

# The Last Voyage of S.S. Orsa

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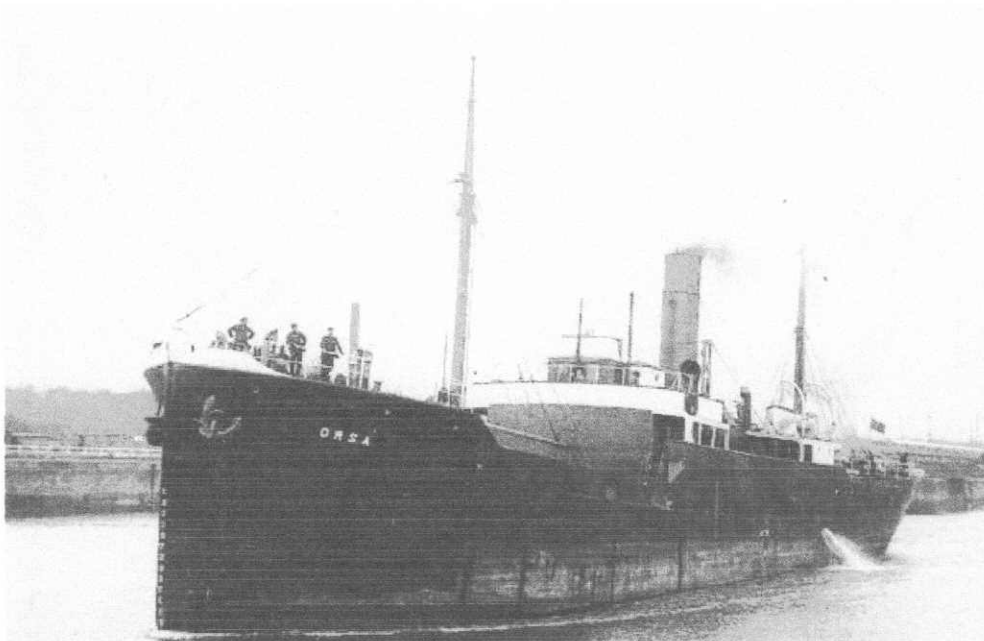
## S.S. ORSA. (148852)

S.S. Orsa was owned by Clydesdale Shipowners Company Limited, and registered in Glasgow, although managed by Glen & Company. She was sailing under the flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

She had been built at Schiedam in the Netherlands by Nieuwe Waterweg Scheepsbouwmaatschappij (New Waterways Ship Building Co.) and completed in April 1925.

Her dimensions were length 250ft, beam 37.1ft and a draught of 16.3 ft. (76.2m x 11.3m x 4.95 m.). She was 1478 gross ton with 2 decks.

Orsa was screw driven with one triple expansion steam engine and with 2 boilers capable of developing 144nhp and a speed of 9 knots.



(Photo used with the permission of Mr P Ackroyd)

Most of her voyages in 1939 had been from The Clyde to Gothenburg with general cargos sometimes via Dublin or Belfast.

She had just been painted grey from top to bottom.

Her last voyage was from the Tyne with a final destination of Bordeaux with a cargo of 2,100 tons of anthracite coal.

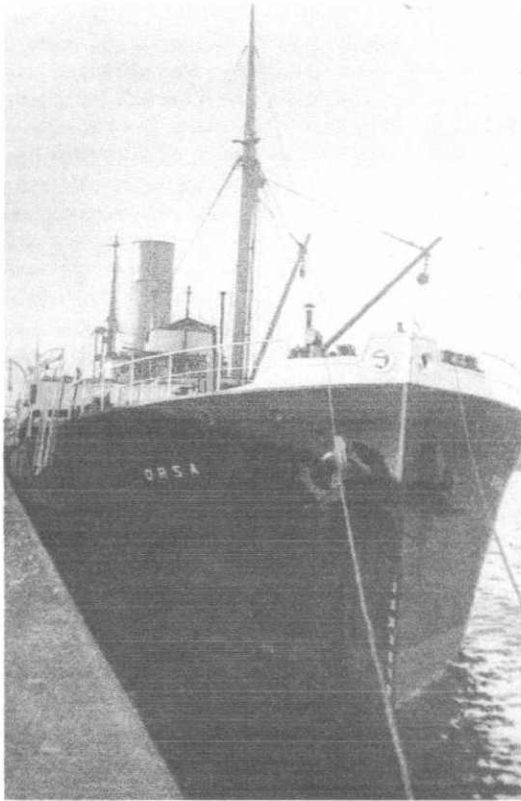


Photo used with the permission of Mr J Howard)

She possessed no gun. There were no navigation lights on as the ship made its way down the Yorkshire Coast. They were not flying an ensign. It is believed she had a crew of 20.

S.S. Orsa sank on the morning of Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October 1939 off Flamborough Head. (53°54'N, 0°07'E)

It is known that U15 (Heinz Buchholz) was laying mines from 31<sup>st</sup> August until 8<sup>th</sup> September 1939 off Flamborough Head.

## The last voyage.

From reports given by some of the survivors it has been possible to find out what may have happened to S.S. Orsa.

Just after 4am on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1939 there was a terrific explosion. One man was thrown against the side of his bunk. He rushed to the deck to find out what was happening. It was completely dark and the ship was starting to sink rapidly.

The vessel was keeling over rapidly to port.

The starboard life boat was reportedly "smashed out" so there was only the port boat to use.

The Chief Officer ordered the Second Mate to see if he could get the port boat away. He believed that they had been torpedoed. He also told the Second mate that both of his legs were broken.

Several of the crew attempted to lower the remaining lifeboat getting one end into the water but the other end was caught in the davit. There should have been an axe "made fast to the end board gunnel of the boat". But it could not be found. The Bo 'sun was attempting to let the lashings go but the boat had jammed on the roller winches. The second Mate knew he had put an axe in the Chart Room and attempted to find it but could not.

He returned to the boat deck to find that only the Bo 'sun was left on the deck. They got to the lifeboat and as the boat started to float the men unhooked the falls.

But as the lifeboat was not clear of the ship it was being drawn under water. The men had to dive into the water to avoid been drawn under with it.

Some men managed to cling to pieces of the wreck and eventually to the upturned lifeboat. (It is believed there were 4 men clinging to the lifeboat including one of the firemen and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate.)

There were sounds of shouting from time to time but it was impossible to make out the direction the sounds came from.

The men gradually drifted away from the wreck.

Several ships passed but as the men were low in the water it was impossible to make contact.

Eventually around noon a destroyer, which could have been HMS Woolston (L49), picked the men up. They were tended to by the crew and eventually landed in port.

It has been reported that some men were working below decks at the time of the explosion and would not have been able to jump clear of the ship.

Some of the survivors were confident to report that S.S. Orsa had struck a mine and had not been hit by a torpedo.

Unfortunately the ships confidential books and papers appear to have not survived.

S.S. Orsa sank in less than 10 minutes.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1939 German Wireless announced that they had sunk the steamer. Orsa.

## Local involvement

Early on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1939 three bodies were discovered on the shore in North Somercotes. They were recognised as being merchant sailors.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1939 the Rev Hall buried the 3 men in North Somercotes Village Cemetery.

Eventually one body was identified as that of John Elias Evans, the other 2 were also believed to be from SS Orsa but could not be named.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1939 two "unknown persons" who had been washed ashore at Saltfleet were buried in St Botolphs Skidbrooke. Later one was identified as R Macdonald. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November another body was found at Saltfleet and buried on the 8<sup>th</sup>. It is not clear whether or not this was a seaman from S.S. Orsa.

The ships master, Captain Alexander Simpson, was taken to his hometown of Hartlepool for burial.

William Moir was buried at St Clements in Saltfleetby.

## The men from S.S. Orsa who lost their lives on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1939.

**JOHN BUSHFIELD** aged 20 had been born in Glasgow. He was the son of Andrew and Agnes Bushfield of 268, Birkenhead Road, Glasgow. He was a Fireman and Trimmer.

**PETER ALEXANDER CADWALLADER** (900008) who had been born in New Brompton, Kent, was aged 59. He was the Chief Engineering Officer, the husband of Frances Duncan Cadwallader of 89, Baldwin Avenue, Knightswood, Glasgow. Peter was 5ft 6ins tall with brown hair and eyes and a fresh complexion.

**WILLIAM DUTHIE** aged 39 had been born in Dumbarton. He was a Fireman and Trimmer. William was the son of William and Isabella Duthie of 68, Darie Street, Methil, Fife.

**JOHN ELIAS EVANS (535345)**, aged 42, had been born on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 1895 in Aberdovey. He was an A.B. and lamp trimmer. John was buried in a CWG in North Somercotes Village Cemetery. (CWG ref. comp 1 grave 80.) John was the son of Elias and Margaret Jane Evans and the husband of Alice Evans of 14, Whitlees Crescent, Adrossen, Ayrshire. He was 5ft 11½ins tall with blue eyes, light brown hair and a fair complexion. He had a scar on his left cheek. He had joined S.S. Orsa on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1939.

**JOHN GABRIEL FOSTER** aged 48 was the Chief Officer (1st Mate). He had been born in Victoria Australia. He had been living at 46, Glenpatrick Road, Elderside. His next of kin was noted as Miss Isabella Forster of the children's home, Ravenscraig, Glasgow.

**HENRY RUSSELL JARDINE** aged 52 was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineering Officer. He had been born in Dumbarton the son of William and Mary Jardine. He was married to Helen and lived at Viewfield, Karmes, Argyleshire.

**MICHAEL KELLY** aged 19 was a Trimmer. He was the son of Michael and Joan Kelly of 41, Crimea Street, Glasgow.

**RODERICK JOHN McPHEE McDONALD (R157928)**, aged 18, an ordinary seaman, is buried in St Botolph's churchyard in Skidbrooke. He was the son of Angus McDonald of 93, Earl Street, Glasgow. Roderick had been born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1920 in Glasgow. He joined S.S. Orsa on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1939.

**JAMES McGUIRE** aged 30 was an assistant engineer and donkeyman (junior engineer). He was the husband of Agnes of 38, Carrick Street, Glasgow.

**EWEN MacKAY** aged 19 was an Ordinary Seaman. He was the son of Angus and Catherine Mackay of Caa, Geocrab, Harris, Isle of Lewis. Ewan had been born at Harris and is remembered on the Harris War Memorial.

**JOHN MacKINNON** aged 45 was an Able Seaman. He was married to Elizabeth of 16, Lochalsh Road, Inverness. He had been born on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1894 at Elgol on Skye the son of Lachlan and Catherine Mackinnon.



**WILLIAM MOIR**, aged 28, an able seaman, is buried in St Clement Churchyard at Saltfleetby. He was married to Catherine of Ormislake, Lochboisdale. William had been born in Glasgow

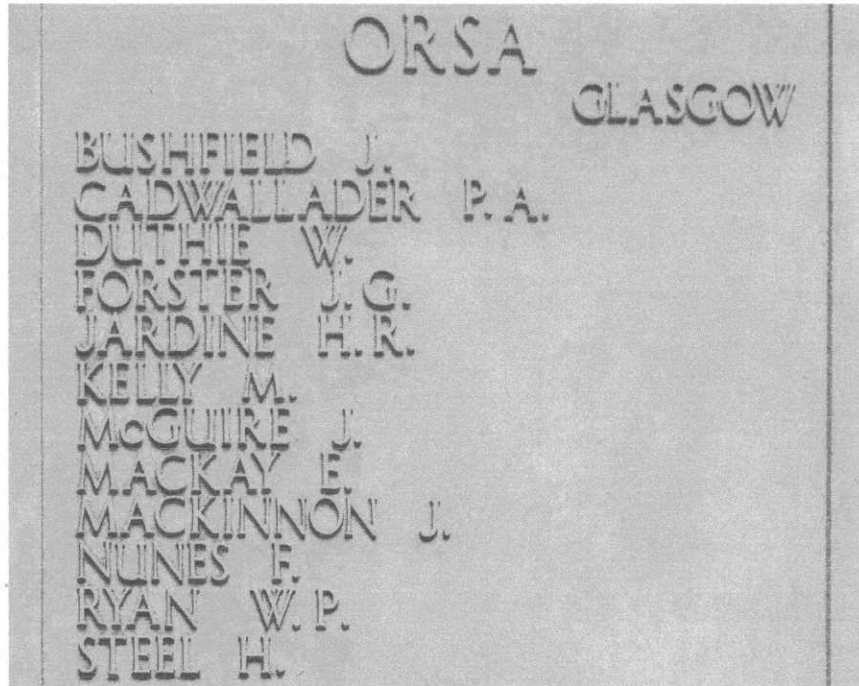
**FRANK NUNES** aged 22 was an ordinary seaman. He was the son of Amelia and Francisco Nunes of 23, Edward Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Frank had been born in Trinidad.

**ALEXANDER SIMPSON**, aged 38, was a master mariner. (The Master, ship's captain.) He is buried in a CWG at Hartlepool (Stranton) cemetery (ref plot 5 grave 211). He had been born in West Hartlepool and was married to Doris. His last recorded Merchant Navy address was Main Street, Dent, Sedgbergh. When his will was published the address given was 13, Baden Street, West Hartlepool. Doris was granted administration of his effects (£851. 7s.4d.).

**H STEEL** aged 44 was a junior engineering officer. He had been born in Glasgow and married Mary. She was living at 71, Casino Road, Fairview Dublin.

**WILLIAM PATRICK RYAN** aged 51 was the ships cook. He was the husband of Janet Ryan of 16, Earl Street, Glasgow. He had been born in Liverpool the son of John and Mary Ryan.

The men with no known Graves are remembered on the Tower Hill Memorial in Trinity Square Gardens, near The Tower Of London. This Memorial commemorates men and women of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets who died in both World Wars and have no known grave.



Panel 77 at Tower Hill Memorial

## The Wreck of SS Orsa

The wreck now lies at a depth of 20m in a SE to NW direction with her bows to NW. When she went down in 1939 her mast was showing about 1m above the surface. The wreck was swept, cleared and dispersed as a navigational hazard in 1945 and 1948. Now she is totally collapsed lying flat on her starboard side. The engine and boilers are exposed. The wreck is a mass of twisted metal standing no more than 2.7m high amidships. Numerous crustaceans have been reported sheltering there during various dives in the summer months.

Tidal streams are strong and there is poor underwater visibility.

The wreck is treated as a Grave Site.