

Talk020120

## January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 - 'The Forgotten War'- David James, West Wales Maritime Trust

David explained that German U-boats were very active in the Atlantic and Welsh maritime waters, up to the end of World War 1. They had orders to torpedo any enemy ship they saw.

On October 4<sup>th</sup> 1918 U-boat UB91 sank a Japanese ship, the Hirano Maru (the Japanese were our allies in the 1<sup>st</sup> WW) just off the Pembrokeshire coast and, from the 320 crew on board only 29 survived. Many bodies were washed up on Pembrokeshire beaches and were buried at the local churches. Most had no documentation of their names but the few that did were recorded in the Church records and the site of the burials had a memorial marker.

Angle Church had a wooden marker which survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century but then collapsed. David decided it would be a good gesture to replace the old wooden marker with a stone one. However this would be expensive and funding was required. He approached the Japanese Embassy and was given help by Setsu Kato, a Japanese photographer working in London. The Embassy was willing to provide the funding. David also checked the Church records which he found had the names of some of those buried. He gave them to the Embassy who carried out checks in Japan but only found one lady relative. She was the granddaughter of one of the sailors and was funded to fly over for the commemoration.

The event was attended by the Japanese Ambassador and the Duke of Gloucester represented the UK. The granddaughter fainted when she was told he was a member of the Royal Family. The stone is there to see in the Angle churchyard engraved in Japanese, English and Welsh.

David set another hare running. In the 1870s, the Pembroke Dockyard was building a warship for the Japanese Navy. A naval officer, 'Mr Togo', was billeted in the Dockyard to overlook the building of the ship. He enjoyed his time there and, as a thank you, arranged for a Ginko tree to be sent and planted in the Dockyard. The tree still survives and David mentioned this when he was in the Japanese Embassy. The Embassy requested a cutting to plant in their garden. It was explained that 'Mr Togo' prospered in his naval career and became Marshal Admiral Hehachero Togo who destroyed the Russian Eastern Fleet in 1905. He is the Japanese equivalent of our Admiral Nelson and is still greatly revered in Japan. This turned the initial request for a cutting into a 'forest' of requests from places in Japan with associations with Admiral Togo. The National Garden of Wales has been tasked to satisfy the demand.