

Ballina's Gerald O'Hara is remembered

Born in Ballina in 1893, Gerald O'Hara lived a unique life by virtue of his job as a radio officer.

It was a career choice that saw him sail the high seas of the globe during a period that witnessed two world wars and ultimately landed him in the Bremen Farge labour camp in Germany where he died of lung disease in 1944, leaving a wife and young family behind.

Gerald's story and sacrifice has now been permanently preserved as a result of the relocation of a commemorative plaque to the Mayo Peace Park in Castlebar. The plaque pays tribute to Gerald and the four Irish colleagues that were captured alongside him by a German war ship in 1941.

It had originally been on display in the merchant navy convoy section of the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffs, England but, thanks to the intervention of the Irish Seamen's Relatives Association (1939-1946), was rehoused in the Mayo Peace Park on August 26 last.

Present on the day were Gerald's descendants including his son, Pdraig, who taught Irish for years in St Muredach's College in Ballina.

Also in attendance was



Pictured is the attendance at the unveiling of the Bremen Farge plaque in the Mayo Peace Park, Castlebar. Included in the group are members of the O'Hara family of Ballina, including Pdraig O'Hara (6th from left), Cllr Martin McLoughlin and Ballina historian PJ Clarke.

well-known war historian PJ Clarke who has conducted extensive research into Gerald O'Hara's story as part of his near life-long commitment to documenting the role played by Mayo soldiers in the Great War.

In his studies, PJ has also examined the service of local seamen in the

British merchant navy which is how he came to uncover extensive details of the incredible story of Gerald O'Hara.

The son of Edward and Margaret O'Hara of Bridge Street, Gerald was academically gifted and undertook an apprenticeship as a radio officer after leaving school.

Radio communication was at its zenith at the time and there was huge demand for the specialist knowledge Gerald acquired both on luxury liners and in the British merchant navy.

After the outbreak of the Second World War, Gerald was working on the SS Devon when it was

captured by a camouflaged German war ship, The Komet, off the Galapagos Islands in 1941.

Gerald, his fellow seamen and the ship's passengers were taken prisoner and the Ballina native, despite hailing from a neutral country, ultimately ended up in the Bremen Farge con-



The plaque from the National Memorial Arboretum in England that commemorates the five Irish merchant seamen who died in Bremen Farge concentration camp in Germany during the Second World War, having refused to co-operate with the Nazis. Among them was Ballina native Gerald O'Hara. The plaque now stands in the Mayo Peace Park in Castlebar, having been on loan to Bremen Farge in recent years.

centration camp in Germany along with four more Irish colleagues, having refused to co-operate with the Nazis.


Gerald never saw Ireland again. He passed away in Bremen Farge in 1944, as a result of a lung disease and was laid to rest in Germany.

Now, over 70 years later, the story of his sacrifice, can be shared in his native Mayo thanks to

the recent relocation of the memorial plaque to him and his fellow Irish seamen to the Mayo Peace Park.

The dedication accompanying the newly installed plaque notes that Gerald was officer in charge of the Irish prisoners at Bremen Farge and pays tribute to his exemplary role in this respect as well as his bravery.





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