heartiest wishes to the coming Easter to you and Mrs Clover."

Good Friday April 10 1914

A packet containing the "Dedication Ribbons" arrived by registered post. "they consisted of Red & White satin ribbon joined along their edge measuring about 36" long & 9" wide. They were four in number, each bearing an inscription in gold (in German) as follows:-"

Translation of Dedications:

- 1) Our dear son & brother Felix Sondermann from Lubeck
- 2) Our dear son & brother Heinz Muller from Lubeck
- 3) Present from his Parents & sister & brother Easter 1914
- 4) Present from his mother and his sister & brother Easter 1914

The wreaths were made by the Emmetts at Froe Farm. A large anchor in narcissi had been made for Felix Sondermann's grave and several others had also been completed. It was decided to have a cross made for each of the sailors buried. As well as those made by the Emmetts, 9 more crosses were made that evening by Dr Clover's wife, daughter and two servants with flowers that had been sent by friends for the purpose.



Saturday April 11 1914

Dr Clover's daughter Nancy got up early to gather more flowers so that the final cross could be completed. Later that morning the remaining crosses were brought over by Simon Emmett. He also brought the photographer from Portscatho, "a man who keeps the stores at Portscatho but makes a hobby of photography". In the journal, Dr Clover notes: "NB. It has been pointed out to me by Mr Sondermann that the ribbon to the right on the 'anchor' should have been attached to the 'cross' as it was sent by the Muller family."

A series of 6 photos were taken. Dr Clover notes "There was considerable delay in the execution of the order owing to the exorbitant charge made for them; in the end the charge was modified considerably to be nearly 50% and half a dozen of the accompanying were ordered & delivered sometime in July 1914 one of each being given to both Mr & Mrs Sondermann, Mr Hans Muller & Miss Mali Muller who happened to be here at the time the prints arrived. My wife also had one of each."

The crosses were placed on the grave that evening.

Sunday April 12 1914 Easter Day

Although there had been heavy rain during the night, Dr Clover notes that "this had in no way damaged the crosses all of which looked fresh & light: a good many people remarked how nice the graves with the flowers looked."

That evening Dr Clover wrote to Mr Sondermann explaining what had been done and asking him to let Mr Muller know the content.

Monday April 20 1914

With the flowers having died, Canon Kempe gave instructions for the crosses to be removed. Dr Clover was also informed that one of the Directors of the shipping company would be viewing the grave with a view to erecting a suitable headstone.

Friday April 24 1914

It was noticed in the morning that some "wanton mischief" had taken place around the grave. The police had been informed and were investigating. The two flags at the west end of the grave had been disturbed with the Union Jack having been torn from its pole and partially destroyed. All of the ribbons were lying about torn and a wreath of everlasting flowers was found some distance from the grave.

Dr Clover comments: "At first this was thought to be the act of some individual: but personally I believe it to have been done by a dog."

Sunday April 26 1914

Dr Clover received a letter from Karl Sondermann enclosing letters of thanks for:
Mr Trudgian (Tretheake)
Mr Gay (Portholland)
Mr Emmett (Froe)
Mr Davis (Veryan)
Mr T Blamey (Broom Parc)

Sunday May 3 1914

Dr Clover was notified that a body had been found washed up on Curgerrell beach by Mr Seagor of Curgurrell Farm. It was thought to be the body of Captain Lorenz.

Tuesday May 5 1914

An inquest was held by the Coroner E.L. Carlyon regarding the body.

Friday May 8 1914 The Cornish Echo published a report of the inquest. On the same day, Dr Clover happened to meet one of the jury who told him that the general opinion was that there was not much doubt that the body was that of Captain Lorenz. Dr Clover also ascertained that the body had been buried in Gerrans churchyard.

Thursday June 11 1914

Whilst at Portloe, Dr Clover noticed a "one funnel two mast steamer". He was allowed to go up to the "Bad weather look out station" where he was told that Trinity House were blowing up the "Hera" as she was a danger to fishing boats. Dr Clover returned to Veryan, picked up his "party" and went out to Nare Head to watch. He left his car in exactly the same place as when he had tried to help rescue the sailors. They saw 5 charges fired.

"The effect was rather strange as one could hear & feel, where we were seated on the bank, a sort of subterranean rumbling then the surface of the water became covered with rising air bubbles, then rising to the surface burning brilliantly for perhaps half a min came the charge emitting dense brownish yellow smoke which was carried away by the wind to the south."

"A third charge was fired at 1:35 PM which created a far greater disturbance in the water, for after feeling the vibration of the ground on which we were sitting, a huge volume of water shot up into the air half the height of Gull Rock itself: When this disturbance had subsided we realised that the last visible evidence of the wrecked Hera had disappeared."

Monday July 6 1914

Mr and Mrs Karl Sondermann arrived in Veryan. They visited the grave and had supper with Dr Clover before going to the New Inn where they were staying.

Tuesday July 14 1914

Mr Tom Blamey invited the Clovers and the Sondermanns to supper. On the way back, they met with Hans Muller and his sister at Camels and brought them back to Veryan.

Tuesday July 28 1914

On his departure from Veryan, Hans Muller wrote: (translated)

"When I heard the dreadful news in Germany of the shipwreck of the "Hera", and the loss of my dear brother 'Heinz' not only did the mourning over that unbearable loss oppress me, but also the thought that the dear boy must rest in a far off & strange country. It was some consolation to me however to feel that such friendly people had taken kind pity on the bodies of the sailors that perished & laid them in their last resting place so feelingly. My heartfelt thanks are permanently due to the dear family of Clover for all their kindness in the matter. I shall not forget all that they did for the brave dead fellows; one of whom was my dear brother 'Heinz'.

Monday August 3 1914

Writing in Dr Clover's journal (translated by Dr Clover), Mali Muller wrote:

"The news of the loss of our dear boy brought us deep grief, for much joy and love has gone with him. Your dear letters brought us a little consolation in our grief for we felt you had deep compassion for the poor dead and my dear brother 'Heinz'. In a disinterested manner you received me a stranger, and gave me your friendship. For all your kindness I wish to thank you, and ask you with all my heart to accept my love and friendship; Even though now it may be the battle thunder resounds afar, and our nation may stand opposed to yours so I ask you to preserve me a little place in your heart

To see you again

I am your

Signed Mali Muller"

Tuesday August 4 1914

At 7PM, War was declared against Germany.

Saturday 8 August 1914

Karl Sondermann wrote (translated by Dr Clover)

"The glorious experiment of the approach between England & Germany is here in Veryan in its truest sense & success, simply through mutual confidence & love-

The names 'Hera', & 'Gull Rock' are tragic 'songs without words' for us all, and understood by us all- I may declare this, if I were not German I would be an Englishman:

To my dear friends at Bay House

Mr Clover, Mrs Clover & little Nancy

I remain in greatest friendship

Karl Sondermann."



Tuesday August 4 1914

Mrs Lisa Sondermann wrote (translated by Dr Clover)

"To dear family Clover who have taken us in such a friendly way at so sad a time which followed on the loss of our eldest, never to be forgotten son on Feb 1 1914, for what has been so willingly & joyfully done for us from a far we are heartily thankful. May the time come when we can return the same friendship.

These words I write upon the day of The Declaration of War on the 4 Aug 1914. Now we do not know how or when we shall get home; but the name Clover will be never forgotten through all times.

In true friendship

Yours

Mrs Lisa Sondermann"



In the days leading up to the declaration of war, the future was looking increasingly ominous. Hans Muller left Veryan on 28th July to return to Hamburg via Plymouth. His sister decided to stay on for a few more days and return with Mr & Mrs Sondermann on the "President Grant" on or about August 7th.

In some ways, life carried on as normal. Dr Clover wrote on Thursday 30th July:

"It being more or less a general holiday and not being in the least bit interested in the Veryan Show, I decided to take the day 'off' and motored over to Bude."

Sunday August 2 1914

Dr Clover wrote:

"The first thing I saw upon opening 'The Times' of yesterday (we get it a day late) is that the SS @President Grant' which had left New York for Southampton & Hamburg had been recalled by wireless to New York!!!"

Coming out of the New Inn where he had passed on the news, Dr Clover met a Portloe fisherman 'Wallas Leau' in full Naval uniform who had been recalled to the naval reserve. The publican of the New Inn (who was a naval pensioner) and several other men in the village received orders to report the following day.

Tuesday August 4 1914

Dr Clover received a reply by wire to a letter he had written to Thomas Cook & Son, stating:

"Daily Service Harwich & Hook, Liverpool St 8.30PM No Guarantee, Passports necessary"

Mr & Mrs Sondermann both had passports but Miss Muller didn't.

Mr Sondermann wired the Agents of the Hamburg & American Line at Plymouth and received the reply:

"Service to Hamburg entirely suspended until further notice"

Wednesday August 5 1914

While in Falmouth, Dr Clover spoke with the German Vice Consul (Mr R Barclay Fox). Mr Fox advised that he was unable to advance them money or obtain a passport for Miss Muller. He also advised he was no longer German consul. When asked about transport home for the Sondermann's & Miss Muller, Mr Fox said there was no chance of them being able to get on German lines in Falmouth. They had better keep as quiet as they could in Veryan.

Thursday August 6 1914

In the daily paper there was a notice to the effect that the British Government had made a proposal to Germany to exchange all 'prize' shipping.

Dr Clover wrote to Thomas Cook & Son asking about a passport for Miss Muller and all three German guests packed so that they would be ready to leave at a moment's notice.

Saturday August 8 1914

Dr Clover received a reply from Thomas Cook advising it was impossible to obtain a passport. In the evening, a telegram was received from Mr Fox in Falmouth:

"Germans here receiving permission to return to Germany on giving undertaking not to serve in war. American Consulate General New Bond St London acting for Germany now advise applying him: Fox"
Dr Clover immediately wired the American Consulate General. He also wrote some lines for the three.

Monday August 10 1914

A telegram was received saying:

"Newspapers state Ackland will make statement Monday House: Steiner" (American Consulate General)

In Tregony, Dr Clover was told by Police Superintendent Sparkes that all 'aliens' had to register their names and addresses. That evening Dr Clover took Mr & Mrs Sondermann and Miss Muller in to Truro Police Station to register. Canon Kempe had given a supporting letter to be passed on. After some difficulties, partly due to Veryan being in a 'prohibited area' and partly due to Sondermann being an artist who had served three short periods in the German army (a year in 1885 & two periods of 6 weeks in 1886 & 1887), Dr Clover was able to persuade the Superintendent to issue three permits allowing them to reside in Veryan for 10 days.

Tuesday August 11 1914

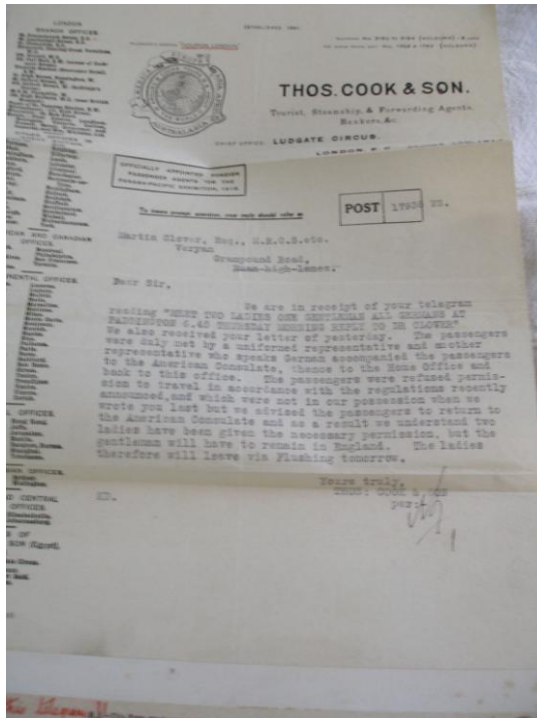
After some difficulties, passage was booked and travelling permits had been issued by the police in Truro allowing Mr & Mrs Sondermann & Miss Muller to travel to London and then on to the continent.

Wednesday August 12 1914

The three eventually left by train from Truro to Paddington. Dr Clover wrote:

"I felt their departures very keenly having very little hope that they would be able to get through to their ultimate destination without a hitch. We saw their train disappear. My wife & I came back to the car & Hudson drove us home. It was a very mild evening & the moon had risen ere we arrived back at Veryan at 11PM:

Thus ends a sequel to the wreck of the 'Hera' that no one would have imagined!!"



Friday August 14 1914

Mr Sondermann returned to Veryan having been told that he could travel by police in London. PC Rogers gave him back the permit to reside in Veryan until the 20th and said that he expected to get further instructions in the morning.

Saturday August 15 1914

Dr Clover asked Canon Kempe if he would write to the Home Secretary setting out Mr Sondermann's case and asking if an exception could be made. Canon Kempe said he would gladly do this.

Thursday August 20 1914

Canon Kempe accompanied Dr Clover and Mr Sondermann to Truro where the permit to reside was extended to 31 August. Mr Sondermann was also allowed to take his art equipment on the condition that he only used it in and around Veryan and that he did not draw or paint the coast.

Monday August 31 1914

Mr Sondermann was initially refused permission to travel to Truro to renew his resident permit as he did not have a permit to travel outside of a 5 mile radius of Veryan. A travel permit did follow in the post and he travelled to Truro with a further supporting letter from Canon Kempe. A further resident permit of 1 month was granted.

The last entry in the journal is for Thursday September 3 1914 when Dr Clover received a letter from Germany advising that Mrs Sondermann and Miss Muller had arrived safely.

We do know that Mr Sondermann was eventually able to return to Germany. At some point prior to 1916, Dr Clover joined the Royal Medical Corp as a temporary Captain.