

# The loss of Michael McLoughlin on HMS Pheasant

by Michael Kirwan

**O**n Sunday night, 2 April 1911, 55-year-old widow Bridget Gavin of 2 Summer Street, Cathedral Place, as head of the family, completed the 1911 Census of Ireland form. Bridget recorded herself as a cook/domestic servant. The other people in the house at the time were her daughter Mary Mc Loughlin, her grand-daughters Mary Bridget and Johanna and her grand-sons Michael, Joseph and John. Michael was 12 years of age and was attending school. He was born on 14 August 1898. He also had a sister Christina that died in 1901 from tuberculosis.



No 1 and 2 Summer Street.  
(Picture courtesy of Michael Cowhey)



Michael's sister Johanna outside house in later years.

In 1911 the population of Limerick city was 38,518 with 15,025 unemployed. There was no old age pension, unemployment benefit and no social welfare allowances etc. When World War 1 was declared on 4 August 1914 there were some 20,000 Irish already serving in the British Forces. A recruitment campaign was put in place as the war progressed. Michael decided to join the Royal Navy and gave up his employment as a sawyer's assistant in a saw mill. On 13 August 1915 Michael was deployed to the Navy in Devonport, England on a 12-year contract. Due to his age he joined with the Naval rating of Boy 2nd Class which was reserved for a Navy boy aged between 15 and 17 on entry to a training ship. It was conditional on a boy's adequate height, weight and medical fitness and evidence of being of good character.

The Navy barracks in Devonport was known as *HMS Vivid*. Michael was attached to the section known as Vivid 1 which specialised in seamanship, signalling and telegraphy. On his 18th birthday he became rated as Ordinary Seaman. This entailed a variety of duties including cleaning, maintenance, signalling, telegraphy and the general upkeep of the ship.

On 29 November 1916 Michael was assigned to the destroyer *HMS Pheasant* which had been launched at Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co Ltd. (on the Clyde) the previous month. She was 1,025 tons, capable of a speed of 34 knots and equipped with three 4-inch guns, one or two pom-poms, and four torpedo tubes.



Admiralty M Class destroyer similar to HMS Pheasant.

She became part of the Grand Fleet based at Scapa Flow and in March 1917 she was assigned to patrol around the island of Hoy in the Orkney Islands north of Scotland. During the week she lay at anchor in the Flow and she patrolled outside Hoy Sound by day. She was ordered to send a weather report at 5 30 am as the Commodore of destroyers planned to hold gunnery practice for his ships. She was seen by the staff at the

signal station in Stromness at 5 30 am and around 6 am a loud explosion was heard. Men on two trawlers anchored inshore heard the explosion and from one of the trawlers, the *MT Grouse*, they could see black smoke and immediately set out in the direction of the smoke but found nothing. The ship had disappeared. Later that morning *HMT Oropesa* discovered a patch of oil and wreckage and the body of midshipman Reginald Campbell Cotter RNR was found wearing two lifebelts. He was 20 years old and he is buried in the military cemetery at Lyness, Hoy, Orkney. At least 88 men had been on board, but his was the only body recovered. It was assumed the ship struck a mine.

The wreck was discovered by divers from the Army Sub-Aqua Club in 1996 after locating it through towed sonar in the location derived from the original records. They found the ship in 82 metres of water with the forward part destroyed. The hull lay on its side and the deck had become separated and badly broken. In the summer of 2017 a maritime survey conducted by Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology located the remains of the destroyer again.

Sadly, the final entry in Michael McLoughlin's official record is DD – discharged dead. The Admiralty contacted Michael's family in Summer Street, by telegram advising them of his

death. His mother subsequently received a pension of 11 shillings 3 pence a week as she was listed as his dependant.

The crew members of *HMS Pheasant* are remembered at the Plymouth Naval Memorial. There is an initiative underway to develop a memorial on Hoy, Orkney to commemorate all those who lost their lives aboard.

#### Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank John McLoughlin for family records and Seán Curtin for permission to reproduce the picture of Summer Street from his book *Limerick- A Stroll down Memory Lane Vol. 4.*

#### Endnotes and sources

The picture of Johanna McLoughlin, outside 2 Summer Street, entitled 'Time Takes its Toll' won a photographic competition circa 1970.

<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/>

<https://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?10747>

<https://theorkneynews.scot/2017/09/26/discovering-the-last-resting-place-of-hms-pheasant-1917/>

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/238204/hms-pheasant-hoy-atlantic>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-41387186>

Date and Period of Engagement		Age	Height	Complexion	Build	Complexion	Wounds, Scars, or Marks
From	To	Years	Fe. In.	Complexion	Build	Complexion	Wounds, Scars, or Marks
11 September 1916	-	12 years	5 1/2	Dark	Slender	Dark	

  

Way, As, arrived in	Dist.	No.	Rating	Period of the tour		If discharged, date and to what rank	Particulars			Character and Rating			Remarks	
				From	To		Rating	From	To	C.	Dist.	A.		
Trafalgar 2	1/2	111	Boys	18415										
Impregnable 15	1007			18418										
Bida (Hornet)	1077			18418										
Landward (Mearns)	1276			18418										

Michael Kirwan recently retired from the Irish Aviation Authority. He worked at their North Atlantic Communication Centre at Ballygirreen, County Clare. In the 1970's he worked as a Radio Officer in the Merchant Navy. He has a keen interest in local history and writes occasionally for the *Old Limerick Journal*.

Michael McLoughlin Royal Navy service record. Final entry DD – discharged dead.



*HMS Impregnable (Training ship), Devonport. Michael McLoughlin is in fourth row from front and third from left.*