

HMS Kildwick – A village at sea

Farnhill has had, in the past, a couple of nautical allusions: the Ship Inn and The Harbour (the original name of The Arbour) come to mind. But these are to do with the building of the canal.

Kildwick went one better. It had its own Royal Navy fighting ship: HMS Kildwick. In fact, there were two !

HMS Kildwick (1) – WW1 Anti-submarine gunboat

The first HMS Kildwick was built in 1918 by Cochrane Shipbuilders of Selby¹. It was one of the “KIL-class” vessels, designed to counter the impact that German U-boats were having on British shipping.

All of these ships were, supposedly, named after Scottish and Irish towns and villages, and quite how one came to be called HMS Kildwick isn’t known. (Perhaps the Admiralty thought that all of “up North” was Scotland ?)

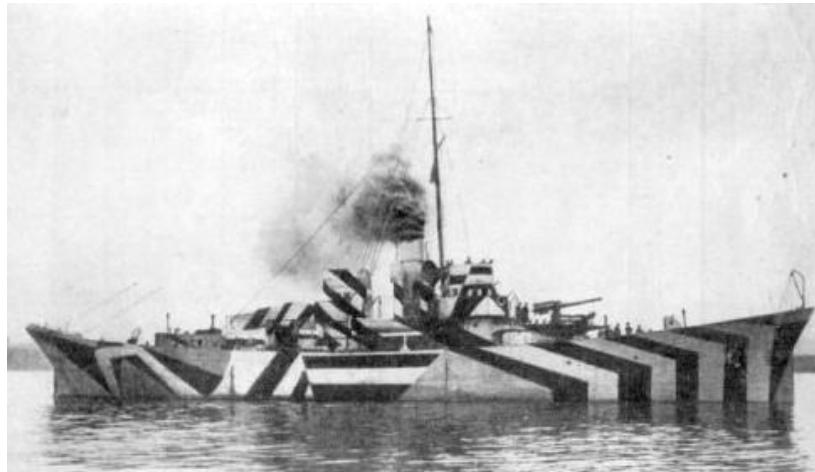


Figure 1: The first HMS Kildwick, in “Dazzle” camouflage².

The KIL-class vessels were double-ended and painted in Dazzle³ camouflage. This made it difficult for the U-boat crews to determine which way the ships were travelling and how far away they were without exposing their periscopes for an extended period, making them vulnerable to attack⁴.

They were equipped with recently-developed hydrophones, depth charges, and anti-submarine guns. Their effectiveness, however, is unclear. Introduced towards the end of the war, when the U-boat threat was beginning to subside, only 38 of the planned 85 vessels were built before the Armistice, and orders for the final 30 were cancelled altogether.

After the war the ships, including some arriving straight from the shipyards, were laid up and later put up for sale. In February 1920 alone, 48 KIL-class vessels were sold to two civilian owners for conversion to cargo vessels. The fate of the first HMS Kildwick is not known.

HMS Kildwick (2) – WW2 Convoy-escort vessel

This one didn't start life as HMS Kildwick. At first, it wasn't even a British naval vessel !

USS PCE 832

USS Patrol Craft Escort 832 was built by the Pullman Standard Car Company of Chicago, Illinois. It was ordered by the US government on May 10th 1942; laid down on February 5th 1943; launched on 10th July 1943; and commissioned into the US Navy on September 27th 1943.¹

In two years, Pullman built 34 PCEs, all to a similar design, 180 feet long and weighing 850 tons. The boats were built in 40-ton blocks, the blocks being assembled in a fabrication shop on 111th Street and moved to the boatyard at Lake Calmut on gondola cars.²

All the PCEs were fast (powered by an 800hp GE diesel engine, generating 18 knots), manoeuvrable, lightly armed and equipped with depth-charges for anti-submarine warfare.

HMS Kildwick

PCE 832 was immediately transferred, along with 14 other PCEs, to the Royal Navy under the WWII lease-lend arrangement. These 15 ships formed the KIL-class of convoy escort vessels.³

- HMS Kilbirnie
- HMS Kilchrenan
- HMS Kilham
- HMS Kilmalcolm
- HMS Kilmelford
- HMS Kilbride
- HMS Kildary
- HMS Kilhampton
- HMS Kilmarnock
- HMS Kilmington
- HMS Kilchattan
- HMS Kildwick
- HMS Kilkenzie
- HMS Kilmartin
- HMS Kilmore

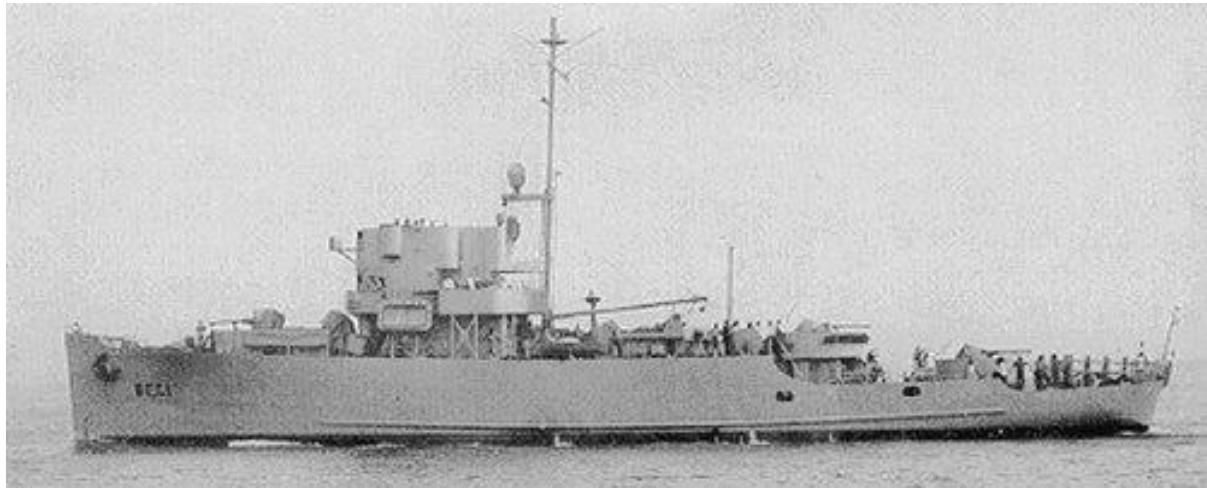


Figure 2: A WW2 KIL-class vessel. This is HMS Kildwick's sister ship, HMS Kilbirnie (under its original designation, USS BEC-1)²².

Between February 5th and December 17th 1944, HMS Kildwick provided escort support for 13 convoys, between Freetown (Sierra Leone) and the UK and on the Freetown – Takoradi (Ghana) – Lagos (Nigeria) West African triangular route.⁴⁵

It was on one of these triangular voyages that HMS Kildwick carried out its most important action of the war.

On 26th February 1944, convoy STL012 came under attack from the German U-boat U-66. The 5300-ton British merchant ship SS Silvermaple was torpedoed and sunk about 130 nautical miles west of Takoradi.⁶ The master, five crew members and one gunner were lost⁷; 47 crew members, nine gunners and one passenger were picked up by HMS Kildwick, under the command of Lt. Peter Pannell RNVR, and landed at Takoradi on the following day.¹⁸

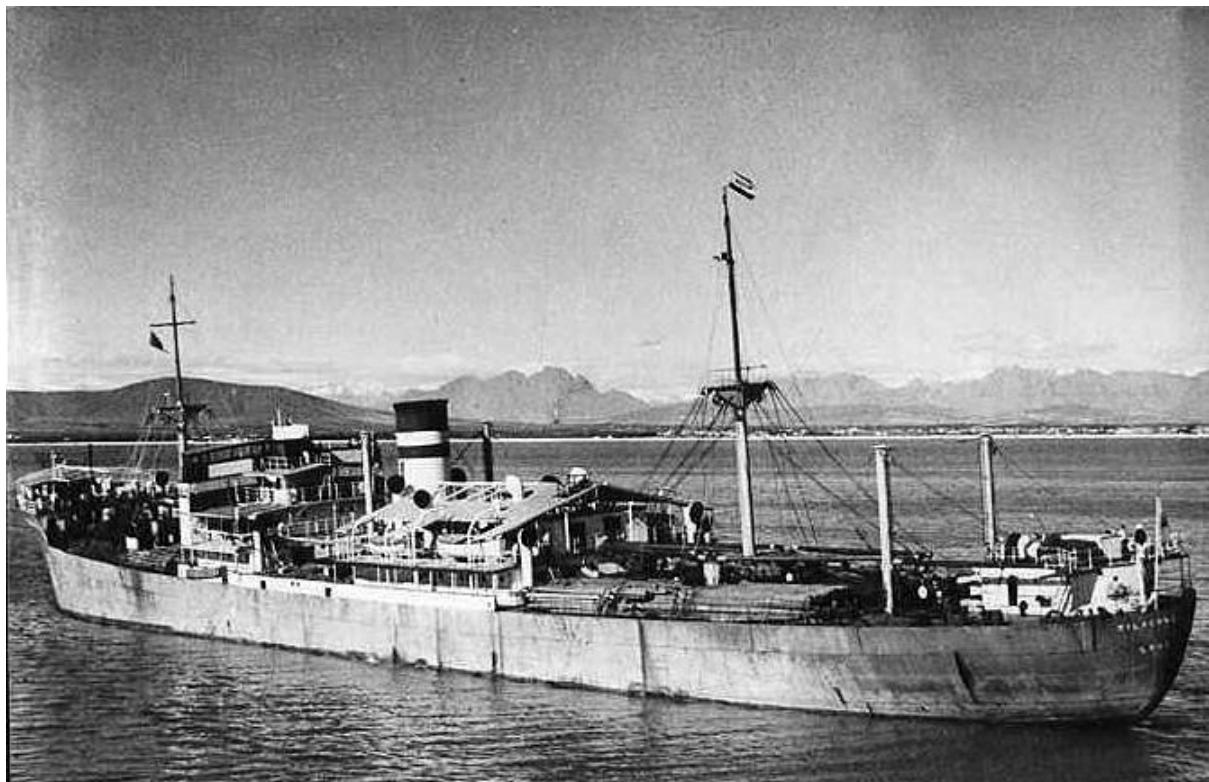


Figure 3: HMS Silvermaple. The ship was torpedoed on 26th February 1944 with the loss of seven lives.

It seems unlikely that anyone in the village was aware of HMS Kildwick until the vicar of St. Andrew's Church, Rev. Walkden, published two letters he had received from the father of a man serving on the vessel, in the April 1945 issue of the parish magazine.

H.M.S. KILDWICK.

That heading ought to make our readers blink. Yet it is true that H.M.S. Kildwick appears in the Admiralty list of His Majesty's ships now serving abroad. How does the connection come about? Well, a perusal of the two following letters which the Vicar has received will explain the circumstances and how the discovery was made.

198, Northwoodside Rd.,
Glasgow, N.W.
2nd, March, 1945.

Dear Rev. Sir,

Excuse me taking the liberty of writing to you. The reason is, my son is serving on H.M.S. Kildwick named after your town.

Recently I sent him a Postcard view of the Church at Kildwick, now he has asked me to try and get some Postcard views of the Town, as now his Pals on the Ship would like them.

Would you kindly let me know sir, if it is possible to obtain a dozen of these views, and what would be the cost?

Thanking you Sir, in anticipation,

Yours faithfully,

GEO. DODDS.

Same address,
20th March, 1945.

Dear Rev. Sir,

Kindly accept my sincere thanks for the lovely Photos and Postcard Views received, you can rest assured your kindly action will be much appreciated by my son and his friends. In fact it is more than they expected, thanks go to those kind people who responded so well.

I despatched the Photo's and Cards straight away and asked my son to show them to the Commanding Officer. I also enclosed the letter I received from you If at all possible I am sure the C.O. will forward on a photo of the Ship.

The Ship is at present stationed abroad, so it will be some time before you get a reply.

It was rather strange how I secured the Postcard of Kildwick (It was a coloured one of the Church and Graveyard, and similar to one of the Photos you sent). I am a Postman in Glasgow, and one day I delivered this Postcard to a lady on my beat. I said to her that is very strange that is the name of my Boy's Ship, so she said that I could have it and send it to my son.

It must have come as a surprise to know that one of H.M. Ships was named after your Parish, and I can just imagine how interested the children would be.

Kindly accept my thanks once again Sir, and trust you will get word from the Ship in due course.

Yours faithfully,

GEO. DODDS.

P.S.—If a Photo of the Ship cannot be sent, I have a Photo of the Crew, which might be acceptable.

Figure 4 (above and previous): Two letters published in the April 1945 issue of the St. Andrew's Parish Magazine.

Details were later published in Keighley News²¹.

A couple of weeks later, the same newspaper reported:²⁰

Garth E. G. Robinson, a former member of the 5th Skipton troop of Boy Scouts, who is in the navy, has written to the leaders of the Kildwick and Farnhill Boy Scouts to say that he has been aboard HMS Kildwick. He suggests that the Kildwick and Farnhill scouts should adopt the vessel to the extent of collecting books and periodicals for the crew.

In June 1945, the Craven Herald reported on an exchange of letters between the vicar and the captain of the ship^{[19](#)}:

The Rev. A.T. Walkden, Vicar of Kildwick, has received a letter from the commanding officer of HMS Kildwick, along with a photograph of the ship's company. The ship, he says, was commissioned in September 1943 and since then has been in the Battle of the Atlantic. "We are now on our way to the United Kingdom for the first time in the ship's life and the men are falling over each other with excitement", says the writer. "Most of them have been away from home for around two years, and are anxious to see their families."

The second HMS Kildwick's war was over.

MS Sunnfjord

After the war HMS Kildwick was returned to the US Navy. No longer required for escort duty, the vessel was struck from the naval record in 1947 and sold to the Fager Lines of Norway^{[9](#)}, who appear to have immediately sold it on to Fylkesbaatane (known as FSF) in New Jersey (Norway)^{[11](#)}.

In 1949 the vessel underwent a major refit as a car and passenger ferry at the Haugesund Mechanical Workshop AS, on the west coast of Norway. Then, renamed as MS Sunnfjord, it went into service between Bergen and Ardalstangen.^{[10](#)}

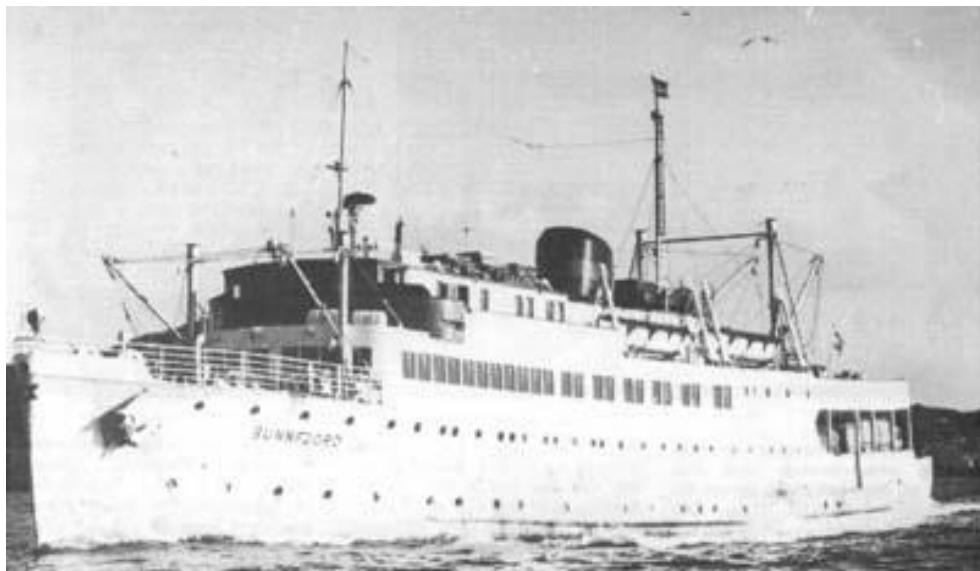


Figure 5: MS Sunnfjord

The conversion was so successful that the FSF bought and converted a sister ship, HMS Kilham (the former PCE-833), the following year^{[11](#)}.

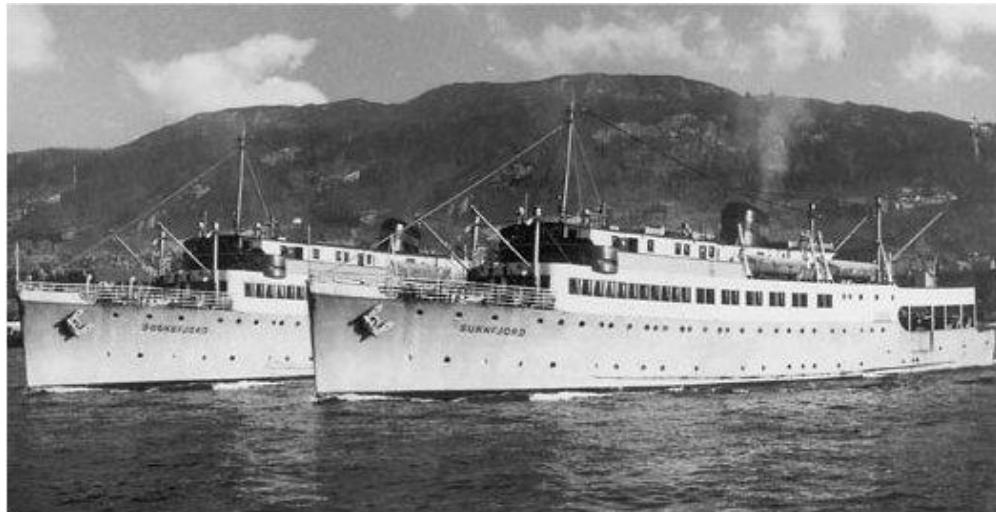


Figure 6: MS Sunnfjord (the former HMS Kildwick) with its sister ship MS Sognefjord (the former HMS Kilham)^{[15](#)}

The Sunnfjord had capacity for 738 passengers with berths for 138. High-quality leather seating was used in all the lounges^{[12](#)}.

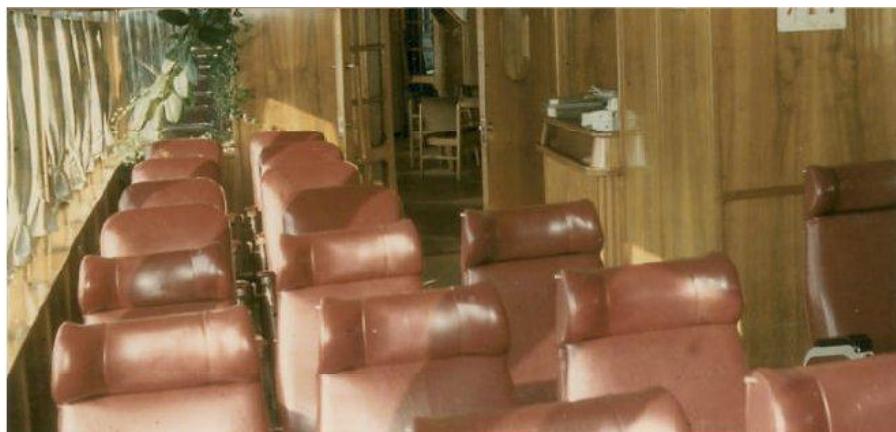


Figure 7: One of the lounges on the MS Sunnfjord

During the following years the Sunnfjord suffered a number of mishaps, including both groundings and collisions and, in 1974, it suffered a major engine failure which was so bad that the vessel did not return to regular service again. The ship was laid up permanently at Florvåg, and subsequently used as a source of spare parts for its sister ship, MS Sognefjord.^{[10,11](#)}

In 1978 the ship was sold to Finland (or possibly the ferry company was sold^{[13](#)} – in any event the vessel itself was not moved) and it was renamed Sunnfjord II^{[9](#)}.

It was sold again in October 1983 to the company Iris Scan AS of Oslo, who intended converting the ship for use as a floating office – but it was not to be. On October 22nd 1983, whilst being towed around the coast from Bergen to Oslo, Sunnfjord II, the former HMS Kildwick, the former PCE-832, started to take-on water; laid over on one side, and sank near the Feistein lighthouse just off Stavanger^{[14](#)}.



Figure 8: The last known photograph of the Sunnfjord. Taken on October 22nd 1983, just before it started on its final journey^{[15](#)}

Postscript – Orient Explorer

Even before the Sunnfjord sank, its sister ship, the MS Sognefjord, which the Sunnfjord had been cannibalised in order to maintain, had been withdrawn from service in Norway. But, unlike its sibling, the Sognefjord was to continue to have a long and interesting career^{[16](#)}.

In 1982, it was sold to a Norwegian film company; renamed Orion, and featured in the film “Orion’s Belt”.^{[17](#)}



Figure 9: HMS Kildwick’s star-struck sister, renamed Orion

Its film career over, Orion served for a number of years as a ferry in the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea.

The final change of name appears to have occurred in 1997, when it was sold to a company based in Rotterdam. Now called Orient Explorer, the craft is still in use (2009) as a diving-support vessel operating out of Thailand/Malaysia. It is still powered by the original GE engine installed when it was built in 1943¹⁸.



Figure 10: Orient Explorer, formerly Orion, formerly MS Sognefjord, formerly HMS Kilham, formerly PCE-833

Appendix – A Kildwick crew member

When we published the first issue of this article, at the end of 2011, the last thing we expected was to be contacted by someone who had sailed on the second HMS Kildwick. In fact we received an email from Cyril Dennis who, as a teenager, served aboard the vessel during WWII.

Since then we've prevailed upon Cyril to write his war-time memoirs; and his remarkable story can now be found on our website.

What next – can you help ?

Do you have any information about either HMS Kildwick ? Do you know any more about any connections between the ships and the village ? Do you have information about any of the second HMS Kildwick's crew ?

If so, please contact us by email to history@farnhill.co.uk. Alternatively, why not come along to one of our monthly meetings – details on the website.

References

HMS Kildwick (1) – WW1 Anti-submarine gunboat

- 1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kil-class_sloop
- 2 <http://www.rcgroups.com/forums/attachment.php?attachmentid=4142668>
- 3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dazzle_camo
- 4 <http://scientiamilitaria.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/335/372>

HMS Kildwick (2) – WW2 Convoy-escort vessel

- 1 <http://www.uboot.net/allies/warships/ship/6227.html>
- 2 <http://shipbuildinghistory.com/history/shipyards/4emergencysmall/pullman.htm>
- 3 <http://navalhistory.flixco.info/H/192596x53056/8330/a0.htm>
- 4 <http://www.naval-history.net/xDKEscorts21PV-Kil.htm>
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- 6 <http://www.uboot.net/boats/successes/details.php?boat=66>
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- 8 http://sixtant.net/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1300&Itemid=2

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- 10 http://faktaomfartyg.nu/pce_832_1943.htm
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- 14 www.skipet.no/fleetlister/lister/057.doc
- 15 <http://www.stp-norway.com/WebShop/utdrag-fraa-krigsskip-til-flaggskip.pdf> - This is an extract from the book "FRÅ KRIGSSKIP TIL FLAGGSKIP" by Otto Ersland, a definitive history of the WWII warships that served as passenger ferries in Norway. Unfortunately, only available in Norwegian.
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- 18 <http://www.fjordsteam.no/?p=261>
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- 20 Keighley News, May 12th 1945
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