



The Great War 1914-18

Peter Masters

Shimian House.
Griceoth
June 7th 1917

Captain Brown.

My Dear Friend.

Excuse me of being so long without writing to you. I was very glad to hear that you got home safe, and all your crew, the same as we did. It was an awful sight to see our ships gone as they did. But we ought to thank God we both got home safe. It would be awful to go in German hands, we are living in an awful time just now. I know Mr Brown was very anxious about you by seeing us, so long coming home. I understand the Harold got to Spool safe, but we did not get them also with our cargoes, but likely you feel about it at times loosing our old homes. I don't know what to do next. You can't say I will stop home just now, or they might put Rakie on us. I would sooner be a sailor than a soldier. I know Mr Brown and your little children was as glad as my Mrs seeing you home safe again, we both join and wishes you good health, hoping we shall meet again soon. James gave me a good reference, and settled without any trouble as usual. But he gave me nothing with #

Kind regards from your truly
J Roberts

This Story began with an enquiry

I wonder if you can help me.

I'm working on a family history project and I have a letter from a Mr J Roberts of Criccieth that forms a poignant part of the story. The letter is dated June 7th 1917. The house name is unfortunately unclear, but looks like Lleiniau House Criccieth. But The double L could be S or even H.

My questions are of course - if you can recognise the name - is the house still there, and is anything known about Mr J Roberts? He was a seafarer by the way and his ship was sunk by a U boat a few weeks before the letter date.

*Kind regards,
Roger Brown
Oakbank Farm
Crook
Cumbria LA8 8JZ*

This was accompanied with a copy of a letter

The transcription of which reads

*Lleiniau House ,
Criccieth.
June 7th 1917*

*Captain Brown,
My Dear Friend.*

Excuse me of being so long without writing to you . I was very glad to hear that you got home safe and all your crew. The same as we did .It was an awful sight to see our ships gone as they did. But we ought to thank god we both got home safe it would be awful to go in Germans hands. We are living in an awful time just now. I know Mrs Brown was very anxious about you by seeing us, so long coming home .

I understand the Harold got to L/pool safe, pity we did not get there also with our cargoes. Most likely you feel about it at times losing our old homes. I don't know what to do next .

You can't say I will stop home just now or they might put the khaki on us, I would sooner be a sailor than a soldier.

I daresay Mrs Brown and the little children was glad as my Mrs seeing you home safe again, we both join in wishes you a good health ,hoping we shall meet again soon .

James gave me a good reference and settled without any trouble as usual but he gave me nothing. !

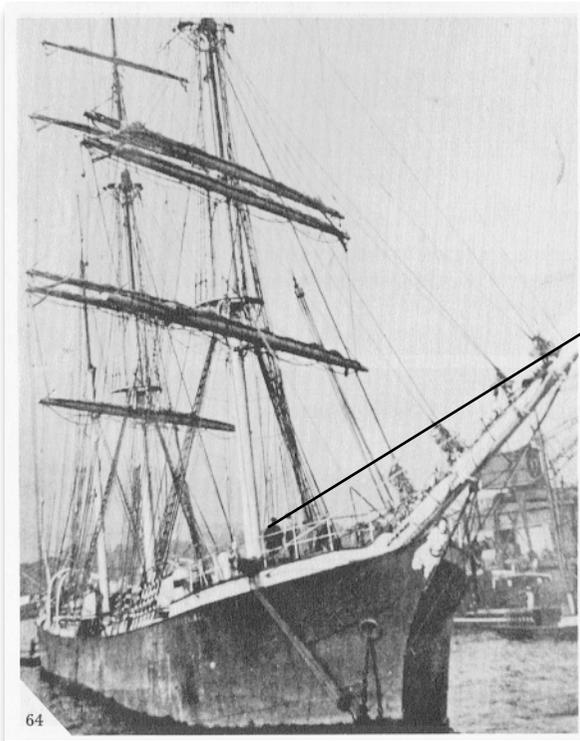
With kind regards yours truly.

J Roberts

This piqued my interest and thus began a long search which led to some unexpected connections and stories of seemingly common experiences among sailors in the first world war. Namely that of having their ships sunk under them and being cast adrift in an open boat.

So let us start with Captain Roberts, He was a local Criccieth man and was born in 1 Tanygrisiau Terrace in 1875. In the 1891 census he is listed as Mariner and his father is listed as a Master Mariner..

Having served on several sailing ships as apprentice learning his craft by October 1915 he is now the Master of the Beeswing



Oct 1913 At mooring in Rotterdam with Chief Officer [later] Captain W.H. Hughes on the forecstle

The Beeswing was built by Russel Greenock in 1883 rated as a 3 mast Barque

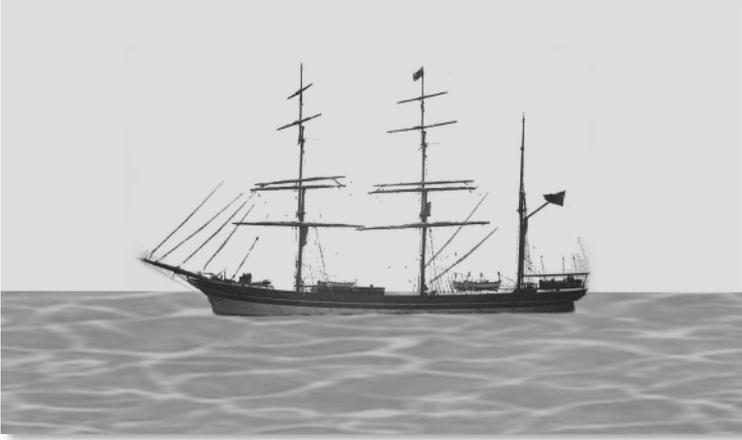
She was 236 .5 Ft x 21.7ft Iron hull and weighed 1462grt

She was previously managed by Pritchard Bros of Porthmadoc

But by 1915 was owned by J.B.Walmsey, Liverpool.

They owned several similar vessels and seem to specialise in small cargo Sailing ships.

The Beeswing



On May 2nd 1917 the *Beeswing* was on voyage from Pensacola to Liverpool with a cargo of timber.

She had left port on the 18th April and during the uneventful passage the lookout reported what he thought was steamer some way off. Whilst looking he saw a flash and then heard a bang, this was followed by a shell which came whizzing across the ships stern. The Captain was called for and all hands called on deck. The Ship hove to and the boats were swung out.



The ship had been stopped by U-58 commanded by Kurt Wippen



The Beeswing's Deck Boat

The Submarine approached and the commander asked for the ships Captain and her papers. They were summoned aboard the submarine and after examining the papers, seeing there were no munitions aboard the U-boat ordered the men into the open boats gave them their position as 130 -140 miles true east. Then they shelled the Beeswing below the water line and she slowly sank stern first.

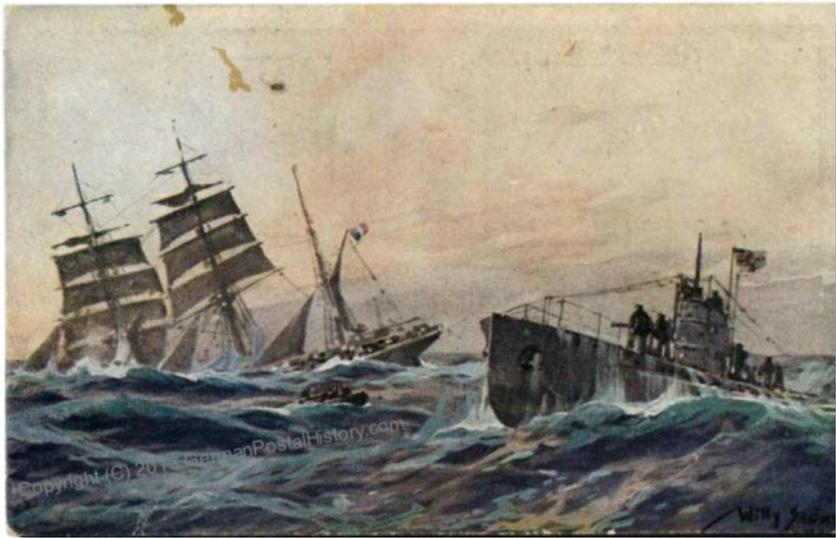
Barque Beeswing
 Date : 2 May 1917
 Loss type: Sunk, Stopped and sunk by gunfire
 Position :50° 50'N, 13° 00'W
 Location :140 miles WxN of Fastnet
 Route: Pensacola - Liverpool
 Cargo : Timber Casualties: 0
 U-boat : U58 (Cpt Kurt Wipern)

Having lost their boat the crews started to row towards land, but owing to the heavy seas made little headway .

After several days in the open boats they made landfall near Cork .
 They then made their way back to Liverpool.



A long pull for home



The Germans were so excited by this heroic deed they even produced a post card of it



The Beeswing's position when she was sunk

The Beeswing muster list in 1915

John Roberts; rank/rating, Master; age, 40; place of birth, Criccieth;
previous ship, same ship.

John Owen; rank/rating, Mate; age, 63; place of birth, Carnavon;
previous ship, Ellen James of Carnavon.

Henry James; rank/rating, Boatswain; age, 26; place of birth, Criccieth;
previous ship, Talhybius of Liverpool.

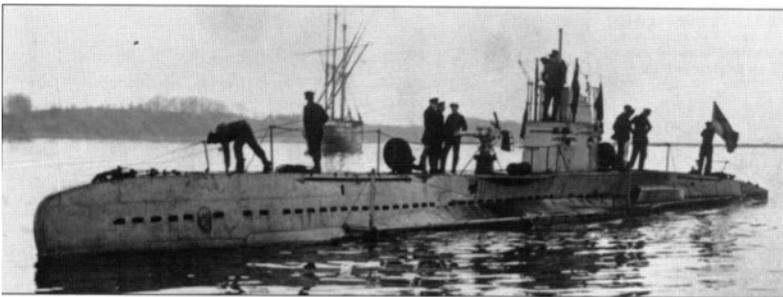
It may be assumed that some these men were still serving aboard the
Beeswing when she was sunk.

The Killarney



The Barque Killarney left Brunswick on 6th April 1917 with a consignment of timber. She had diverted from her course due to bad weather and was about 5 days behind her schedule. On the 8th May at 4.15 a.m the chief officer saw what appeared to be a steamer a long way off and going across the Killarney's stern . Whilst looking he saw a flash and heard a shot . A shell came whizzing across the stern.

Captain Brown was called for and all hands called . The vessel hove to and the boats were swung out. Whilst the port boat was put over, a shell struck the ship carrying away the mizzen topmast stay and starboard main lower topsail sheet .



U-21 Capain Otto Hersing.

general

nationality: British purpose: transport type: barque - bark
propulsion: sailing ship date built: 1892 status: unknown
details weight (tons): 1413 grt dimensions : 70 x 11.3 x -- m
material: iron rigging: 3 masts speed: about cause lost:
charges/explosives date lost: 08/05/1917 No casualties:
builder: Evans R. & J. & Co., Liverpool owner: J. B. Walmsley & Co
.Liverpool

The crew took to the boats, 13 in one 9 in the other. The submarine approached and the commander asked for the ships papers. The Captain was called aboard, after the papers were examined the u-boat commander stated that they were 120 to 150 miles east true .

Then submarine then shelled the Ship

Barque Killarney

Date : 8 May 1917

Loss type: Sunk, Stopped and sunk by
gunfire

Position :50° 55'N, 14° 44'W

Location :200 miles WxN of Fastnet

Route: Brunswick, GA - Liverpool

Cargo : Timber Casualties: 0

U-boat : U21 (Cpt Otto Hersing)

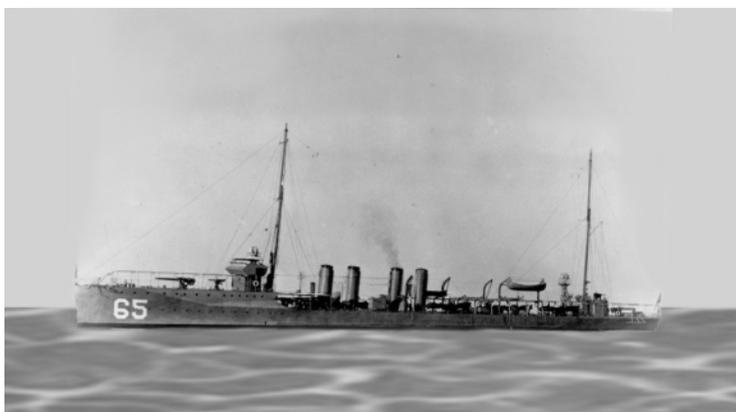


Pulling away from the heavily listing vessel to escape the fatal whirlpool.



The Killarney's position when sunk

Having lost their boat the two crews started to row towards land, but owing to the heavy seas made little headway . After three days in the open boats at 3 p.m a vessel was seen which was a United States Destroyer which picked them up . They were taken to Liverpool arriving 13th May



The USS Davies comes to the rescue

The crew of the Killarney were lucky to be rescued by the USS Davis, She was on anti-submarine patrol and had just come out of Cork only days before. It was on station knowing there were U-boats in the vicinity. It was in this same area that the Lusitania was sunk 7th May 1915 and was one of the reasons the U.S entered the war

Excerpt from the ship's log:

USS Davis.

Picked up 22 survivors of barque Killarney, sunk by submarine on 8th May.

Killarney (United Kingdom): The barque was shelled and sunk in the Atlantic Ocean 200 nautical miles (370 km) west of the Fastnet Rock (50°55'N 14°44'W) by SM U-21 (Kaiserliche Marine). Her crew survived.

Assigned to Destroyer Force, Atlantic Fleet, Davis operated on the east coast and in the Caribbean until the United States entered World War I. She sailed from Boston 24 April 1917 as one of six destroyers in the first American destroyer detachment to reach European waters,

Arriving at QueensTown, Ireland, 4 May.

She performed patrol duty off the coast of Ireland and escorted merchant convoys through the zone of greatest danger from submarines.

It was in this same area that the Lusitania was sunk 7th May 1915

Between 25 and 28 June she met and escorted troop transports carrying the first American Expeditionary Force to France

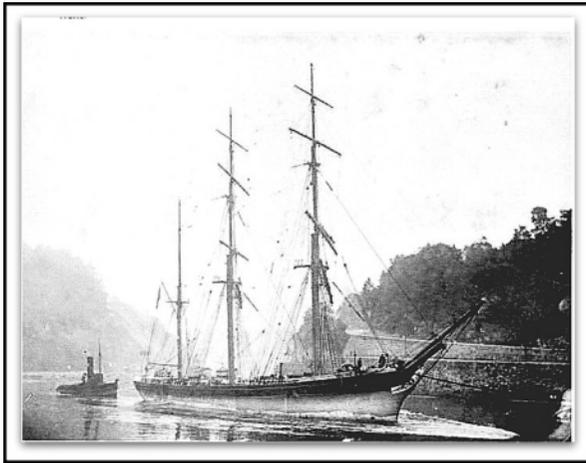
Another twist in the tale USS Davies picked up the U-103 Crew after they were rammed and sunk by R.M.S Olympic 12 May 1918.

The Borrowdale

An earlier encounter

On the 30th April 1917 just two days before the Beeswing was sunk U-21 intercepted and shelled another Barque .This was the Borrowdale an ex Liverpool ship .

Several of her crew has served on the Beeswing, Killarney or Harold.



1868

Built of iron by Potter & Co., Liverpool for J.D. Newton & Co., Liverpool. She was rigged as a full-rigged ship carrying royals over single topgallant sails.

1889

Sold to Nicholson & McGill, Liverpool.

1899

Sold to August Troberg and 30 co-owners in Mariehamn.

1903

Rerigged down to a barque.

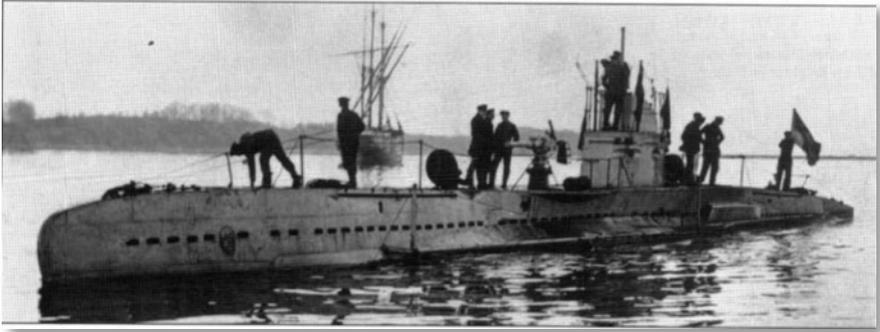
1916

Sold to Gustaf Erikson, Mariehamn.

3 May 1917

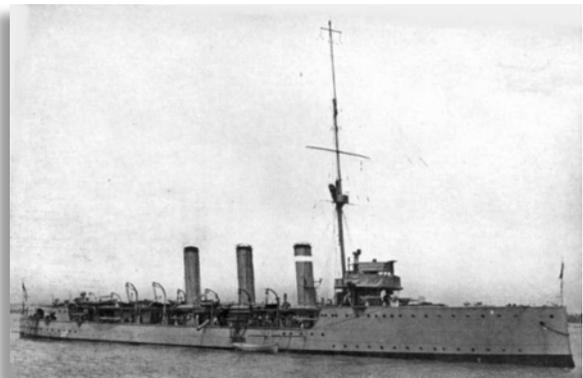
Sunk by German submarine sailing out from Newport Mon. with a cargo of coal. The crew managed to get ashore in the life boats.

30th April 1917 the Barque Borrowdale was stopped and sunk by gunfire South of Ireland by the submarine U-21 Cmdr Otto Hersing



This was no ordinary submarine. Commanded by Captain Otto Hersing throughout the entire war, This was the first submarine to torpedo a Battle ship in WW1. 5th Sept 1914.

HMS Pathfinder was sunk with a Loss of 260 Men



U-21 was part of the third Half Flotilla (2nd Flotilla) stationed in Heligoland at the outbreak of war in August, 1914.

The U-boats were stationed there in anticipation of an Allied naval drive into the Heligoland Bight, which failed to materialize.



The Borrodales Position when sunk



The crew set off in their deck boats for the long haul to Ireland

The Barque Naiad

Some coincidences.

In 1910 at the age of Thirteen, Leslie Noel Morton ran away to sea He signed on as a deckhand on the *Beeswing* He later became an apprentice and served on her for four years under Captain Roberts.

In March 1915. He and his brother joined the *Naiad*. another J.B Walmsley square rigger on voyage to Australia via New York.

Also on board was Arthur Graham 'Jo' Elliott. He first went to sea on windjammers in 1910 and he was also an apprentice on board the square rigger *Beeswing*,

Whilst in New York, Leslie Morton his brother John and Jo Elliot along with and several other shipmates, were becoming fearful that the war would be over before they would have time to make a significant contribution to it, so they jumped ship.

They wired home for some money to buy tickets to get back .they found a suitable ship and set about buying tickets .

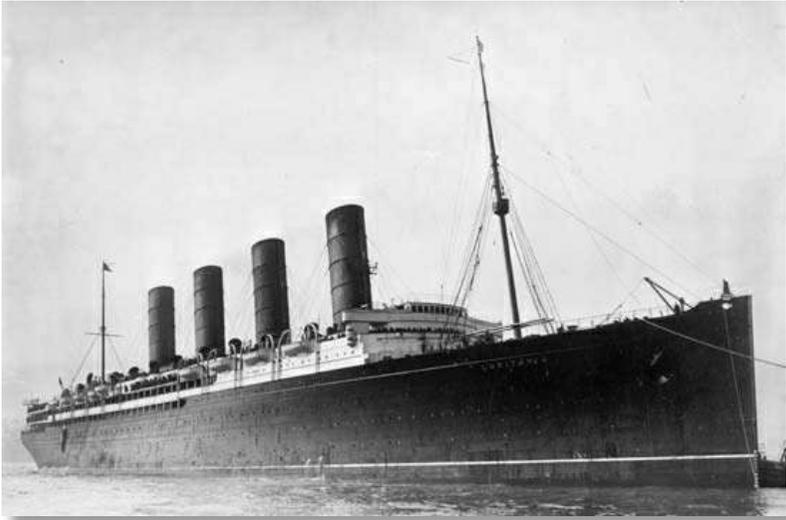
On learning that they were seamen the Purser offered them employment instead. So on 30 April 1915 they engaged as able seaman on the Deck Department on the ***Lusitania***.

On the 7th May in the afternoon John Morton was on deck duties when he witnessed the torpedo strike the starboard side.

The ship went down within twenty minutes.

John & his brother Leslie survived but their friend Jo Elliot and 1198 others did not.

[From extracts the "Long Wake " by John Norton



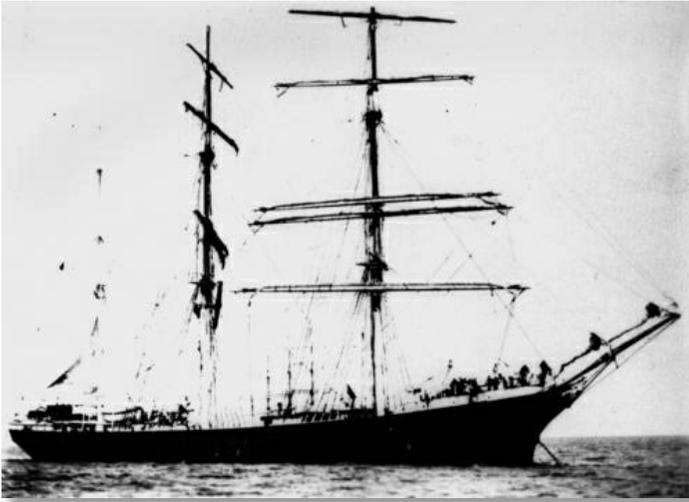
The Lusitania was torpedoed by U-20 commanded by
Kapitanleutnant Walther Schwieger

The Germans awarded the Iron Cross this was later rescinded but
restored by Hitler



The Harold

But what of Captain Brown ? He had managed to get back to Liverpool after the Killarney was sunk and the crew rescued by the USS Davies



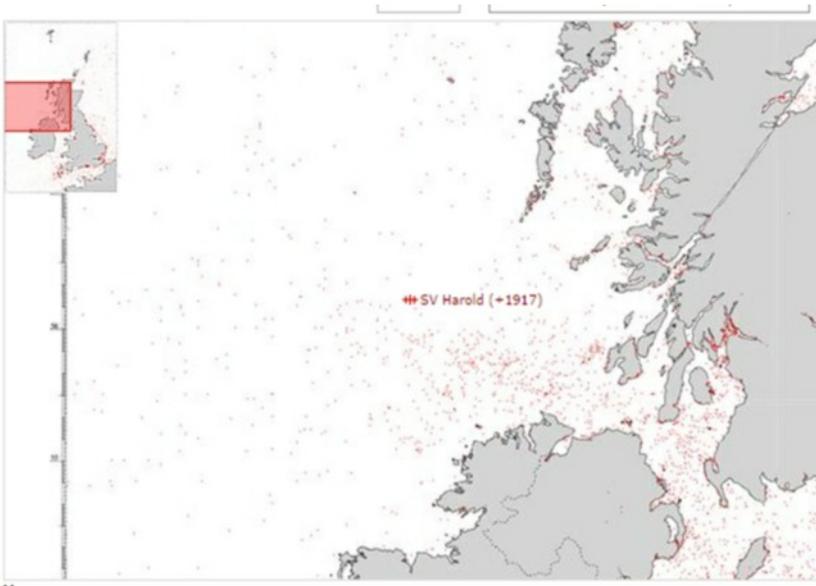
Barely two months later he was back at sea in command of the Barque Harold .

He took a route north west to avoid the risk of Submarines in the south Irish Sea but unfortunately a grim fate awaited as the U-66 commanded by Gerhard Muhle was lurking nearby



“The British barque Harold was torpedoed and sunk by German submarine U-66 when 65 miles N.N.W. 1/2 W. of Tory Island on July 21st, 1917 when carrying a cargo of coal from Liverpool to Santos. Thirteen men, including the captain, were killed.”

The U-boat U66 reported her position in the North Sea but neither she nor any of her 40-man crew were ever heard from again. A post war German study offered no explanation for *U-66*'s loss, although British records suggest that she may have struck a mine in the Dogger Bank area.



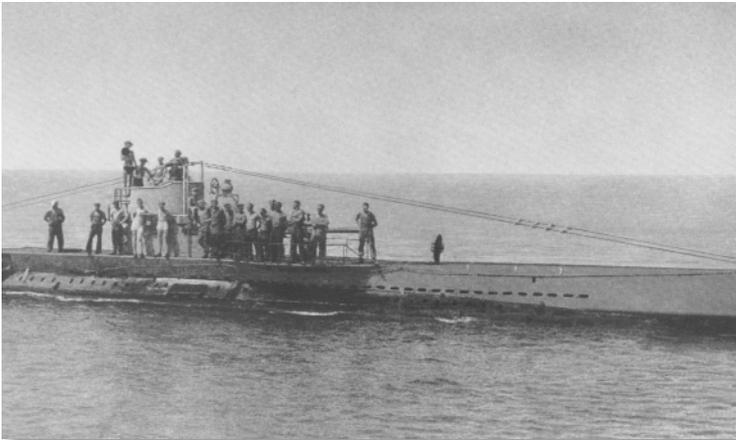
The last know position of the Harold

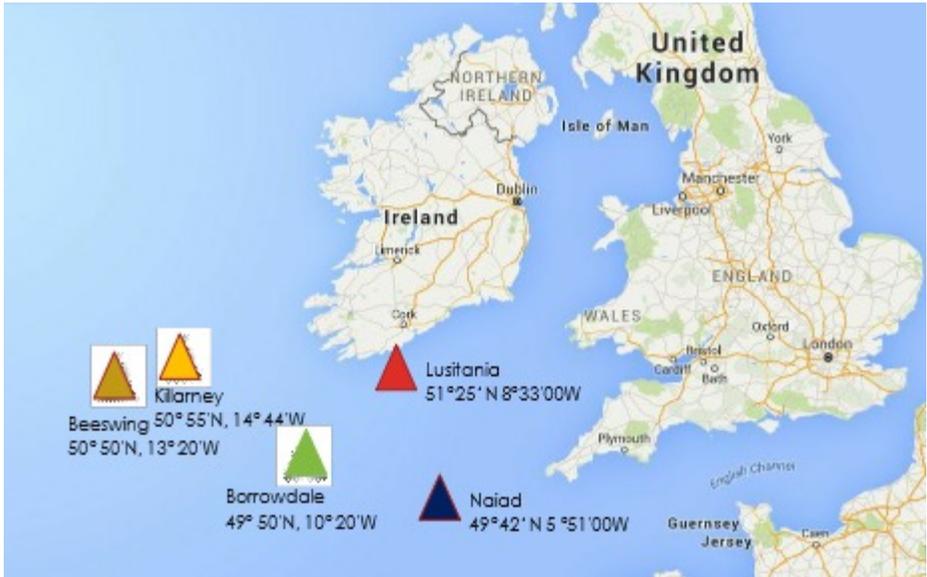
‘HAROLD’ Built 1888. Steel barque of 1376 Tons. Length: 240 ft. Breadth: 36.5 ft. Depth: 21.3 ft. Built by Duncan for T. Stephens and Son. She was sold to Warmsley and Co in her later life.

The Barque Naiad

Had the Morton Brothers not jumped ship in New York and signed on to the Lusitania .They would have completed the journey to Australia and made it safely back to the U.K

But only to suffer the same fate as all their other ex shipmates. on voyage from London to Buenos Aires with a cargo of cement and pipes. On the 15th December 1916 the Barque Naiad was stopped and sunk by gunfire off Fastness by the submarine UB-38 Cmdr Wilhelm Amberger , They set the crew adrift in the open boat. There were no reported casualties.





The ships positions when they were sunk

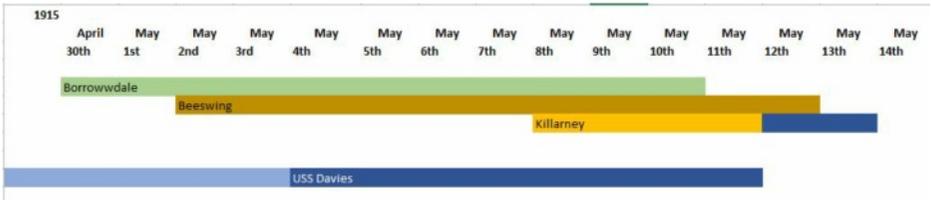
CAPTAIN Stanley Lord, 34, was Master of the Boston-bound liner *Californian*, owned by Leyland & Co., on the night the *Titanic* sank.

He first went to sea in March 1891 at the age of 13½ as a cadet in the barque *Naiad* owned by Messrs J. B. Walmsley

The *California* approached a large ice field on April 14th and sent a warning to other shipping in the area. During the night rockets were seen but they assumed they were company rockets. Morse signals were sent from the *Titanic* but the signals officer on the *California* was asleep after a long watch and not awakened. Morse lamp signals to the *Titanic* went unheeded.

The subsequent enquiry after the disaster believed the *California* to be close to the *Titanic* than stated. When the wreck was located in 1985 it was shown to be in a different location to that given by her officers.

The assumption that Capt Lord was wrong was called into doubt and he was as stated twenty miles away and not in sight of the *Titanic*



The above diagram shows the respective open boats presumed time in the water .

As all captains reported heavy seas and headwinds and therefore little or no forward progress for several days then it is likely that by the time the Killarney was picked up by the USS Davies they were probably all in the same area and although the ‘Davies’ log only records the Killarney it also likely she rescued the other crews as well since they all seemed to arrive in Liverpool at around the same time. Capt Roberts Letter is dated 7th June and Capt Brown had departed on the Harold by mid July.



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