



The Second World War, Internment and the 'Arandora Star'



The 'Arandora Star' in peacetime

INTERNMENT

As can be seen from the previous chapters, the Italian community in South Wales was not only accepted, it was well-respected. Italian families had put down roots over many decades, and they had many friends in the valleys of South Wales.

However, when Mussolini declared war on Britain on 10 June 1940, the Italians in Britain had become '*enemy aliens*' overnight. The British Government were prepared to take no chances and interned all Italians living in Britain as soon as they could.

In many cases the round-up was literally overnight. Over 160 Italians from Glamorgan alone were detained, including Les Servini from Abercynon, who was woken up during the night and arrested by a police inspector and sergeant " 'I am very sorry', the inspector said, and he put his arms around me. He was crying as he picked me up".

Having arrested 10,000 Italians, the government had a problem - what to do with them. British internment camps were already full. Many were sent to camps on

the Isle of Man. On 11 June Canada agreed to accept three thousand prisoners of war and four thousand internees. Australia also agreed to accept internees.

THE 'ARANDORA STAR'

By 15 June there were three ships available to take 7,000 prisoners of war and internees to Canada. Fifteen hundred were to be transported from Liverpool to St John's, Newfoundland, aboard the '*Arandora Star*'.

Until the outbreak of war the '*Arandora Star*', belonging to the Blue Star Line was a modern cruise liner. It was launched in 1927, and took four hundred wealthy passengers first-class on luxury cruises around the Mediterranean or the West Indies.

In June 1940 the Ministry of Shipping took her over, fitted armaments and painted her funnels grey.

THE LAST VOYAGE

When she left Liverpool at 4:00am on 1 July 1940, bound for Canada, the



'Arandora Star' was carrying 1,673 people comprising:

- 174 Officers and Crew
- 200 Military Guard
- 479 German Interned Males
 - 86 German Prisoners of War
- 734 Italian Interned Males

The following day (2 July) at 7:58am she was sailing 125 miles (200 km) off the north-west coast of Ireland when she was struck by a torpedo from the German submarine U-47. It is assumed that the U-boat crew had mistaken her grey livery for that of an armed merchant ship.

Just over thirty minutes later the 'Arandora Star' sank. She had fourteen lifeboats. One was destroyed by the torpedo, another could not be launched and two were damaged during their launch and were rendered useless. At least four were launched with very few survivors on board, and one other lifeboat sank shortly after being launched.

The Canadian destroyer 'HMCS St. Laurent' responded to the SOS signal and rescued the survivors. 682 perished on the 'Arandora Star', of whom 446 were Italian nationals who had made their home in Britain. The survivors were taken to Greenock in Scotland - yet within eight days over two hundred of them had been taken by train back to Liverpool and sent to Australia as internees aboard the 'Dunera'.

REMEMBRANCE

Of the 446 Italians who died aboard the 'Arandora Star', forty-two had been born in Bardi, and all but a few were from South Wales. They included members of the Carpanini, Conti, Rabaiotti and Tambini families. Their names are recorded separately in the chapel at Bardi. Even today memorial masses are held annually by those Italian communities in Britain

and Italy who lost loved ones.



Map showing where the 'Arandora Star' sunk (red dot)



The Arandora Star Chapel in Bardi



AUSTRALIA

The Italians who departed for Australia aboard the 'Dunera' had to endure hardship before reaching Australia. The hatches were battened down for most of



the voyage. The ship was attacked by a submarine during the early part of the two month voyage. Some of the men ended up in Melbourne, whilst others went on to Sydney. In Melbourne they were taken to a camp of corrugated iron huts at Tatura for internment. They were released from internment before the end of the war and went to work in the Melbourne area. Some returned to Britain, while the more cautious preferred to wait until the end of the hostilities.

CANADA

Around four hundred Italians were taken to Canada aboard the 'Ettick'. They eventually ended up in St Helen Island Camp near Montreal. Of the 407 Italians at the camp, sixty managed to persuade the British authorities that they were not fascist sympathisers, and were released after six months. The rest remained until 1943 before they were released back to Britain, many initially going to the Isle of Man for a further spell of internment.

ISLE OF MAN

Internment camps had been set up on the Isle of Man during the First World War. And they were to be used again from 1940. Most of the Italians were housed in requisitioned bed and breakfast houses or hotels in Peel. Some managed to prove that they had no connections with the Italian fascist movement and were released back to Britain. For most, however, it was not easy to provide proof and they remained imprisoned on the island until September 1943 when Italy signed an armistice with the Allies.

GLAMORGAN WAR AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE

Upon release from internment camps the Italians from South Wales returned and for the rest of the war many were employed by the Glamorgan War Agricultural Committee working on the land for the war effort.

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