



RMS Leinster Log

October 2021

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Welcome to our 9th Bulletin (October 2021) which is being sent to those who have asked to be kept informed of events and research relating to the sinking of the *RMS Leinster* in October 1918. This Bulletin is currently being sent by email to 300 people.

The Annual Commemoration will take place at 10 a.m. at the Anchor in Dun Laoghaire on 10th October 2021. All welcome. Please gather at 9.45 a.m.

Thanks to you, we remembered them

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Heartbreak and Hope:

A newly discovered account of the aftermath of the *RMS Leinster* sinking

Pádraig Allen, Archivist of St. John Ambulance Brigade and very good friend of *RMS Leinster* research, was recently in contact. Among the memoirs of Reginald Herber Keatinge he had discovered an account of the aftermath of the *RMS Leinster* sinking, which he was eager to share with us. (Keatinge's second name was Herber, not Herbert.)

Notes: The 1911 census shows Reginald Herber Keatinge living at 40 Sutton South, Howth, Dublin. A Director in a Painting Contracting Company, he was aged 36 and had been born in Dublin City. At the time of the census, he had been married to Florence (34) for 11 years. They had four children. Keatinges Contractors had its own St. John Ambulance Division. Sir John Lumsden was Chief Medical Officer of Guinness Brewery, during which time he founded St John Ambulance Brigade of Ireland and St. James's Gate Football Club. William George Smith was second-in-command of St. John Ambulance Brigade. Dorothy Eleanor Augusta Hignett was a member of St. John Ambulance Brigade and Deputy Director of the Irish War Hospital Depot.

The following is taken from the memoirs of Reginald Herber Keatinge, Superintendent of Dublin Building Trades Corps, St. John Ambulance.

"One morning about 10.30 o'clock I got a phone message from the Chief's [Sir John Lumsden] home – he was laid up with a cold, or something – to say it was rumoured that the S.S. Leinster had been sunk,ⁱ that I was to gather up all; the Ambulance men and Nursing Sisters I could, and get down to Kingstown at once. Smithⁱⁱ would be down later. I got what women I could and a few men, and drove to Kingstown. There at the water's edge, the Victoria Wharf, I could not believe the rumour. No excitement, no fuss. There seemed to be no one on duty – just Kingstown in the sunshine.

We were always hearing rumours and this was just another. I asked Mrs Hignettⁱⁱⁱ if she'd come up to the Marine Hotel for lunch, while we were waiting. While we were lunching, someone, a waiter I think it was – said, There's the first torpedo boat^{iv} coming in with casualties from the Mail Boat. "We looked and saw a boat coming in, and still I did not believe, but we hurried down, and were in time to see it come alongside. I shall never forget the sight. On the deck of the boat lying in orderly rows were soldiers, perfectly clean soldiers – there was something awful about them, clean soldiers, no mud or blood: just dead soldiers, lying side by side. What queer things one notices – no hats on. Then a sailor came up the gangway – the ship was lying below us – carrying a red-headed boy, about 10 years of age, in a brown blanket in his arms, and the boy was naked. My red-headed sons, three of them, had gone over to school by the 'Leinster' the 'day before yesterday.' It might have been one of them. I had a great revulsion of feeling. I went behind a shed and sobbed and sobbed until I thought I'd never stop. I'm not ashamed to say I repeated that ghastly performance twice again, before the day was done.^v

"It was my duty to ascertain and list the names of the survivors. A stretcher is carried off. I lift back the blanket from the face – A woman – 'Where's John? Where's John? Oh, I want John. Is John there?' I couldn't ask her for her name. I couldn't speak."^{vi}

There were several brides aboard the Mail Boat. They had been married that morning.^{vii} One wife had been saved, and I had her sent to the Marine Hotel ^{viii} and not to a hospital – she begged to be allowed stay at Kingstown until she could be assured of her newly wed husband's safety. The St. John men carried her to the Marine Hotel and they promised to let her know the very minute her husband would be brought in. Now every stretcher was watched with terrible interest. Would it be 'the Major'? ^{ix} "there was quite a crowd of people – onlookers, all the way to the hotel. Then, thanks be to God, a stretcher came ashore. I turned back the blanket from the face. I said, 'Name, please?' He told me his name. I turned and said to the bystanders – 'It's him.' It carried from mouth to mouth – Hurrah! It's HIM. It's HIM.

The husband came ashore. His arm or hand was injured. I did not have any difficulty in arranging where he was to be sent, for the St. John men, who had carried his wife, were already changing him to one of our stretchers, and people -ordinary quiet people – onlookers, dozens of them were running, running like mad things up to the Marine Hotel, shouting all the way – 'He's safe! He's here! He's all right!' ^x

Endnotes (Philip Lecane)

ⁱanecdotally, it would appear that rumours of a mailboat being attacked or sunk were not infrequent. This time, however, the incoming *RMS Ulster*, which had passed the outgoing *RMS Leinster*, had docked in Kingstown harbour at 10.14 a.m. and word of the sinking had begun to spread through the town. Presumably Sir John Lumsden had received a phone call on foot of this information.

ⁱⁱ William George Smith

ⁱⁱⁱ Mrs. Dorothy Eleanor Augusta Hignett

^{iv} What were later called destroyers were originally created as a defence against torpedo boats and were known as "torpedo boat destroyers," later shortened to destroyers. The first rescue ship to arrive in the harbour was the destroyer *HMS Lively* which was seen approaching at about 1.30pm and docked at Victoria Wharf at 1.50p.m.

^v The log of *HMS Lively* does not record the recovery of any bodies. It records the rescue of 102 men, 24 women and one child. While Keatinge did not specifically state that the red-headed boy was dead, his reaction certainly strongly implies he was. Often in tragic events or disasters, there are discrepancies between different accounts. Indeed, two accounts of a social event will often differ. In a letter to John Croker on 8 August 1815, the Duke of Wellington wrote, "*The history of a battle, is not unlike the history of a ball. Some individuals may recollect all the little events of which the great result is the battle won or lost, but no individual can recollect the order in which, or the exact moment at which, they occurred, which makes all the difference as to their value or importance.*" *HMS Seal* docked at 2p.m., ten minutes after *HMS Lively*. Aboard were 51 survivors and two recovered bodies. Having rescued 19 men and 2 women, *HMS Mallard* docked at 3p.m. Its log says that one of those rescued died aboard, but does not say if it was a man or a woman. Throughout the afternoon ships

continued to arrive carrying survivors and bodies recovered from the sea – including the Dublin Port and Dock Board’s tugs *Anna Liffey* and *Majestic*, which between them recovered 21 bodies. It would appear that by the time he came to write his memoirs, Keatinge’s memory failed him as to which ship carried the bodies of the soldiers and the red-headed boy. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to identify the red-headed boy. The only 10-year-old boy known to have been aboard the *RMS Leinster* was Richard Hobson, but unfortunately his body was not recovered. The body of 7-year-old Peter Blackburne was recovered, as were the bodies of fourteen-year-olds Ruben Ellis and Thomas Woodgate. The last named was serving in the Royal Air Force. His enlistment papers show that his hair was dark brown. Thus the closest in age to the red-headed boy of about 10-years-old are Peter Blackburne (7) and Ruben Ellis (14). Their details can be found on the www.rmsleinster.com

^{vi} It has not been possible to identify a woman survivor who travelled on the *RMS Leinster* with a man or boy named John, who was either lost or rescued.

^{vii} In fact Violet Haxby married Regimental Quarter-Master-Sergeant Samuel McKenna on 2 October 1918. They were lost. Anna Ferguson married Lieutenant John Craig Carlisle on 5 October 1918. They both survived. Cora England married Major Louis Daly on 8 October 1918. They appear later in Keatinge’s account. Margaret Bowes had married Army Gym Instructor Alfred George (known as George) Phillpott on 16 February 1918. Both were lost. Virginia Maude Frizzell (née Carter) had been married on 23 April 1918. Some newspaper accounts incorrectly identified her on being on honeymoon. Her husband was not aboard the ship. His surname was not Frizzell. Their story and those of the other couples mentioned can be read on www.rmsleinster.com

^{viii} Royal Marine Hotel

^{ix} This sentence facilitated identification of the couple as Cora (née England) and Major Louis Daly from Cork.

^{xx} After ensuring that Cora was safely in a lifeboat, Louis, as a senior army officer, stayed aboard to assist *RMS Leinster’s* Captain William Birch. Daly was on the bridge with Birch when the second torpedo struck the ship. Birch was blown into the sea. Daly found himself on the forward deck with both knees out of joint, a fractured leg and numerous cuts and bruises. By this time the water was level with the ship’s deck. With a male civilian, he managed to push a large wooden grating off the deck and they floated away from the ship. Daly was eventually picked up by a trawler and landed in Kingstown at about 6.30pm. He was subsequently brought by ambulance to a Red Cross Hospital in Dublin Castle.

The *RMS Leinster* Team is very grateful to Pádraig Allen, Archivist of St John Ambulance Brigade, for making Reginald Herber Keatinge’s most important account available for publication.

Philip Lecane.

The WALLS PROJECT – Dun Laoghaire

As part of the “Dun Laoghaire Anseo” project in Summer 2021, 14 artists were commissioned to paint images on walls and buildings in Dun Laoghaire. Among other subjects the projects were designed to reflect Dun Laoghaire’s maritime heritage.



“Artist at Work”

Paul Francis, a graphic designer and illustrator, completed the image seen below on a wall in Haigh Terrace opposite the National Maritime Museum of Ireland. It reflects the dramatic rescue by William Maher, a member of the crew of the R.M.S. Leinster on 10th October 1918, of a 13 year old girl, Dorothy Toppin. William Maher was awarded the Royal Humane Society Silver Medal for his action on that day.



2021 COMMEMORATION – Dun Laoghaire



All are very welcome to attend the Annual Commemoration of the sinking of the R.M.S. Leinster which will take place at the Anchor on the seafront, opposite the Lexicon, in Dun Laoghaire at 10.00 hrs. on Sunday 10th October 2021.

Keeping the Memory Alive

The RMS Leinster Team

Philip Lecane

Will Lockhart

Brian Ellis

Lucille Ellis

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<http://www.rmsleinster.com/privacy.htm>

Remembering all those who sailed on the final voyage of the *RMS Leinster*,

You can contact us at info@rmsleinster.com

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