



This item contains the Dublin core metadata attributes and Curatescape item type metadata fields for a story from the Ports, Past and Present archived collection on the digital repository of Ireland. It has been provided in .odt format for easy copy and pasting.

For more information about the Ports, Past and Present Project, see

<https://portspastpresent.eu/>.

For more information about Omeka Classic, see <https://omeka.org/classic/>.

For more information about Curatescape, its Omeka plugin suite and this item type metadata schema, see <https://curatescape.org/>.

For a .csv containing tabular data for all stories, see the larger collection at

<https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.ht259b362>.

For an archived snapshot of the story as it appeared between 2020 and 2023 on

<https://portspastpresent.eu/>, see the Relation field below.

Dublin Core

Title

The Sinking of the *St Patrick* | *Suddo'r St Patrick*

Subject

World War Two

Ail Rhyfel Byd

St Patrick (ferry)

St Patrick (fferi)

Tragedy

Trasiedi

Creator

Natasha de Chroustchhoff

Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

Date

2023

Rights

CC BY 4.0 International License

Relation

<https://perma.cc/J4PF-JH58>

Format

Curatescape story

Language

English

Welsh

Coverage

52.05626235026138, -5.063203044985755

Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

Lede

“TRAGEDY OF THE SEA” read the headline in North Pembrokeshire’s local newspaper, The County Echo, when it reported the destruction by enemy action of the Fishguard to Rosslare passenger and mail ferry the *St Patrick* with the loss of 28 lives.

Lede (Welsh)

“TRAGEDY OF THE SEA” meddai pennawd papur newydd lleol Sir Benfro, The County Echo, wrth nodi bod ymosodiad gan y gelyn wedi dinistrio’r fferi i deithwyr a phost rhwng Abergwaun a Rosslare, *St Patrick*, pan gollwyd 28 o fywydau.

Story

The *St Patrick* was the only ferry still sailing between Ireland and Wales during World War Two. The others, the *St David* and the *St Andrew*, had been requisitioned as hospital ships serving the European front. The *St. Patrick* made a regular daily crossing of St. George’s Channel, protected from submarine attack by an extensive minefield to the south. The ship had however been twice strafed from the air and the previous year a Wexford sailor, Moses Brennan, had died following a machine gun wound.

Some of those who boarded in Wexford on the night of Friday June 13th, 1941 might have considered the date inauspicious, but the sea was calm and the ship was in the experienced hands of Captain Jim Faraday who expected to reach his home port of Fishguard soon after sunrise. Unusually, he had his Merchant Navy cadet son Jack with him ‘for the ride’ since he happened to be home on leave. The captain, like most of the crew, was a local man, but five were Irish, as were most of the passengers.

Twelve miles off Strumble Head, just as the summer dawn was breaking, the ship was targeted by a German Heinkel aeroplane which dropped a stick of four bombs amidships, destroying the saloon cabin and the bridge and igniting the fuel tanks. All but one of the first class passengers died instantly as did the captain and his senior officers. The burning ship broke in two and sank in minutes. The surviving crew launched a lifeboat and a raft and did their utmost to save the remaining 43 passengers most of whom were floundering in the oily water.

Of the two stewardesses, one had been killed outright, leaving only 41-year-old May Owen to evacuate the women and children. May refused to leave the sinking ship until all her charges were in life jackets, and even at the last moment she went below again to assist a passenger. She then supported a woman and a girl in the water for two hours before being picked up by a rescue vessel.

Second engineer Frank Purcell bravely went down into the burning ship to save three men trapped in the engine room. He found a fourth lying injured in a passageway, brought him on deck and supported him in the water until they could be rescued.

The radio operator, Norman Campbell, remained at his post below decks until the bitter end using emergency equipment to signal for help. As a result of his courage and presence of mind he was able to alert nearby ships, which raced to the scene. The surviving passengers and crew were plucked from the sea and taken to Milford Haven. By the time the Fishguard lifeboat reached the spot nothing was visible apart from a couple of fish boxes floating among the bubbles.

These three crew members, all residents of Fishguard and Goodwick, were later honoured for their courage. Frank Purcell and Norman Campbell received the Order of the British Empire while May Owen was awarded the George Medal for gallantry. She returned to work as a stewardess and lived out her life quietly, with few knowing of her heroism. She married but had no children, and is buried in a peaceful windswept cemetery high above her home town within sight of the sea and of Strumble Head, not so far from where the *St Patrick* lies on the seabed. The small initials G.M. after her name are barely noticeable.

By strange coincidence, two parallel father-son tragedies are associated with the loss of the *St Patrick*, mirroring one another across the water as if to highlight the fragility of sea-going lives.

Captain Faraday's 19-year-old son Jack, although not officially a crew member, was a strong swimmer and worked tirelessly to rescue people from the water but, finding his father not among them, went back to look for him. He was not seen again. His brother later joined the air force to seek vengeance and also lost his life.

The youngest crew member on the *St Patrick*, deck boy Michael John Brennan, aged 17, was the son of the Wexford sailor who died from injuries received in the previous enemy attack on the ship. The eldest of Moses Brennan's seven children, John had gone to sea to support his family after his father's death.

Following the sinking of the *St Patrick*, the close-knit communities of Wexford and Fishguard/Goodwick shared the pain of a loss that rippled out and touched so many in those wartime years – and which is not forgotten even now. Every Remembrance Day the current ferry pauses in its crossing and drops a wreath at the spot where the *St Patrick* went down.

Story (Welsh)

St Patrick oedd yr unig fferi oedd yn dal i hwylio rhwng Iwerddon a Chymru yn ystod yr Ail Ryfel Byd. Roedd y lleill, St David a St Andrew, wedi cael eu hanfon fel llongau ysbyty i wasanaethu'r ffrynt Ewropeaidd. Roedd y *St Patrick* yn croesi Môr Iwerddon yn gyson bob dydd, lle roedd maes ffrwydron helaeth i'r de yn ei diogelu rhag i longau tanfor ymosod. Serch hynny, roedd y llong wedi cael ei phledu ddwywaith o'r awyr a'r flwyddyn flaenorol roedd morwr o Wexford, Moses Brennan, wedi marw yn dilyn clwyf gwn peiriant.

Efallai fod rhai o'r teithwyr a ddaeth i'r llong yn Wexford nos Wener 13 Mehefin 1941 o'r farn bod y dyddiad yn un anlwcus, ond roedd y môr yn dawel ac roedd y llong yn nwylo profiadol y Capten Jim Faraday a oedd yn disgwyl cyrraedd ei borthladd cartref yn Abergwaun yn fuan ar ôl codiad haul. Yn anghyffredin ddigon, roedd ei fab Jack a oedd yn gadget yn y Llynges Fasnachol gydag ef ar y daith 'o ran hwyl' gan ei fod yn digwydd bod gartref ar wyliau. Fel y rhan fwyaf o'r criw, dyn lleol oedd y capten, ond roedd pump yn Wyddelod, fel y rhan fwyaf o'r teithwyr.

Ddeuddeg milltir oddi ar Ben-caer, wrth i wawr diwrnod o haf dorri, cafodd y llong ei thargedu gan awyren Heinkel o'r Almaen a ollyngodd bedair bom ar ei chanol, gan ddinistrio'r caban salŵn a'r bont lywio a thanio'r tanciau tanwydd. Bu farw pob un ond un o'r teithwyr dosbarth cyntaf ar unwaith ac felly hefyd y capten a'i uwch swyddogion. Torrodd y llong yn ddwy ran a suddo mewn munudau. Lansiodd y criw oedd wedi goroesi fad achub a rafft a gwneud eu gorau glas i achub y 43 o deithwyr oedd ar ôl, y rhan fwyaf ohonyn nhw mewn trafferth yn y dŵr llawn olew.

O'r ddwy stiwardes, roedd un wedi'i lladd yn y fan a'r lle, gan adael Mai Owen, 41 oed, ar ei phen ei hun, i achub y menywod a'r plant. Gwrthododd May adael y llong wrth iddi suddo nes bod ei holl deithwyr mewn siacedi achub, a hyd yn oed ar y funud olaf aeth isod eto i helpu un teithiwr. Yna, cynhaliodd fenyw a merch yn y dŵr am ddwy awr cyn iddyn nhw gael eu codi gan fad achub.

Aeth yr ail beiriannydd Frank Purcell i lawr yn ddewr drwy'r fflamau i achub tri dyn a oedd wedi'u dal yn ystafell yr injan. Daeth o hyd i un arall wedi'i anafu mewn tramwyfa, dod ag ef i'r dec a'i gynnal yn y dŵr nes y gellid eu hachub.

Arhosodd y gweithredwr radio, Norman Campbell, yn ei le islaw'r deciau tan y diwedd un, gan ddefnyddio offer brys i alw am help. O ganlyniad i'w ddewrder a'i feddwl chwim, llwyddodd i rybuddio llongau cyfagos, a ruthrodd i'r fan. Cafodd y teithwyr a'r criw oedd wedi goroesi eu codi o'r môr a'u cludo i Aberdaugleddau. Erbyn i fad achub Abergwaun gyrraedd, doedd dim byd i'w weld ond ychydig o focsys pysgod ymhlith y swigod.

Cafodd y tri aelod criw hyn, bob un yn byw yn Abergwaun ac Wdig, eu hanrhydeddu'n nes ymlaen am eu dewrder. Derbyniodd Frank Purcell a Norman Campbell yr OBE tra dyfarnwyd Medal George am ddewrder i Mai Owen. Dychwelodd i weithio fel stiwardes a byw yn dawel, heb i lawer wybod am ei harwriaeth. Fe briododd ond chafodd hi ddim plant, ac mae wedi'i chladdu mewn mynwent wyntog a thawel yn uchel uwchben ei thref enedigol o fewn golwg i'r môr a Phen-caer, heb fod yn bell o'r fan lle mae St Patrick yn gorwedd ar wely'r môr. Prin y gellir gweld y llythrennau bach G.M. ar ôl ei henw.

Yn rhyfedd iawn, mae dwy drasiedi gyfochrog yn ymwneud â thadau a meibion yn gysylltiedig â *cholli'r* St Patrick, gan adlewyrchu ei gilydd ar draws y dŵr fel pe baen nhw'n tynnu sylw at fregusrwydd bywydau ar y môr.

Roedd Jack, mab 19 oed y Capten Faraday, er nad oedd yn aelod swyddogol o'r criw, yn nofiwr cryf a bu'n gweithio'n ddiflino i achub pobl o'r dŵr ond, pan welodd nad oedd ei dad yn eu plith, aeth yn ôl i chwilio amdano. Chafodd e mo'i weld eto. Yn nes ymlaen, ymunodd ei frawd â'r llu awyr i geisio talu'r pwyth yn ôl a chollodd yntau ei fywyd hefyd.

Roedd aelod ieuengaf criw y St Patrick, gwas dec o'r enw Michael John Brennan, 17 oed, yn fab i'r morwr o Wexford a fu farw o anafiadau a gafwyd yn ymosodiad blaenorol y gelyn ar y llong. Yr hynaf o saith o blant Moses Brennan, roedd John wedi mynd i'r môr i gynnal ei deulu ar ôl marwolaeth ei dad.

Yn dilyn suddo'r St Patrick, rhannodd cymunedau clos Wexford ac Abergwaun/Wdig boen y gollod a ymladdodd ac a gyffyrddodd â chynifer ym mlynnyddoedd y rhyfel – poen nad yw'n cael ei anghofio hyd yn oed nawr. Bob blwyddyn ar Sul y Cofio mae'r fferi presennol yn oedi wrth groesi ac yn gollwng torch yn y fan lle'r aeth y St Patrick i lawr.

Factoid

Strumble Head is on the Pembrokeshire Coast Path and it is about a six mile walk between and Goodwick.

Mae Pen-caer ar Lwybr Arfordir Sir Benfro ac mae tua chwe milltir o daith gerdded oddi yno i Wdig.

Related Resources

Shane Dunphy, 'The Sinking of the St. Patrick'. Radio documentary for RTÉ, 2011, <https://www.rte.ie/radio/doconone/646913-radio-documentary-saint-patrick-ferry-rosslare-fishguard-ww2-german>

Tony Matthews, *Quiet Courage: Forgotten Heroes of World War Two* (Big Sky Publishing, 2021)

Official Website