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CROYDON NEWS

# Last known survivor of 'Indian Titanic' found in South London

📅 11 October 2022 👤 James Twomey 💬 0 Comments

**By James Twomey and Claudia Lee**

The last known survivor from a cargo liner sunk in 1942 dubbed the *Indian Titanic* has been found living in South London.

Arvinbhai Jani, 83, who lives in Brigstock Road, Thornton Heath, was aboard the S.S. Tilawa ship which sank in the middle of the Indian Ocean during the Second World War.

On November 23, 1942, the British-built ship was travelling from Mumbai to South Africa when it was struck near the Seychelles by two Japanese torpedoes in the early hours of the morning.

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On board were 222 crew members, 732 passengers, nine lifeboats and more than 6,000 tons of cargo.



Clockwise from top left: S.S. Tilawa, Kash Kumar's late grandfather who drowned, Nichhabhai Chibabhai Solanki, and survivors in a lifeboat (Picture: Tilawa 1942)

The ship contained many Indian nationals – 280 of whom lost their lives.

Eventually a rescue mission led by a Royal Navy Cruiser HMS Birmingham and S.S. Carthage rescued 682 people, who were all taken back to Mumbai four days later.

Mr Jani was three years old during the Tilawa attack, and although he said he was too young to remember the event, he remembers his mother talking about how she “wrapped him in her sari and jumped into the lifeboat”.

His older sister, Chandraben Rawal, 86, who lives in



Ben

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Addiscombe, recalled how often her late mother, Vasantben Labshankar Jani, would speak of her survival account.

In order to make the last lifeboat, she had to wrap Mr Jani in her sari and make the jump from the boat.

In 1975, Mr Jani settled in Thornton Heath, along with other family members. He worked as a self-employed insurance broker.

A campaign to highlight the tragedy, called Tilawa 1942, has been spearheaded by radio presenter Kash Kumar, who lived in West Norwood for 23 years and whose grandfather drowned on the ship.

Mr Kumar and his son, Emile, made the discovery that Mr Jani was the last known survivor in the world of the tragedy.

Mr Kumar, who now lives in Leicester, said: "We lived as a family in West Norwood for 23 years and they were right on our doorstep. It's shocking. This young boy was on the same ship as my grandfather who drowned. My father was nine years old. It's very sad."

In 2017 a British exploration company visited the wreck site using a subsea vessel. It was always known that the cargo Tilawa was carrying the day it was sunk included silver.

It took more than six months to find 2,364 silver bars with a value of approximately £32m.

November 23, 2022, will mark 80 years since the tragedy. A commemoration has been organised on this date at the Royal Bombay Yacht Club, Mumbai, India.



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It will be the first time the incident is officially acknowledged and the loss of life memorialised.

Mr Jani said he is “excited and grateful” to the Tilawa 1942 team for bringing this story to the world for the 80th anniversary.

*Pictured top: Kash Kumar and Arvinbhai Jani (Picture: Tilawa 1942)*



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