

Arandora Star Victims - Burial Sites

Out of 442 Italian casualties, it has only been possible to identify the final resting places of just 22 individuals. Their graves can be found in small churchyards around the west coast of Ireland from County Mayo in the Irish Republic to Rathlin Island in Northern Ireland and then northwards through the Inner Hebrides as far as the islands of Barra and South Uist and finally on the west coast of Scotland in south Ayrshire. After the war a number of bodies were returned to their country of birth and others were re-interred in the communities in which they had made their homes.

The AS Burial Spreadsheet, recently compiled (2024) by Alan Davis and Terri Colpi, provides summary detail of the twenty-two men whose final resting place is known.

So why were so few victims recovered and identified?

The Arandora Star went down comparatively close to land (75 miles north west of Ireland). With the prevailing westerly winds as well as the Gulf Stream, one would have expected that the bodies of many more of the casualties would have been found. Certainly some were recovered by the Canadian destroyer HMCS St Laurent during the rescue mission, however many of the survivors reported that considerable numbers stayed aboard the stricken vessel.

They were either unsure of what to do or afraid of jumping into the water. Many were from the mountainous regions of their homeland and had little or no experience of boats or the sea and almost certainly therefore, could not swim. They majority were older men and even those who did attempt to save themselves would not have lasted long in the cold waters of the Atlantic, even in summer. The sea survival time may have been as little as ten minutes.

There are 37 known sites in the west of Scotland and Northern Ireland where bodies of victims from the Arandora Star were buried. The identity of most of these victims is not known.

Ireland

In late July and throughout August 1940, in the weeks after the sinking, strong north westerly gales carried many of the bodies towards the shores of Ireland. In Donegal, the most northerly county, the local papers reported that 33 bodies were washed ashore in one week.

The first came ashore in Mayo four weeks after the sinking and a few days later an Atlantic storm brought a terrible harvest. Almost 300 km south-west in County Mayo, the Western People newspaper for 10 August 1940 carried the headline: *"100 Dead Bodies Floating in sea off Inniskea"*. However the seas were so rough that they could not be recovered.

The newspapers reported each grim discovery, stating that the unknown victims had been buried alongside the soldiers. The Army personnel had identity discs and pay-books, but very few civilians, would have carried any papers or documentation which, even if they had survived four weeks immersion in salt water, could have been used to confirm an identity. The soldiers were named in the burial registers, the unknowns were not and often the shallow depressions between the Army headstones were the graves of the unknowns.

All along this wild and hazardous coastline and despite the treacherous conditions, local people took considerable risks to recover the bodies, which were treated with great sympathy and reverence. There were so many bodies, it was reported, that during the second week of August, a party of four Italians including a professor of Italian from Trinity College Dublin, visited the west coast of Ireland on behalf of the Italian Consul to see if they could identify some of the casualties. Sadly they were unable to do so.

The recovery of so many bodies in early August created problems for the local Health Boards in what were very poor and isolated regions. Local newspapers such as the Western People and the Donegal Vindicator reported that the Health Boards were finding great difficulty in meeting the costs of setting up formal inquests and providing coffins and funerals for the deceased, let alone headstones.

In those days the west coast was a very isolated Irish speaking area reached by gravel roads normally used by donkey carts. Only a few professional people like doctors had cars, and petrol was rationed. Very few people had telephones. So it was difficult to assemble the coroner, his staff and a twelve-man jury for so many inquests along 200 miles of this wild coastline. As the scale of the disaster unfolded, it was agreed that local doctors could authorise the interment of war victims and thus most of the deaths were not recorded.

Soon, the councils had to reopen old graveyards, some dating from the Famine almost 100 years before. Donegal Board of Health was told that 33 bodies had been washed ashore during the previous week and that funeral expenses had been paid by board officers out of their own pockets.

Unidentified bodies were buried in cemeteries close to where they were found, in unmarked and unrecorded graves, in the Poor Ground - the part of the cemetery set aside for those who could not afford to buy a plot.

In County Mayo, there was one body for every kilometre along the Erris coastline west of Belmullet and the Board of Health became concerned at the cost of so many funerals, with coffins costing £2.10 shillings each. That's around £360 in today's money and these were some of the poorest areas in Ireland.

On Rathlin, a 1940 Coastguard record stated that on 10 August 1940 two bodies had been found near the West Light. One had a document in the name of Capella, the other had no identification and they were buried together. The previous day, two Merchant Navy seamen were buried in Bonamargy cemetery, Ballycastle. A few days later a lifeboat from the Arandora Star was towed into Rathlin Harbour.

Throughout August 1940, 213 bodies were washed up on the Irish coast, of which 35 were from Arandora Star and a further 92 unidentified, also most probably from the Arandora Star.

This tragic outcome is perhaps best summed up in the words of South Donegal coroner Dr John O' Sullivan as reported in the Donegal Democrat of 17 August 1940. Returning verdicts of death by drowning on two unidentified bodies washed ashore locally on 10 August 1940 he said:

"Like many others, these men met cruel deaths and it is possible that their dear ones will never learn the facts of their fate. I am sure we shall all breathe a prayer for the happy repose of their souls and ask the Almighty to bring comfort to the hearts of their grief stricken relatives".

However, for a very small number of families, this was not the case.

There are dozens of Italians in unmarked graves in 29 cemeteries around the north-west coast of Ireland, some beside the British soldiers who had been their guards.

County Antrim (NI)

Rathlin
Bonomarghy

County Sligo

Ahamlish
Karraghan
Dromore West
Easkey

County Mayo

Ballycastle
Kilgalligan
Termoncaragh
Kilcommon Erris
Fallmore

County Donegal

Tory Island
Carndonagh
Culdaff
Clonmany
Faughn
Magheragallon
Kilclooney
Carn
Ardara
Kilcar
Killybegs
Killaghtee
Frosses
Bundoran

Details of the fourteen known and identified casualties buried in Ireland are as follows:

1. **Marco Baccanello**

Born 3 April 1888 at Venezia, Marco moved to London and became Head Waiter at the Savoy Hotel London. Unknown to his family his body had washed ashore at Fanad Head, Co Donegal and buried at Kerrykeel Burial Ground.

Marco was identified many years later around 2012 when researchers found details of his internment in the Irish Archives at Dublin. Amongst the possessions of an unidentified body was a cashed cheque for £14,500 made out to Ugo Ciolli, dated 1935 and signed by an M Bacconello. This item allowed the researchers to identify the man as Marco Baccanello. Today's value of this amount of money is approximately £750,000! His family, when contacted, could add no further information concerning the cheque.

2. **Cesare Camozzi**

Cesare was born 2 November 1891 at Iseo, Brescia and his remains are buried in Carndonagh Cemetery, near Malin Head, County Donegal. He emigrated to Manchester and opened the Monogram Cafe in the city. Cesare was identified by a letter from his wife found on his body. It was addressed to him at his Scottish Internment Camp. The police officer who identified the body had the painful task of phoning Cesare's wife Minnie in Manchester to inform her of her loss. Today his grave is marked by a fine headstone paid for by local subscription

3. **Giuseppe Capella**

Giuseppe was born 13 April 1885 at Borgo Val di Taro (Borgotaro), Parma and he was buried in St. Thomas Church of Ireland Churchyard, Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim on 12 August 1940. Giuseppe had been a waiter at the Savoy Hotel London.

A Coastguard report notes that two bodies were found on the shore at the west end of Rathlin Island. Both were Italians, however, only Giuseppe could be identified from documents found on him. They were buried alongside one another in St Thomas's Churchyard. The grave of Giuseppe Capella is marked by a headstone.

4 **Leonello Corrieri**

Leonello was born 16 October 1888 at Albiano, Barga and emigrated to Liverpool where he opened a fish and chip shop at Wallasey. He was identified by this letter from his daughter Yolanda, found on his body:

"Dear Daddy, I am so happy to get your card this morning, just how happy you will never know. Are you keeping well? If there is anything you want just let me know and I will send it off at once. The weather being so nice is of course good for business. I am managing quite well, so don't worry about me. Mummy is keeping quite well and will write you a long letter tomorrow.

Yolanda"

Leonello is buried at Magheragallon Cemetery, Co Donegal

5. **Giovanni Ferdenzi**

Giovanni was born 15 June 1879 at Castelletto, near Bardi and he was buried in Clonmany Cemetery, Co. Donegal on 11 August 1940. Giovanni ran a business delivering ice to local cafés and restaurants in London. A striking memorial cross, erected by his wife and family, marks his grave.

6. **Matteo Fossaluzza**

Matteo was born 25 November 1897 at Cavasso, Pordenone and buried in Easkey Cemetery, Co. Sligo. His body, together with another found on 10 August 1940 and buried in the same cemetery, were taken home by relatives after the war.

The Western People reported that this second victim, aged about 45, had a badge with '*Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*' on the front and '*L. Fassino, Corso Vittorio n. 99*' on the reverse. He has not been identified.

7. Ettore Gianetti

Ettore was born 20 May 1910 at Camporgiano, Lucca and he emigrated to London with his parents. According to the BT334 Register, his body was washed ashore at Ballyhooriskey, Kerrykeel, Co. Donegal on 10 August 1940. He is buried at Kerrykeel Burial Ground. Ettore was employed in the family restaurant business in London. His father, Alfredo, also perished on the *Arandora Star*

8. Luigi Giovanelli

Luigi was born 24 April 1890 at Bardi, Parma and a headstone was erected to mark his death at the Foreigner's Graveyard on Tory Island. Luigi's occupation was 'Glass Blower'. He was buried at Tory Island and subsequently Luigi's body was re-interred by his family at Islington & St Pancras Cemetery, London

9. Giovanni Marengi

Giovanni Marengi was born on 23 April 1897 at Bardi, Parma and emigrated to South Wales. His body was washed ashore on the remote Erris peninsula in County Mayo on 30 July 1940. Giovanni was identified by a membership card for Pontypridd Bowling Club and a Food Ration book. Giovanni owned a cafe in the town. He was buried in Termoncarragh Cemetery and in early 1941 his family arranged to have his remains taken back to Pontypridd for re-interment there.

10. Ernesto Moruzzi

Ernesto was born 12 August 1879 at Bardi, Parma and subsequently emigrated to Neath, Wales. His body was found on 30 July 1940 at Cloughglass, Burtonport, Donegal and buried at Cruit Island, Co. Donegal. A small stout man with thinning grey hair and a dark moustache, he was identified by the receipt for his yearly subscription to the Neath Constitutional Club. It was the only item in his wallet, save five religious medals and a small crucifix.

Such '*Pathetic Relics*', as a coroner's report called them, were more than many had in their possession and Moruzzi was lucky to be identified. He was buried with others from *Arandora Star* in the same graveyard.

11. Antonio Nardone

Antonio was born 2 October 1892 at Cassino, Frosinone and emigrated to Middlesborough. After an extensive search by family to discover his last resting place, he was finally located very recently at Bonamarghy Friary, Ballycastle, Co Antrim. An inscribed stone was also unveiled at Middlesborough, England commemorating Antonio, who ran an ice cream business in that city.

12 Luigi Peretti

Luigi was born 1 October 1880 at Agrano, Novara and emigrated to London where he worked as a wardrobe dealer. His body was washed ashore at Tory Island on 30 July 1940. There are only two references to Luigi after the tragedy, both in articles by Michael McRitchie:

1. The War Graves Photographic Project (www.twgpp.org - Spring 2010)
2. The Belfast Telegraph (www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk - 6 June 2015)

13 Francesco Rabaiotti

Francesco was born 6 March 1894 at Bardi, Parma and emigrated to Swansea. Francesco's body was recovered from the Mayo coastline and subsequently transferred to Italy where he was buried in the family plot in the Campo Santo at Bardi.

14. Luigi Tapparo

Luigi was born 22 October 1898 at Bollengo, Torino and emigrated to Edinburgh there he was employed as a cook at the Royal British Hotel. He was buried in Termoncarragh Cemetery, Co. Mayo after his body was recovered. Luigi was able to be identified as he had a makeshift chain with a disc showing his name and address. His body was taken home for burial after the war however his headstone, paid for by his family, still stands in the cemetery today.

Alongside the headstone there are a number of unmarked graves which most likely contain the bodies of unidentified Italians recovered at the same time.

Scotland

There was much less Scottish newspaper reporting of Arandora Star casualties. This is primarily because a fewer number of bodies were recovered. There are only eight known locations around the coast of Scotland where casualties have been buried.

Hallan Cemetery, Dalabrog, South Uist
St Barr Old Churchyard, Eoligarry, Barra
St Brendan's Burial Ground, Barra
Kilchattan Churchyard, Isle of Colonsay
Island of Oronsay
Bowmore New Churchyard, Isle of Islay
Port Ellen Churchyard, Isle of Islay
Carleton Bay, South Ayrshire

Details of the known and identified casualties buried in **Scotland** are as follows:

1. Francesco D'Inverno

The body of Francesco D'Inverno, born 17 April 1901 at Villa Latina, Frosinone was found on Tuesday, 20 August 1940, by a local inhabitant of Gamesloup, South Ayrshire. The body, wearing a life-jacket was later identified as Francesco D'Inverno from London. His was the only body to be washed up on the coastline of mainland Scotland - the others had been driven by the prevailing winds to the shorelines of the Western Isles.

It is not certain how the body was identified but Francesco is one of the very few victims to have his death formally recorded in the UK death registers and a death certificate issued on October 9th 1940 following information being made available by the local Procurator Fiscal. The temporary cross that marks his grave will be replaced by a proper engraved stone in April 2024

2. Giuseppe Delgrosso

Giuseppe was born 20 April 1889 at Borgo Val di Taro (Borgotaro), Parma and emigrated to Glasgow where he had an Ice Cream Parlour. His body was discovered at "Prior's Leap", Lower Kilchattan, Colonsay and was initially buried at Leum a' Bhrair on the Isle of Colonsay. After the war his family arranged to have his remains moved to St Kentigern's RC Cemetery, Glasgow. Today, a cairn marks the spot where Giuseppe was first laid to rest, close to where his body was recovered, and a memorial plaque on the cliffs nearby is dedicated to his memory and to all of those who lost their lives on the SS Arandora Star. The inscription in Gaelic reads: *'I will hide myself under the shadow of thy wing'*.

3. Oreste Fisanotti

Oreste was born 9 August 1897 at the small town of Mathi, Torino and emigrated to London where he was a waiter at a London hotel. He is buried in St Brendan's Catholic Burial Ground, Borve, Isle of Barra. In London he met and married his wife Vera Maschova - herself a Russian Revolution refugee from Petrograd. An additional headstone indicates that Vera, who died on 20 January 1975, is buried in the same grave.

4. Andrea Gazzi

Andrea was born 2 August 1900 at Bardi, Parma and emigrated to Gorseinon, South Wales where he ran a Fish and Chip Shop. He was buried in Bowmore New Parish Churchyard, Isle of Islay. A simple headstone indicates that he was found on 6 September 1940 and is inscribed *MORTO PER LA PATRIA*.

Buried alongside Andrea is Trooper Frank Geoffrey Munton (aged 24) who also lost his life in the disaster. He was one of the Army guards on the Arandora Star.

5. Enrico Muzio

Enrico was born 12 December 1892 at Napoli and emigrated to London. His body was washed ashore in August 1940 on the beach behind the home of Compton Mackenzie in Barra.

Mackenzie wrote in his diary "*The corpse was identified by his card which showed he had been a tenor, singing probably at the Teatro San Carlo in Napoli and over here for the BBC and at the Coliseum*". Enrico is buried in St Barr Old Churchyard, Eolgarry, Isle of Barra.

Enrico worked in the UK throughout the 1920s and 1930s, appearing in productions in most music hall venues. He received acclaim for his singing with references to 'the brilliant tenor', 'the renowned tenor' and praised for his ability to 'sing equally well in English, French and Spanish' – and, one assumes, also in Italian.

6. Baldassare Plescia

Baldassare was born 1 January 1915 at Palermo, Sicily and emigrated to London, where he worked as an Estate Agent's Clerk. His body was buried in the Cladh Hallan Cemetery, Dalabrog, at the southern end of the Island of South Uist.

Baldassare's elder brother, Andrea, also perished on the Arandora Star.

7. Vilfrido Sagramati

Vilfrido was born 19 October 1910 at Rome and he was enumerated in the 1939 Register living at 3 Earlham Street, Holborn, London. His employment is given as *none - independent means*. BT334 records his employment status as *student*. Vilfrido was initially buried in Kilchattan Old Churchyard on the island. After the war his family discovered where he lay and arranged to take his remains back home to Italy.

8. Edmondo Armando Sottocornola

Edmondo was born 2 April 1897 at Gargallo, Novara and he emigrated to London where he was employed as Head Waiter at the Criterion Restaurant, Piccadilly Circus.

His body was discovered, 11 August 1940, on the shores of uninhabited island of Eilean nan Ròn. This tiny island, (Gaelic for 'Island of the Seals'), lies to the south west of the Isle of Oronsay. Edmondo was buried on the island the following day. Initially the authorities did consider exhumation and reburial (see Official Scottish Documents below), however this did not happen due to the difficulties involved in getting to and landing on the islet itself.

A simple inscribed wooden cross was erected at the site: "*The resting-place of Edmondo Armando Sottocornola, born 2 April 1897, a native of Gargallo; he was lost in the tragedy of 'Arandora Star' July 1940*".

The original wooden cross marking his grave was replaced with this one by islanders in October 2002. There are plans to replace the wooden cross with a more permanent memorial such as an inscribed stone.

'Sconosciuto Italiano'

The grave of an unknown Italian is marked by a simple headstone in the churchyard of Port Ellen on the Isle of Islay.

From the Commonwealth War Graves Commission:

"This churchyard contains five burials of the 1914-1918 War and seven of the 1939-1945 War. This last total is made up by one sailor, two airmen, and three unidentified Merchant Navy seamen belonging to the United Kingdom, and one unidentified Italian internee".

Extracts from Official Scottish Documents

The following information has been extracted from a photocopy of the typed original documents.

REFERENCE LIST OF BODIES WASHED ASHORE (on Colonsay) IN ARGYLL, AND BURIED IN:
Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay Island, Argyll, Oronsay Priory Burial Ground, Oronsay Island, Colonsay & Oronsay, Eilean-nan-Ron (Isle of Seals), Colonsay and Oronsay, (OFF ORONSAY ISLE)
(Cragaig Burial Ground, Ulva Island, Kilninian & Kilmore, Mull.

"Colonsay No. 1" body:- "Eilean-nan-Ron", ("Isle of Seals") Isle shore grave, Colonsay & Oronsay.

Orlando SOTTOCORNOLA

Italian Internee, Buried 12.8.40. Doctor states:- "Several months in water".* Found on Island of Eilean-nan-Ron, off South West coast of Oronsay Island 11.8.40, on part of Oronsay Island farm. Parish of Colonsay and Oronsay. Head Waiter, Criterion Restaurant, Piccadilly Circus, London W.1.

Grave not a recognised burial place and, Island being uninhabited, it is recommended for exhumation and re-interment elsewhere, either privately, or in the Service Plot in Kilchattan Old Churchyard, in the neighbouring Island of Colonsay.

*Probably drowned 2.7.40 on S.S. "Arandora Star."

"Colonsay No. 2" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

UNKNOWN SEAMAN, Merchant Navy. Found at Ardskenish Bay, Colonsay Island, 11.8.40.

Buried 13.8.40. Grave No. "Col/2" Wore heavy blue tweed trousers. Might have been a civilian? Doctor states:- "Certainly over 2 months in water".

"Colonsay No. 3" body:- Glasgow (St. Kentigern's R.C. Cemetery).

Giuseppe DELGROSSO

No. 14700, Italian Internee. Found at "Prior's Leap", Lower Kilchattan, Colonsay, on 16.8.40. Buried on shore 17.8.40 [Local tradition is that he was at first buried nearby, where a cairn now stands]. Later exhumed and re-interred in St. Kentigern's R.C. Cemetery, Glasgow in lair No. 37, Section 10. (P.P.M. erected). Doctor states:- "Must have been in water at least two months".

"Colonsay No.4" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

Wilfred SAGRAMATI (7293? Or 58305?), Italian Internee.

Found at Machrins Bay, Colonsay, 16.8.40. Buried 17.8.40. From Warth Mills Interment Camp, Bury. Doctor states:- "Body in sea at least one month". Might be "Arandora Star", sunk 2.7.40?

"Colonsay No. 5" body:- In same grave as No. 4 body (SAGRAMATI)

UNKNOWN INTERNEE, found at "Port Mhor", Colonsay, 18.8.40. Buried 19.8.40. Doctor states:- "In water at least a month or 6 weeks." Probably "Arandora Star", sunk 2.7.40.

"Colonsay No. 6" body:- In same grave as Nos. 4 and 5 bodies, "Col/4-5-6".

UNKNOWN SEAMAN. Merchant Navy. Found at Kiloran Bay, Colonsay, 19.8.40. Buried 21.8.40. Doctor states:- "In water at least 6 weeks or 2 months". Might be "Arandora Star"

"Colonsay No. 7" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

Able Seaman James KELLACHER, R.N.V.R., H.M.S. "Enterprise".

Found east of Kiloran Bay, Colonsay, 19.8.40. Buried 22.8.40. Grave No. "Col/7". Of 18.A. Great King Street, Edinburgh. Doctor states:- "Not more than 2 or 3 weeks in water".

"Colonsay No. 8" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

UNKNOWN SAILOR, Petty Officer, R.N. (R.C. Religion) Grave No. "Col/8". Found Kiloran Bay, Colonsay, 19.8.40. Buried 22.8.40. Doctor states:- In Naval dress. Probably a Petty Officer. Body badly decomposed."

"Colonsay No. 9" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

Leading Steward James McINTOSH, H.M.S. "Transylvania". Found at "Port-na-Fleuchin", Uragaig, Colonsay, 20.8.40. Buried 23.8.40, Grave No. "Col/9". Of 39, Cowdernill Circus, Knightswood, Glasgow. Doctor states:- "Body badly disfigured".

"Colonsay No. 10" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

UNKNOWN SEAMAN ("J.H."), Merchant Navy. H.M.S. "Transylvania". Found at Inver, Kilchattan, Colonsay, 20.8.40. Buried 23.8.40. Grave No. "Col/10". Doctor states: "In water 6 weeks to 2 months."

"Colonsay No. 11" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

Chief Petty Officer Frederick NORTHGATE, R.N. Found at Inver, Ardanish Point, Machrins,

Colonsay, 20.8.40. Buried 23.8.40. Grave No. "Col/11". Usual residence:- 4, Malpas Road, Dagenham. Doctor states:- "In water for at least six weeks".

"Colonsay No. 12" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

UNKNOWN SAILOR (Petty Officer) R.N. Found at Dungallon, Colonsay, 20.8.40. Buried 23.8.40. Grave No. "Col/12". Two Naval collars in pocket; one with name "J. Phinn", other with name "G. Tinglay". Doctor states:- "In water a month to 6 weeks".

"Colonsay No. 13" body:- Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Colonsay, Argyll.

Stoker Petty Officer Robert STEWART, (MM 31,) R.N.R. (Religion – R.C.)

Sources

Alan Davis

Dr. Terri Colpi

YouTube video: Arandora Star - Ireland's Legacy

Donegal Vindicator

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Stornoway Gazette

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colonsayhistory.info (website)

Clyde Maritime - The Loss of the Arandora Star (website)

Imperial War Museums - Islands of Barra and Vatersay (website)

Ayrshire Advertiser