Irish Seamen's Relatives Association (1939-46)

Ardmore Crew

The Irish Registered vessel SS Ardmore [No 140454] owned by the City of Cork Steam Packet Company went missing with her crew of 24 on the 11th of November 1940 while on a voyage from Cork to Fishguard in Wales. In August 1997 following a request by Mr Con Galvin from Carrigaline Co Cork seeking to register the death of his grandfather Mr Edward Bruland, research was initiated to establish the cause of the loss of the SS Ardmore and to establish the final location of her wreck. On the 16th of February 1998 the Evening Echo in Cork published an article on this research which revealed publicly the location of her wreck. Mr Jim Power who had previously requested assistance in locating the wreck of the Ardmore was subsequently advised of her wreck site enabling the relatives of her crew to have a dignified closure. On the 19th of November 1999 an inquest was held in Wexford into the loss of the SS Ardmore and her crew which was recorded and published by the Irish Times on 22nd of November 1999. The verdict of the jury is consistent with the evidence one submitted to the court; *that the SS Ardmore and her Crew were lost on the morning of the 12th of November 1940 as a consequence of an explosion [mine] while they were on board*. See also Dail Debates 13th October 1999.

Mr A Murphy a Fireman aged 56 years from Main Street, Passage West in Cork was not a member of the crew of the *SS Ardmore* when she sailed for Fishguard on Monday 11th of November 1940. His name has erroneously been included in some bibliography and on the National Seamens Memorial located at City Quay, Dublin. There were no survivors from the *SS Ardmore* sunk on the 12th of November 1940. In deference to the crews lost on Irish vessels relatives are entitled to an expectation of authenticity when information is being published. The publicity surrounding the medal presentation in Cork in April 1998 prompted a complaint from the Dalgarno family that they had not been included in the ceremony. Just to clarify: "We Did Not Know" about Joseph Dalgarno, as we had relied on Frank Fordes Book The Long Watch for corroboration of the crew lists. This query prompted a full search of all the Department of Marine files relevant to awards of service medals to seamen lost on Irish vessels during the Emergency years. Following this review, some classes of medals had been found to have been issued in error and as far as possible those families affected were contacted and the position rectified. However the error of the names on the memorial has never been rectified even though those concerned were advised of the error. In 1999 the correct names were included on the SS Ardmore Memorial plaque on the Penrose Quay Cork which was the families response. The plaque in Cork was funded by the Dept of Marine.

Crew Lost

James Power 126 Blackwater Road, Cork, Able Seaman, aged 28.

Edward Bruland, Convent Place, Passage West, Cork, Cook, aged 57.

Frank Barry, 5 Canning Place, Passage West, Cork, Carpenter, aged 26.

John Cronin, 18 Spring Lane, Cork, Cattleman, aged 43.

Bartholemew Desmond, 2 Custom House Street, Cork, Able Seaman, aged 41.

John Fennel, Saint Mary's Avenue, Gurranabraher, Cork, Seaman, aged 18.

Patrick Flynn, 15 Assumption Road, Cork, Cattleman, aged 39.

Michael Ford, 11 Brown Street, Cork, Fireman, aged 53.

Thomas Ford 12 Fairfield Road, Warrington, Liverpool, Master, aged 55.

Thomas Edwin Hare, 39 Beechwood Park, Rathmines, 1st Mate, aged 37.

A. Johnson, 47 Whiteout Avenue, Bedingon, Liverpool, Chief Engineer, aged 56.

John Kelleher, Fairhill, Washbrew Lane, Cork, Cattleman, aged 35.

John Lane, 1 Pophams Road, Cork, Cattleman, aged 53.

John McGlynn, 80 Tolka Road, Clonliffe Road, Dublin, Bosun, aged 40.

Sydney McNally, 24 Nicandy Road, Liverpool, 2nd Engineer, aged 49.

Joseph Dalgarno, 16 Railway Avenue, Inchicore, Dublin, 3rd Engineer, aged 29.

Patrick O Donovan, 31 Henry Street, Cork, Donkeyman, aged 45.

Timothy O Leary 4 Whitehorn Road, Cork, Messboy, aged 20.

John O Regan, 19 Fort Street, Barrack Street, Cork, Fireman, aged 65.

Frank O Shea, 16 Lower Oliver Plunkett Street, Cork, Able Seaman, aged 39.

John Power 41 Upper John Street, Blackpool Cork, Able Seaman, aged 27.

Michael Raymond, Farranferris Avenue, Cork, Cattleman, aged 26.

Patrick Ryan Passage East, Co Waterford, 2nd Mate, aged 40.

Edwin Speed, 60 Eastbourne Street, Liverpool, Fireman, aged 61.

The SS Ardmore official No 140454 was built at the Caledon Shipbuilding and Engineering Company, Dundee, Scotland. She was purchased in 1919 by the British and Irish Steampacket Company as the Lady Killiney. In May of 1923 she was transferred to the City of Cork Steam Packet Company and renamed the SS Ardmore. She could steam at 14 knots was 1022 Tons Gross, 417 Tons Net, Length 254.4 Feet, Beam 36.1 Feet.

The SS Ardmore left Cork for Fishguard at approximately 20.00 Hours on the night of Monday 11th of November 1940. Research from the intelligence documentation available in Irish Army Military Archives and from the Ministry of Defence in London indicates that the Ardmore was last seen by British intelligence personnel operating in Cobh as she proceeded from Cobh Harbour. She was logged by Irish Coastwatchers passing the Ballycotton look out post at 22.20 hours "as the Ardmore travelling east". She was then logged by the Knockadoon Head look out post at 22.55 hours "as a cargo boat 3 miles south of post going east".

Although a search operation was initiated at the time which involved checking her estimated steaming route to Fishguard from land,sea and air for any sign of flotsam. Nothing more was heard from the Ardmore until wreckage was spotted coming ashore on the 20th of November 1940 off St Davids Head in South Wales. Other wreckage began to come ashore off Carnsore point which included the carcase of a pig.

With the assistance of Commandant's Peter Young and Victor Laing, a secret intelligence report was discovered in January 1998 in the Irish Military Archives at Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, which reveals that wreckage from the Ardmore was also washed up onto the Great Saltee Islands off the Wexford coast. In an intelligence report dated 21st of November 1940 the master of the British Coaster Begerin [433 tons] reported to the Port authorities at Waterford that he had observed wreckage and dead animals on the rocks on the Salteee Islands during the course of his journey to Waterford Harbour. He stated "that in view of the livestock carried by the Ardmore he felt that this wreckage may possibly throw some light on the fate of the Ardmore" .

On the 8th August 1940 Irish Intelligence records indicate that a German Aircraft was seen laying Magnetic Mines off Dungarvan Harbour, the Keeragh Islands and the Saltee Islands off Wexford.

The bodies of 3 crewmembers from the Ardmore were subsequently recovered. On December the 3rd 1940 the body of Captain Thomas Forde was recovered from the Beach at Llanon and the bodies of Able Seaman Frank O Shea and Cattleman Michael Raymond were recovered from the Beach at Aberarth which are south of Aberystwyth in Wales. The remains of Frank O Shea and Michael Raymond were later returned to Cork for burial. In 1943 it was decided by the then Minister for Industry and Commerce that the Ardmore and her crew of 24 was lost as result of belligerent action.

Towards the end of January 1998 and following extensive research into the cause of the loss of the Ardmore I became aware that a wreck had been discovered in position 52 . 04 . 56 North / 006 . 33 . 71 West by a Diver from Kilmore Quay in a location on the sea bed off the Great Saltee Island Co Wexford *[an unconfirmed report indicates that the wreck of the SS Ardmore had been discovered in 1995 by members of the diving community and up till the conclusion of this research in 1998 its location had been kept secret].*

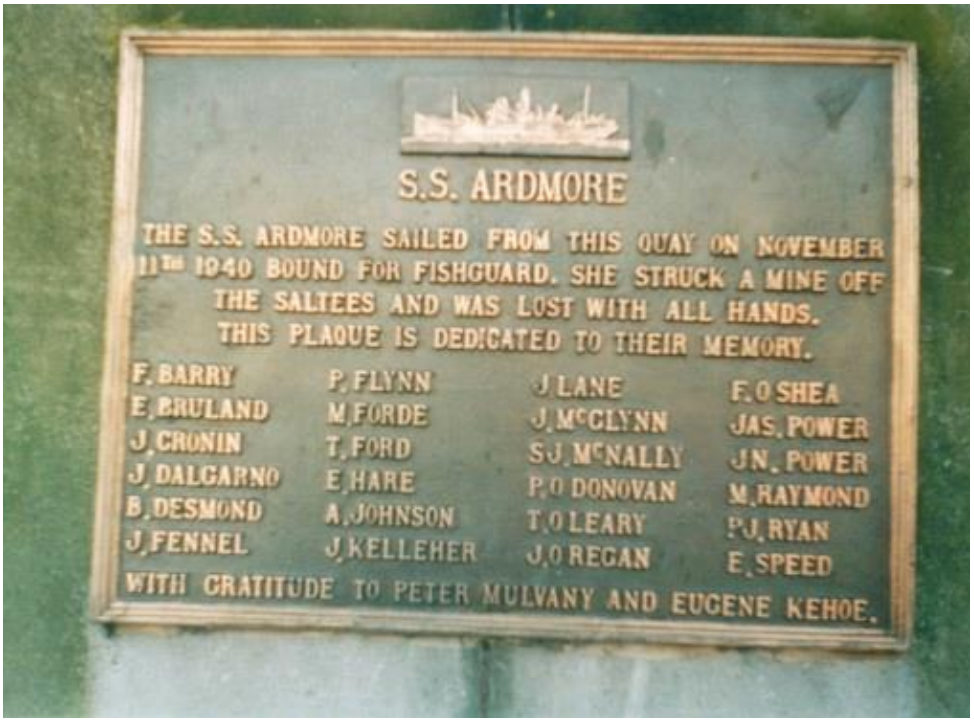
Following a meeting with the diver in Kilmore Quay on the morning of Tuesday the 3rd of February 1998. It was confirmed in writing to the relevant authorities, to Mr Con Galvin and Mr Jim Power, both relatives of the crew, that from the divers report and ones research which included inter alia photographs of the Ardmore, intelligence documentation and the original shipbuilding plans of the Ardmore, that this wreck was indeed the Ardmore lost from the 11th of November 1940.

This research now indicates that while on a voyage from Cork to Fishguard in Wales with a cargo of cattle, pigs and other agricultural produce the Irish registered vessel SS Ardmore official number 140454 was the subject of an large expolsion to her mid-ship section where her boilers were positioned. This destroyed the mid-ship section of the vessel and caused her to sink immidiately, trapping her crew. It should be noted that on the 8th of August 1940 Irish intelligence records indicate that a German Aircraft was seen laying Magnetic Mines off Dungarvan Harbour, the Keeragh Islands and the Saltee Islands off Wexford. German Military Archives at Freiburg also indicate that there was no U- Boat activity within this area from the 11th to the 12th of November 1940. It was concluded that the Ardmore and her crew of 24 were lost as a result of a mine explosion to her mid-section off the Great Saltee Islands, Co Wexford between 24.00 hours and 04.00 hours on or about Tuesday morning the 12th of November 1940. In official files the loss of the Ardmore is as a result of belligerent action.

Postscript

On the 16th of February 1998 following successful completion and Publication of this research into the loss of the SS Ardmore, a submission was made to the Irish Department of Marine, which persuaded the Irish Government to alter its policy in relation to the presentation of the Marine Valour Medals. From April 1998 a Minister would in future personally present these awards to relatives and survivors. Heretofore medals would have been sent by post.

In June of 1998, the closing chapters of the SS Ardmore research project were written in Kilmore Quay, County Wexford, when a memorial service for her crew was held in the village Church and at sea off the Saltee Islands at the site of her wreck. The idea of memorial services for the Ardmore crew and the erection of a static memorial in Kilmore Quay where relatives could return and remember their loved ones with dignity *(and as a consequence would also benefit the Kilmore Quay Community)* was first mooted on the 16th of February 1998 in the Cork Edition of the Evening Echo and on Saturday 25th of April 1998 following discussions at the inaugural Ardmore memorial service held in St Mary's Cathedral, Cork City.



In October 1998 The SS Ardmore Memorial Plaque was erected by the relatives and dedicated by the Naval Service Chaplain, Father Des Campion. The Irish Naval Vessel L.E Deirdre docked nearby sounded her siren in final tribute. The Ardmore Plaque is located on the Penrose Quay side of the Michael Collins Bridge in Cork. The Ardmore Memorial Cross *[the anchor donated by* Clontarf Yacht and Boat Club*, the fabrication by Richard Johnson of* Dublin Bus Clontarf Garage*, the 24 nameplates of each crewmember made by the pupils of St David's Christian Brothers School Artane]* had also been laid at the Wrecksite of the SS Ardmore off the Saltee Islands by the Irish Naval Vessel LE Deirdre on behalf of the relatives.

Following our submission, the Minister for Justice, Mr John O Donoghue T.D., directed that an inquest be held in the Wexford District Court pursuant to Section 23 of the Coroners Act. See also Dail Debates 13th October 1999. On Friday the 19th of November 1999 the jury subsequently returned a verdict consistent with ones evidence presented to the court; *that the SS Ardmore and her Crew were lost on the morning of the 12th of November 1940 as a consequence of an explosion [mine] while they were on board*.

Sponsored by the Irish Seamen's Relatives Association (1939-46), the Irish Merchant Navy Memorial Plaque and Plinth uniquely embossed with the Irish flag commemorating those crews lost on Irish registered vessels during world war two, is now on view in the British Merchant Navy Section of the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas, Staffordshire, England, *which is currently managed by the Royal British Legion*. An oak tree within the Merchant Navy Convoy *oak wood section* which is located directly behind the plinth is also dedicated to their memory. In September 2007, a new memorial plaque was fixed to the front of the plinth, to record the names of the 5 Irish Born Merchant Seamen captured while serving on British merchant vessels who lost their lives as a result of Gestapo ill-treatment in the Arbeitsertziehungslager located in Bremen-Farge 1943-45. The Irish Merchant Navy Memorial Plaque is listed in the official inventory of United Kingdom War Memorials. In 2017 this Memorial Plaque was relocated from Bremen, Germany to the Mayo Peace Park in Castlebar County Mayo.

Peter Mulvany
Chairperson
Irish Seamen's Relatives Association (1939-46)
[redacted]
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