

## Petty Officer James Sutherland Mackay Flett



Flotta was relatively fortunate in World War 2 and only one serviceman from there is recorded on the Flotta War Memorial as having died in that long conflict, Petty Officer James Sutherland Mackay Flett of Roadside, Flotta. James's father, John Flett, was a Flottarian, but his mother, Catherine Flett (née Miller), came from Kirkwall. James Flett joined the Royal Navy and was promoted to Petty Officer. James Flett was serving as a Canteen Manager on a merchant ship, S.S. *Baltonia*, when he was killed in action.

Between 1939 and 1945 the Royal Navy lost 51,578 men listed as killed or missing as a result of enemy action, the Army lost 177,850 and the Royal Air Force lost 76,342. The number of British merchant seamen killed serving on Merchant Navy ships is difficult to quantify, because crews on British registered ships included foreign crew (mostly from Commonwealth countries), also Royal Navy and Royal Artillery gunners, other Royal Navy personnel, including James Flett, and civilian passengers. The 1939-1945 Tower Hill Memorial in London is dedicated to "The Twenty-Four Thousand of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets" and bears the names of seamen who "have no grave but the sea".

James Flett died on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1943 when convoy MKS 7, bound for Liverpool from Algiers, sailed into a minefield off Bougie, North Africa. It had been laid on 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> February by U-118 and sank *Baltonia* and two other ships, *Mary Slessor* and *Empire Morded*. The Master, Jack Prosser, one gunner and nine crew members of *Baltonia* were lost in its sinking, 42 crew members and nine gunners were picked up and eventually landed at Londonderry.



S.S. *Baltonia*, 2013 tons



James Flett is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial, Kent. When it sank S.S. *Baltonia* was carrying 1,215 tons of sour oranges, intended for the production of marmalade, a basic wartime food product.

James Flett's death was the only one during World War 2 that was inscribed on the Flotta War Memorial. His framed photo is inside the Flotta Kirk. James is also commemorated on the Kirkwall War Memorial.