

HMS Kildwick, MV Silvermaple and U-66: a fatal encounter

Early in 2026 the Farnhill and Kildwick Local History group were contacted by John Halliday, the great-nephew of William Candlish Brydson, the master of the ship MV Silvermaple. The sinking of this vessel and the death of Captain Brydson and others of his crew were described in [Part 2 of Cyril Dennis's HMS Kildwick memoir](#). John has kindly provided us with the following biographical information.

Whilst researching family history I had been investigating the story of my great-uncle Bill, so I was bowled over and deeply moved when I came across your website and the vibrant and candid memoir of Able Seaman Cyril Dennis, crew member on *HMS Kildwick* during the Second World War. In his fascinating account he describes amongst other things a fatal U-boat attack on the convoy that *HMS Kildwick* and others were escorting, off the coast of Africa, in February 1944. One merchant ship of the 19 in the convoy was torpedoed and sank. Cyril's description of how they rescued survivors is powerful enough in itself but he also relates how they discovered the dead body of the captain in one of the lifeboats and the subsequent funeral arrangements for him in a way I found uniquely moving.

The reason is simple. The captain he saw and described was none other than my great-uncle William Candlish Brydson, master of the *MV Silvermaple*.

William Candlish Brydson – a short biography

Bill, as he was known, was born 18 March 1905 in Palnackie, a small tidal port village near Dalbeattie, Kirkcudbrightshire, one of seven children. He and his siblings, including my paternal grandmother had already suffered the tragedy of losing their eldest brother on the Western Front near Arras in September 1918. By this stage the family had moved to Liverpool and, following a family tradition Bill and his brother James both left school at 16 to join the merchant navy. Aged 16 Bill had become a clerk in a firm of Chartered Accountants in Liverpool – Denton, Son, and Welsh. However, life behind a desk was not for him and so he joined the merchant navy as soon as he could. He joined a ship in Liverpool in 1923, aged 18, starting as Deck Boy, the lowest rank, which often did involve literally swabbing the decks.



William Candlish Brydson, taken around 1925

His first ship was the *SS Bereby* of the Elder-Dempster Line which traded between Liverpool, west and southern Africa and North America.

During the 1930s Bill and James both obtained their master mariner certificates but during the depression years they did not always have work, so they often stayed with their sister Marion, assisting her husband (my grandfather) John Halliday on board their coaster *MV Moucheron* transporting goods to the various ports between Glasgow, Dublin and Liverpool.

At the end of the 1930s Bill joined the Silver Line. Their ships were named after trees prefixed with the word 'silver'. This was a British registered company but ships, carrying cargo and limited passenger traffic, did not dock in the UK often, instead trading between Africa, India and North America.

Records show that Bill joined the *MV Silverguava*, as 2nd Officer in 1939, in North America, voyaging there from Liverpool to New York on the maiden voyage of the Cunard liner RMS *Mauretania* on 17th June, just months before she was converted into a troop ship for the duration of WWII.



Second Officer William Candlish Brydson, taken around 1930–5

During the early years of WWII, Bill continued to work for the Silver Line, first on the *Silverguava*, then, most likely in July 1943, joining her sister ship the *Silvermaple* when it was leased to the Elder Dempster Line for work on the Liverpool to West Africa routes, landing at Dakar, Takoradi, Lagos and Port Harcourt respectively.

Bill's last, fateful, voyage began in Gravesend, Kent on 4 January 1944, when he took the *Silvermaple* via Southend, and Methil in Fife to sail for Dakar, arriving 11 February. A few days later the *MV Silvermaple*, with a cargo of general goods and post, were allocated to Convoy STL.12. This convoy consisted of 13 merchant ships:

- *Anglo-Indian*
- *Clunepark*
- *Conakrian*
- *Dunkerque*
- *Empire Falcon*
- *Empire Flame*
- *Fort Chipewyan*
- *Fort Tadoussac*
- *Madras City*
- *Montaigne*
- *Silvermaple*
- *Stanhill*
- *Tombouctou*

They were escorted by 9 ships from the 57th Escort Group, West African Command, based in Freetown:

- *HMS Duncton*
- *HMS Fal*
- *HMS Kildwick*
- *HMS Kilkenzie*
- *HMS Lowestoft*
- *HMS ML 289*
- *HMS ML 574*
- *HMS Southern Gem*
- *HMS Southern Pride*

The code STL represented the convoy route from Freetown, Sierra Leone --- Lagos, modern Nigeria, via Takoradi and Sekondi. It operated between September 1943 and September 1944. In addition to local traffic, these convoys sometimes included ships destined for South America and the Cape, which peeled off on reaching safer waters.

STL.12, with the *Silvermaple*, arrived in Freetown on 15 February, where it unloaded, reloaded and refuelled, before setting off on 22 February for Takoradi, now Ghana, escorted by *HMS Kildwick* and the others.

The U-boat danger was ubiquitous and lethal, even at this stage in the war, and STL.12 was intercepted by U-66, captained by Oblt Gerhard Seehausen. U-66 had left its base in Lorient, Brittany, in January 1944 on its 9th and what turned out to be its last patrol. On 26 February, just after 6.00pm, some 130 miles west of Takoradi, Seehausen struck.

The 9 escort ships were completely taken by surprise and unable to prevent the attack. The *Silvermaple* took a direct hit, exploded and sank. Another ship was damaged but survived. The escorts then attacked the U-boat, launching 53 depth charges, but Seehausen had dived to 120 metres and despite minor damage was able to survive and escape, continuing to patrol in the area between Cape Palmas and Lagos. By their actions the escorts prevented further sinking and *HMS Kildwick* was instructed to pick up any survivors.

Through his actions in quickly launching lifeboats, Bill managed to save 47 crew members, 9 gunners and one passenger. However, he, along with five other crew members and one gunner, didn't make it. The survivors (and the bodies of those killed) were picked up by *HMS Kildwick* under Lt Peter Pannell RNVR, and transported to Takoradi on 27th February. The rest of the convoy continued as per instructions, reaching Lagos on 29th February.

Bill died of his wounds on 27th February 1944, aged 38. He is buried in the CWGC cemetery, Takoradi, Ghana. On his gravestone is inscribed:

ETERNAL REST GIVE TO HIM, O LORD; AND LET PERPETUAL LIGHT SHINE UPON HIM



CWGC cemetery, Takoradi, Ghana

C O D E	349	500	658	B	38	$\frac{44}{2}$	246	180	288
	Nat.	Rank or Rating	Cause of Death	Ship	Age Group	Date of Death	Res		

Record of Death of Merchant Seaman

Surname: **M** BRYDSON, Ship: M/V "Silvermaple"

Other Names: William Candlish Official No: 169925

Address: 8, Delamain Road, Port of Registry: London
Mrs Wife
Kildred St, West Derby, Liverpool, 12 British/Fishing/Foreign

Birthplace: Palnackie Country: Scotland Rank or Rating: Master **M.**

Date of Death: 27/2/44 Place of Death: At sea Age at Death: 44/2/3/05 38

Cause of Death: Died through injuries. Vessel sunk by enemy action.

Fpd by: *M. J. J.* Register Entry: E.A. Reg. Gen. 4

Ckd by: *M. J. J.* Year: 1944 Month: May Page: 8

The official record of the death of William Candlish Brydson

The date is given as 27th February 1944, although the U-boat attack on MV Silvermaple was the previous day and Brydson was found dead in the lifeboat when it was picked up by HMS Kildwick that evening

Postscript – the fate of U-66

Convoy STL.12 was unlucky. U-66 was the seventh most successful of the 1000 plus U-boats in the Germany Navy, sinking a total of 33 allied vessels under four captains – the *Silvermaple* being the first of four ships sunk by U-66 under its last captain, Gerhard Seehausen.

U-66 was itself sunk two and a half months after the sinking of the *Silvermaple*, on 6th May 1944 in the Atlantic west of the Cape Verde Islands, by depth charges, gunfire and from Avenger and Wildcat aircraft (VC-55 USN) of the US escort carrier USS Block Island, and by the US destroyer escort USS Buckley which also rammed the U-boat head on. Seehausen and 23 crew died. 36 survived and were rescued.

The U-66 survivors were interrogated by the US Navy and a "Report on the Interrogation of Survivors from U-66 sunk 6 May 1944", is available online at <https://www.uboatarchive.net/U-66A/U-66INT.htm> provides a wealth of detail on the boat, its crews and its nine patrols. This site also includes photos and other documents relating to the sinking of U-66.