

WILLIAM CONNELLY, Gunner 1780834, 2nd Maritime Regiment, RA, 27th Oct 1941

William Connelly is one of only two of those commemorated on the village War Memorial for there is a headstone in the village cemetery as well as being commemorated on the war memorial.

William was born on 21st May 1904, and the 1939 register shows him as a Painter and Decorator, living with his wife Clara (nee Matthews) and daughter Theresa (aged about 8). There may also be another child too (but the 1939 record remains closed – indicating the possibility of a surviving member of the family).

It's hard to read, but the address seems to be "Farmer's Arms Cottage"

James Connelly	34	1	Connelly William	M	31 May 04	Painter (Decor)
20 10 44		2	MATTHEWS Clara	F	6 Jun 03	Widow (Decor)
A - A M.		3	Connelly Theresa	F	3 May 31	School Girl

It appears from the UK Army Roll of Honour gives his birthplace as Carlisle and he appears to be the son of Stephen and Francis Connelly of that town.

William served with the 4th Battery, 2nd Maritime Regiment, Royal Artillery and as such would likely have been assigned as a gunner to a [Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship \(DEMS\)](#).

Maritime gunners sailed on a wide variety of merchant vessels: trawlers, coasters, freighters, ore carriers, tankers, passenger ships and others. They were often away at sea for months at a time, sometimes for over a year. They sailed alone or in convoys of up to 70 ships to destinations such as the Mediterranean, America and Canada, Russia, South Africa, Australia, and the Middle and Far East. The large passenger liners such as the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth and Mauretania were used as troopships and often sailed alone, relying on their speed to outrun the enemy. The Queen Mary could transport 15,000 troops at a time, and carried up to 200 DEMS gunners. Although tasked with defending merchant ships, maritime gunners also took part in offensive operations, serving on merchant vessels which took part in landings such as North Africa, Sicily, Normandy, and the South of France.



Perhaps the best known and most costly action for the maritime artillery was [Operation Pedestal](#), better remembered as the SS Ohio convoy to Malta. On 2 August 1942 fourteen merchant vessels with a strong naval escort set sail from the Clyde for Malta with desperately needed fuel and supplies. The convoy was under constant attack from 11th to the 15th August. Only five ships, four of which were badly damaged, arrived at their destination. Of the 162 maritime gunners who took part in the convoy, thirty were killed, six wounded and nineteen taken prisoner.

Fifty three maritime gunners stranded on Malta were ‘hijacked’ to bolster anti-aircraft units on the island, and soldiers rescued at sea found themselves stranded in distant ports.

Of the 24,000 Royal Navy gunners who served in DEMS 2,713 were killed. Official records state that 2,600 merchant ships were sunk and 30,000 merchant seamen lost their lives, the majority drowned or killed by exposure.

Maritime RA gunners are quite difficult to trace as records don’t tend to reveal which ship they were serving on when lost. However, William is **not** listed as a naval casualty and has a physical grave in Brompton-on-Swale cemetery, although that does not necessarily mean he is buried there, it could be a memorial headstone to someone lost at sea.

Eventually decided I had to order a copy of William’s death certificate.

Registration District RICHMOND.									
DEATHS in the Sub-District of RICHMOND in the County of YORK (N.R.)									
1941									
Columns :-	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	
No.	When and Where Died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Cause of Death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.
34	Twenty death October 1941 Farmer's Arms batteries Brompton-on-Swale Richmond	William Connelly	Male	36 Years	Gunner No 9/1780834 4 th Maritime Anti Aircraft Battalion Royal Artillery (Painter Journeyman)	Natural Causes Cerebral haemorrhage Certified by Francis R. Addison Coroner for West Yorkshire N.R. of York after Post Mortem without Inquest	E. Bosomworth Present at the death Farmer's Arms batteries Batterick Bridge Brompton on Swale Richmond	Twenty Eighth October 1941	Wellman Walker Registrar

This revealed that he died of natural causes, although sadly at the young age of 36. It also revealed he was an anti-aircraft gunner.

Sources:

- (1) WW2 Naval Casualty Lists <http://www.naval-history.net/xDKCas1003-Intro.htm#WW2>
- (2) Merchant Gunners – Article from Britain at War (Feb 2018) – with kind permission of the author David J.B. Smith, <https://davidjbsmith.weebly.com/the-merchant-gunners.html>
- (3) CWGC Grave Ref 231 [BROMPTON-ON-SWALE CEMETERY](https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2407122), England
<https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2407122>