

John & Elizabeth Rankin d 14 April 1941: Victims of the Barrow Blitz



IN
LOVING MEMORY OF
A DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER
JOHN RANKIN
AND HIS WIFE **ELIZABETH**
DIED THROUGH ENEMY ACTION
14TH APRIL 1941
AGED 58 AND 55

*Somehow I had missed John & Elizabeth Rankin in my various sweeps through the Cemetery Records. Thanks to the power of Facebook, I was contacted by their granddaughter and **her** granddaughter, who provided me with information.*

The grave stands somewhat isolated at the bottom of the Cemetery below a row of Commonwealth War Grave headstones.

The Rankin family were yet another pair of victims living in Vernon Street, one of the most bombed streets in the Barrow Blitz. 14th April was the first day of what became known as the Barrow Blitz. Local historian Bryn Trescatheric's *"The Barrow Blitz"* (Dock Museum 2009) has:

14th April (1941)

Air raid warning from 3.05 a.m. to 4.40 a.m. on Easter Monday. Two bombs were dropped on the Steelworks, one of which failed to explode; bombs fell on Vernon Street and Napier Street killing 14 people and totally demolishing six homes; a bomb on the Trevelyan Hotel ... killed five guests and demolished the Hotel. This bomb clipped the Technical College on its way down and the building today is minus its eastern gable. (p10)

A family tree (of Douglas Berry) on *Ancestry* says a son, John, was born 4 December 1911 (*NB according to my correspondent – his daughter, this is an error, and should be 1909*) in Barrow in Furness. *Cumbria BMD* has a John Rankin born 1909, mother's maiden name Smith; and a Catherine Smith Rankin born 1914; and an Agnes Jackson Rankin born 1916, as well as James in 1920. *I was able to find exact birth dates on Ancestry.*



The Rankin Family c1916
(photo kindly provided by the Berry family)

Left – Right

Dan b 17 January 1912

John b 9 Sept 1883

Catherine b 6 Feb 1914

Jean b 17 Feb 1909

Elizabeth b 12 Nov 1885

Agnes b 25 May 1916

John b 4 Dec 1909

For a woman with 5 children under the age of seven, Elizabeth looks remarkably composed, cheerful and proud. 1909 was a busy year!

From *Ancestry*, the **National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) 1941** has **RANKIN** Elizabeth of 48 Vernon-street Barrow-in-Furness widow died 14 April 1941 Administration **Lancaster** 30 October to Jean Allonby (wife of Wilson Allonby). Effects £262 12s 9d. *In the 1939 Register*, Jean (nee Rankin) was living with husband Wilson Allonby (Timber Faller) and his extended family at Sandground, Hawkshead.

In the **1939 Register** living at 48 Vernon Street, Barrow, were John Rankin (DoB 9 September 1883), Iron dresser, Shipyard; Elizabeth Rankin (DoB 12 November 1885) Unpaid Domestic Duties; and James Rankin (DoB 9 June 1920), Apprentice Fitter, Shipyard. (*Listed as Rawkin by Ancestry*).

The Rankins were not living at 48 Vernon Street in the **1911 Census**, but I haven't yet found them elsewhere. (June 2021)

John and Elizabeth's granddaughter told me that they came from Glasgow to Barrow. A vague family story was he came to play football but no proof has been found.

Of their children, Dan Rankin was born in Motherwell. Jean was also born in Scotland, but John, Catherine, Agnes and James were born in Barrow, or at least their births were registered there. (*Cumbria BMD*)

Also in the **1939 Register** are John and Elizabeth's son John Rankin [on the right in the family picture] (DoB 4 December 1910 – sic) Iron Moulder, and his wife Annie (DoB 22 October 1914), Unpaid Domestic Duties), living at 7F Blake Street. There is a third record which is redacted. John & Annie née Steele had married in the second quarter of 1936. Daughter Catherine Smith Taylor née Rankin (DoB 6 February 1914) is married to Arthur Taylor (DoB 3 March 1911), a Coach Painter (Cellulose) and living at 12 Strathmore Avenue. They had married in Barrow in Q2 1935, and later moved to Canada.

John and Elizabeth's son Dan received some news coverage in the local press:



This news account appeared in the *Barrow News* 26 September 1942:

**BARROW E.R.A. ON DESTROYER SIKH
SERVED ON H.M.S. NAIAD AND CUMBERLAND**

Mrs. Rankin, or 132, Marsh-street, Barrow, has received no news from her husband, E.R.A. Daniel S. Rankin, for a few weeks. The last word she had from him was to say he was still serving on the destroyer Sikh, which, burning, sank with guns firing to the last off Tobruk on 13 September, when a British party attacked the port.

Aged 31, he has been serving in the Navy for four years. He met his wife, of Plymouth, when his ship put in to the Devon port for repairs. They have been married about 12 months, and have a baby daughter, Elizabeth, who has not yet seen her father. Rankin served on the British cruiser, Naiad, from which he was transferred just prior to its sinking and was on the cruiser Cumberland, when it encountered the Graf Spee. Before joining the Navy he was a mechanic in the Rolls-Royce works at Derby.

KILLED IN BARROW'S "BLITZ"

His parents were killed on 14 April, 1941, when Vernon-street, Barrow was bombed. He has two brothers, one older, one younger than himself. One of his sisters lives in Barrow, the other two residing in the Lake District.

Mrs. Rankin's father, a widower, lives in a small village near Plymouth. Of her two brothers, one is in the Sudan and the other is in the West African Field Forces. They have not heard of the latter since the fall of Tobruk in June.

Better news came in the *Barrow News* 27 March 1943:

BARROW E.R.A. REPATRIATED

Mrs. D. Rankin, 132, Marsh-street, Barrow, on Thursday received a telegram from her husband, E.R.A. Daniel Rankin, who has been a prisoner of war in Italy, stating that he has been repatriated, is safe and well, and will be home soon. E.R.A. Rankin has been in the Navy for four years, and was taken prisoner off Tobruk on 12 September 1942. He is a Barrow man and served his apprenticeship as an engineer at the Shipyard, later going to Derby to work. It will be recalled that both his father and mother perished in the blitz on Vernon-street, in April, nearly two years ago. He has a daughter nine months old, whom he has not seen.

Daniel Smith Rankin married Emily J. Sings in the Tavistock Registration District of Devon in the third quarter of 1941, and died in the Medway District of Kent in September 1999 (DoB 17 January 1912).