



About Colonsay

S.S. ARANDORA STAR - ITALIAN CASUALTIES

When the SS *Arandora Star* set sail from Liverpool on 1 July 1940 she had on board in excess of 1600 men consisting of the crew, a military guard and passengers of German and Italian origin - some being prisoners of war but the majority being civilian internees. Whilst it is fairly certain that over half the passengers were of Italian origin, like many other aspects of this tragic story, it is difficult to find accurate figures and details, as reference to the following sources show:

1 . **Embarkation List, Arandora Star** , a document from FO 371 25210 in the National Archives, lists alphabetically the names of all internees under two columns headed 'Survivors' and 'Lost' At the bottom of every page is a handwritten total for each column. In additional columns, each individual is identified by a number as well as a camp of origin [where known]. On the front page, a simple handwritten calculation under the heading 'Italians', indicates 486 lost and 226 saved out of a total of 712 men.

Of these, 181 had previously been in an internment camp in Edinburgh , 123 in Lingfield, 88 in Bury, 22 in Southampton, 17 in Paignton, 10 in Pembroke, 9 in Kempton Park and 1 in Winchester . For the remaining 261 of the Italians named on the list, the camp of origin is recorded as 'Unknown'. This document was compiled by the War Office immediately after the sinking, however it soon became clear that it contained a considerable number of errors and inaccuracies.

2. **The Blue Star website** <http://www.bluestarline.org/arandora.html> gives the following figures for Italian casualties. Out of a total of 734 individuals, 470 were lost and 264 saved. Undoubtedly the source of these figures is another document from the National Archives marked 'Secret' and dated 4 July 1940 from F.O. i/c Greenock . It is headed thus - 'Addressed Admiralty for Trade Division Casualty Section' and continues: 'The following is an account compiled from the reports of the Chief Officer and Chief Engineer of the SS *Arandora Star* and of Major Drury of the Military Guard.' The fact that these figures were taken from reports which contain approximations of numbers aboard, saved and lost merely adds to the confusion. A further report dated 8 July 1940 from the National Archives and presented by Commander H. G. de Wolf of the HMCS *St Laurent* , states that 258 Italians were landed at Greenock after having been rescued by the crew and taken on board.

3. **The Missing Persons List**, which can be found in a separate section, has been reproduced on a couple of other websites as well as in two publications. One of these is the excellent book, now in its second edition, '**Arandora Star, una Tragedia Dimenticata**' by Maria Serena Balestracci, a native of Florence , Italy who has visited the Isle of Colonsay on a number of occasions. It is understood that this list originated from a document sent to an Italian newspaper and it contains the details of 446 casualties listed alphabetically by surname. As well as Christian name, additional information includes date and place of birth as well as last

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known place of residence. Those who are familiar with this list agree that even this is not believed to be a 100% accurate record of those who were lost on 2 July 1940.

Undoubtedly, the decision to send some 1400 internees and prisoners of war to Canada on board the SS *Arandora Star* was made in haste which helps to explain the lack of detailed records, either of those who survived or those who were lost.

BURIAL OF CASUALTIES

Out of over 400 Italian casualties, it has only been possible to identify the final resting places of thirteen 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 [see map]. After the war some were returned to their country of birth and others were re-interred in the communities in which they had made their homes. So why were so few recovered and identified?

The SS *Arandora Star* went down comparatively close to land and 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 HMCS St Laurent during the rescue, however many of the survivors reported that considerable numbers stayed aboard the stricken vessel 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 were, by and large, 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 10 minutes.

Early in August 1940, just one month 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. Almost 300 km south-west in County Mayo, the *Western People* newspaper for 10 August carried the headline - '100 Dead Bodies Floating in sea off Inniskea'. 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, that the same newspaper 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 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 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. Eventually it was agreed that local doctors could authorise the burial of war victims and thus most of the deaths were not recorded. 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.

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 he said "*Like many*

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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".

For a very small number of families this, however, was not the case. The Donegal Vindicator of 17 August 1940 reported that a local policeman, Garda J. J. Duffy told an inquest that one of the bodies found floating in the sea near Malin Head carried a letter addressed to a Mr Cesare Camozzi at an internment camp in Scotland . The envelope was postmarked 21 June 1940 and inside was a letter headed Monogram Café, 10 St Peter's Square, Manchester and signed: 'Your affectionate wife Minnie'.

Garda Duffy said that he then telephoned the Monogram Café at the address on the letter and was answered by a lady who said she was the wife of Cesare Camozzi and that she had written the letter found on the body of the dead man.

Cesare Camozzi was buried in Carndonagh Cemetery and many local people attended his funeral. The original wooden cross marking his grave has since been replaced by an inscribed headstone. A mass was held on what would have been his 100 th birthday. His story is told on the local website www.inishowenonline.com/arandora



Cesare Camozzi [Michael McRitchie]



Cesare Camozzi [Michael McRitchie]

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

Cesare Camozzi - Born 02.11.1891 in Iseo and buried in Carndonagh Cemetery , County Donegal . Today his grave is marked by a fine headstone paid for by local subscription.

Giuseppe Capella - Born 13.04.1885 in Borgotaro and buried in Rathlin [St. Thomas] Church Of Ireland Churchyard , Rathlin Island , Northern Ireland . 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 Capella could be identified from documents found on him. They were both buried alongside one another in St Thomas 's Churchyard on 12 August 1940. Only the grave of Giuseppe Capella is marked by a headstone. On the previous day, the bodies of two unidentified seamen were buried in Bonamargy churchyard, Ballycastle, eight miles south of Rathlin and the ferry port for the island. Given the timing, it is probable that they too were from the SS *Arandora Star* . About three weeks later, a lifeboat from the SS *Arandora Star* was found drifting between Ballycastle and Rathlin and towed into port by fishermen.

Giovanni Ferdenzi - Born 15.06.1879 in Vernasca and buried in Clonmany Cemetery, County Donegal where a striking memorial cross, erected by his wife and family, marks his grave.

Matteo Fossaluzza - Born 25.11.1897 in Cavasso and buried in Easkey Cemetery , County 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.

Giovanni Marenghi - Born 23.04.1897 in Bardi and buried initially in Termoncarragh Cemetery . After the war, his body was taken back to the town of Pontypridd in South Wales , where he had made his home.

Luigi Tapparo - Born 22.10.1898 in Bollengo and buried in Termoncarragh Cemetery , County Mayo . 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 his headstone there are a number of unmarked graves which undoubtedly contain the bodies of unidentified Italians recovered at the same time

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

Giuseppe Delgrosso - Born 20.04.1889 in Borgo Val di Taro and buried in Glasgow [St Kentigern's] Roman Catholic Cemetery. He was initially buried at Leum a' Brhraidh on the Isle of Colonsay and was re-interred after the war. 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* .

Oreste Fisanotti - Born 09.08.1897 in Mathi and buried in Borve [St Brendan's] Catholic Burial Ground, Barra. An additional headstone indicates that his wife, Vera Maschova, who died on 20 January 1975, is buried in the same grave.

Andrea Gazzi - Born 02.08.1900 in Bardi and 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. [Died for his home country].

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Enrico Muzio - Born 12.12.1892 in Napoli and buried in Eoligarry [St Barr] Old Churchyard, Barra.

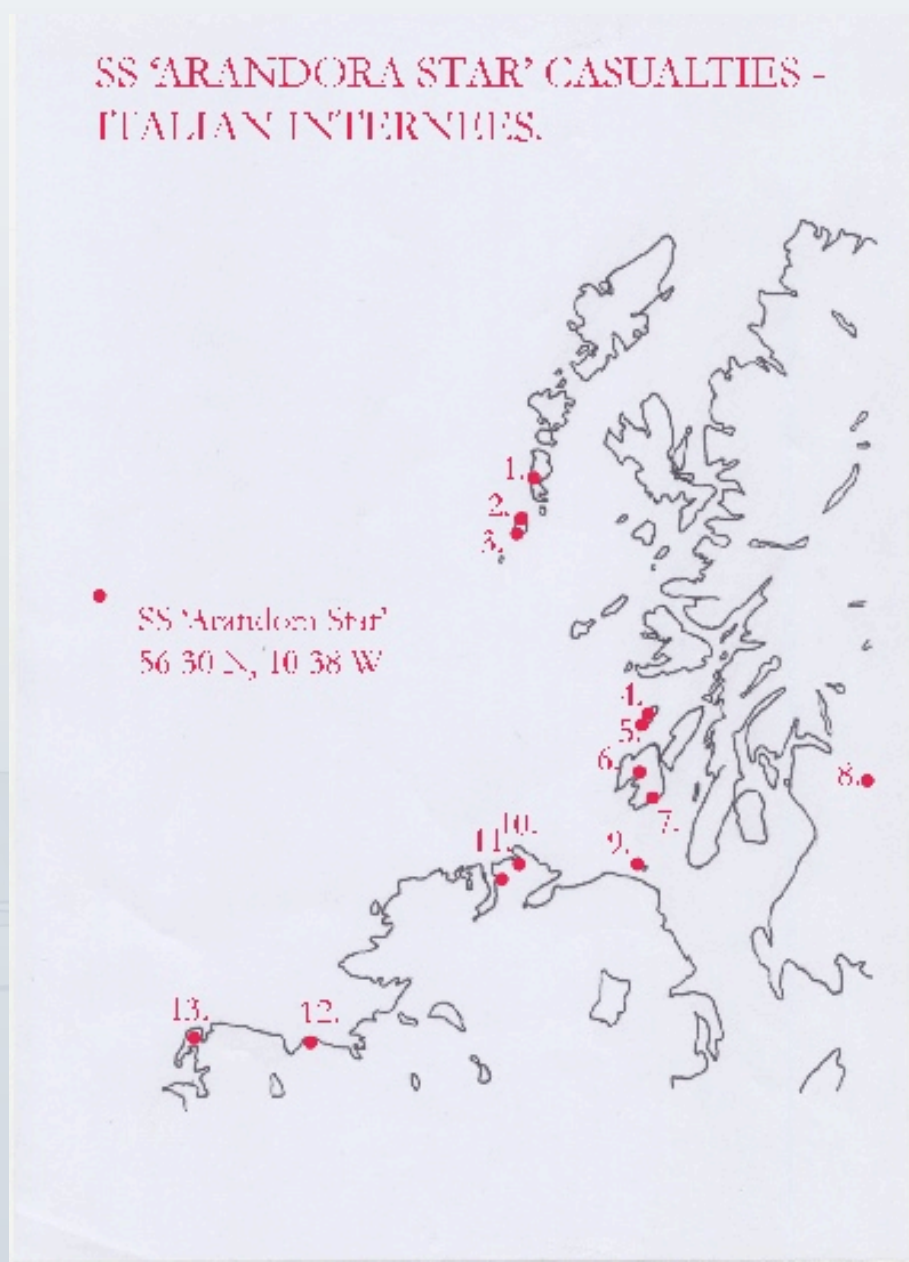
Baldassare Plescia - Born 01.01.1915 in Palermo and buried in Hallan Cemetery , Dalabrog, South Uist.

Vilfrido Sagramati - Born 19.10.1910 in Rome and buried in Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Isle of Colonsay. After the war Vilfrido's body was taken home to Italy by relatives.

Edmondo Armando Sottocornola - Born 02.04.1897 in Gargallo and buried on Eilan Nan Ron, a tiny island off the island of Oronsay which lies to the south of the Isle of Colonsay. The original wooden cross marking his grave was replaced by islanders in October 2002 .

'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.T

his map shows the graveyards where the recovered were laid to rest:



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Map Key

1. Hallan Cemetery , Dalabrog, South Uist, Scotland
2. Eoligarry [St. Barr] Old Churchyard, Barra , Scotland
3. Borve [St Brendan's] Roman Catholic Burial Ground, Barra , Scotland
4. Kilchattan Old Churchyard, Isle of Colonsay , Scotland
5. The island of Oronsay , Scotland
6. Bowmore New Parish Churchyard, Isle of Islay , Scotland
7. Port Ellen Churchyard, Isle of Islay , Scotland
8. Glasgow [St Kentigern's] Roman Catholic Cemetery, Scotland
9. Rathlin [St Thomas] Church of Ireland Churchyard , Northern Ireland
10. Carndonagh Cemetery , County Donegal , Ireland
11. Clonmany Cemetery , County Donegal , Ireland
12. Easkey Cemetery , County Sligo , Ireland
13. Termoncarragh Cemetery , County Mayo , Ireland

MEMORIALS TO ARANDORA STAR VICTIMS IN THE UK

London - In St Peter's Italian Church , Clerkenwell, London , the victims of the SS *Arandora Star* tragedy are commemorated by a dramatic piece of sculpture mounted inside the church and unveiled in 1960. It is inscribed thus:

IN MEMORIA DEI PERITI NELL' AFFONDAMENTO

DELL' ARANDORA STAR

2 LUGLIO 1940

..IL RICORDO CHE E' VIVO NEL CUORE DEI

PARENTI, DEI SUPERSTITTI E' COLONIA ITALIANA

4 NOVEMBRE 1960

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO PERISHED IN THE SINKING

OF THE ARANDORA STAR

2 JULY 1940

THE MEMORY LIES IN THE HEART OF THE

RELATIVES, THE SURVIVORS AND THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY

4 NOVEMBER 1960

Each year a mass is held on the first Sunday in November, close to the anniversary of the unveiling of the plaque.



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St Peter's Italian Church memorial plaque [Kay Lorenzato]

Glasgow - In Scotland, the victims of the SS *Arandora Star* tragedy were first commemorated by a plaque unveiled in 1975. Displayed in the Casa d'Italia - an Italian community leisure/cultural centre linked with the Italian Consulate - the plaque took the form of a brightly coloured mosaic with the words *Arandora Star 1940* [in roman numerals] at the top and 'Non vi scorderemo mai' [We will never forget you] at the base. During the 1980's, services of remembrance were held each year on the anniversary of the sinking, to commemorate not only those who were victims but also to remember the survivors and all of those who suffered interment. On the 50th anniversary of the tragedy, the Italian national honour of 'Cavalieri' [Knight] was conferred on the survivors of the tragedy by the Italian president Francesco Cossiga.

Sadly this memorial is no longer on view, as the Casa d'Italia no longer exists and therefore the plaque has been removed and is currently in a private collection.

Stop Press - Recently, a £1.5 million fundraising appeal was launched in order to create a memorial garden at St Andrew's Cathedral in Glasgow. Mario Conti, the Archbishop of Glasgow, said that the garden would act as a place of reflection and mark the bonds of friendship between Scotland and Italy.



The Casa d'Italia Mosaic [Maria Serena Balestracci]

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Manchester - Whilst not being a physical memorial to the victims of the SS *Arandora Star* tragedy, the website www.italian-heritage-ancoats.org.uk commemorates 15 men who came from Manchester 's Italian community of Ancoats. On 20 March 1941 a requiem mass was held for Father Gettano Fracassi and the other 14 men in St Alban's Church. Bishop Marshall, who conducted the mass, proclaimed that the church should be a lasting memorial to the memory of the victims and this was a sentiment which was welcomed by all of those present. Sadly St Albans Church was demolished in 1968, however the tradition was continued at St Michael's Church Ancoats where an annual memorial mass was celebrated on the evening of 1 July for a number of years. Sadly, due to the closure St Michael's Church, the annual mass was moved to Corpus Christi Church in Miles Platting which itself was closed recently. Despite these difficulties, local residents from the Italian community were determined to continue this much valued tradition and the annual mass is now held at St Chad 's Roman Catholic Church on Cheetham Hill Road in Manchester on or close to 2 July each year. Details can be found by contacting Mr Anthony Rea through the website.

The Isle of Colonsay - On 2 July 2005, a group of over 60 islanders and visitors gathered at Leum a' Bhrair on the remote and rugged, western cliffs of Colonsay to dedicate a memorial to the memory of Giuseppe Delgrosso and all of those who perished with the loss of the SS *Arandora Star* . The simple stone plaque was mounted on a small rock outcrop close to where his body was recovered and laid to rest by the islanders who found him. The inscription reads thus:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF GIUSEPPE DELGROSSO

AND MORE THAN 800 OTHERS

WHO PERISHED WITH "ARANDORA STAR"

JULY 2 nd 1940

FO SGAIL DO SGIATHAN FALAICH MIPSALM 17, v.8

The inscription in Gaelic reads: 'I will hide myself under the shadow of thy wing'



The Plaque at Leum a' Bhrair [Alan Davis]

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Nearby, a cairn was constructed from local stone and every year since, a wreath has been laid beneath the plaque on the anniversary of the sinking. A full and illustrated account of this dedication ceremony can be found in the archive section of the bi-monthly newsletter, 'The Corncrake'. In recent years, strong links have been forged between the islanders of Colonsay and the 'Association for the Arandora Star Victims' based in Bardi and especially, the people of Borgo Val di Taro [Borgotaro], the village where Giuseppe Delgrosso was born.

Liverpool - On 2 July 2008, a memorial service was held at Our Lady & St Nicholas' Church to mark the 68 th anniversary of the sinking of the SS *Arandora Star*. A memorial plaque was unveiled and this will eventually be located on the Pier Head close to where the vessel left for her final tragic journey. The day continued with a number of events including the launch of a book entitled "Arandora Star. Dall' oblio alla memoria", [From oblivion to memory], by Maria Serena Balestracci. The afternoon continued with a Wreath Laying Ceremony on the River Mersey and later a very moving performance of "Arandora" for narrator and ensemble at the Merseyside Maritime Museum.

The event was attended by over 200 people representing the nationalities, regions, communities and families of the victims. Guests of honour included two of the three known survivors of the tragedy, 88 year old Rando Bertoia from Glasgow and 89 year old Evan Morgan Jones, formerly of the Welch Regiment, who was one of the Military Guard.



The Liverpool Memorial Plaque [Alan Davis]

Middlesbrough - On 2 July 2009, this specially commissioned plaque bearing the names and details of 13 Italian men who had made their homes on Teesside, was unveiled at a civic reception in the Town Hall. Attended by many representatives of the families who had lost loved ones, the plaque was unveiled by Lord Mayor, Ray Mallon and the local MP, Sir Stuart Bell.



The Middlesborough Memorial Plaque [Alan Davis]

MEMORIALS TO ARANDORA STAR VICTIMS IN ITALY.

Bardi - A small town in the region of Emilia Romagna, 50km south west of Parma, is home to the Arandora Star Memorial Chapel which can be found in the local cemetery. It was decided to build the chapel following the creation of The Association for the Arandora Star Victims in 1968. Amongst the many victims who came from all over Italy, were 48 local men who had emigrated to the UK where they had settled, worked hard and had been welcomed by their new neighbours and communities. Many got married and raised families, before being caught up in the events of the summer of 1940, when their native country entered the war and their lives suddenly changed.

The Association, since 1985, has been led by Beppe Conti, nephew of Guido Conti from Bardi who lost his life in the tragedy aged just 32. The aims of the Association are as follows:
The memory we wish to preserve is not one of hatred and vengeance, but one of love, of hope, of harmony and of brotherhood for the loved ones we mourn - for all the victims. Our wish is that the forgotten tragedy of the Arandora Star becomes more widely known, and we call for a "Remembrance Day" to be held in the presence of both the British and Italian Authorities, in which all the tragic events and all the victims could be remembered with dignity. [Taken from The Association website].

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The Arandora Star Memorial Chapel, Bardi [Viviana Balestracci]

Inside the chapel, commemorative panels give details of all the local victims and in recent years, photographs of victims from other parts of Italy have been sent by their families, to be included in the remembrance and displayed in the chapel. Every year on 2 July, a mass is held at the chapel and this is attended by many families who lost loved ones in the tragedy.



Commemorative Panels [Viviana Balestracci]



Commemorative Panels [Viviana Balestracci]

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Photographs of those who were lost [Viviana Balestracci]

In the town of Bardi itself, a street has been named in memory of all the Italian victims and a plaque gives details of which Province they originated from.



Via: Vittime "Arandora Star" Bardi [Viviana Balestracci]

Lucca - Unveiled in 2004, at the Palazzo Ducale in the tiny courtyard of the museum of the Paolo Cresci Foundation for the History of Italian Emigration, a striking memorial, in the form of a ship's funnel, is dedicated to the memory of 31 local men. The town of Lucca can be found in the region of Tuscany about 20 km north east of Pisa



The memorial at Lucca [Michael McRitchie]

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The inscription on the memorial at Lucca [Michael McRitchie]

Picinisco - The church of Santa Maria in the town's graveyard has a memorial tablet which bears the names of 17 local men who perished. The town of Picinisco is in the region of Lazio, 168 km south-east of Rome .



Picinisco [Michel Vacca]

Also in the town there is stone plaque unveiled on 2 July 1998 which commemorates all of the victims of the SS *Arandora Star* who came from Picinisco.



Picinisco plaque 1998 [Michel Vacca]

Borgo Val di Taro [Borgotaro] - Unveiled in the 1960's, the memorial was restored and two further victim's names added, to coincide with a visit by representatives of Colonsay, on 13 September 2004. One of the names added was that of local man, Giuseppe Delgrosso, whose body was found and laid to rest on Colonsay. This commemorative plaque in the main town square, gives details of seven local men who perished in the 'mare d'Irlanda' on 2 July 1940. Borgo Val di Taro is in the region Emilia Romagna 75 km south west of Parma.

Bratto - Unveiled on 13 July 1975, a commemorative plaque on the wall of the church gives details of 5 local men who perished on the SS *Arandora Star*. The village of Bratto is in the region of Tuscany , 186 km north-west of Florence .



The Church at Bratto [Viviana Balestracci]

Other Memorials - In the course of my research, I have been sent details of two men whose names are included on local war memorials in small Italian communities. In neither case is the SS *Arandora Star* mentioned on the memorial. In addition I have been informed of one man's name inscribed on a plaque in a family vault, situated in his home town. Undoubtedly there are many more individuals remembered in similar circumstances.

Here is a list that gives the known place of burial and or commemoration for all the Italian civilians who were lost.

We hope that relatives of those who were lost will contact us with additional information in order to ensure that the lists are accurate and as up to date as possible. Contact details can be found on the first page of the SS *Arandora Star* story.