

**St. Mura's Church of Ireland Churchyard,
Upper Fahan, County Donegal,
Republic of Ireland War Graves**



Lest We Forget

World War 1



735086 SAILMAKER

F. L. ROYLE

MERCANTILE MARINE RESERVE

Serving on H.M.S. "LAURENTIC"

25TH JANUARY, 1917 Age 25

Francis Leonard (Frank) ROYLE

Francis Leonard Royle was born on 17th October, 1891 in Melbourne, Victoria to parents Francis & Elizabeth Ann Royle (nee Brown).

Francis Leonard Royle married Irene May Blorn/Blom in Victoria in 1911.

A birth was registered in 1912 for Leonard Oscar Royle, son of Francis Leonard & Irene May Royle (nee Blom).

From the Victorian Police Gazette – 9 October, 1913:

DESERTERS OF WIVES AND CHILDREN

FRANCIS LEONARD ROYLE is charged, on warrant, issued at the instance of his wife, Irene May Royle, 94 Roden-street, West Melbourne, with deserting his child, at West Melbourne, on the 2nd inst. Description:- Tentmaker, 22 years of age. 5 feet 6 or 7 inches high, fair complexion, clean shaven, stout build, bow-legged; wore a grey suit and cap.-O.7920A. 2nd October, 1913.

Elizabeth Ann Royle, mother of Francis Leonard Royle, died in 1916.

Francis Leonard Royle joined Mercantile Marine Reserves in England.

Sailmaker Francis Leonard Royle died on 25th January, 1917, perished at Lough Swilly, County Donegal, Ireland whilst on board S.S. *Laurentic* which had hit a mine in the North Irish Coast.

The UK Royal Navy and Royal Marine War Graves Roll for World War 1 records Francis Leonard Royle, Sailmaker 735086, M.M.R. died 25th January, 1917 H.M.S. "Laurentic" as a direct result of enemy action. He was buried Fahan Churchyard, Co. Donegal, Ireland. Relative notified – Mother – Eliza, Blantyre Avenue, Chelsea, Melbourne, Australia.

S.S. *Laurentic*

S.S. *Laurentic* was a British ocean liner of the White Star Line. She was converted to an armed merchant cruiser at the onset of World War I.

On 23 January 1917, the *Laurentic* departed Liverpool en route to Halifax, under the command of Captain Reginald Norton. She carried some 479 passengers, mostly naval officers, ratings, and Naval Volunteer Reserves, as well as a secret cargo of gold which was to be used for the purchase of war munitions from Canada and the United States. On 25 January the ship made an unscheduled stop at the naval base in Buncrana, Ireland, to allow four passengers with yellow fever symptoms to disembark. The ship lifted anchor around sunset, moving toward Fanad Head, where she was to meet with a destroyer escort. The weather was bitterly cold and a blizzard affected visibility, but Captain Norton gave the order to proceed without the escort, despite reports that a German U-boat had been spotted in the area earlier. Less than an hour after leaving Buncrana, the ship struck two mines laid by the German mine-laying submarine U-80 off Lough Swilly. One of the mines exploded near the engine-room, which left the ship without power and caused it to list 20 degrees; the combination of the darkness and list made it difficult to lower the lifeboats, and made it impossible for the ship to issue a distress call. Without power the main pumps were inoperable and the ship sank within an hour.

Those who made it onto lifeboats faced extreme cold as low as -13 °C (9 °F). Survivors rowed towards Fanad Lighthouse, and some were rescued by local fishing trawlers. In the morning, many were found frozen to death in their lifeboats, with their hands still gripping the oars. The official count lists 475 passengers on board at the time of sinking, meaning that only 121 survived and 354 were lost in the disaster.

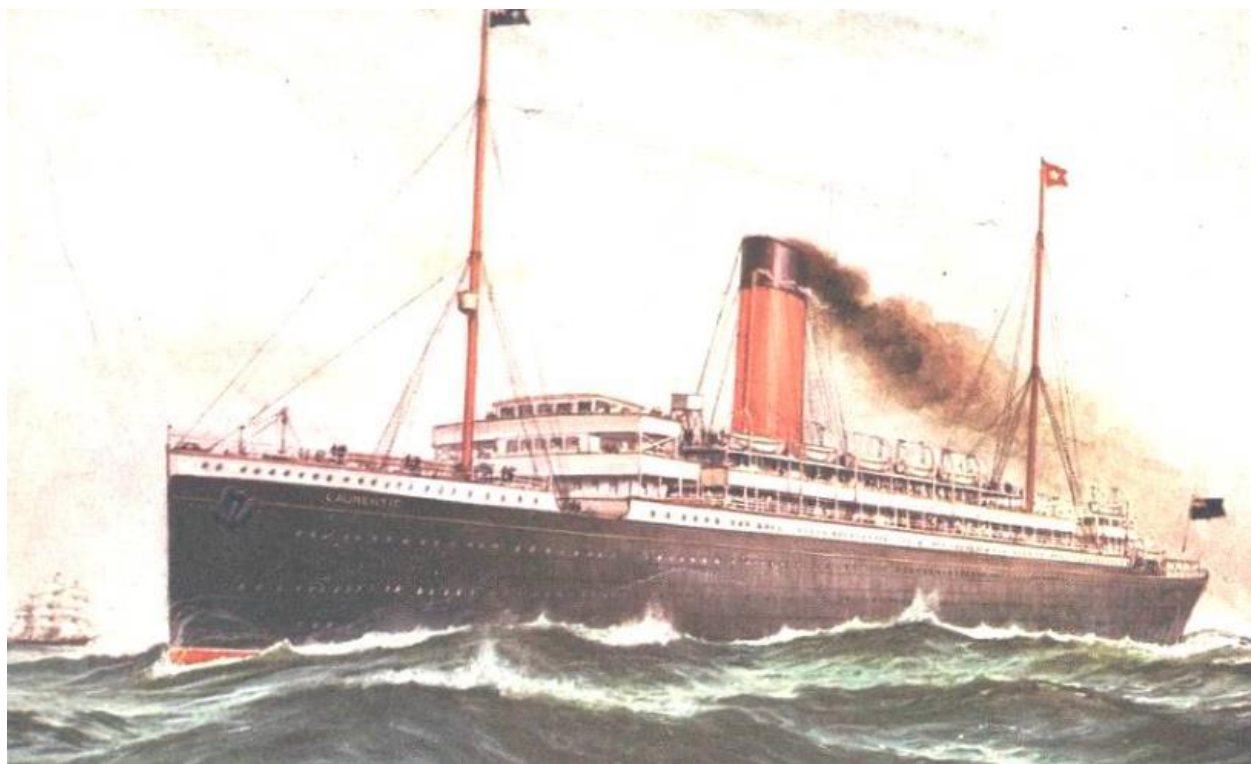
On 1 February, The New York Times reported that the last person to leave the ship was Captain Norton, who survived. He was quoted as saying: "To the best of my knowledge, all the men got safely into the boats. The best of order prevailed after the explosion. The officers and men lived up to the best traditions of the navy...The deaths were all due to exposure, owing to the coldness of the night. My own boat was almost full of water when we were picked up by a trawler the next morning, but all the men in the boat survived. Another boat, picked up at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, contained five survivors and fifteen frozen bodies. They had been exposed to the bitter cold for over twenty hours." Bodies of the dead continued to wash up on shore for several weeks.

In addition to her passengers and crew, the ship was carrying 3,211 gold ingots (about 43 tons) stowed in its second class baggage room. At the time the gold was valued at £5 million (approximately £390 million in 2016) and was intended to pay for war munitions. Royal Navy divers made over 5,000 dives to the wreck between 1917 and 1924 and recovered all but 25 of the ingots. In 1934, three more ingots were recovered by a private salvage company, while further attempts in the 1950s and 1980s recovered nothing. As of 2016, 22 bars of gold remain unaccounted for. The last of the gold recovered by the Royal Navy was some 10 metres (33.8 feet) under the sea bed, thus the remaining gold may be difficult to reach.

The wreck lies about 40 metres (131.2 feet) beneath the surface, and its salvage rights are privately owned. It is considered an official war grave under international law.

In 2007, one of the deck guns was recovered and put on permanent display at Downings pier.

(S.S. Laurentic information from Wikipedia)



S.S. Laurentic

Sailmaker Francis Leonard Royle was buried in St. Mura's Church of Ireland Churchyard, Upper Fahan, County Donegal, Ireland & his death is acknowledged by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

FUNERAL OF SIXTY-NINE VICTIMS

Impressive Scenes

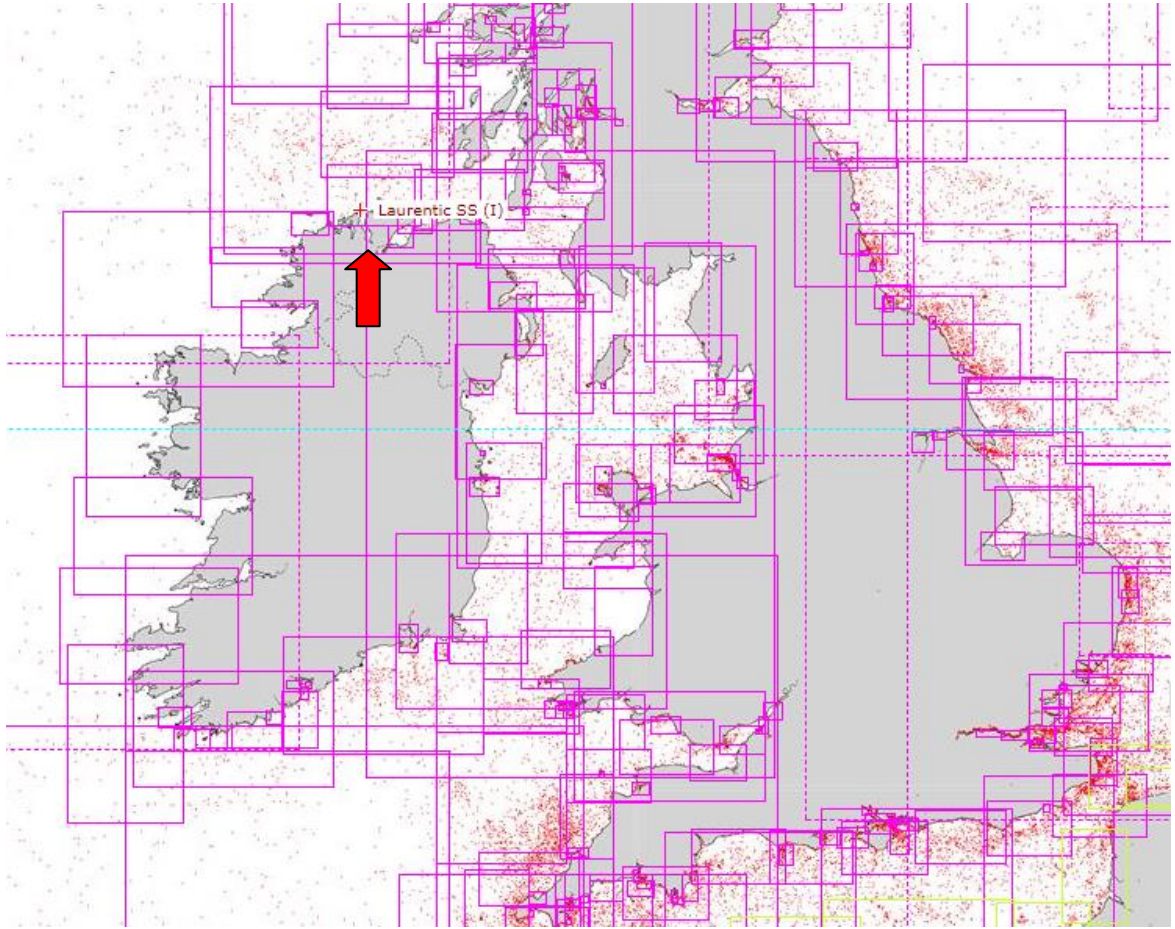
Yesterday the funeral of sixty-nine victims of the lost Laurentic took place to a little wayside churchyard of a Northern Irish coast village. The funeral procession commenced at eleven o'clock from the port at which the survivors and victims were first landed, the distance to the place of interment being some four miles. At the head of the procession marched a detachment of Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, with arms reversed, and as they slowly marched the band of the Inniskillings played the Dead March in "Saul." Behind the band came two motor ambulances, containing the remains of the three dead officers enclosed in oak coffins with brass mounting and enveloped in Union Jacks, with beautiful floral tributes on top. Then followed twelve Army Service Corps wagons, each containing a number of coffins, on all of which were placed Union Jacks and numerous wreaths. Immediately after the remains of the victims walked the 120 survivors, officers and men, with the exception of the captain, who has gone to England. The men were dressed in the clothing which had been provided for them by the Mayor of the neighbouring borough when they were landed after the sinking of their vessel, and some of them were still looking as if they had not quite fully recovered from the effects of their terrible ordeal. Following them came the Mayor and Mayoress (who did so much for the comfort of the survivors), The Admiral in charge of the district, the officers of the naval and military staffs, representatives of local and district public bodies, coastguards, and police. Large crowds of people lined the route, and as the cortege passed they reverently uncovered their heads in honour of the brave departed. When the band had finished playing the solemn music of the Dead March the pipers commenced a Highland lament.

At the churchyard a detachment of blue-jackets met the cortege, and the coffins were placed in a huge grave, which troops from a neighbouring camp had been engaged in making for the last couple of days, part of the grave being set aside for the three officers. Along one side of the huge grave was a detachment of troops, with their hands resting on the butts of their rifles. Close by were the naval and military officers of the district, and on the other side were the surviving officers and crew of the Laurentic, as well as a number of other bluejackets, while there was also present a large number of the general public, the scene at the graveside being a most impressive spectacle.

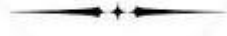
The three Church of Ireland clergymen read the burial service, and when they had concluded two ministers of the Presbyterian Church read a portion of Scripture and said several prayers. Then two Roman Catholic priests read the prayers for the dead, each burial service of course being separate and distinct. When this had concluded the band of the Inniskillings played "When our heads are bowed with woe," the troops joining in the singing of this beautiful hymn of Dean Millman. The firing party discharged a volley, and afterwards the band played the first verse of "Peace, Perfect Peace." This was followed by another volley, and again the band played, this time the second verse of "Peace, Perfect Peace," while after the third volley they played the last verse of this hymn. The firing party, having fixed bayonets, presented arms, and the band played "The Last Post."

Many beautiful tributes were sent by the surviving officers and men of the Laurentic, the naval and military officers of the district, the troops of the district, the officers and crews of the ships of the port, and a number of leading people of the district. One wreath bore the inscription:- "In loving memory of our fallen shipmates; from four who are left to carry on." Others were:- "To the undying memory of the officers and men of the Laurentic who perished, January __," and "All honour to the brave who are no more."

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Sailmaker Francis Leonard Royle – service number 735086, aged 25, of H.M.S. "Laurentic"), Mercantile Marien Reserve. He was the son of Francis and Elizabeth Ann Royle, of Essendon, Victoria, Australia.



The wreck of S.S. Laurentic (From wrecksite)



Newspaper Notices

CHELSEA

Mr F. Royle, Blantyre Avenue, received an official cable on Tuesday informing him that his son, Frank, was sailmaker on the "Laurentic" when she was sunk and it is feared he was amongst the drowned.

(*Moorabbin News*, Victoria – 10 February, 1917) & (*Seaside News*, Cheltenham, Victoria -10 February, 1917)

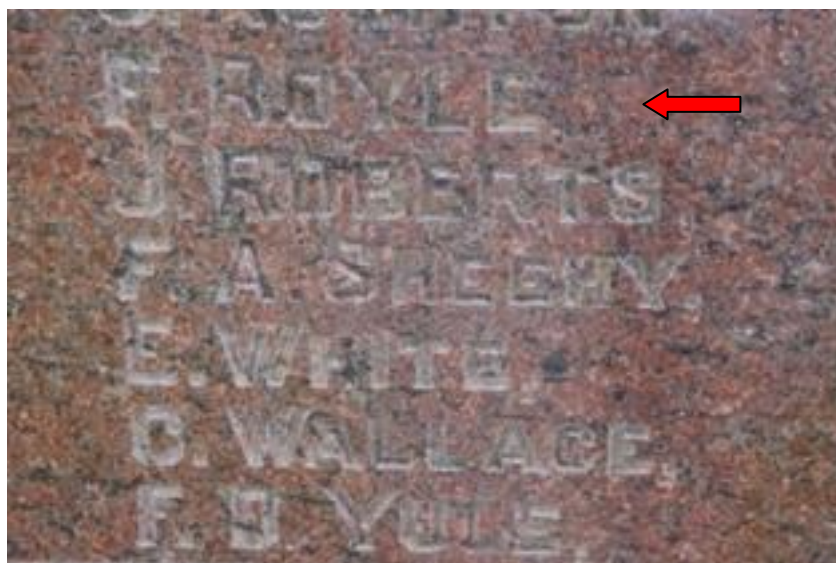
St. Mura's Church of Ireland Churchyard, Upper Fahan, County Donegal, Republic of Ireland

St. Mura's Church of Ireland Churchyard, Upper Fahan contains 71 identified War Graves. There are 62 World War 1 War Graves & 6 which are unidentified & 9 World War 2 War Graves & 2 which are unidentified.

A Naval Plot was purchased in the Churchyard of St. Mura's Church by the Admiralty for victims of H.M.S. *Laurentic*. A permanent Memorial in the form of a 12 foot granite Celtic Cross, with 4 large marble panels at the base bearing the names of the deceased sailors was erected.



H.M.S. *Laurentic* Memorial (Photo from CWGC)



Laurentic Memorial Name Panel in St. Mura's Church of Ireland Churchyard



Laurentic Memorial Name Panel in St. Mura's Church of Ireland Churchyard



08 April 2010

A large crowd gathered around the pier in the seaside village of Downings on Easter Monday for the official unveiling of the plaque at the recently mounted gun from the ill-fated liner, the Laurentic. After a careful restoration project the Laurentic Gun has now been mounted for permanent display at the pier and was unveiled by local Councillor Noel McBride on Monday afternoon.

The gun was recovered from the seabed some 90 years after the sinking of the ill-fated White Star Liner the SS Laurentic. During the First World War years the former luxury passenger cruise ship was converted to an auxiliary gun ship. Whilst on a mission to purchase arms and munitions from the United States and Canadian, the famed gold ship struck German laid mines as she rounded Malin Head shortly after leaving port at Bunrana, carrying a valuable payload of some 35 imperial tonnes of pure gold, worth in excess of €300million today.

Today, some 20 bars of the gold have yet to be recovered, which still proves an alluring prospect by visiting divers!

It was not the boat's original intention to call to Bunrana but shortly after departing Liverpool some crew members showed signs of fever and were left at Bunrana for medical attention. Just one hour after leaving Inishowen on January 25, 1917, the ship was holed and rapidly sank to her watery grave with the loss of over half her 722 crew and of her treasured gold.

The wreck of the Laurentic now lies three miles north-east of Fanad Lighthouse at the entrance to Lough Swilly at a depth of 40 metres.

On September 30, 2007 a group of local Downings divers who raised one of the two bow guns. Led by Kevin McShane, with the diving expertise of Eoin Fogarty, Ivan Irwin and Mícheál McBride ably assisted and supported by Michael McVeigh, Liam Gillespie, Ivan Kerr, Tommy McKeemey, Noel McShane, Eamonn Doherty, Sean Doherty, Charlie McBride and Joe Devenney, the gun broke the surface of the Atlantic waters for the first time in almost a century and now sits proudly at its new home as a striking visitor attraction



The Gun from the *Laurentic* & Memorial (Photos by John Campbell)



