

RMS LUSITANIA

The RMS Lusitania was known as the “Queen of the Seas”, was launched on the River Clyde on the 16th June 1906. In an age of big ships the Lusitania was a majestic luxurious transatlantic liner that had a special air of grandeur about her. She was 785 feet long and weighted 31,550 gross tons and was the largest liner afloat. The construction of the Lusitania like the Mauritania and Aguitania was mainly financed by the British government and in return for this the Admiralty could requisition the liners in times of war. At the start of the war the Lusitania had not been requisitioned and it continued with its normal transatlantic service. Few passengers paid any heed to the fact that the German Embassy in Washington D.C. had issued a warning on 22nd April 1915 that any British ship was liable to be sunk. The warning read “Travellers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies, and Great Britain and her allies, that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles, that in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government vessels flying the flag of Great Britain or any of her allies are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk”.

The RMS Lusitania left New York on the 1st May 1915 on what was to be its last voyage. There were a large number of wealthy Americans on board and this fact influenced the course of the war in the long term. On 7th May 1915 off the coast of Ireland a German U-Boat torpedoed the Lusitania. The ship sank in 18 minutes and 1,195 lives were lost of which 123 were Americans out of 1,959 people on board. The Lusitania now lies in 295 feet of water off the coast of Ireland. Following the sinking of the Lusitania American opinion hardened and contributed to the mood that turned the tide of American public opinion against Germany and led the United States to join the Allied cause in World War 1.

The crew of the Lusitania were from many countries but we know that 8 Mayo crewmen perished. They were Trimmers, Patrick Kearney, Martin Welsh, Peter Gavan, Patrick Coyle and Patrick Brown, Fireman Jermiah Sweeney from Turlough, Fireman Patrick Campbell from Fisherhill and Fireman Thomas Kearney from Tonnyshawn, Castlebar, maybe they were others. In an article dated 22nd May 1915 The Connaught Telegraph carried a report that Mayo men and women had been on the passenger list of the Lusitania. It stated that Ballyheane men named Coyne and Brown were lost as was a Killawalla man named Costello. It also stated that three men from Crimlin Castlebar Pat Cooney, Thomas Carney and Pat Holmes perished as well as a Mr Feerick from Ballinrobe. The report indicated that Mr. Feerick’s sister was thought to have been saved. The Telegraph also carried a report on the inquest on the body of Mr. Thomas Brownlee of America that was washed up at Pullacapel near Belmullet. The coroner Dr. P.J. McHale stated “it is very hard to restrain ones feelings when we see this body lying here before us. The innocent man and his wife were coming very probably, like so many others, aboard the ill-fated Lusitania to spend perhaps a holiday with some friends, when without any warning they were launched mercilessly to an untimely end. It is purely a piece of German piratical murder”. Mr McIntyre (a juror) said, “the man like other innocent passengers on

the Lusitania was barbarously murdered by heartless Germans” The jury returned a verdict of “found dead” and added the deceased was a victim of German murder and piracy

Michael Feeney 2007.