



## Harry Aldwinckle

Harry Aldwinckle was born in Corby in 1880. His father was Harry Aldwinckle of Rothwell, his mother Sarah Aldwinckle (nee Bailey) of Corby. Harry and Sarah married at St. John the Baptist Church, Corby in 1877.

### Family History

Harry and Sarah had a son Tom born in Corby 1878. By the 1881 Census the Aldwinckle family (Harry Snr., Sarah and sons Tom & Harry) were resident in Bromley. Harry Snr. was a general labourer.

Sarah Aldwinckle died in Bromley in 1883. Harry Snr. remarried in 1886 to Harriett Barnes, originally from Chatham but now living in Essex. Harry Snr. and Harriett were to remain in Essex and raise a family.

### Merchant Navy History

It is recorded, that Harry Aldwinckle Jnr. enlisted on the SS Ortona (Liverpool) in 1900 (ref. 110613). The Ortona was a passenger liner sailing between the UK and Australia. In 1910 the Ortona was renamed the Arcadian. A brief summary of the wartime role of the Arcadian is given at the end of this piece.

At some stage Harry Aldwinckle enlisted in the crew of the SS Conargo. The SS Conargo was originally called the *Altona*, launched in 1902 and was a 4,312 ton German steamer. It was seized by the Australian Government upon the outbreak of the war and renamed the SS Conargo.

On 31st March 1918 the SS Conargo was on a voyage from Liverpool when it was torpedoed and damaged by a German submarine (U-96) off the coast of the Isle of Man. The ship remained afloat but was torpedoed again whilst under tow off Holyhead and finally sunk. Aboard SS Conargo was Fireman, Harry H Aldwinckle.

Ten crew members were killed in the attack. Other crew members escaped in lifeboats to Dublin and Holyhead. Fireman Harry Aldwinckle of the SS Conargo is commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial.

In the First World War, the civilian navy's duty was to be the supply service of the Royal Navy, to transport troops and supplies to the armies, to transport raw materials to overseas munitions factories and munitions from those factories, to maintain, on a reduced scale, the ordinary import and export trade, to supply food to the home country and - in spite of greatly enlarged risks and responsibilities - to provide both personnel and ships to supplement the existing resources of the Royal Navy. Losses of vessels were high from the outset, but had peaked in 1917 when in January the German government announced the adoption of "unrestricted submarine warfare". The subsequent preventative measures introduced by the Ministry of Shipping - including the setting up of the convoy system where warships were



used to escort merchant vessels - led to a decrease in losses but by the end of the war, 3,305 merchant ships had been lost with a total of 17,000 lives.

In the Second World War, losses were again considerable in the early years, reaching a peak in 1942. The heaviest losses were suffered in the Atlantic, but convoys making their way to Russia around the North Cape, and those supplying Malta in the Mediterranean were also particularly vulnerable to attack. In all, 4,786 merchant ships were lost during the war with a total of 32,000 lives. More than one quarter of this total were lost in home waters.

The First World War section of the Tower Hill Memorial commemorates almost 12,000 Mercantile Marine casualties who have no grave but the sea. The memorial was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens with sculpture by Sir William Reid-Dick. It was unveiled by Queen Mary on 12 December 1928.

The Second World War extension, which commemorates almost 24,000 casualties, was designed by Sir Edward Maufe, with sculpture by Charles Wheeler. It was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II on 5 November 1955.

***Lest We Forget***

**Harry Aldwinckle**  
of the SS Conargo (London)

d. 31<sup>st</sup> March 1918

The **SS Arcadian** was converted into a transport during the First World War. On April 15th, 1917, Arcadian with a company of 1,335 troops and crew was proceeding from Salonika to Alexandria, and was in the southern Aegean, 26 miles N.E. of Milo.

The troops had just completed boat-drill when a German submarine UC-74 approached unseen and discharged a torpedo which inflicted such extensive damage that the vessel sank in six minutes. Fortunately the men's recent exercise at the boats imparted steadiness and confidence and 1,058 were rescued, either through their own efforts or by the escorting destroyer.

The number drowned was 277 and, had it not been for the sudden capsizing of the vessel, many more would have been saved. Those lost included 19 army officers and 214 other ranks, as well as ten naval ratings and 34 members of the crew.

A considerable amount of wreckage and spars was sucked down and this, coming to the surface with great force, killed many who were swimming in the water.

