

FOUR MARKS FALLEN (Addendum)

CREESE-SMITH, POMROY WILLIAM, Apprentice Seaman, Merchant Navy. Lost at sea when *SS Temple Moat* was sunk by U-95 south of Iceland on Sunday 23rd February 1941, age 16. He is commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial Panel 106.

Pomroy (or Pomeroy as it appears in some official records) was a Four Marks lad, born at 15 Blackberry Lane, the elder son of William Smith and Violet Creese in Spring 1924. Pomroy's surname is the amalgamation of both his father's and mother's names, an early example of this now common practice. He probably went to Four Marks School (an offshoot of Ropley at that time) as the main school building has a plaque *RS 1902*. From there he went to Eggars School, Alton. It was a grammar school then and he may have gained entry through sitting a form of 11+ to win a scholarship, or perhaps as a fee-paying pupil. His father was a Dental Prosthetist trained in London and Germany (a skilled job making inserts to reshape the mouth and jaw following loss of teeth or bone). It's not clear what Pomroy did between the age of 14, when he would have left school, and 16, when it was aboard *SS Temple Moat*. However by the time of the 1939 National Register, taken on 29th September 1939 in order to issue Identity Cards to the population, his family were living in Southampton.

The post of apprentice seaman is a first step on the ladder to ultimately becoming captain or master in the Merchant Navy. Pomroy was too young to be conscripted, so it's likely that he volunteered to go to sea and, having a Grammar School education, may have been seen as a potential officer. It's possible that he wanted to follow in his maternal grandfather's footsteps. Captain William Creese (Master) went down with his ship, *ss Jutland*, on Monday 19th November 1917 on the way from Bilbao to Middlesbrough. That ship, carrying iron ore, was sunk by a submarine off the coast of Brittany. Although Pomroy was age 16 when he died, he was not the youngest member of the crew on that fateful night. There was another 16 year old apprentice, a cabin boy aged 15 and other boys aged 16 or 17.

SS Temple Moat was a steam merchant ship of 2,620 nrt, built in 1928 and operated by Lambert Brothers. It was a general cargo tramp steamer picking up and discharging cargo whenever hired to do so. Like many merchant ships at the start of WWII, the *SS Temple Moat* was armed by the Admiralty to provide some defence against enemy submarines and aircraft. These defensively equipped merchant ships (DEMS) also carried Royal Navy personnel to operate the weapons.

Since the start of WWII *SS Temple Moat* had sailed both independently and in convoy around the British Isles and across the Atlantic to north and south America. On 2nd January 1941 the ship sailed from Oban to join a convoy (OB 268) of 33 merchant ships outbound from Liverpool. These OB convoys catered for vessels crossing the

Atlantic, and were escorted by ships of the Royal Navy for part of the way. On 4th January 1941 the convoy dispersed and the next day *SS Temple Moat* was bombed and damaged by aircraft. The ship is next reported as being back in the Clyde on 9th, presumably having returned independently for repairs. She was laid up for about six weeks.

As Germany was using French bases from late 1940 OB convoys were being routed north of Ireland. OB288 left Liverpool on 18th February 1941 and *SS Temple Moat* left the Clyde the next day to join it. She was probably still carrying the cargo of 6,130 tons of coal destined for Buenos Aires she had picked up at Blythe on 24th December 1940. Initially there were 46 merchant ships protected by 6 escorts in the convoy. In the afternoon of 21st a course change was made to avoid a U Boat. The next morning at 9 am the escort reported an attack by aircraft when two merchant ships were hit. These were subsequently escorted back to the UK. In line with normal practice, the C in C Western Approaches ordered the convoy to disperse at dark on 23rd when the last escort left. From that point on the convoy had no defence against submarines.

During that night a number of ships were sunk by submarines, including *SS Temple Moat*. She had straggled behind the convoy and was hit by one torpedo from U-95; she sank fast by the bow about 240 miles south of Iceland. The master, Thomas Ludlow MBE, all the 39 crew members and two gunners were lost. The Tower Hill Memorial records their deaths as Sunday 23rd February, whereas records subsequently available suggest that it was at 1:45 am on Monday 24th. U-95 was on her third sortie, having left Lorient on 16th February, when she sank both *Temple Moat* and *Cape Nelson* from the same convoy. Although of no consolation to the mariners who lost their lives, U-95 was subsequently sunk in the Mediterranean by a Dutch submarine on 28th November 1941.

Thomas Ludlow, MBE, the Master of *SS Temple Moat*, had previously been Chief Officer on *SS Terlings*, another Lambert Brothers' cargo steamer of 2,318 tons built in 1937. On the 21st July 1940, when in convoy en-route from Southend to Falmouth in ballast she came under air attack from German Do-17 with fighter escort and Me-110 aircraft. The ship was defensively armed and when the alarm was sounded Thomas Ludlow went amidships to the Lewis gun, and, though bombs fell all round him, he remained there, firing until he was thrown into the water. He was awarded the MBE and subsequently Lloyd's War Medal for Bravery (posthumously) for his actions that day.