

Arandora Star Remembered

International Commemorative Conference
to mark the 80th Anniversary

held at:
The Italian Cultural Institute
39 Belgrave Square
London

Presented by

The Italian Cultural Institute London
The Mazzini Garibaldi Club Ltd
The Arandora Star London Memorial Trust

<https://arandorastar.online>



*Arandora Star Life Ring, 2014, by Alison Limentani,
Granddaughter of the late Uberto Limentani, Arandora Star Survivor*

**These are my own personal notes and comments from the sessions.
They are NOT the definitive record of the conference.**

Agenda

Welcome

Domenic Pini Arandora Star London Memorial Trust
Dr. Katia Pizzi Director, The Italian Cultural Institute
Raffaele Trombetta H.E. The Italian Ambassador

Political Session

On. Massimo Ungaro (Italia Viva), Camera dei Deputati

Marco Lunghi, MP (Conservative), Dudley North - "Arandora Star represents the largest single loss of civilian life in one incident affecting one community in the UK"

Academic Session

Dr. Rachel Pistol, Kings College, London
Early Internment Camps and Deportation Policy, June-July 1940

Robert Rumble, The Imperial War Museum
Hunters & Hunted: The Sinking of the SS Arandora Star within the Wider Context of the Battle of the Atlantic

Dr. Cav. Terri Colpi, University of St Andrews
Arandora Star: Memory and Remembering in Britain and Italy

Memorials & Minorities Session

Dr. Bruna Chezzi, University of Cardiff
Arandora Star, from Memories to Memorial and Beyond in Wales: Insights into the Creation and Legacy of the First National Memorial

Cav. Ronnie Convery, Archdiocese of Glasgow,
'These Things Happen in War...'
The Story of Glasgow's Italian Cloister Garden and Arandora Star Monument

Cultural Session

Tom Conti – *A Personal Story*

Dominic Minghella – *A Personal View*

Nicola Gallani BFI : *Arandora Star: Archive or Absence?*

Film by Anna Chiappa: *SOS Arandora Star*

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The organisers of the conference have stated: "It is planned that the presentations from the conference will become 'papers' that are to be published in *Immigrants & Minorities* (a journal similar to *Italian Studies*). This is same journal where the presentations/papers from the *Internment Remembered* conference were published. Dr Terri Colpi, who organised the programme for the conference, chose this journal for this purpose. The *Internment Remembered* papers were published shortly thereafter as a book. Again, this is the plan for this conference papers. The editor of *Immigrants & Minorities* (from Sheffield University) attended the conference at the Institute and has indicated his commitment to the project. Dr Colpi will also be seeking input from the other speakers and their contributions will certainly be included in the 'proceedings' summary. The timescale for publication is the end of 2022/beginning of 2023."

Dr. Rachel Pistol, Kings College, London

Early Internment Camps and Deportation Policy, June-July 1940

Internment & Tribunals timelines: In mid May 1940, the previous tribune system of categorising German & Austrian 'aliens; into A, B or C was abandoned. At that time, the government were expecting an imminent invasion by German troops.

13 May	everyone on the East Coast of England was arrested
18 May	all Category B males in UK arrested
28 May	Category B females (plus their children) arrested
10 June	Italy & Britain at war
10-11 June	Italian males arrested
21 June	Circular for general internment of all Category C males
25 June	Category C males arrested

from June - all Italians interned

11,000 men and 7,000 women living in U.K. 4,000 were interned, of which 700 were defined as "fascisti"

Arrested Italians were only allowed to go in front of a tribunal after they had been interned. They were then assessed under two categories: hostile or friendly

Camps where Italian internees were held:

Edinburgh	Lingfield Park Racecourse	Kempton Park Racecourse
Southampton Racecourse	Pembroke	Winchester Prison
Warth Mills	Paignton	

All those rescued from Arandora Star and landed at Greenock were boarded on to Dunera, if they were deemed to be "fit to travel". Given that they had all been shipwrecked, had spent many hours in the cold water, many covered with thick diesel oil, this was a travesty. Only 58 of the 258 rescued were deemed 'unfit to travel'.

Dunera carried Arandora Star survivors plus additional German and Austrian refugees/internees.

There were five boats that transferred internees abroad around this time:

21 Jun	Duchess of York	2,108 German & Austrian "A" Internees 523 Prisoners of War
1 Jul	Arandora Star	479 German Internees 714 Italian Internees 86 German Prisoners of War
3 Jul	Ettrick	1307 "B" & "C" German & Austrian single men 16-50 407 Italian single men 20-30 880 Prisoners of War
4 Jul	Sobieski	983 "B" & "C" German or Austrian single men, 16-50 545 Prisoners of War
10 Jul	Dunera	2236 Italian & German internees 251 German Prisoners of War

In total, these boats transported over 8,200 internees and 2,200 PoWs to Canada and Australia.

Robert Rumble, The Imperial War Museum

Hunters & Hunted: The Sinking of the SS Arandora Star within the Wider Context of the Battle of the Atlantic

The Arandora Star had left Liverpool and was heading for Halifax, Canada when it was torpedoed. It was the fourth largest loss of civilian life of ships sunk during WWII.

In total, throughout the North Atlantic theatre during WWII, 72,000 people died at sea (cf 800 on Arandora Star). The great cost: 3,500 allied merchant ships and 175 warships were sunk - for the loss of 783 U-boats and 47 German warships, and 17 Italian submarines.

The sinking of the Arandora Star was a result of both UK and German naval war strategy during WWII. Both were mostly informed by the experiences of WWI.

At the start of the war, UK had the largest merchant fleet in the world. Although the convoy strategy was implemented (following from WWI success), there were not enough navy convoy escort support ships available in 1939/40. Small 1000 tonne destroyers had been commissioned but they would not be available until 1941.

Convoy Strategy: Convoys had to travel at the slowest speed of the constituent ships - which were in reality very slow - two categories convoy: 12 knots and less 8 knots. Faster ships (>15 knots) had to usually sail on their own. Arandora Star rated speed was 16 knots (30kph) and so it was deemed able to outrun the U-boats.

When Preen came across the Arandora Star, he was probably able to identify it. He therefore would probably know it had most recently been used as troop carrier on a couple of occasions - and so assumed it was a fair target - especially as it was painted dark grey, carried no markings and had some guns installed. Even if it had some markings to indicate it was carrying civilians, it would only be conjecture whether or not that would have made any difference. U-boat captains were measured (and rewarded) on the gross tonnage they sank.

Why did the Arandora Star sink so quickly? probably because Preen was lucky in hitting the centre of the boat where the unprotected boiler room was. This would have caused a rapid influx of water due to the size of the room. Naval ships were built with protected (4 ice thick shielding) around the boiler rooms.

A number of other cruise ships were torpedoed

- SS Athenia (Sep 1939) - first UK ship to be lost - 117 lives lost out of 1418 total.
- SS Volendam, (Aug 1940) with 320 children aboard, but all had been rescued by other ships. Only one life lost out of 1152 passengers.
- SS city of Benares - torpedoed in Sep 1940 - 260 out of 407 lost

Five IWM sound archive Interviews with survivors:

Nicola Cua
Luigi Beschizza

Ivor Duxberry
Ludwig Baruch

Gino Guarnieri

Arandora Star victims: a supplement to the White Paper by Louis Eleazar Gutmann-Pelangen, c.1941, typescript testament by a man who had been interned on the SS Arandora Star.

See also list of maritime disasters in World War II on Wikipedia

Dr. Cav. Terri Colpi, University of St Andrews

Arandora Star: Memory and Remembering in Britain and Italy

Much real information concerning the tragedy was suppressed during the war. Only when some survivors started to return to the UK after 1945 was any real information made available to the Italian community.

Then followed a period of self-imposed silence and acquiescence until 1960

First memorial was established in 1960 at St Peter's Church, Clerkenwell, London. This was followed in 1975 with the mosaic installed in the Casa d'Italia. The inscription read "Non vi scordoremmai". It was last seen in 2011.

Umberto Sereni - Italian historian and previously Mayor of Barga:

"The tragedy had been forgotten twice: by Fascist Italy because the boat was sunk in an act of war, by the German Allies, and by post-war Italy, because the English were no longer our enemies and the new allies had defeated the Nazi-Fascists".

Historian Professor John Foot (UCL).

Worth reading his very accessible books on Italy. One title 'Italy's Divided War' and another 'Archipelago'. He is the only 'British' historian who deals with the Arandora Star in a factual and sympathetic way.

Arandora victims name are still being added to local War Memorials in Italy today.

In 1990, year of the 50th anniversary - the narrative started to grow in UK. As a result of the '50 year rule' and for the first time, some data concerning the Arandora Star was released by UK government eg lists of names and origins.

In that year, the surviving twenty or so Italians from the Arandora Star were decorated with the *Cavaliere al Merito della Repubblica Italiana* by President Francesco Cossiga of Italy

Gian Antonio Stella: "*L'Orda - quando gli albanesi eravamo noi*", published 2002

2008 was a pivot point for 'remembering' with the establishment of a memorial in Liverpool, the European City of Culture - and a symbolic funeral on the Mersey. This had a domino effect with memorials in Newcastle, London, Glasgow, Middlesbrough all following in subsequent years.

Only last year, July 2020, Italian President Sergio Mattarella conferred "*La Medaglia della Repubblica Italiana*" on the tragic event itself

Dr. Bruna Chezzi, University of Cardiff

Arandora Star, from Memories to Memorial and Beyond in Wales: Insights into the Creation and Legacy of the First National Memorial

National Library of Wales, Theatre na nOg and a number of books are now part of Welsh education activities.

Lucio Sponza: *Divided Loyalties: Italians in Britain During the Second World War*

Cav. Ronnie Convery, Archdiocese of Glasgow

'These Things Happen in War...'

The Story of Glasgow's Italian Cloister Garden and Arandora Star Monument

"These things happen in war" was a recurring comment by Rando Bertoia when he was being interviewed as part of the creation of the Glasgow memorial.

First recorded Italian immigrant to Scotland who appeared in the PO directory for Glasgow was Bernardini Lucchese - occupation "figurino".

1940 was when the Glasgow Italians went from being "brava gente" to "enemy alien"

Words and phrases chosen for the Italian Cloister Garden from Professor Eileen Ann Millar, Glasgow University.

Foscolo: ...a noi prescrisse il fato illacrimata sepoltura
 ... for us fate has ordained a tomb where no-one will weep

Leopardi: ... Così tra questa immensità s'annega il pensier mio, e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare
 ... So engulfed am I in this immensity, that shipwreck is a welcome thought

Petrarca:Tu sai ben che 'n altrui non ho speranza
Lord, you know so well that my hope lies in you alone

Dante: ...la bontà infinita ha sì gran braccia che prende ciò che si rivolge a lei
 ...infinite goodness has arms so wide that it welcomes all who approach

Manzoni: L'amore è intrepido
 Love casts out fear

Dante: E'n la sua volontade è nostra pace: ell'è quel mare, al qual tutto si move
 In His will is our peace: that sea to which everything flows

Tom Conti – A Personal Story

His father was briefly interned while they were living in Paisley although he had never talked to his father about his experience. A couple of funny stories about his mum trying to “pay” to free his dad. Conti featured in an programme broadcast by BBC Sound entitled “Collar the Lot” - first broadcast in April 2013 and available online on Archive on 4,

Dominic Minghella – A Personal View

Dominic is best known as a British television producer and screen writer. Among his creations are Robin Hood & Doc Martin on BBC and Knightfall (US). In the TV series, Doc Martin's (Martin Clunes) surname - Ellingham - is an anagram of Minghella.

He recently became aware of the Arandora Star story and is now wants to dramatise it as part of a story line of Italian peasant life, emigration, success, war, distress and desolation, recovery.

Moving story about his best childhood friend at school in Isle of Wight - Richard Neil. Recently reconnected with him after a long time. Discovered his real name was Richard Rice, his mother had remarried. His biological father was originally a Ricci - family emigrated from the same area of Italy - the two school friends were possibly related!!

Nicola Gallani British Film Institute : Arandora Star: Archive or Absence?

Not much real archive material available to allow full reconstruction of events. Newsreels at the time had superimposed a pernicious anti Italian and German theme as soundtracks over the film footage. She then introduced a new film by Anna Chiappa.

Anna Chiappa film SOS Arandora Star

This 40 minute film collected together many of the threads and contributions over the years especially by Serena Balestracci. Included a number of interviews - including family members of survivors and also officers from the Canadian destroyer St Laurent that rescued the survivors from Arandora Star.

New film footage of the rescue and verbatim accounts made the film very emotional.
 DVD of film available from "info@arandorastar.online"