

# Sailors who died in war registered after inquest in Wexford

## Ferry firm wants wreckage of ship to be preserved

By Maria Pepper

THE south Wexford coroner, Mr Jimmy Murphy, had an unusual task to perform on Friday when he inquired into the deaths of 24 sailors in an explosion on the *SS Ardmore* off the south-east coast during the second World War.

The inquest, which he described as unique, was held with the special permission of the Minister for Justice, Mr O'Donoghue, under Section 23 of the Coroners Act.

The seamen ranged in age from 18 to 65. Most were from Cork and Dublin, with two from Liverpool and one from south Wales.

The inquest was attended by Mr James Power from Cork, who was born three months after the *Ardmore* went down on November 12th, 1940. His father and uncle were on board. When his mother wished to remarry some time after the tragedy she was unable to do so because her husband's death had not been registered. This was done later.

The significance of the case is that the deaths of the men can now, for the first time, be formally registered following the jury's verdict that they had died as the result of an explosion on board the *Ardmore* off the Great Saltee Island.

Three of the bodies were subsequently washed ashore in Wales but the others were never recovered. Only two were registered and the others were consigned to the unresolved category of "missing, presumed dead".

There was no medical evidence at the inquest and only one witness, Mr Peter Mulvaney from Clontarf, Dublin, a law graduate who became interested in the case in 1986. He embarked on a private investigation into the fate of the *SS Ardmore*, which left Cork for Fishguard at 10.30 on November 11th with a cargo of live animals.

By chance Mr Eugene Kehoe, a diver from Kilmore Quay, discovered the wreck of a ship on the seabed off the Great Saltee Island in the summer of 1995. Mr Mulvaney became aware of the find in January 1998 and, following a meeting with Mr Kehoe, was able to confirm from photographs and the original plans of the *Ardmore* that it was, indeed, the wreck.

Mr Mulvaney told the inquest

he had concluded from his research that the vessel had suffered a large explosion to its mid-section where the boilers were located. The explosion caused it to sink immediately, trapping its crew.

Irish Intelligence records dated August 8th, 1940, indicated that a German aircraft was seen laying magnetic mines off the Keeragh Islands and the Saltee Islands.

The current position of the wreck means that when it went down, the *Ardmore* was inside Irish territorial waters, rebutting the previous presumption that it was not, according to Mr Mulvaney. In official files, the loss of the *Ardmore* is attributed to "belligerent" action and Mr Mulvaney told the inquest he believed the deaths of the crew members were due to warfare.

Since 1940, only two of the deaths have been registered under Section 4 of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act of 1972 — that of James Power (28) of 126 Blackwater Road, Cork, and Edward Bruland (57) of Convent Place, Passage West, Cork.

Mr Mulvaney pointed out, however, that the registrations were invalid since the Act covered only deaths

**OUTSIDE IRISH TERRITORIAL WATERS.**

A large number of seamen lost as a result of "belligerent action" on other Irish vessels between 1939 and 1946 also never had their deaths registered at the time. To date only nine out of a total of 150 have been registered.

The Government made no claim against the German government arising from the loss of the *Ardmore*. Claims were made in relation to other vessels and, in a small number of cases, liability was accepted and compensation recovered.

After the inquest, Mr Mulvaney said he believed the verdict had significant implications for the Government and for maritime law. "The whole issue of the non-registration of maritime deaths will not go away," he said.

Irish Ferries, in a statement, said the wreck should be preserved in deference to those who were lost and their surviving families.

# Wartime seamen are given valour awards

By Lorna Siggins,  
Marine Correspondent

VALOUR awards for service in the Irish merchant fleet in the second World War have been presented to 20 more recipients by the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources, Dr Woods.

Medals and certificates were awarded to three of the 20 seamen at a ceremony in Dublin Castle on Saturday, while four awards were awarded to the next of kin of seamen who lost their lives in wartime service. A further 13 were presented to next of kin of those who had subsequently passed away.

The Minister emphasised the Government was acknowledging a debt of honour owed to the men of Ireland's wartime merchant fleet, and said the awards were a matter of pride in terms of family heritage for the recipients and their extended families.

Maritime historians estimate some 156 seafarers lost their lives during the war years keeping shipping lines open. Of these, the families of over 40 are probably entitled to posthumous awards which remain unclaimed. The Minister appealed to such claimants to come forward and contact his Department's mercantile marine offices in Dublin and Cork.

The recipients at the weekend, who served on ships including the *Irish Pine, Irish Fir, Irish Larch, Irish Spruce, Irish Alder, Irish Elm, Irish Beech, Irish Ash, Irish Cedar, City of Antwerp, Monaleen, Isolda, Cymric, Edenvale* and others were:

Mr Thomas Cusack, of Cork, who was lost at sea; Mr Edward Kirby, of Cork, posthumous; Mr John Kent, of Cork, posthumous; Mr William Murphy, of Cork, posthumous; Mr Samuel Williams, of Dublin, present; Mr Thomas Sharkey of Dublin, present; Mr Richard Grimes, of Dublin, lost at sea; Mr William Carr, of Dublin, lost at sea; Mr Anthony Whitty, of Dublin, posthumous; Mr John Kenny, of Dublin, posthumous; Mr Richard Jones, of Dublin, posthumous; Mr William McDermott, of Dublin, posthumous; Mr John Reynolds, of Louth, posthumous; Mr Simon O'Connor, of Wexford, present; Mr Anthony O'Farrell, of Wexford, posthumous; Mr James Brennan, of Wexford, lost at sea; Mr William Kenny, of Wexford, posthumous; Mr Edward Barry, of Wexford, lost at sea; Mr Joseph Hannon, of Wexford, posthumous; and Mr Patrick Higgins, of Waterford, posthumous.

Also, a memorial to 16 men from the Loughshinny area of north Dublin who lost their lives at sea this century has been unveiled by Dr Woods. The Minister also presented a medal for valour to Mr William McGee (82), for his service aboard Irish vessels during the second World War.