

# DOVER

## The Cinque Ports Pilots

Dover

Kent

It is understood that for many years those men employed as Cinque Ports Pilots were considered to be seaman of exceptional ability, a mantle which they carried back prior to the Dover Pilots forming an association in 1526. Whilst not wanting to infer nepotism, but it also would appear that one of the reasons for the high standards was due to family members involved, in a lot of cases sons following in their fathers footsteps.

## The Great War

1914 - 1919

**KITSON, REYNOLDS HAMILTON.** Pilot.  
Mercantile Marine, Cinque Ports Pilot, (Permanent).S.S. "Menapier."  
Died 7 June 1915. Aged 35.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London.

Reynolds is also commemorated on at least three forms of remembrance in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, they being, the Borough of Cheltenham civic war memorial, Cambray Baptist Church, Cheltenham, and Cheltenham Grammar School. Built in 1908 by Short Brothers Ltd of Sunderland for Brys & Gylsen, the 1,886 ton Belgian cargo ship S.S. "Menapier" was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine UB-10, commanded by Otto Steinbrinck. The UB coastal torpedo attack boats class submarine sunk the S.S. "Menapier" in the North Sea approximately two miles off the Tongue Light Vessel in the Thames Estuary, on the day that Reynolds died. At the time of her loss the ship was commanded by a Captain De Brock and was on a voyage from Algiers to Middlesbrough laden with iron ore. When she was sunk the S.S. "Menapier" was owned by Antwerpsche Zeevaartmij of Antwerp Belgium, and managed by (S.A. de Commerce & de Navigation managers), of Antwerp Belgium. The war memorial information appertaining to Reynolds was accessed from the excellent website [www.remembering.org.uk/memorials](http://www.remembering.org.uk/memorials).

**BLAXLAND, THOMAS.** Pilot.  
Mercantile Marine, Cinque Ports Pilot, (Permanent). S.S. Thornaby.  
Died 28 February 1916.  
Born Dover, Kent c1879.

Husband of Mary Louise Blaxland of 19 Barton Road, Dover, Kent.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London, and on the civic war memorial Dover, Kent. Judging by the 1881 census details appertaining to the Blaxland family, the Pilotage 'tradition' would appear to be applicable to it in much the same way as several

other families. At the time of the census the family was residing at 45 High Street, Charlton, Dover, Kent, which is where Thomas (Junior) was also probably born:-

Thomas BLAXLAND. Aged 40. Born Whitstable, Kent.

Trinity Cinque Ports Pilot

Ann E. BLAXLAND. Aged 38. Born Chelmsford, Essex.

William BLAXLAND. Aged 5. Born Dover, Kent.

Elgar BLAXLAND. Aged 4. Born Dover, Kent.

Thomas BLAXLAND. Aged 2. Born Dover, Kent.

Agnes M. BLAXLAND. Aged 1 month. Born Dover, Kent.

Jane FOAD. Aged 15. Born Whitstable, Kent.

Niece. General Domestic Servant.

Built in 1889 and owned by Ropner & Son of Stockton, the 1,730 ton vessel S.S. Thornaby was mined and sunk approximately 4 nautical miles north east of the Shipwash Light Vessel off Harwich, Essex at about midday on Monday 28 February 1916, during a voyage from Marbella to Hartlepool laden with a cargo of iron-ore. Pilot Thomas Blaxland being amongst the 19 lost in the sinking of the vessel. Trinity House records at The Guildhall Library, London, show that Thomas had boarded a Trinity House vessel at Dover, Kent which took him to join the S.S. Thornaby in the English Channel off the South Foreland, which was to comply with the pilotage requirements to take the vessel as far as the port of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, where there was to be an exchange of Pilots. The UC I type UC coastal minelayers class German submarine, UC-3 commanded by Erwin Wabner had laid the mine which sank the S.S. Thornaby, she being one of the nineteen vessels sunk by the UC-3 mines before it was itself mined on 27 May 1916, north of Zeebrugge, Belgium with the loss of 18 hands onboard. At the time of the submarines loss Günther Kreysen was in command, having taken over from Erwin Wabner on 17 May 1916. Nicknamed "Ropner's Navy," during the years of the Great War, Ropner & Son of Stockton lost 27 of their ships due to enemy action, it being half of the company's fleet. During the Second World War another 43 of the ships which were owned and managed by Ropner & Son were also lost.

**FLETCHER, WILLIAM**, Pilot.

Mercantile Marine, Cinque Ports Pilot, (Permanent). S.S. "Trignac."

Died 25 February 1916. Aged 42.

Son of the late William and Jane Fletcher of Whitby, Yorkshire.

Husband of Flora Fletcher of Sydenham House, The Strand, Walmer, Kent.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London.

All data accessed except William's CWGC commemoration, states that the 2,375 ton French steamship S.S. "Trignac" struck a mine and sank in the North Sea on February 24 1916. She was built in 1903 by the Chantiers Nantais de Constructions Maritimes, and owned by the Society Anon, des Chargeurs de VOuest.

**FERGUSON, JOHN.** Pilot.

Mercantile Marine, Cinque Ports Pilot, (Permanent). S.S. "Ren."

Died 29 October 1917. Aged 65.

Son of Andrew Ferguson.

Husband of Margaret Oliphant Ferguson.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London.

**KNOX, ALFRED GEORGE JOHN.** Pilot.

Mercantile Marine, Cinque Ports Pilot, (Permanent). S.S. "Estrella" (London).

Died 5 March 1918. Aged 37.

Son of Alfred William and Martha Knox of 32, Sotheron Street, Goole, Yorkshire.

Husband of Annie Matilda Knox of 22, Cecil Street, Goole, Yorkshire.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London.

Built in 1912 by the Clyde Shipbuilding Company Port Glasgow, and named the "S.S. Sanwarine," for Sanwarine Steamship Company of Manchester, Lancashire. In 1914 the 1740 ton vessel was purchased by the Bergen Line and registered at the port of Bergen. At the time of her loss when the S.S. "Estrella" hit a mine in the North Sea off Harwich, Essex, she was managed by Elder Dempster & Co.



# The Second World War

## 1939 - 1945

**SMITH, EDWARD MITCHELSON.** Pilot.

Lighthouse and Pilotage Authorities. Trinity House Service.

S.S. Blackhill (Newcastle-on-Tyne).

Died 18 November 1939. Aged 60.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London. Panel 122.

Heading for the river Tees from Salta Caballo, Spain, the 2492 ton S.S. Blackhill was sunk by a mine in the Thames Estuary on the day that Edward died. Various checks made point to Edward being the sole death onboard the ship on 18 November 1939, but some data points to the man who died, as being an actual crew member of the vessel.

**ENSOR, FRANCIS OLIVER.** Pilot.

Lighthouse and Pilotage Authorities. Trinity House Service. S.S. Georgios Ohlson.

Died 14/15 February 1940. Aged 53.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London. Panel 122.

**MacDONALD, DONALD.** Pilot.

Lighthouse and Pilotage Authorities. Trinity House Service. S.S. Stokesley.

Died 24 April 1940. Aged 41.

Son of John and Christina Howat MacDonald (né Anderson).

Husband of Bessie A.L. MacDonald of Glasgow.

Cremated at Charing, Ashford, (Kent County) Crematorium. During the Second World War 60 servicemen and women were cremated at Charing, Ashford, (Kent County) Crematorium. They are commemorated by name on a Portland stone panel set into a recess on the west pavilion of the crematorium building.

The 1,149 ton S.S. Stokesley was built for W. A. Souter & Co. Ltd., of Newcastle by Verschure & Company, in Amsterdam, Holland and launched in April 1922 as the S.S. Wynding. In 1937 the vessel was sold to Frances Duncan Steamship Co. Ltd., Cardiff, (J. T. Duncan & Co. Ltd., managers), and renamed the S.S. Stokesley. She was still owned by Frances Duncan Steamships when she was lost after hitting a mine and sunk in Thames Estuary, about eleven miles NNW of Margate, Kent. At the time that she was sunk the ship was on passage from Antwerp to London with a cargo 1,600 tons sulphate of ammonia. Fourteen of her crew onboard were also lost in addition to Donald, and four survivors were rescued by H.M. Drifter Plummer.

**HOPKINS, WILLIAM HENRY.** Pilot.

Lighthouse and Pilotage Authorities. Trinity House Service, M.V. Arinia (London).

Died 19 December 1940. Aged 67.

Son of Thomas Hopkins and of Jane Hopkins (née Payton).

Husband of Fanny Edith Hopkins of Whitfield, Dover, Kent.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London. Panel 122, and in the Dover, Kent, Second World War Book of Remembrance.

Off the pier of Southend-on-Sea, Essex, the 8,024 ton tanker M.V. Arinia (London), which was owned by the Anglo Saxon Petroleum Co, and commanded by 48 year old Benjamin B. Bannister from Southsea, Hampshire, was sunk by a mine. Having travelled from the island of Aruba in the Caribbean to the Isle of Grain, Kent, the tanker had dropped anchor and were waiting for the gates to open. The 1st Officer instructed the engines to be shut off, which resulted in fatal consequences. With the engines off the vessels anti-magnetic system was simultaneously also turned off. This system allowed ships to avoid mines that had been place in the water. Unfortunately the tanker had dropped anchor directly adjacent to a mine, which was amongst 186 acoustic mines which had been dropped by a force of 93 enemy bombers in the Thames Estuary on the night of 12/13 December 1940. When the tankers engines were turned off, the mine exploded. In addition to William, 54 merchant seaman, and 5 D.E.M.S. Gunners were lost. Eyewitness accounts of the tragedy state that following the initial explosion, the tanker was quickly ablaze from stem to stern. The M.V. Arinia was amongst sixteen vessels that were lost as the direct result of the 186 acoustic mines which were drooped.

**PEVERLEY, WATSON EVANS.** Pilot.

Lighthouse and Pilotage Authorities. Trinity House Service, S.S. Storaasund (London).

Died Wednesday 3 November 1943. Aged 51.

Born 11 June 1892.

Husband of Dora Peverley of Dover, Kent.

Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London. Panel 122.

Watson was a pupil at the Dover, Kent Grammar School for Boys from 1908 to 1913, where he is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, and was the father of the last casualty commemorated above.

On 2 November 1943, the S.S. Storaasund left Southend, Essex as part of Convoy CW 221, the convoy proceeding along the Channel Westwards, transporting 2500 tons of tank parts from to a weapons factory in Cardiff, Wales. H.M.S. Whitshead was the escort to the convoy which consisted of 19 Merchant ships including the S.S. Storaasund. The bills of lading show that it had a cargo of 376 tons of steel slabs, 250 tons of steel billets and 608 tons of pig iron (a total of 1234 tons). However, a contemporary account by a survivor, the 3rd officer, Mr H.B. Knudsen, describes the cargo as "tank parts and aircraft." Just after midnight on 3 November 1943, a number of German E-boats (Schnellboots) were sighted. H.M.S. Whitshead and the S.S. Storaasund opened fire and the E-boats were driven off, but approximately a quarter of an hour later a torpedo struck the S.S. Storaasund amidships. She was heavily laden and sank quickly. Of the total of 36 people onboard, 22 were lost, they being her Master, the 1st and 2nd Officers, 2nd and 3rd Engineers, Steward, Cook, 1 Naval and 2 Army D.E.M.S. Gunners, and 12 of her crew. Seven

survivors from the vessel were picked up by an English coaster which was also part of the convoy, the rest being rescued by a motor launch and taken to Newhaven, Sussex.

**Addendum.** In view of the long term importance regarding maritime war graves, it seemed right to add the following information to the above, although both the Dover Grammar School commemorations and the Dover, Kent Second World War Book of Remembrance transcriptions were *completed?* in 2003, and the above in 1987:-

Petty Officer, P/J 34814. James Varndell, aged 44 was amongst the twenty one men who were lost when the S.S. Storra, was sunk. At the High Court in late 2005, sisters Rosemary Fogg and Valerie Ledgard, who are the daughters of James, argued quite rightly that their late father was on “active military service” when his ship was sunk by the Germans in November 1943. Presiding judge Mr Justice Newman heard that because the S.S. Storaa was armed and being protected by H.M.S. Whitshead and Petty Officer Varndell was a member of the Royal Navy, the wreck should be preserved under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986. The sisters’ judicial review challenge was fought by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and John Short, who was sold the diving rights to the S.S. Storaa in 1985, and is a member of the Hastings Sub Aqua Association. Mr Justice Newman, who found in favour of the sisters, said: “The Storaa was obliged to travel into one of the most dangerous sea passages off the coast of England to face the known risk of being attacked by the enemy. If threatened with attack, by reason of being armed, it was required to engage in combat with the enemy for its own protection and for the benefit of the convoy.” Following the ruling by Mr Justice Newman, the M.O.D. had to declare the wreck of the S.S. Storaa a war grave. Rosemary Fogg and Valerie Ledgard said they were delighted with the ruling.

