

RIVISTA

No. 395 2012/13 The Magazine of the British-Italian Society

LONDON MEMORIAL TO ARANDORA STAR VICTIMS

Our chairman Charles de Chassiron represented the Society at an important symbolic event in London, the formal unveiling on 2nd July 2012 by the Italian Consul-General of a memorial in St Peter's Italian Church to the 240 London-resident Italians who died in the Arandora Star disaster of 2nd July 1940. They were among nearly 500 Italian victims of the German torpedo attack on a British ship carrying recently-detained Italians (and some Germans) to Canada, shortly after the wholesale detention of enemy aliens was decided on in the aftermath of Mussolini's declaration of war against Britain. The death toll would have been even greater had not the Canadian Navy rescued survivors.

Similar monuments exist already in Liverpool, Glasgow, Middlesbrough and Cardiff, as well as in several Italian cities, but the largest group of those lost, the victims born or resident in London, is now at last fittingly commemorated more than 70

years on. The unveiling was preceded by a Mass said in both languages, and the service was attended by many of the children and grandchildren of those who died, and also by the Mayors of Islington and Camden and the local MP, Frank Dobson. Money for the plaque (which is made of glass) had been collected among the Italian community of London, thanks to efforts by a group of Trustees led by the Mazzini-Garibaldi Foundation's Domenic Pini.

The maritime disaster was followed by a parliamentary enquiry held that far-off autumn, which in turn led to the suspension of the whole policy of internment, which had been brought in too hastily amid fear of fifth-columnists, and had netted many obviously harmless people. In every other way the tragic sinking of the Arandora Star was and remains a painful example of the many terrible things that happen in wartime. The monument is on the southern wall of the Church and is well worth a visit.
