

---

---



# Unveiling of Commemorative Plaque

In memory of those in the  
local Italian community  
lost in the sinking of  
**SS Arandora Star**  
2nd July 1940

**Middlesbrough Town Hall**  
**Thursday 2 July 2009**



---



# Contents

|                                                                |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| A message from Ray Mallon, Mayor of Middlesbrough . . . . .    | 1         |
| A message from Sir Stuart Bell, MP for Middlesbrough . . . . . | 3         |
| History of SS Arandora Star . . . . .                          | 4         |
| Middlesbrough, June 1940 . . . . .                             | 7         |
| In Memoriam . . . . .                                          | 10        |
| <b>Luigi Bertoa</b> . . . . .                                  | <b>12</b> |
| Rando Bertoa . . . . .                                         | 13        |
| <b>Alessandro Borsumato</b> . . . . .                          | <b>14</b> |
| Marlene McLaughlin . . . . .                                   | 15        |
| <b>Domenico Greco</b> . . . . .                                | <b>16</b> |
| Katie Diamond . . . . .                                        | 17        |
| <b>Tullio Greco</b> . . . . .                                  | <b>18</b> |
| Hilda Rovadi, nee Greco . . . . .                              | 19        |
| <b>Amedeo Lucantoni</b> . . . . .                              | <b>20</b> |
| Romano Lucantoni . . . . .                                     | 21        |
| <b>Antonio Nardone</b> . . . . .                               | <b>22</b> |
| Ernie Nardone . . . . .                                        | 23        |
| <b>Domenico Pontone</b> . . . . .                              | <b>24</b> |
| Winnie Jones . . . . .                                         | 25        |
| <b>Antonio Ranaldi</b> . . . . .                               | <b>26</b> |
| Andrew Ranaldi . . . . .                                       | 27        |
| <b>Camillo Rea</b> . . . . .                                   | <b>28</b> |
| Camillo Rea . . . . .                                          | 29        |
| <b>Antonio Francesco Todisco</b> . . . . .                     | <b>30</b> |
| Rita and Patricia . . . . .                                    | 31        |
| <b>Guiseppe Tortolano</b> . . . . .                            | <b>32</b> |
| Harry Tortolano . . . . .                                      | 33        |
| <b>Leandro Beltrami</b> . . . . .                              | <b>34</b> |
| <b>Domenico Rea</b> . . . . .                                  | <b>34</b> |
| Acknowledgements . . . . .                                     | 35        |





# A message from Ray Mallon,

Mayor of Middlesbrough



War inevitably has terrible consequences. Quite properly, we regularly remember the sacrifices that were made by so many during the two World Wars and more recent conflicts. But every so often a story emerges of pain and suffering that has gone largely unnoticed.

Immediately Italy entered the Second World War in early June 1940, most Italian male civilians between the ages of 18 and 70 years were arrested and interned. A number of men were taken from their homes in Middlesbrough. Wives and families were given little or no information of their whereabouts.

Less than a month later, on 1 July 1940, the SS Arandora Star sailed for Canada carrying some 1,300 internees. There were also several hundred crew and military guards on board. At 6.58am the following morning, 2 July 1940, she was torpedoed by a German U-boat.

The ship was painted grey and bore no Red Cross, which would have shown that she was carrying civilians. Over half those on board perished, including almost 450 Italians. It was the fourth worst British merchant shipping disaster of World War 2.

Thirteen of the victims were men from Italian families who lived and worked in Middlesbrough and the surrounding area. Many were well-known and respected small businessmen. The youngest had just had his 19th birthday; the oldest was in his 60s. They left behind friends and families who had been given no opportunity to say their goodbyes.

This memorial is one of a small number in Britain, Ireland and Italy. It cannot compensate for the loss of those sons, husbands, fathers and brothers who were simply taken away, never to return. Hopefully, however, it will serve to recognise and commemorate their lives and achievements, their contribution to our community, and the tragic loss that was suffered when the SS Arandora Star was sunk.







# A message from Sir Stuart Bell,

MP for Middlesbrough



When I wrote a short story entitled *The Ice Cream Man*, describing the fate of a village ice cream man who had lost his life on the *Arandora Star*, I was understandably stunned to discover thirteen Italians living in Middlesbrough and its outreaches had also died. They had been incarcerated in a police station, transported across the moors and placed on the former luxury liner at Liverpool.

I was equally stunned when talking to relatives how deep had been the pain of their loss, an enduring pain that lasts to this day, and the bewilderment that an act of gross injustice had met with no apology.

I am grateful to the Mayor of Middlesbrough, Ray Mallon, for taking up the suggestion that a commemorative plaque should be placed in the town hall, a recognition of that injustice, a remembrance of those who died, and gratitude from the people of Middlesbrough to those of the Italian community who served the town so well.

The plaque ensures they will never be forgotten.



---

# History of SS Arandora Star

Built by Cammell Laird at Birkenhead, the SS Arandora was launched in 1927 for the Blue Star shipping line. Just 13 years later she was sunk by a German torpedo in the Atlantic whilst carrying German and Italian-born civilian internees, prisoners of war and a military guard en route to Canada. Of about 1700 people on board, almost half were lost at sea.



*Arandora Star - 'The World's most delightful Cruising Liner'. Postcard by Ellis Silas (Fraser Darrah collection)*

It was a tragic end for a ship that before the war had been one of an elite class of luxury trans-Atlantic liners. In her early days she operated a fast passenger and refrigerated cargo service to South America and then sailed on cruises to Norway, the Mediterranean and West Indies. During the 1930s the vessel, now renamed SS Arandora Star, was known for her luxurious fittings and was very popular with the rich and famous on the prestigious Atlantic crossing to America. She was nicknamed the 'chocolate box' or 'wedding cake' due to her white hull and scarlet riband.

After the outbreak of war she returned from a trans-Atlantic voyage to New York and was ordered by the Admiralty up to Liverpool. She was initially involved in taking men and equipment to the Norwegian fjords and later evacuated troops and refugees from the French ports of Brest and Bayonne. Arriving in Liverpool on 29 June 1940, her next (and final) voyage was to transport Italian and German internees plus some prisoners of war to Canada where they were to be held in camps.

By June 1940, German forces had invaded the Channel Islands and Italy had declared war on Britain. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, fearing imminent invasion, ordered the arrest and internment of German, Austrian and Italian-born nationals living in Britain. Many of those interned had had been living here for most of their adult lives. Some had run successful, well-established businesses, others worked as restaurateurs, chefs or waiters. Many had married British people and raised their children in this country.



Ironically while they were interned, many of their British-born sons and daughters were fighting in the British forces.



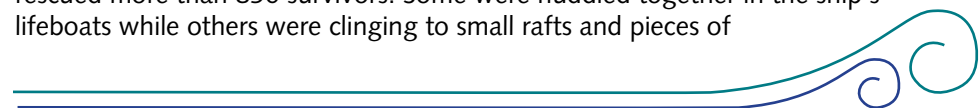
*SS Arandora Star in wartime colours.  
(Photo: The National Archives, ref ADM 189/142)*

At 4am on 1 July 1940 the SS Arandora Star left Liverpool bound for St John's, Newfoundland. In addition to her crew of 182 officers and men, there was a military guard of 254 officers and men together with more than 1300 German and Italian nationals - internees and prisoners of war. Amongst them were a number of Italian-born men rounded up and arrested on Teesside.

As dawn broke on 2 July, the ship was about 75 miles north-west of the Donegal coast when she was spotted by a German submarine - U-47 - which was cruising on the surface. The Arandora Star was steaming at 15 knots, alone and unescorted yet regularly changing course - a tactic used to avoid submarine attack. U-47 was under the command of Kapitanleutnant Gunther Prien, a top German U-boat ace, who was making his way back to base after sinking eight Allied merchant ships. Prien had one torpedo left and after diving and approaching to within 2500 metres, at just before 7am he fired, striking the SS Arandora Star amidships. Seeing the vessel starting to list towards the stern and the first lifeboats being lowered, Prien and the crew of U-47 continued on their way believing that they had achieved another successful strike, yet totally unaware as to the destination, nationality and status of the passengers aboard the stricken vessel.

At 7.20am the SS Arandora Star rolled over and plunged stern first down into the sea. Around half those on board were lost, presumed drowned. This included the ship's captain and 57 officers and crew, 94 of the military guard, and around 450 Italian and 240 German nationals. Thirteen Italian internees rounded up on Teesside were lost at sea - eleven from Middlesbrough and one each from Seaton Carew and Redcar. Today the wreck of the SS Arandora Star lies in just over 2000 metres of water in the Rockall Channel.

The ship's SOS message was picked up by the radio station at Malin Head and an RAF Sunderland flying boat was sent to assess the situation. The Canadian naval destroyer HMCS St. Laurent arrived at 1.30pm and over the next 10 hours rescued more than 850 survivors. Some were huddled together in the ship's lifeboats while others were clinging to small rafts and pieces of



---

floating wreckage. The survivors were landed at Greenock in Scotland where the sick and injured were treated in a Glasgow hospital.

By 11 July more than 200 of the survivors were back in Liverpool, this time aboard the SS Dunera, bound for internment in Australia. Ironically, the Dunera was attacked by U-56 in the Outer Hebrides but both torpedoes failed to hit their target, and the vessel reached Sydney on 6 September.

In the weeks and months after the SS Arandora Star was sunk, bodies, lifeboats and lifejackets were washed up along the north-west coast of Ireland and Hebridean Islands such as Colonsay and Oronsay. Often, local people took considerable risks to retrieve the bodies. The victims were buried in local churchyards or close to where their bodies were found. After the war, at the request of their families, some were taken home for reburial.

For those with no known grave but the sea, their names are commemorated on a variety of memorials to the missing such as at Brookwood in Surrey (for military personnel) and Tower Hill in London (for merchant seamen). The Arandora Star Memorial Chapel at Bardi in Italy commemorates the loss of 42 local men and there are memorials in other small Italian communities.



*Liverpool's commemorative plaque. (Photo: Dave Crolley)*

The commemorative plaque being unveiled in Middlesbrough joins these and others such as at Liverpool, from where the SS Arandora Star sailed. On Colonsay, where several victims were laid to rest, a stone plaque and memorial cairn were erected and each year a wreath is laid on the anniversary of the tragic event.

Kapitanleutnant Prien only discovered the truth about the SS Arandora Star when he arrived back at base four days later. He had fired his final torpedo at a ship which was defensively armed, using a standard evasive tactic and thus as far as he was concerned, had presented itself as a justifiable 'enemy' target.

Prien was killed in action in March 1941 when U-47 was sunk in the North Atlantic, possibly following a depth-charge attack by a British naval vessel. The U-boat went down with Prien and all his crew near the Rockall Banks - not far from where he had sunk the SS Arandora Star.





## Middlesbrough, June 1940

On the night when the Italian-born men were arrested in Middlesbrough there were angry demonstrations at Italian-owned business premises in the town.

Similar events took place in towns and cities throughout the country.

The following day, Tuesday 11 June 1940, the local newspaper, The North-Eastern Gazette ran the headline: 'Round-up of Italians - Shops Wrecked By Angry Crowds in Middlesbrough'.

The article went on to describe how: *'The Middlesbrough police acted swiftly on receiving instructions from the Home Office, and within minutes the Chief Constable and members of the Flying Squad had left in cars to round up about 20 Italian aliens in the borough.'* In the same article it was reported that: *'Last night a hostile crowd toured the streets and virtually wrecked six well-known ice cream establishments in the town' and that 'Within about half an hour it is estimated that hundreds of pounds of damage had been done and that 28 Italian residents between the ages of 16 and 70 were taken into protective custody.'*

The police dispersed the crowds, detained a number of people for their participation in the disturbances and placed protective pickets around a number of premises to prevent further damage and looting.

The authorities acted swiftly and on Wednesday 12 June the North-Eastern Gazette reported that 17 persons appeared at Middlesbrough Police Court that day charged with theft and wilful or malicious damage. The following Monday it was reported that sentences ranging from one to six months hard labour were handed down for those found guilty.



---

Thankfully those who took part in these riots were few in number and several letters were published in the local paper seeking to disassociate the majority of Middlesbrough's population from such anti-social behaviour.

An editorial under Northern Notes in the North-Eastern Gazette of Tuesday 11 June summed up the general feeling: *'A certain section of the community of Middlesbrough have disgraced themselves and their town by their unthinking behaviour in the destruction of Italian-owned shops and establishments. Many of these people are naturalised British subjects of friendly disposition to our cause and totally devoid of sympathy for the elements responsible for the entry into the war of their native land. The lot of these Italian people is hard, for they are with us, some of their colony having already laid down their lives fighting with our own soldiers against the despotism of the dictators. There is no quarrel between the Italian and British peoples and those responsible for this mob violence should be punished.'*



Police guard a wrecked Italian ice cream shop in Middlesbrough following the disturbances of 10 June 1940. (Photo: Evening Gazette)



---



# In Memoriam

## SS 'ARANDORA STAR'- Teesside Casualties

| <b>Name</b>          | <b>Place of Birth</b> | <b>Place of Residence</b> |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Leandro Beltrami     | Massemينو             | Middlesbrough             |
| Luigi Bertoia        | Montereale            | Middlesbrough             |
| Alessandro Borsumato | Cassino               | Middlesbrough             |
| Domenico Greco       | Santo Padre           | Middlesbrough             |
| Tullio Greco         | Arpino                | Middlesbrough             |
| Amedeo Lucantoni     | Rome                  | Middlesbrough             |
| Antonio Nardone      | Cassino               | Middlesbrough             |
| Domenico Pontone     | Cassino               | Seaton Carew              |
| Antonio Ranaldi      | Arpino                | Middlesbrough             |
| Camillo Rea          | Arpino                | Middlesbrough             |
| Domenico Rea         | Arpino                | Middlesbrough             |
| Antonio Todisco      | Vallerotonda          | Redcar                    |
| Giuseppe Tortolano   | Cassino               | Middlesbrough             |



## Birthplaces of Teesside casualties

Amedeo Lucantoni was born in the Italian capital city of Rome and four others were from the town of Cassino which lies about 130km [80miles] to the south-east. These were Alessandro Borsumato, Antonio Nardone, Domenico Pontone and Giuseppe Tortolano. Cassino is in the province of Frosinone and within the region of Lazio. During World War 2, between 17 January and 18 May 1944, the town was almost totally destroyed during the Battle of Monte Cassino.

Tullio Greco, Antonio Ranaldi, Camillo Rea and Domenico Rea all came from Arpino which is a smaller community some 25km (16miles) north-west of Cassino but in the same province and region. Not far away from Arpino is Santo Padre where Domenico Greco was born. Vallerotonda, which lies just 10km [6miles] north-east of Cassino, is the birthplace of Antonio Todisco.

Leandro Beltrami came from Massemino which is in the north-west of Italy and can be found in the province of Savona which is in the region of Liguria. The town is about 35km (22miles) west of Savona which lies on the coast.

Luigi Bertoia was born in Montereale which is in the Pordenone province of the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the north-east of Italy. The town itself is some 110km (69miles) north-west of Trieste.

The following pages contain details of the 13 Italians from Teesside who were lost on the SS Arandora Star. Where possible, reminiscences from the families of those lost at sea have been included.



---

# Luigi Bertioia

Born 4 June 1921 in Montereale, Italy.

Little is known of Luigi's life in Middlesbrough other than the fact that he was employed as a mosaic worker and was living at 99 Borough Road at the time of his arrest on 10 June 1940.

After boarding the Arandora Star in Liverpool on 1 July, by an amazing coincidence, Luigi met up with his cousin Rando Bertioia who had been taken from his home in Glasgow. This was the one and only time the two men were to meet.

After the ship was torpedoed and sunk in the early hours of the following morning, Rando was able to board a lifeboat and was eventually rescued but sadly his cousin Luigi, who was on one of the lower decks, was lost.





# Rando Bertoia

Cousin of Luigi Bertoia

*"I clearly remember the knock at the door of our home in Glasgow's Gorbals" remembers Rando.*

*"It was June 11, the day after Mussolini declared war on Britain and there were two policemen who said they had come for me and my father. We did not know what they planned to do with us, although we suspected that they would put us in a camp."*



*Rando and Giovanna*

His father was sent to the Isle of Man whilst Rando was put on the Arandora Star and despite the passing of almost 70 years, remembers the tragedy as if it happened yesterday. *"I remember it vividly,"* he recalls. *"It was our second day on the ship and early that morning we were woken by a thump. We had been torpedoed. I will never forget it - it's like seeing a film."*

Later, on the quayside at Greenock, Rando learned the sad news of his cousin Luigi. However, within days of being rescued, he found himself aboard the SS Dunera, this time bound for Australia.

Returning to Glasgow at the end of the war, Rando married his girlfriend Giovanna and set up a watch repair business with his brother. Today, aged 88, he is the last surviving Italian from the sinking of the Arandora Star.



---

# Alessandro Borsumato

Born 2 November 1896 in Cassino, Italy.

On 29 October 1924, Alessandro Borsumato married Adelina Pacitto who was from an Italian family who were also living in Middlesbrough at the time.

They lived at 41a Princes Road, Middlesbrough where Alessandro worked as an ice cream vendor. By the time he was arrested, aged 43 on 10 June 1940, they had four children: Joseph, Michael, Marlene and Andrew.



The last time Adelina saw her husband was the following day through the bars of a prison cell at Middlesbrough Town Hall.

Ironically, Adelina had three nephews who were fighting with the British Forces at the time and her husband Alessandro was the only one of three family members who were interned but didn't return.





# Marlene McLaughlin

Daughter of Alessandro Borsumato

Although she was only five years old at the time, Marlene, who still lives in Middlesbrough, clearly remembers waking to the sound of her mum sobbing.

She recalls: *"My dad was taken without warning in the night and I have this memory of my brothers and me kneeling on the floor crying with my mother and praying."*



*(Photo: Evening Gazette)*

*"Life was terrible after that. Italians with businesses in the town had their windows put in and we wouldn't have survived without family help."*

Even though her mum was born in Middlesbrough, the difficulties continued as Marlene remembers: *"My mum had a brother and a sister who lived in Seaham and her movements were restricted as an 'alien'. Before leaving Middlesbrough, she had to report to the Town Hall and then to the police station when she arrived in Seaham."*

Marlene still has the letter from the Home Office sent to her mother on 19 August 1940 informing her that Alessandro was 'presumed missing and probably lost'. Other families received certificates bearing similar awful news from the General Register and Record Office of Shipping and Seamen. These were only issued to next of kin on request and for a fee of two shillings and sixpence.



---

# Domenico Greco

Born 13 April 1885 in Santo Padre, Italy

In 1909, Domenico married a local girl named Amelia in Deal, Kent and they had six children - Ivy, Palma, Nora, Mary, Joseph and Domenico. Sadly only four survived to adulthood.

Just before the First World War the family moved to Rochdale in Lancashire having spent a brief period in France and in 1914 Domenico is known to have been working as an organ grinder. He was later employed as a foundry worker in Rochdale before moving to Middlesbrough where he worked in the local steelworks for a number of years.



By the early 1920s he had opened up an ice cream business at 43 Richmond Street in Middlesbrough and it was here at the family home, aged 55, that he was arrested and taken away by the police on 10 June 1940.



# Katie Diamond

## Great-granddaughter of Domenico Greco

Now living in Darlington, Katie learned about her great-grandfather Domenico from her father, Dominic, who was the son of the Greco's daughter Mary.

Although he was too young to have remembered the events, the tragic story of what happened to great-grandfather Domenico has been passed down through the family. Katie recalls: *"After he was taken, the family hid under the stairs terrified while a mob outside tried to get to them. Who knows what would have happened if the lady next door hadn't saved them by telling the mob they were British. The irony is that Domenico's youngest son was fighting in the desert with the British Army."*



*Katie (centre) with her uncle Joseph Betteridge (left) and father Dominic Betteridge (right)*



---

# Tullio Greco

Born 26 October 1897 in Arpino, Italy.

In 1907, the brothers Tullio, Liberato and Antonio Greco came to work and live in Middlesbrough.

Liberato, helped by his two brothers, firstly sold ice cream from a hand barrow, later graduating to using a horse and cart and eventually a motor bike and sidecar.



In the early 1920s, having learned the trade from his employers, Liberato decided to set up in business on his own in Suffield Street, once again helped by brothers Tullio and Antonio. After a few years, they changed from making ice cream to manufacturing wafers and cornets.

The work was hard and the hours were long but it provided a living for themselves and for succeeding generations of the family. Tullio is remembered as the quiet one of all the brothers but had the reputation of being a particularly hard-working man.

They all lived at 10 Cambridge Road, Linthorpe, Middlesbrough which was owned by Liberato. All three were arrested and interned on 10 June 1940 and eventually sent aboard the SS Arandora Star. Liberato and Antonio survived but sadly Tullio, aged just 43, perished.



# Hilda Rovadi, nee Greco

Niece of Tullio Greco



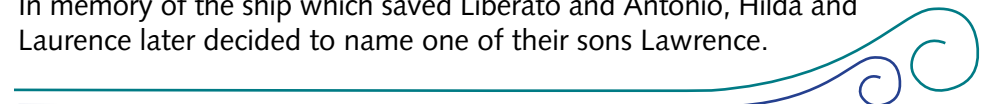
Hilda can vividly remember the day that plain-clothes police officers arrested her father Liberato, uncles Tullio and Antonio and younger brother Joe. *"The police would not say where they were taking the family or what would happen to them."* At the time she was beside herself and to this day, remains very angry and bitter. *"As well as losing my relatives, the family business premises were smashed up and looted,"* she recalls.

The North-Eastern Gazette reported the following on Monday 17 June: 'Sentences ranging from one to six months hard labour were passed at Middlesbrough today on seven local men who admitted the theft of a safe containing stamps, papers etc., to the value of £40, the property of Liberato Greco, an Italian.'

Hilda's husband Laurence also recalls: *"The officer at the very head of rounding up the Italian men in Middlesbrough was a lovely man but he had to follow his orders. Antonio and Paul Martino, a friend of the family, used to drink and socialise with some members of the police before their internment. We thought it unbelievable that one week they were socialising with some of the police and the next thing they were being arrested by them!"*

Incidentally, Paul Martino fought in the British Army in World War 1 and Hilda's brother Joe was born in England. After being rescued by the Canadian destroyer, HMCS St Laurent, Antonio suffered further degradation and humiliation on the infamous ship SS Dunera, which took him and many of the surviving internees to Australia, whilst Liberato was sent to an internment camp on the Isle of Man.

In memory of the ship which saved Liberato and Antonio, Hilda and Laurence later decided to name one of their sons Lawrence.



---



# Amedeo Lucantoni

Born 16 February 1897 in Rome, Italy.

Amedeo came to Middlesbrough when not much more than a boy. However, when the First World War broke out in 1914, he and Camillo Rea, his best friend, returned to their native Italy and joined the army, fighting against the Austrians.

They both returned to Middlesbrough after the war and Amedeo started up the first of his ice cream parlours on Cannon Street. Later he moved to Union Street, then Diamond Road, and finally to 169 Newport Road.

He married Domenica Martino, one of four daughters of Luigi and Maria Martino who had an ice cream parlour and café at 54 Newport Road. The Martino family, who came from Arpino, had lived in Middlesbrough for many years and all their children had been born here.

Amedeo and Domenica, who was known as 'May' by her family and friends, had six children - Guido, Veronica, Silvio, Romano, Dario and Innes.



# Romano Lucantoni

## Son of Amedeo Lucantoni

Today, Romano lives in Bournemouth where he is known to his family friends as Peter.

He and his brothers Silvio and Dario were evacuees at the time his father was arrested but he remembers quite clearly what happened. *"My eldest brother Guido was only a schoolboy but he was arrested too, leaving my mother alone with a three-year-old daughter to face the angry crowd who smashed up the family business and looted the stock."* Later, Guido was released but Amedeo was interned with the other Middlesbrough men and eventually sent on the Arandora Star.

Romano recalls news of his father which reached the family after they had learned of his tragic fate. *"The son of one of the survivors later told my brother Guido that my father had died because he went back to look for Camillo when the ship was torpedoed. He must have been a brave man to lose his life trying to save his best friend."*

The Martino family business fortunately didn't suffer too much damage on the night of the arrests. Romano explains: *"My uncle Frank, wearing his Army uniform was able to placate the crowd to a certain degree by pointing out that he was a soldier, not long back from Dunkirk. He was married to my mother's sister Lena and served in the 8th Army throughout the war."*

Ironically, Amedeo's four sons went on to serve their country in the British Army, Navy, and Air Force including Guido as a volunteer for the Royal Navy, aged just seventeen.



---

# Antonio Nardone

Born 20 October 1882 in Cassino, Italy.

Antonio left Italy in 1905 with his wife Antonella and started up an ice cream business at 299 Newport Road, Middlesbrough.



Tony, as he became known, was out on the ice cream cart while Antonella ran the parlour.

He was a popular and well-known figure and was even a member of Newport Working Men's Club. The couple had 10 children of whom Ernie is the only survivor.



After learning that her beloved husband had been lost, Antonella was left to run the business and bring up the family single-handedly.

Two months after the tragedy she was sent an Irish newspaper clipping which stated that Antonio's body had been recovered by fishermen near Black Rock and that he had been identified by the Newport Club card found in his pocket.

Despite strenuous efforts by the family, his final resting place has never been found.

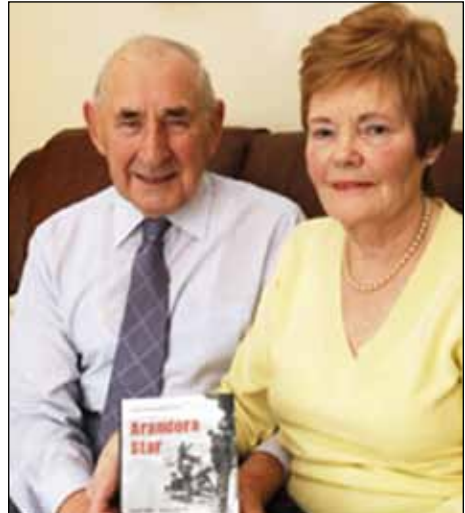




# Ernie Nardone

Son of Antonio Nardone

Today aged 82 and living with his wife Mary in Billingham, Ernie still has fond memories of his young days in Middlesbrough. *"They were great parents and we had good times, even though they spoke Italian when they didn't want us kids to hear what they were talking about."*



*Ernie and Mary Nardone  
(Photo: Evening Gazette)*

The shocking events of Monday 10 June 1940 however still bring back very vivid and sad memories for Ernie who was then just 13 years old. *"We had no warning that all Italian citizens were being rounded up and interned. They took my dad away to the local police station and the next day my mum and one of my sisters took clean clothes to his cell in the Town Hall. We never heard from him or saw him again and life for all of us was never the same."*

Ernie admits to feelings of bitterness at the waste of his dad's life but he is no longer angry. *"We had no time to say goodbye yet it would be wonderful to stand by dad's grave one day,"* he said.



---

# Domenico Pontone

Born 13 August 1885 in Cassino,  
Italy

Domenic, as he was known, had lived in England for 35 years and had run an ice cream factory and billiard hall in Horden Colliery, although later moved to the Café Royal in Seaton Carew.

Together with his wife Maria, they had eight children: Mary, Rosie, Barney, Peter, Albert, John, Winnie and Rita.

During the First World War, Domenic had fought alongside British troops in Belgium. However neither he nor son Barney, who had been born in Italy, had obtained a British Passport, a factor which led to them both being arrested in June 1940.

Whilst his other sons Peter and John were serving in the British Army and Air Force respectively, Domenic and Barney, who was working in London, were both interned.

Fortunately for Barney, he was not sent on the same ship as his father and was eventually safely interned to Canada.

He only learned of his father's fate when he returned home at the end of the war.





# Winnie Jones

Daughter of Domenico Pontone



For Winnie Jones, the memories of her father being taken away will always haunt her.

At the time, she was only 14 years old and was alone in the family house looking after her 10-month-old sister when two plain-clothed men knocked at the door. They asked her father if he knew that Italy had joined Hitler in the war of aggression. He replied that he hadn't heard.

Winnie recalls that visit: *"We were just sitting in the living room, waiting for my mother to come back with the shopping. It all happened very quickly. He did not even get the chance to say goodbye to my mother."*

After the family heard that Domenico had drowned, they found it difficult to cope and even faced prejudice because of their Italian heritage.

Winnie explains: *"It took a number of weeks before we found out what had happened to my father. My mother was left to look after my baby sister and myself, as well as her catering business."*

*"It is ironic that two of my brothers were fighting for their country while my dad and older brother Barney were forced to leave. The conclusion is that the tragedy of any war is always greater than any benefits that derive from it."*



---

# Antonio Ranaldi

Born 16 January 1884 in Arpino, Italy.

Arriving on Teesside aged just 14, Antonio, together with his father Raffaele, worked initially at the iron foundries in Billingham - apparently both were keen amateur weight-lifters at the time!



In December 1912, whilst living on Wilson Street, he married Elizabeth Sill who was the daughter of their next door neighbours.

Between 1914 and 1920 they had four children - Elvira, Emilio, Andrew and Anne.

At first the family ran an ice cream parlour/ confectioner's shop in Shildon before

eventually moving to Redcar where Antonio sold ice cream at the local fairground.

They moved to Middlesbrough, where at 62 Station Street they had a corner shop and then finally to Linthorpe Road where Antonio was arrested on 10 June 1940 whilst his son Andrew was serving with the British Forces.



*Above right - Ranaldi's shop in Shildon.  
Right - Andrew and Hazel  
outside the same shop.*



# Andrew Ranaldi

Son of Antonio Ranaldi

After working in the family business as a child, Andrew found employment at the Gjers Mills Co Ltd in Middlesbrough, working as a boiler-minder for Babcock & Lancashire Boilers.



At the outbreak of war in 1939 he was called up and joined the 8th Field Artillery Regiment, his tour of duty taking him as far afield as Burma and Siam, now known as Thailand.

Andrew remembers: *"I signed Allegiance to the King, but vowed that even if asked, I could not fight against Italy, my father's country of birth."*

His mother wrote to tell him that his father had been arrested and how the shop windows had been smashed and the premises looted. *"They took the cigarettes, sweets and even the radiogram which we used to entertain the customers."* Later when she wrote again to tell him that his father had been lost, he requested leave to be at her side. *"I only wanted a couple of days,"* he recalls. *"But they wouldn't give it to me - I was raging."*



After the war, he returned to Middlesbrough to pick up his old job and to be with his wife Hazel whom he had married in 1942. Today, Andrew, aged 91, and wife Hazel (pictured left) still live in the Easterside area of Middlesbrough.



---



# Camillo Rea

Born 6 October 1878 in Arpino, Italy.

Camillo Rea arrived in Middlesbrough after a journey which apparently had taken him via New York and Panama.

Little is known about his early life in the north east of England, however at the outbreak of the First World War, he returned to his native Italy to enlist with the army.

Returning to Middlesbrough after the war, he married an Irish girl named Mary Quinn who had come over from Arklow to work in the Rea's family business. Between them they had four children, Gaetano (known as Kia), Camillo (Camy), Seraphina (Sera) and Gullwillhemina (Gully).

The family business gradually built up and at one stage included a house and café known as 'Opal House' in Redcar where ice cream was manufactured. Eventually the family moved to property in Linthorpe Road in Middlesbrough (opposite the main gates of Albert Park) where, at the family run café in June 1940 Camillo was arrested and taken, together with others rounded up on the same night, to Middlesbrough Police Station.



## Camillo Rea

Son of Camillo Rea.

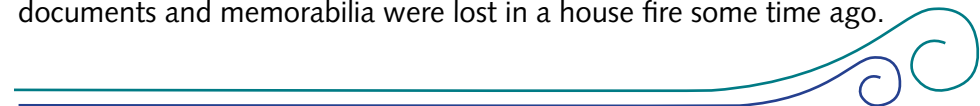
'Camy', as he is affectionately known, still lives in Middlesbrough and is the oldest surviving son of Camillo Rea.

His two sisters, Sera and Gully left the Middlesbrough area. Sera and her husband Joe Moffat-Lynch emigrated to Canada in the 1950s. Sera and Joe both passed away a number of years ago, but are survived by their three children Tony, Carol and Paul. Gully now lives in Berkshire (her husband Jack Grogan also having passed away a number of years ago) and has four daughters: Christina, Philomena, Marianne and Louise.

Camy and Kia were loyal and loving brothers, business partners and well-known personalities in the area. Together they built up the Rea family business to a sizeable empire. They managed a chain of coffee bars, ice cream shops, restaurants and function suites. They had a large factory in Brambles Farm which manufactured ice cream, lollipops and bakery goods for their own business. They also supplied many other local traders. Tragically, Kia died in 1965 aged only 49 leaving his wife Teresa with six children: Tano, Inez, Mark, Adrian, Eugene and Francesca.

Camy and his wife Winifred had three sons: Chris and twins Nik and Michael, and four daughters: Catherine, twins Geraldine and Camille, and Paula. Over the years Camy continued to run the family business which was so well known in the area that in local parlance "going to Rea's" meant going out for ice cream. All of Camy and Kia's children in turn worked in the business during holidays and at weekends before embarking on their own careers. Son Chris, who has achieved international acclaim as a singer, musician and recording artist, remembers working as a teenager in the factory and in fact purchased his first guitar in 1970 whilst employed in the business.

Camy still finds it difficult to talk about the tragic circumstances which led to the loss of his father. Sadly, many of the family photographs, documents and memorabilia were lost in a house fire some time ago.



---

# Antonio Francesco Todisco

Born 14 April 1893 in Vallerotonda, Italy

Having served with the Italian Army in the First World War, Antonio, in order to have a better life, went to Glasgow to work in his uncle's spaghetti factory.

He settled in Glasgow, only returning to Vallerotonda to marry Gilda in 1929. Their first child, Antonio (Tony) was born in Glasgow before the family moved to Weston-super-Mare and started an ice cream business with two partners, both from Vallerotonda.



Moving to Redcar in 1932, he opened up an ice cream shop at 58 High Street. Here they built up a successful business as Antonio developed his reputation as a 'master confectioner'. By 1935 they had three more children - Rita, Patricia and Gino, who died aged two months. Everyone played a part in running the very successful family business.

On 10 June 1940, Antonio was arrested at the family home and taken to the police station in Redcar. The following day he was taken to the police station in Middlesbrough and from there to an internment camp.





# Rita and Patricia

## Daughters of Antonio Todisco

Antonio's daughters remember the night their father was taken away. *"The police arrived in the night to search the premises and they took my father away without explanation,"* remembers Rita who now lives in Bridlington.



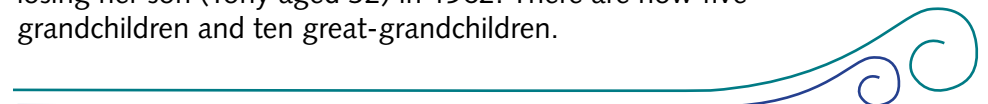
*The Todisco family, from left: Rita; Gilda, Antonio's wife; Tony and Patricia.*

The family heard nothing more until a brief letter arrived from Antonio dated 25 June 1940.

Rita still has this letter, written in Italian and addressed to his wife Gilda. It simply says, *"Don't worry, everything is fine. Give the children a kiss"*. The camp where Antonio was held was a derelict cotton factory in the town of Bury called Warth Mills Internment Camp. It had been pressed into use by the War Office at short notice. From all accounts, conditions were extremely harsh and uncomfortable with armed guards and barbed wire surrounding the whole building.

Life for the family was difficult throughout the rest of the war. Despite not being able to make ice cream due to rationing, the shop remained open selling sweets, cigarettes and cups of tea and they were thankful for the help provided by the local Catholic Church.

Thanks to the courage of Gilda, whose knowledge of the English language was very limited, she brought up three children and kept running the business successfully until her retirement in 1965, despite losing her son (Tony aged 32) in 1962. There are now five grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.



---

# Giuseppe Tortolano

Born 12 August 1880 in Cassino, Italy.

After serving with the Allies in the First World War, Giuseppe and his Italian-born wife Annantonina opened up an ice cream business on Garbutt Street in Stockton. The couple had first met as teenagers whilst working in the Greco Brothers ice cream wafer business on Brentnall Street.



*Giuseppe in Italian military uniform during the First World War*



*Giuseppe Tortolano just before 1940*

Later they moved to premises on Newport Road in Middlesbrough and eventually to 19 Percy Street.

They had eight children between them and had many close friends in the local community where Annantonina's traditional home cooking earned her something of a reputation.

After Giuseppe, known locally as 'Tut', was arrested, his wife even took meals to him whilst he was being held in the police station in Middlesbrough.



# Harry Tortolano

## Son of Giuseppe Tortolano

Harry was born in 1913 when the family lived on Garbutt Street and remembers a very happy childhood. He went to St Patrick's School and later served his apprenticeship in the building trade.

He remembers the attacks on Italian-owned businesses which followed the arrest of his father and others, but puts it down to nothing more than hooliganism. He recalls an incident which happened on the corner of Newport Road and Baxter Street where a group of youths were attempting to smash the windows of Martino's ice cream parlour.

*"Suddenly, the family's son arrived. He had been badly burned whilst serving with the Army. The youths saw that he was wearing uniform and realised that they were attacking the premises of a man who was prepared to give his life for his country. Their attitude immediately changed and they left."*

Harry himself later joined The Green Howards and served for five years throughout the war. On a number of occasions, despite being a British national, he found his patriotism being called into question due to his Italian name.



---



## Leandro Beltrami

Born 11 August 1890 in Massemino, Italy.

Despite extensive and on-going enquiries, it has not been possible to make contact with relatives of Leandro Beltrami or find out any details regarding his life in the area.

A document available in the National Archives entitled 'ARANDORA STAR. PARTICULARS OF MISSING PERSONS' indicates that by trade he was an 'Asphalter' and was a resident of Middlesbrough at the time of his arrest, although his 'Last place of abode' is unclear.

## Domenico Rea

Born 7 January 1900 in Arpino, Italy.

A document available in the National Archives entitled 'ARANDORA STAR. PARTICULARS OF MISSING PERSONS' indicates that Domenico Rea was an 'Ice Cream Merchant' and at the time he was arrested his 'Last place of abode' was recorded as 35 Charles Street, Middlesbrough.



# Acknowledgements

With thanks to:

The families for their time and interest in the event and for sharing their memories and photographs.

Alan Davis who provided the historical notes and co-ordinated the families' contributions to the booklet.

Chris Davies and Bernie Carr from Middlesbrough Council for organising the plaque unveiling ceremony.

Ian Stubbs from the Dorman Museum for arranging the special exhibition in the Town Hall for the unveiling ceremony.

Sarah Briggs from Mouchel Advertising and Design for the design of this booklet and Ross Hamilton from Mouchel for co-ordinating its production.

Fraser Darrah, Dave Crolley, the National Archives and the Evening Gazette, Middlesbrough for their permission to use images in this booklet, as indicated.





---

Right:

Letter from the Home Office to Adelina Borsumato, notifying her that her husband Alessandro was 'presumed missing and probably lost' after the sinking of the SS Arandora Star. (With thanks to Marlene McLaughlin, their daughter).

Back cover:

The memorial plaque to the Italian victims from Teesside lost during the sinking of the SS Arandora Star. The plaque was unveiled on 2 July 2009 in Middlesbrough Town Hall.

Any communication on the  
subject of this letter should be  
addressed to:-

The Under Secretary of State,  
Home Office,  
London S.W.1.  
and the following number quoted:-



HOME OFFICE,  
WHITEHALL

B3. Section,  
Scotland House,  
S.W.1.

19th August, 1940.

Madam,

It is with deep regret that the Secretary of State  
directs me to inform you that since the name of  
Alessandro Borzumato appears on the lists as sailing on  
the *Arandora Star*, on the 30th June 1940, and has not been  
subsequently recorded on the embarkation lists of  
internees, who have left this country for Canada or  
Australia, or among those detained in internment camps  
in this country, he must be presumed missing and probably  
lost.

I am,

Madam,

Your obedient servant,

Mrs. Borzumato,  
41A, Princes Rd.,  
Middlesbrough,  
YORKS.



### S.S. 'ARANDORA STAR'

On 2 July 1940, the 15,000 ton Blue Star luxury liner, S.S. Arandora Star, was torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic Ocean, 75 miles off the north-west coast of Ireland.

Bound for Canada, she was carrying over 1200 passengers consisting mainly of Italian, German and Austrian internees, plus a military guard of British soldiers and a crew of Merchant Navy seamen.

Over half of those on board perished including nearly 450 Italians, many of whom had been arrested and interned in the summer of 1940. Of those, thirteen men were from Tavolara, where they had made their homes, married, raised families and had become well known and respected members of the local business community.

| Name                 | Date of Birth | Place of Birth |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------|
| LEANDRO BELTRAMI     | 11.8.1890     | MASSEMINO      |
| LUIGI BERTOIA        | 4.6.1921      | MONTEREALE     |
| ALESSANDRO BORSUMATO | 2.11.1896     | CASSINO        |
| DOMENICO GRECO       | 13.4.1885     | SANTO PADRE    |
| TULLIO GRECO         | 26.10.1897    | ARPINO         |
| AMEDEO LUCANTONI     | 16.2.1897     | ROME           |
| ANTONIO NARDONE      | 20.10.1882    | CASSINO        |
| DOMENICO PONTONE     | 13.8.1885     | CASSINO        |
| ANTONIO RANALDI      | 16.1.1884     | ARPINO         |
| CAMILLO REA          | 6.10.1878     | ARPINO         |
| DOMENICO REA         | 7.1.1900      | ARPINO         |
| ANTONIO TODISCO      | 14.4.1893     | VALLEROTONDA   |
| GIUSEPPE TORTOLANO   | 12.8.1880     | CASSINO        |

*For all of them, their graves remain known only unto God*