

## John Peters COUCH

**Born:** 1859, Padstow, Cornwall  
**Occupation:** Ship's captain, Mercantile Marine  
**Enlisted:** Pre-war  
**Unit:** SS Rosalie  
**Rank/number:** Master Mariner  
**Death:** Killed in action, 20th February 1917  
**Detail:** John Couch died along with 20 of his crew when his ship *Rosalie*, a 4,000-ton merchant vessel, was sunk without warning by U-39 on 20th February 1917. German submarine ace Capt. Walter Forstmann torpedoed the vessel, which was bound for Salonica and then New York with a cargo of munitions and oats, 8 miles east of Djidjelli, Algeria.



**Age at death:** 58

**Military info:** The sailors of the Mercantile Marine were the lifeblood of Britain and the unsung heroes of the Great War. This civilian navy braved the threat of surface raiders and submarines to service both the fighting men abroad and their families at home. John Couch, torpedoed twice in three years, knew every voyage could be his last. On 10th August 1915 his freighter *Rosalie* was hit off the Norfolk coast by UB-10, commanded by sub ace Captain Otto Steinbrinck. John steered it close to shore at Cley-Next-The-Sea where it sank, but he escaped with his life. John worked for a Cardiff shipping firm founded by Padstow-born John Cory, who moved to Wales in 1872. Within a year of the sinking another Cory ship was sailing under the same name and it was in this vessel that John Couch and 20 of his crew died. In January 1917 Germany declared unrestricted submarine warfare and ship losses peaked. A month later the new *Rosalie* was sunk by Capt. Walter Forstmann in U-39. Judged by tonnage, Forstmann ended the war as the second highest scoring submarine captain of all time. By the close of WW1, 3,305 British merchant ships, 20 of them owned by Cory, had been lost at a cost of 17,000 lives.

**Grave/memorial:** John is commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial to the Merchant Service, and at St Petroc's Church, Padstow and on the Padstow War Memorial.

**Family info:** Father: John Couch, born Padstow, Cornwall in 1834. Ship's Pilot. Mother: Jane Peters Chalk, born Padstow in 1836. They wed in 1857 & had 7 children

**Additional info:** John married Cardiff girl Mary Maria Tillet in 1887. She was born in 1869. The newlyweds set up home in Cardiff, but later moved 10 miles west to Rhoose, a quiet town overlooking the Bristol Channel. They called their home Westward Ho! They had seven children, one of whom died.



This information was researched by Peter Smith, who is currently writing a book about Padstow's part in the Great War. Anyone wishing to correct errors or supply additional information can write to him at 24 Mallard Drive, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5PW. Also phone 01825 762226 or email smithpeter24@gmail.com.

+Lest we forget+