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New information on Kinsale and Barry Merchant Seamen.

Sinking of 'Daybreak' on website

By Leo McMahon.

No family has done more to promote the strong maritime and family links between Kinsale and Barry than the Greenways, and ongoing research by Keith Greenway, son of Merchant Navy Association Barry Branch Chairman Jim Greenway has resulted in information on two other Kinsale Seamen who were casualties in World War I.

“Through our Greenway research,” Keith told South County, “ We have known for some time of the loss of Thomas Greenway and the ship SS Daybreak. Only recently, however, did we discover that two other Kinsale men were aboard that fateful day. We would welcome any further information on these and other Kinsale and Irish Seamen who ‘crossed the bar’ and the opportunity to communicate our tribute to surviving relatives”.

For the record, the SS Daybreak was sunk as a result of a torpedo fired without warning by a German submarine on Christmas Eve 1917 near South Rock Lightship, Strangford Lough, off the Ards Peninsula, Co Down. Previous records stated that the vessel was sunk at Lough Swilly and this is even mentioned in the memorial card of Thomas Greenway.

Although a British ship registered in West Hartlepool on the North East coast of England, she was defensively armed due to the state of hostilities and actually survived a U-boat attack in the Arctic Ocean on November 1, 1916.

The three Kinsale men who died that day were: James Barrett, ordinary seaman, aged 18, son of Patrick and Hannah Barrett, Fisher Street (now Lower O’Connell Street). William O’Connor, able seaman, aged 39, son of Michael and Ellen O’Connor and husband of Ellen (nee McCarthy), Higher (O’Connell) Street. He was born at Browns Mills. Thomas Greenway, boatswain, aged 47, son of the late James and Mary Greenway and husband of the late Nora Greenway.

Keith Greenway said he would particularly like to hear from descendents of William O’Connor and James Barrett.

An eye witness, John Bailie of Newcastle, a boat contractor attending the South Rock Lightship, recalled the loss of the steamer one mile east. “I remember being on the South Rock as a temporary for 2/6 a day, feed yourself. On Christmas Eve 1917 at about midday, the Daybreak, loaded with maize, was torpedoed and 21 were lost. Her nose was cut clean off. It happened so quick her propeller was going round in the air as she sank. You talk about explosions, boilers were bursting one after another”.

On Christmas Day, the same U-boat 87 attacked a convoy in the Irish Sea but sank after being rammed by the sloop HMS Buttercup and British patrol boat PC56. All of its 44 crew perished.

The names of all casualties of the Daybreak are listed at the Merchant Navy Association’s Commonwealth War Dead Memorial at Tower Hill, London (which has a total of 22,000 names). In 1998, Jim Greenway, of Barry presented the World War 1 medals of his Grandfather Thomas to Kinsale Regional Museum at a function in the Municipal Hall, Kinsale.

Honoured also at Tower Hill is Keith's Great Grand uncle James Greenway who was boatswain on the SS Tregenna, built at West Hartlepool in 1919 but registered in St. Ives, Cornwall when it was torpedoed and sunk by German submarine U-65 while in convoy North West of Rockall in the Atlantic Ocean while on a return voyage from Philadelphia to Newport, Monmouthshire, with a cargo of 8,000 tons of steel during World War II on September 17, 1940. Thirty-three died and four survived. James Greenway was aged 62. Another Irishman to perish was ordinary seaman Michael O'Brien from Arklow.

Given that Ireland was equally at risk of invasion by either Germany or Britain during World War II, the country was mobilised to handle either contingency during a period referred to as 'The Emergency'. Despite the government's official line, "however", said Keith, "most Irish people sympathised with the British. Around 40,000 Irish men joined the British forces and over 150,000 men and women worked in the war effort. In General, when British airmen crashed in Eire (Irish Free State) they were quietly escorted to the border, while German pilots were interned. Irish workers played a key role in the British war effort during World War II, a role that has never been fully acknowledged."

Thankfully, those who served in the Merchant Navy, are many decades later, remembered by the Irish Seamens' Relatives Association, Service with Honour in the Mercantile Marine 1939-46, an internet based monument and also by the Tregenna website.

Among those honoured are Cornelius Farley, boatswain on the Glasgow, registered SS Induna. Aged 36, he is buried in Murmansk and was the son of Cors and Katherine Farley, Kinsale, who died on March 30, 1942 and able seaman Patrick Joseph Lucey, son of Michael and Joan Anna Lucey and married to Mary Christina Lucey, Scilly, Kinsale who died on board the Liverpool registered SS Westdale on April 19, 1942, and is buried at Merthyr Dyfan Burial Ground in Barry. Further details as to cause of death are not available and any information on these and other Kinsale and Barry seamen would be most welcome.

Keith Greenway also tells us that he recently had communication from the family of the late Nora Theresa Greenway who was born on New Years Day 1913, and baptised in St. John the Baptist Church. Her brother was James Joseph. Her mother Nora died a few years before Thomas and at some stage, Nora, who had moved to Wales in her teens, married William Davies from Barry who played for Charlton Athletic and Wales and England in soccer.

The couple then moved to Australia in 1947 and she died in 1984 at Mooroopna in the state of Victoria. Keith has a baptismal certificate and memorial card with a photograph of Nora whose sister was Maisie Greenway who died in Aorel, Sussex back in 1927.

Nora's grand-daughter and daughter of Barri Davies has contacted the website to say that her grandmother's brother James Joseph Greenway, who served on the SS Dudley Rose, died at Blongy West Wharf, Chantenay, Nantes in France on September 28, 1938.

Keith, along with his father Jim Greenway and members of the Merchant Navy Association, Barry Branch have good relations with the RNLI, in Kinsale, Courtmacsherry and Barry. While others in both towns, are campaigning for an official 'friendship pact' between the town councils of Barry and Kinsale. A Friendship Pact between the MNA, Barry and Kinsale Harbour Commissioners was signed in the Trident Hotel, Kinsale on May 14, 1999, and in September 2001 at the Seaview Labour Club in Barry.

Kinsale TC is in favour of a pact and awaits an official response from its counterpart across the Celtic Sea. In the meantime, there have been exchange visits to Armistice/Remembrance (November 11) and Merchant Navy days (September 3) in Barry and Sea Sunday in Kinsale (May or June) as well as link ups between the respective RNLI members in both ports and also Courtmacsherry.

Visitors from Barry to Sea Sunday were Keith Greenway and his partner, Barry Town Councillor Dennis Tooze, Joe Norton and Pat Tobin of the MNA who stayed at Jimmy Conron's San Antonio guest house, Friars Street Kinsale. Among Keith's relatives from Kinsale are cousins, Tony Greenway of Hegarty and Horgan Solicitors, Brendan, Senan, Cyril, Kieran, Declan and Gerard.

Great credit is due to Keith Greenway for content on the website www.ss-tregenna.co.uk which has a lot of information about Merchant Seamen, especially those who served out of Barry, plus material of Irish interest. He is assisted by Joe Earl, Billy McGee and Peter Brooks.

Information of every kind is most welcome and it can also be sent to Keith Greenway at hernamewas.ss@tiscali.co.uk Chairman of the MNA Barry branch, Jim Greenway can be contacted at : mnawalesbarrybranch@tiscali.co.uk

Keith Greenway also sent on a poem by James J. Brown and amended with the former's permission by Brian G. Redding to honour members of the Mercantile Marine. This poem was read at the Old Head of Kinsale and the crosses placed at sea a few miles away from the final resting place of The Lusitania.

THE MERCHANT SEAMEN

No poppies wave above our heads, or mark the place where we must sleep.
Below the oceans wild and wide, our resting place is in the deep.
Out of the night torpedoes came, to start the roar of flash and flame.
The stink of burning oil and then, the cries of all the dying men.
We ask you to call us brave, for volunteered 'tis true.
We gave our lives so you could live, and asked no thanks from you.
Armed forces from around the world, Put their lives upon the line.
Just the same as we did, Having faith in the divine.
The wolf packs now no longer roam and peace then brought the heroes home.
No poppies were above our heads, but we are gone and long dead.
So let us not forget the crew, of merchant ships in battle too.
The Merchant Seamen played their part, remember them with all your heart.



Poppies at the Old Head of Kinsale: for Thomas, James and James Joseph Greenway of Kinsale. SS. Daybreak, Tregenna , Dudley Rose all Captains and Crews. "The Merchant Seamen".

The Daybreak is remembered in a poem by Joe Earl.

The S.S. DAYBREAK

Nineteen seventeen it was – during perilous days,
The freighter S.S. Daybreak loaded deep with maize,
Steamed along on Christmas Eve near the Southern Rock,
Off the coast of County Down abeam of Strangford Lough,
No notice or forewarning, a torpedo found its mark,
It came and blew the nose right off – plunging all in dark
The vessel's screw rotating during its descent,
Her boilers then exploding as underneath they went.

U – Boat Eighty Seven had loosed her lethal load,
To meet this helpless target on a winter's ocean road,
One and twenty brave men - the total of her crew,
Murdered in the Irish Sea by folk they never knew,
It was seen by witnesses or perhaps we'd never know,
What occurred to brave men dragged down far below,
Entombed there now forever, thirty fathoms deep,
Akin to unsung mariners in Davy Jones's keep.

Joe Earl