

George Henry Ainley
1858 – 1893

George Henry Ainley, aged 34, sailed for the west coast of Africa from Cardiff, in early January 1893, as surgeon on board the British and African Steam Navigation Company's ship Mayumba. Arriving on the coast of Africa, the ship docked at Port Lagos for loading. Until twenty years before, Lagos had been a notorious centre of the slave trade. Its merchants resisted their king's ban on the trade, replacing him with his brother who was more favourable to their aims. In 1861 Britain had annexed the country and suppressed the trade, using the port instead for the growing trade in palm oil, ivory, etc.

When the Mayumba docked "*A number of officers, along with the Europeans on shore, got up a cricket match.... While playing, (the heat being very intense) the late Dr. Ainley had a kind of faint, and was carried unconscious into the shade under some trees, and restoratives were applied. These had the desired effect, and he appeared to completely rally. The next day he was about the ship in his usual cheerful manner, until afternoon, when he complained of slight headache.*" The captain, who had experience of conditions on the coast, advised him to go to bed, his temperature having risen to 104F.

A dose of Antopyrine was given to reduce his temperature, but one hour later it had risen to 106F. As the captain talked with his first officer about returning to port for medical assistance, Ainley died.

The captain was unable to say whether Dr. Ainley had died of the effects of sunstroke or of malarial fever. At daybreak next morning he was buried at sea with the impressive ceremony customary on those occasions. News of his death reached his wife by cable in March, but poignantly was followed in April by the arrival of a long cheerful letter George had himself written before his short fatal illness. The effect of such a letter, following so closely on the tidings of his death, may be imagined.