CHAPTER 7

War and transformation (1914–1918)

Market conditions during the First World War[650]

The first years of the war were characterised by a 'business as usual' approach.[651] Companies took the opportunities offered under a regime of strict state neutrality, with the purpose of not taking sides in the war and keeping the country out of the conflict.[652] Expectations were that it would be short-lived, and Norway's economic development is described as a continuation of the peace economy.[653] The state remained neutral, but the industrial sector was left to itself and permitted to establish relations with both warring parties and other foreign countries.[654]

From 1916, the situation changed, with national authorities playing a more active role. Exports and imports became important policy areas and were considered crucial to the welfare of nations.[655] It also became more difficult to maintain strict neutrality as both warring parties repeatedly came up with conflicting demands. The historian Olav Riste characterises Norway's policy of neutrality as predominantly pro-British. This was because, firstly, it secured essential imports to the country; secondly, it was undesirable to come into conflict with Britain, which was perceived as a far more intimidating

650 The initial section draws on the chapter in my doctoral thesis, *The Scandinavian Lines og Sør-Afrikakonferansen*. An introduction to Chapter Four, Wartime and Amendments (1915–1923). Nygaard (2011), p. 109–111.

651 Keilhau (1927), p. 43; Riste (1965), p. 225.

652 Keilhau (1927), p. 39. This is particularly true for Norway. However, according to Keilhau, Norway, Sweden and Denmark developed under broadly similar lines.

653 Ibid., p. 43.

654 Ibid., p. 45; Riste (1965), pp. 60, 62, 225. The war also led Sweden, Norway and Denmark to collaborate and establish a common front in defence of the rights of neutral states. Initially, the Netherlands was also involved in discussions prior to this collaboration but was not included in the final agreement. High-level discussions led to a meeting held in Malmö in Sweden in December 1914, at which the foreign ministers and monarchs of the three countries convened to discuss the situation.

655 Riste (1965), p. 226.

counterpart than Germany; and thirdly, it was in line with public sympathies, which became increasingly pro-British as the war progressed.[656]

An economic boom in the Norwegian economy emerged during the war, offering many opportunities to make money. Shipping was one of the boom sectors, however, the shipping of goods overseas was becoming extremely dangerous and all ice exports to the UK, still Norway's main market, ceased.

Market conditions and the Norwegian ice export trade

Considerable quantities of ice were exported to the UK during the early war period, after which they practically ceased, while exports to the Scandinavian countries continued throughout the war (See Table 7-1). Exports to Denmark and Sweden increased in importance after the waters outside the UK were declared a war zone in 1915, and they continued to increase throughout 1916, when the UK Government implemented a ban on imports. In the last two years of the war, Norwegian ice was exported almost exclusively to Sweden and Denmark.

The decline affected all of the production and export centres in Norway. The war, including the prohibition of imports to the UK, exerted a major negative impact on the Norwegian natural ice industry.

Table 7-1. Norwegian ice exports distributed by country (1914–1918)

(Register tons)

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	Total	In %
UK	132,124	33,624	6,075	20		**171,843**	**60.22%**
Ireland	2,377					**2,377**	**0.83%**
Sweden	12,045	7,313	7,361	1,281	6,309	**34,309**	**12.02%**
Denmark	7,681	10,833	15,767	7,329	1,756	**43,366**	**15.20%**
Germany	3,685	407	625	99		**4,816**	**1.69%**
France	19,630	919				**20,549**	**7.20%**
The Netherlands		1,728				**1,728**	**0.61%**
Belgium	5,912					**5,912**	**2.07%**
Other countries	396	45				**441**	**0.15%**
Total	**183,850**	**54,869**	**29,828**	**8,709**	**8,085**	**285,341**	**100.00%**

Source: Compiled on the basis of Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade (1914–1918).

656 Ibid.

Prohibition of ice imports to the UK

Trade with the UK was further restricted on 10 May 1916, when the UK Government banned imports of ice unless the importer had a licence issued by the Board of Trade.[657] According to the historian Robert David, such licences do not seem to have been issued as imports ceased for the rest of the war.[658] Thos. J. Wiborg & Son evidently also sold ice to the UK in 1916, and four out of a total of seven ships sailed from Norway to the UK after 10 May. Why the company was able to send ice to the UK after the ban was announced is not known; it may have been that the ban initially applied to new contracts.[659]

The editor of the trade journal *Cold Storage and Produce Review* reacted strongly to the ban, if somewhat sarcastically, *'We can't get it so we won't have it, says the Government'*.[660] He went on to state that the ice trade was one of the last one would have expected to be prohibited, not least because the tonnage involved was negligible in a maritime context. He assumed that the government was acting '*on principle*', adding '*but we do not think their move a wise one*'. He pointed to the fisheries sector, especially in Ireland, which needed Norwegian natural ice to supplement artificial supplies, particularly so in summer.

That the ban ended all imports of natural ice to Britain and Ireland for the rest of the war led, as the periodical had anticipated, to supply problems and shortages of ice since factory-produced ice was unable to replace the loss in natural ice imports.[661] In August 1918, the headline in *Cold Storage and Produce Review* was '**No Ice!**' The shortage was keenly felt, especially in the Irish fisheries, which previously imported thousands of tons of ice from Norway and were now struggling due to the lack of ice.[662]

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657 David (1995), p. 66.

658 Ibid.

659 The last of the ships, the SS *Dido*, loaded with 256 tons of ice, arrived safely in Newcastle on 22 August. However, on 22 October, the SS *Dido* was captured by a German submarine and sunk on passage from Stavanger to West Hartlepool. Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920), p. 99; Uboat.net. *Ships hit during WW1 Dido*. The captain of the submarine that sank the *SS Dido* was Otto von Schrader, who later became Admiral and Commander-in-Chief of the German *Kriegsmarine* patrolling the west coast of Norway during the Second World War.

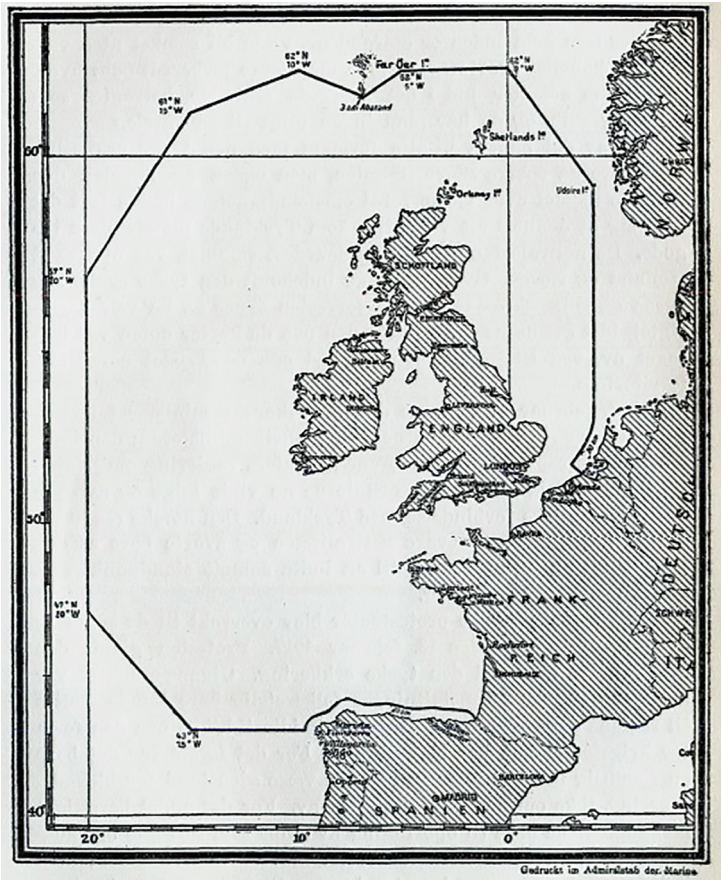
660 Cold Storage and Produce Review. Vol. XIV, no. 218 (18 May 1916).

661 *Cold Storage and Produce Review* (16 August 1917), p. 170, (15 August 1918), Vol. XXI, no. 215.

662 *Cold Storage and Produce Review* (15 August 1918), Vol. XXI, no. 215.

This, in turn, led to a decline in the quality of the fish, since it was not put on ice until a long time after it had been caught. The editor was in no doubt that: *'the whole national ice question is one that calls for urgent attention.'*[663]

At the same time as the problems with the ice supply arose, the problems for the shipping industry grew worse also, considerably so when Germany declared, on 31 January 1917, that from 4 February, all ships within delimited zones around the UK, France and around Italy would be regarded as enemy vessels and sunk without warning.[664] (See Map 7-1).



Map 7-1. The main German vessel restriction zone of 31 January 1917.
Source: Keilhau (1927), p. 183.

663 Ibid.
664 Keilhau (1927), pp. 182–184.

The UK authorities were also concerned with controlling as much Norwegian tonnage as possible. On 19 March 1917, they issued a memorandum expressing a wish to reach satisfactory arrangements for meeting Norway's need for coal and the management of the Norwegian merchant navy.[665] Subsequent discussions and agreements led to the creation on 23 April 1917 of a steamship convoy system, whereby North Sea trading vessels could be escorted between Bergen in Norway and Lerwick in Shetland.[666] Two months later, T. J. Wiborg wrote to his brother-in-law Amandus Raaum, saying that all steamships travelling between the UK and Scandinavia were joining convoys between Shetland and Bergen, escorted by English warships:

> '… there are about 10 steamships in each convoy. Warships sail tirelessly around the convoy in pairs at a speed of 60 knots, and within, destroyers sail around at the same speed. Still, it happens that a vessel is sent to the bottom, because the submarines lurk below the surface …'[667]

After the system was put in place, noticeably fewer steamships were sunk. Sailing ships, which were in extensive use during the war, continued however to travel unescorted. It was impossible to sail in a convoy; their passage depended on the speed and direction of the wind, and they were unable to keep up with the steamship escorts.

Thos. J. Wiborg & Son

Ice exports

Ice exporters had a good year in 1914, not least Thos. J. Wiborg & Son which achieved its third largest export volume since it was established in 1899 (see Figure 7-1). Only two cargoes of ice were shipped to Germany: one in April, bound for Swinemünde; and one in May–June, to Sassnitz.[668] Initially, the company signed three large German contracts mediated by

665 Keilhau (1927), p. 191.
666 Ibid., p. 201.
667 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1917–1920), p. 43. Letter of 23 June 1917.
668 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).

the agent W. Schumann.[669] None of them were completed, however, most likely because they were cancelled. According to the terms of the contracts, cancellation was permissible provided that notice was duly given on payment of a forfeit of 50 Pfennig per ton.[670] This marks the start of a seven-year hiatus in Thos. J. Wiborg & Son's export of ice to Germany, which continued until 1921. It is not known if exports were resumed since no chartering journal exists for the years after 1920.[671] Wiborg's business dealings with Germany may have ceased entirely.

Exports to the other warring parties, most notably Britain, continued throughout 1914 even after the outbreak of war, and new contracts were signed for 1915. Naturally, the war was a major topic of discussion in the company's correspondence, and Director Johnston of Joseph Johnston & Sons in Montrose addressed the issue in a letter to Wiborg in November 1914:

> This war is indeed a ghastly affair and was not sought for by France, Britain or Russia, the militarism of Germany is alone to blame. We trust this will be broken once and for all although it will be difficult to do, and so allow the European races to live peaceably for many years to come.[672]

One change which should be noted in Thos. J. Wiborg & Son's exports is that, as can be seen in Table 7-3, the number of cargoes with purchased ice increased. While in 1913, the company produced 60% of the ice and purchased 40%, much larger quantities were purchased from other companies in the following years: 85% in both 1914 and 1915. Clearly, the company did not maintain its own production. In 1916, 82% of the cargoes carried purchased ice and in 1917 and 1918, all exported ice was purchased from other companies. Since export volumes had plummeted, from 151 cargoes in 1914 to only three in 1918, this was probably a sensible decision.

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669 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Protocol with ice contracts (1910–1915). Two contracts, 2 January and 6 January 1914. The first was for the transport of a shipment of between 1,000 and 2,000 tons to Bremen, and the other two were for transport to Geestmünde, with one shipment of between 3,000 and 4,000 tons, and the other of at least 1,250 tons. All three were due to be loaded in March or April, before war broke out.

670 Ibid.

671 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).

672 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Protocol with ice contracts (1910–1915). Letter of 19 November 1914 from Joseph Johnston & Sons Ltd., Montrose, Scotland.

Labour and operational costs were rising, which the company may not have been able to pay if the ice was not sold.

As already mentioned, on 1 February 1915, UK waters were declared a war zone by the German Admiralty.[673] This led to a sharp reduction in fisheries activities, and fishing out of ports such as Newhaven, Dover and Grangemouth virtually stopped altogether.[674] The result was less demand for Norwegian ice.[675] Nevertheless, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son continued to export ice throughout the year, although at volumes that were a third down on the previous year and only half of that in 1913.[676] The company doubled its share of total Norwegian ice exports from 11% in 1913 to 22% in 1915, as other exporters withdrew either entirely or in part from the trade as the war progressed. In April, T. J. Wiborg wrote about the ice situation in 1915:

> It has been a miserable year for the trade so far. The war is closing everything down! Nobody wants to go to Germany, or even down the Channel. Only one or two shipments have left Kristiania all year.[677]

The economic historian Robert G. David describes 1915 as a year when the market for ice went into a steep decline. Demand in the fisheries sector fell by more than 5,000 tons per month.[678] According to the principle of supply and demand, this should have resulted in falling prices. However, this was not the case.[679] In fact, although the market shrank, it also remained stable, and Thos. J. Wiborg & Son maintained a healthy level of exports to the UK throughout 1915.[680] However, North Sea shipping was becoming increasingly dangerous, not only due to the minefields that had been laid at the start of the war, but also because of the German Navy.[681]

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673 Keilhau (1927), pp. 182–184
674 David (1995), p. 65.
675 Ibid.
676 Thos. J. Wiborg Achive. Chartering journal (1913–1921).
677 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1911–1917), p. 662. Letter without heading, April 1915.
678 David (1995), p. 65.
679 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).
680 Ibid. Chartering journal (1906–1920), Protocol with ice contracts (1910–1915).
681 Keilhau (1927), p. 59.

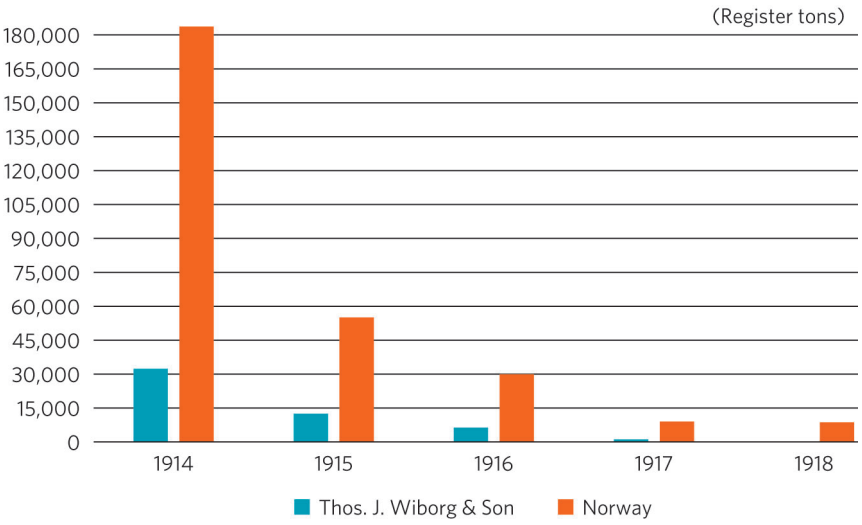


Figure 7-1. Volumes of ice exported by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son and Norway (1914–1918).

Sources: Compiled on the basis of the Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journals (1914–1918); Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade (1914–1918).

Thos. J. Wiborg & Son's exports to the UK continued in 1915 but in much smaller quantities. As can be seen in Table 7-1, it sold no more than just over 6,000 tons of ice to the UK. However, the company's share of all Norwegian ice exports was considerably higher than prior to the war. Ice was shipped to the east coast of Scotland and England, as well as to the southeast coast of Ireland. No ice appears to have been shipped further south on the east coast than King's Lynn in Norfolk, confirming Wiborg's assertion that it was difficult to persuade chartered ships to travel to ports located in and around the English Channel.[682]

Much like in previous years, sales contracts were concluded in the autumn and delivered during the following year (in this case, concluded from October 1914 to September 1915, with deliveries from February to November 1915). Much of the ice was intended for the fishing sector, and the largest customer was the Great Grimsby Ice Co. Ltd., which supplied the Grimsby fishing fleet with ice. Thos. J. Wiborg & Son sold 2,135 tons of ice to Grimsby in 1915, and this was the only Norwegian ice sold to

682 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1911–1917), p. 662. Letter without heading, April 1915.

Grimsby that year.[683] In fact, as can be seen in Table 7-2, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son was the only Norwegian company to export ice to eight of the ten ports it exported to in the UK in 1915.

From the outbreak of the war, the value of ice started to increase; it almost doubled between 1914 and 1915, and remained high throughout 1915.[684] Shipping rates also rose sharply and pressures on the trade were exacerbated by the constant hazards of sailing in a war zone.[685] Thus, although the value of ice was higher, the company's profits did not increase correspondingly. Abrupt and unpredictable increases in the cost of chartering made it risky to enter into sales agreements on a CIF basis, since agreements of this kind included the chartering cost.[686] In order to address this uncertainty, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son explained the issue to its business associates and proposed to use a different type of contract.[687] The ice was to be offered at a fixed price, acceptable to both parties, where transport was not included.[688] Thos. J. Wiborg & Son would be paid on the basis of the number of long tons of ice weighed at the unloading port, and the transport was to be covered by the importer. Sales were made under these terms in Montrose, Perth and Sunderland in 1915.

683 Comparison of the company's exports in the Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1915); total Norwegian exports published in the trade journal *Cold Storage and Produce Review* (20 January 1916).

684 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920), Protocol with ice contracts (1910–1915).

685 Tenold (2019), p. 80; Koltveit & Bjørklund (1989), p. 177; Koltveit & Bjørklund (1990), p. 269; Johansen (1940), p. 13; Keilhau (1927), pp. 178–179; Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920). Thos. J. Wiborg & Son's profits were based on sales revenues less the purchase price of the ice and the vessel chartering cost.

686 Ibid.

687 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Protocol with ice contracts (1910–1915). Letter, 19 November 1914, from Joseph Johnston & Sons Ltd. The contract lay between the CIF and FOB types.

688 Ibid. Two shillings per ton applied to spring shipments, and three shillings for summer shipments.

Table 7-2. Ice exports to British and Irish ports by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son/Norway (1915)[689]

(Volumes in tons)

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Total	Norwegian Exports
Anstruther			224		207						**431**	**435**
Berwick	227				160						**387**	**180**
Grimsby	542				543	788		262			**2,135**	**2,164**
King's Lynn				377							**377**	**378**
Kirkcaldy			142			132		86	135		**495**	**500**
Montrose		192			182		176			186	**736**	**744**
Newcastle			828					127			**955**	**3,669**
Perth				290		436					**726**	**720**
Sunderland				163			153				**316**	**1,662**
Waterford		240									**240**	**240**
Total	**542**	**659**	**1,194**	**830**	**1,092**	**1,356**	**329**	**475**	**135**	**186**	**6,798**	**10,692**
Shiploads	1	3	3	3	4	3	2	3	1	1	24	

Sources: Compiled on the basis of the Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1915); data from *Cold Storage and Produce Review* (20 January 1916).

Ice transport and chartered ships

During the First World War, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son exported 376 shiploads of ice, only two of which were not carried in chartered vessels.[690] (See Table 7-3). Ice was carried primarily by vessels based in Denmark (220) and Sweden (52), and a few from other countries, such as Germany (1), the Netherlands (2) and Russia (2). Exports of Norwegian ice continued to be part of the international shipping market, also during the First World War. One notable example is that of a German sailing ship which carried ice from Norway to Denmark, both of which were neutral countries, in 1915. Of the 376 vessels used to carry ice, 338 were sailing ships. Sailing ships again dominated the trade during the course of the war, because the steamships were busy with carrying more crucial war commodities.[691] None of the ships were sunk while chartered by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son,

689 Exports reported in the trade periodical *Cold Storage and Produce Review* refer to the town of Methil, which is in the same region as Anstruther, and to the identical volume of ice (435 tons) as stated in the Wiborg Archive relating to a shipment to Anstruther. Norwegian exports to Berwick (180 tons) reported in *Cold Storage and Produce Review* are less than exports reported in the Wiborg chartering journal (387 tons).

690 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1914–1918). The vessel *Bethel* transported a shipment in July 1915 and the *Eglantine* did likewise in August 1916.

691 Keilhau (1927), p. 191.

presumably due to most of the ice being carried mainly to Denmark and Sweden, which were outside the war zone around the UK.

The ice cargoes the company transported to Sweden and Denmark were smaller in size than those shipped to the UK prior to the war. The reason was partly due to smaller individual sales and partly that the larger vessels were employed in transporting crucial war commodities.[692] Sales to Denmark and Sweden increased, but this did not compensate for the loss of the company's UK market. Both the size and the number of ice cargoes were in decline. The average weight fell from 214 register tons per cargo in 1914 to 43 in 1918, while the value per register ton remained the same.[693] The war thus resulted in a marked downturn in export volumes. The decline reached its lowest point in 1918, and in 1919, after the war was over, the trade began to recover.

Table 7-3. Nationality, number and types of ships transporting ice, together with bought ice cargoes (1914–1918)

Chartered by Thos. J. Wiborg/Thos J. Wiborg & Son

Year	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	Total
Denmark	60	78	65	16	1	220
Sweden	15	23	8	5	1	52
Russia	2					2
Germany		1				1
The Netherlands		1				1
Total foreign	**77**	**103**	**73**	**21**	**2**	**276**
Total Norwegian	**74**	**14**	**10**	**1**	**1**	**100**
Total ships	**151**	**117**	**83**	**22**	**3**	**376**
Foreign in %	51%	88%	88%	95%	67%	73%
Norwegian in %	49%	12%	12%	5%	33%	27%
Steamships	33	1	4			**38**
Steamships in %	22%	1%	5%	0%	0%	10%
Foreign St.	4	1				5
Bought ice cargoes	129	99	68	22	3	**321**
Bought in %	85%	85%	82%	100%	100%	85%

Sources: Compiled on the basis of the Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).

692 We refer to discussions that took place between Norway and the UK regarding deployment of the Norwegian Fleet.

693 102 register tons per cargo in 1915 (or 79 tons if we exclude sales to Britain), 71 in 1916 and 51 in 1917.

Loss of the UK market

The war forced major changes on Thos. J. Wiborg & Son. One was the loss of the UK market. This led to a severe drop in the company's sales. In 1914, it transported 151 shiploads, and 103 in 1915 when UK waters became a war zone. Exports continued to plummet following the implementation of the ban on ice imports to the UK in May 1916. In 1917, only 22 ice cargoes were shipped. By 1918, shipments had virtually ceased; the records show that only 3 shiploads of ice were transported. The company managed to compensate for some of this by increasing exports to other Scandinavian countries. From 1915 to 1917, former large-volume contracts with UK importers were replaced by smaller agreements with companies in Sweden and Denmark. But turnover continued to decline, a trend that went on throughout the war. After peace was declared, exports to Sweden and Denmark gradually resumed (in 1919), but it was not until 1920 that trading with the UK and continental Europe started up again.[694]

Sales to Denmark: the case of Lemvig

Thos. J. Wiborg & Son's reorientation towards Scandinavian markets can be followed via its operations in Lemvig in Denmark, from 1913 to 1920. The good catches of haddock from the Thyborøn Canal outside Lemvig attracted cutters from other ports, and from 1913, Lemvig gained increasing importance as a fishing port.[695] This marked the beginning of a boom from which Thos. J. Wiborg & Son was able to benefit.

Harbourmaster Andreas Johan Andersen Rønberg (1873–1939) was a leading figure in the Lemvig community. He was born in the town but pursued a career at sea in Russia.[696] He returned to Denmark in 1905, and in 1907 was employed as the harbourmaster at Lemvig, simultaneously founding a broking and freight-forwarding business.[697]

694 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).

695 Damgaard (2020).

696 Lemvig Museum (1957). Letter to the museum from Johan Rønberg, son of A. Rønberg. During the Russo-Japanese War, Andreas Rønberg was stationed in Port Arthur, Manchuria, and served as a blockade runner, carrying important mail.

697 Ibid.

The following year, he co-founded and became chairperson of the Lemvig Fisheries Association.[698] The number of cutters fishing out of Lemvig harbour increased in 1913, from 41 in April to 63 in May.[699] To supply the fisheries sector with ice, the Lemvig Ice House Company was founded by the Lemvig Fisheries Association and an ice house was constructed.[700] Some of the ice was taken from the local Lemvig Lake, while the remainder was imported from Norway. In 1913, 282 tons were harvested from the lake and 161 tons were imported.[701] The Norwegian imported ice was exported by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son, which had signed a contract for the delivery of between 100 and 200 tons of ice to Lemvig on 23 October.[702] The ice was sold via broker Poul Lund to the Lemvig harbourmaster A. Rønberg, and on 6 November, the schooner *Jens Riis* was loaded. On arrival in Lemvig, it unloaded 159 tons of ice.[703]

In October 1914, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son sold yet another cargo of ice to Rønberg, mediated by the broker Poul Lund.[704] On 28 November, the schooner *Marie* was on its way to Lemvig carrying 204 tons of ice.[705] By this time, the First World War had broken out, and in the years that followed, Wiborg sold large volumes of ice to Lemvig. Soon, Wiborg and Rønberg began to conduct their business without mediation, and after May 1916, most of the vessels used for transport were chartered via Rønberg.[706] A large quantity of ice was sold but transported in smaller ships. In 1915, when 850 tons of ice were sold, nine shiploads were sent between August and November.[707]

In 1916, two new ice houses were built in Lemvig.[708] The first was built by the Fisheries Association next to Lemvig Lake, in addition to the 'Skagen

698 Lemvig Museum; Gjerløv (1983), p. 7.
699 *Dansk Fiskeritidende* (30 May 1913), p. 259. Cited in Damgaard (2020).
700 *Dansk Fiskeritidende* (1914), p. 612; Damgaard (2020). Transcriptions by Ellen Damgaard of conversations with P. Sand Bruun made in Lemvig in 1973.
701 Ibid.
702 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Protocol with Ice contracts (1913–1914). Contract of 23 October 1913.
703 Ibid. Chartering journal (1906–1920), p. 99.
704 Ibid. Protocol with Ice contracts (1913–1914). Contract of 23 October 1913.
705 Ibid. Chartering journal (1906–1920), p. 99.
706 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).
707 Ibid.
708 *Dansk Fiskeritidende* (31 March 1916, p. 154, 1 August 1916, p. 367). Cited in Damgaard (2020).

Ice house' where Rønberg was the director.[709] Naturally, ice was in high demand given that it was essential to the handling and preservation of quality of the haddock, on which a good price depended.[710] During this year, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son sold 2,200 tons of ice to Lemvig between April and October, distributed in 23 shiploads.[711]

In the winter of 1916/1917, a large ice factory was built in Lemvig by John M. Larsen, a Danish-American businessman from Chicago.[712] The plant had a production capacity of 25 tons of ice a day. The purpose of the factory was to be a *'means of attracting fisheries to Lemvig and securing the town a base for a lucrative sea-going fishery.'*[713] However, the plant could not start operations immediately because fuel oil was unobtainable.[714] But there was optimism in Lemvig and the new large ice factory was going to start operating as soon as fuel oil was obtained. In the meantime, ice was imported, and in 1917, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son sold 13 shiploads (800 tons) of ice to the town.[715]

However, 1918 marked the beginning of the end for Lemvig as a fishing port and ice importer. Thyborøn Harbour, which was further out in the fjord and closer to the fishing grounds, had been established as a fishing harbour in the years 1916 to 1918, and much of the fleet had moved from Lemvig to Thyborøn Harbour. The Lemvig Fisheries Association had built one ice house in Thyborøn in 1913 and a second followed in 1916.[716] The sale of natural ice to Lemvig declined and Thos. J. Wiborg & Son sold their last shipment to the town – a mere 41 tons – in May 1918.[717] In 1919, it sold a somewhat larger shipment, 61 tons, to the new port at Thyborøn.

The ice plant at Lemvig closed down in December 1920 and the machinery was moved to the coastal town of Esbjerg. The reason for the closure was simply that Lemvig lost in the competition with Thyborøn. Thyborøn

709 Ibid.
710 *Dansk Fiskeritidende* (1 August 1916), p. 369. Cited in Damgaard (2020).
711 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1916), pp. 93–100.
712 Damgaard (2020).
713 *Lemvig før og nu, i Jydske Byer og deres Mænd* (1917), p. 236ff. Cited in Damgaard (2020).
714 Ibid.
715 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).
716 Lemvig Museum; Gjerløv (1983), p. 8.
717 Ibid.

had taken over as the centre for the fisheries and the boom in Lemvig was over.

An ice factory was not built at Thyborøn until 1930, and the import of natural ice continued until the factory started operating.[718]

Expansion into broking and shipowning

Another major change that occurred during the war was that the company expanded into broking and shipowning. This was a sector that Thos. J. Wiborg & Son had been considering entering for a long time and one that in many ways can be considered an expansion of the existing business rather than a transition to something new. The Wiborg family had been involved in shipping since T. J. Wiborg Snr established himself in Brevik as a timber merchant over 80 years earlier, and now that ice exports were on the decline, it seemed sensible to shift the weight over to shipping.

The ice industry had been in decline since the turn of the century and as the 20th century progressed, the company accumulated expertise in the shipping sector. As the war created a boom in shipping, the company probably considered that this was the right time to make the actual expansion.

Purchasing a vessel is not something to be done on impulse, especially if it is not intended as a short-term investment but rather as part of a long-term commitment to the shipping business. Creating a shipping business relied on acquiring a wide range of information and knowledge, spanning from pricing and technical issues to market knowledge.

Thos. J. Wiborg & Son was a 'frontline firm', directly exposed to uncertainties in the market, and had links with a number of 'supporting groups' of brokers, agents and others from which assistance could be sought.[719] (See also Chapter 2 Brokers and knowledge of the market). For both the ice and the shipping industries, this arrangement made it possible for relatively small companies to conduct international trade. The difference between the ice export and shipowning business was,

718 Ibid.

719 Andersen (1997), p. 483.

perhaps, not so great for Thos. J. Wiborg & Son, especially in the context of the North Sea trade. The company was accustomed to dealing with brokers and agents, not only in connection with ice sales, but also in the business of chartering ships. It had been active as a charterer in the shipping sector for more than 40 years and now assumed the novel role of shipowner. It is likely that vessel purchases were made through the shipbrokers who the company had long been in contact within connection with chartering, and who were now assigned a new role. It was also through the shipbrokers that Thos. J. Wiborg & Son obtained the cargoes for the ships it would now be managing.[720] One difference from the ice export business was that instead of having sales mediated by agents in the UK, the cargoes were arranged mostly by Norwegian brokers. Cargoes carried to and from Denmark, Sweden and Germany were also, to some extent, mediated by brokers in these countries.[721] As far as we can see from the available sources, no UK brokers were directly involved in obtaining cargoes other than ice for Thos. J. Wiborg & Son.[722] It is possible that the UK brokers collaborated with Norwegian brokers because they had a better overview of the Norwegian shipping market, and that in such cases, the cargo was mediated by two brokers. The knowledge required for expanding business activities to include shipowning and broking was largely accessed through the company's long-standing business links, and undoubtedly through the crews and skilled people employed.

Preparing the ground

As discussed in the previous chapter, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son already had extensive experience in shipping operations under time-charter terms. Since 1898, the Wiborg companies had used ships on a time-charter basis.[723] During the first years, the ships carried ice out and, if the ice

720 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journals (1872–1920).
721 Ibid.
722 Ibid.
723 Ibid.

market did not permit the vessel to return to Norway in ballast for a new ice cargo, the vessel would carry coal imports as a means of making the best possible use of the chartered ship.[724] In 1898, three steamships, the SS *Björn*, SS *Italia* and SS *Valhal*, operated under time-charter terms for at least part of the year.[725] The main reason for this was probably to secure T. & A. Wiborg sufficient tonnage to transport the 171 shiploads of ice the company sold that year. It was only towards the end of the year, in September and October, that there are records of two returning cargoes of coal. In 1900, Thos. J. Wiborg engaged the steamship SS *A. Dekke* on time charter for parts of the year and, as in 1898, used it primarily for ice transport, although once again, at least two return cargoes of coal were transported in September and October.[726] The same mix appears in 1906, when SS *Valhal* was retained on time charter, also for parts of the year. Ice was primarily transported, although yet again, one return cargo of coal is recorded for September. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, T. J. Wiborg was not satisfied with the ship's earnings, and another four years went by before the company again engaged a ship on time charter. It has been impossible to ascertain how much revenue these ships yielded. Perhaps not very much, which may explain why he abandoned time chartering, or perhaps quite a great deal, which may explain why he turned towards ship ownership.[727] Regardless, around 1907, it seems that Wiborg was considering investing in his own ships. Invitations to invest in shipping companies are recorded in the company's archives in 1907, 1911, 1912 and 1916.[728] He kept himself updated in the shipping sector, and diversification into shipping may have looked like a real possibility.

The company continued to transport goods for other parties in 1910, and activities increased towards and during the First World War (see Table 7-4). All voyages up until 1915, when the company finally invested

724 Ibid.
725 Ibid.
726 Ibid.
727 Ibid. Chartering journal (1906–1920), p. 9.
728 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Folder with nine investment invitations (1907–1916).

in its own ships, were carried out with tonnage on time charter. In contrast to the export of ice, which was transported from Norway to the UK or the Continent, this newer activity focused much more on return passages, crossing the North and Baltic Seas, with detours into the English Channel. The return passages often involved transporting the following cargoes: grain from German Baltic ports to destinations in Scandinavia, the UK and Belgium; coal from the UK to Belgium and Scandinavia; and timber and wood processing products from Scandinavia and the Baltic countries to the UK and the Continent. Other goods included turbine pipes, which were shipped from Rotterdam to a power plant that was under construction in Tyssedal in Norway. Sacks of potatoes were shipped from Ghent in Belgium to Swansea in Wales. Norwegian ice was also a commodity among the various other commodities that Thos. J. Wiborg & Son transported on behalf of other companies.

Table 7-4. Cargoes transported by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son for other parties (1910–1920)

Cargo / Year	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	Sum
Coal coke cinders	7		13	12	3	4	23	11	3	13	8	**97**
Timber	1		2	4		4	24	11	2	11	7	**66**
Grain	1		5	10								**16**
Herring in barrels	1		1	1							1	**4**
Ice as carrier	2		2									**4**
Salt/ saltpeter			1	3								**4**
Wet pulp	1		1							1	1	**4**
Cement	2											**2**
Stone				1							1	**2**
Phosphate			1									**1**
Potatoes in sacks			1									**1**
Turbine pipes	1											**1**
Sum bulk/timber/food	**16**	**0**	**27**	**31**	**3**	**8**	**47**	**22**	**5**	**25**	**18**	**202**
Own ice	183	172	96	133	151	117	83	22	3	20	35	**1,015**
Sum total	**199**	**172**	**123**	**164**	**154**	**125**	**130**	**44**	**8**	**45**	**53**	**1,217**

Source: Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).

If we ignore the ice exports, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son's company was reminiscent of a small tramp shipping company, where the ship or ships were concluded for one or more voyages with cargo before being returned to the shipowner at the final unloading port.[729] The company would then have to find a new cargo for the ship. The special aspect was that the company was also a significant exporter of ice.

In hindsight, the period from 1910 to the First World War can be seen as a learning, or experimental, phase during which the company gained experience in shipping operations and transport activities (by using chartered vessels), with the aim to move into ship ownership one day. Alternatively, the activities between 1910–1914 may simply have been undertaken for short-term gains. The experiment was self-financing and did not involve any major investments. As such, it could have been abandoned without the company losing large sums of money. Regardless, circumstances changed during the First World War.[730] In 1915, at the age of 70, Wiborg made a decision to invest in his own tonnage and, at the same time, launch a shipbroking business involving the purchase and sale of ships. A boom was underway, freight rates were increasing and there were big profits to be made in the sector.[731] Available sources provide no record of the shipbroking business as such, although advertisements printed in the newspaper *Norges Handels og Sjøfartstidende* in the spring of 1916 (reproduced in Picture 7-1), indicate that the company was active in the sale and purchase of ships on behalf of other parties.[732] It appears that the company was engaged in a traditional shipbroking business whereby it received a commission on the contract price.

Other similar advertisements printed in the same newspaper indicate that the company faced a great deal of competition in this field, which may help to explain why advertisements for shipbroking under

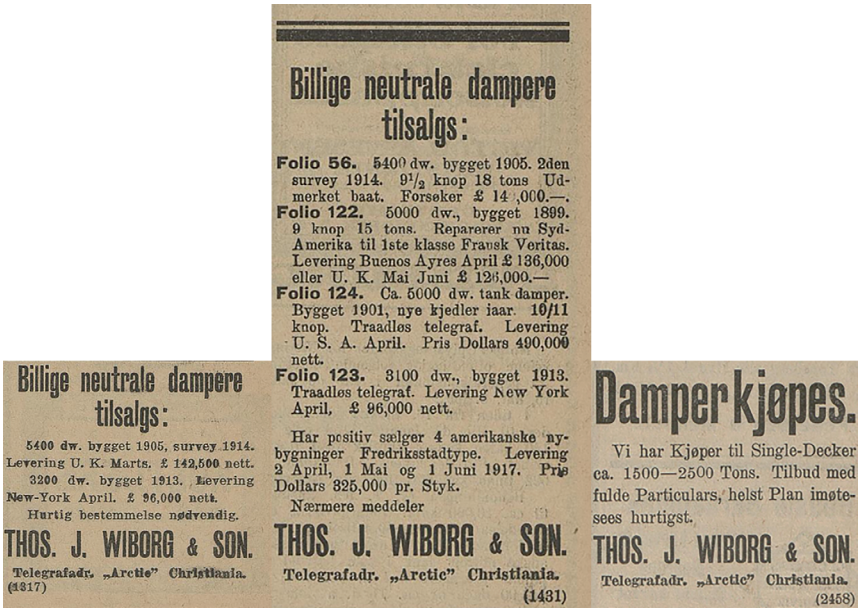
729 Ansteinsson & Reiersen (1998), p. 449; Claviez (1990), p. 330; de Kerchove (1961), p. 853.

730 Tenold (2019), p. 80; Koltveit & Bjørklund (1990), p. 269; Johansen (1940), p. 13; Keilhau (1927), pp. 178–179.

731 Ibid.

732 *Norges Handels og Sjøfartstidende* (3 March, 9 March, 3 May 1916).

the direction of the company, as far as we have found, do not appear later.[733]



Billige neutrale dampere tilsalgs:

5400 dw. bygget 1905, survey 1914. Levering U. K. Marts. £ 142,500 nett.
3200 dw. bygget 1913. Levering New-York April. £ 96,000 nett.
Hurtig bestemmelse nødvendig.

THOS. J. WIBORG & SON.
Telegrafadr. „Arctic" Christiania.
(1317)

Billige neutrale dampere tilsalgs:

Folio 56. 5400 dw. bygget 1905. 2den survey 1914. 9½ knop 18 tons Udmerket baat. Forsøker £ 14 ,000.—.
Folio 122. 5000 dw., bygget 1899. 9 knop 15 tons. Reparerer nu Syd-Amerika til 1ste klasse Fransk Veritas. Levering Buenos Ayres April £ 136,000 eller U. K. Mai Juni £ 126,000.—
Folio 124. Ca. 5000 dw. tank damper. Bygget 1901, nye kjedler iaar. 10/11 knop. Traadløs telegraf. Levering U. S. A. April. Pris Dollars 490,000 nett.
Folio 123. 3100 dw., bygget 1913. Traadløs telegraf. Levering New York April, £ 96,000 nett.

Har positiv sælger 4 amerikanske nybygninger Fredriksstadtype. Levering 2 April, 1 Mai og 1 Juni 1917. Pris Dollars 325,000 pr. Styk.
Nærmere meddeler

THOS. J. WIBORG & SON.
Telegrafadr. „Arctic" Christiania.
(1431)

Damper kjøpes.

Vi har Kjøper til Single-Decker ca. 1500—2500 Tons. Tilbud med fulde Particulars, helst Plan imøtesees hurtigst.

THOS. J. WIBORG & SON.
Telegrafadr. „Arctic" Christiania.
(2458)

Picture 7-1. Advertisements placed by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son for buying and selling ships.[734]
Source: Norges Handels og Sjøfartstidende (3 March, 9 March, 3 May 1916).

Activity as a shipping company

Towards the end of 1915, Thos. J. Wiborg & Son assumed ownership of its first two ships, the brig *Bethel* and the barque *Eglantine*. Next followed the full-rigged ship *Karmø* (see Picture 7-2) and the steamship *Renen*, both of which were taken over in 1916 and were new to the company.[735] All of the ships were owned through separate limited companies controlled by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son, which limited any liability to the individual company's ship. Table 7-5 shows all the ships that were owned by the company in the period 1915–1927.

733 Ibid.
734 Translation of the headline in the advertisements on the left and centre: 'Inexpensive neutral steamers for sale'. Translation of the headline in the advertisement on the right: 'Steamers purchased'.
735 *Renen*, formerly *Prospero*, was previously used by Østlandske Lloyds Lines to Europe. Conversation with Librarian Ole Fiske at the Norwegian Maritime Museum.

Table 7-5. Ships owned by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son[736]

Type/Name	Built	Where built	Bought	Left fleet	Sold/Lost	Building material
Brig Bethel	1868	Salcombe	1915	1917	Sunk by U-boat	Wood
Barque Eglantine	1866	Quebec	1915	1918	Sunk by U-boat	Wood
Full-rigged ship Karmø	1885	Glasgow	1916	1919	Sold	Iron
SS Renen	1869	Hartlepool	1916	1920	Collided/Sunk	Iron
SS Elgen	1918	Hansweert	1918	1922	Sold	Steel
MS Tartar	1919	Greåker	1920	1926	Sold	Ferroconcrete
SS Knut Skaaluren	1900	Rosendal	1922	1927	Sold	Wood
SS Tromøy	1921	Sagvåg	1924	1926	Sold	Wood

Source: Compiled on the basis of the Thos. J. Wiborg Archive; Norwegian Maritime Museum. The Petter Malmstein Sailing Ship Register.

During the war, the company's own ships, except *Karmø* which was too large and was engaged in trading worldwide, were used to carry timber to the UK from the Kristiania Fjord area and Gothenburg in Sweden, carrying coal on their return voyages.[737] This combination was more profitable than replacing the outward cargo with ice, and chartered ships were used to carry the ice that the company continued to export.[738] The timber cargoes were primarily pit props, for use in coal mines to support the gallery roofs in the mine pits.[739] This is an example of exports of crucial war commodities from Norway as requested by the UK authorities in return for coal.

As the war progressed, both the UK and the US authorities sought to control the Norwegian fleet of large sailing ships, over 1,000 register tons.[740] In September 1916, a separate group was established within the Norwegian Shipowners' Association with a mandate to safeguard the interests of the 174 vessels of this tonnage category.[741] One of the aims was to assist in negotia-

736 Owned through separate limited companies, controlled by Thos. J. Wiborg & Son. SS = Steamship, MS = Motorship.

737 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920). The Kristiania Fjord area referred to here is the same as that from which Thos. J. Wiborg's various companies had been exporting ice for over 40 years. The markets here were well-known to Thos. J. Wiborg and he had many connections in the broking industry.

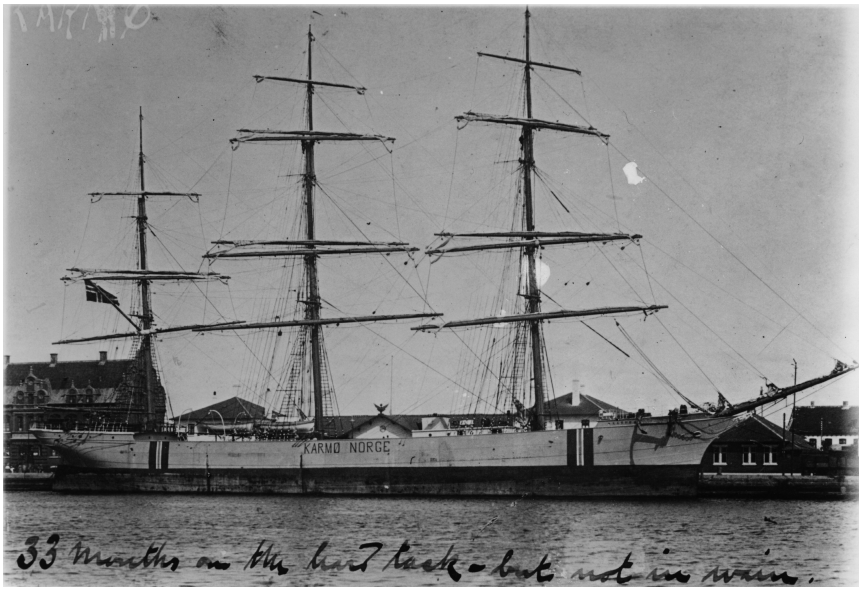
738 Ibid. Chartering journal (1914–1918).

739 Hornby (1980), p. 634.

740 Schreiner (1963), pp. 210–220.

741 Ibid., pp. 210, 211, 215.

tions with the UK and US authorities on issues regarding destinations and the terms and conditions of passage.[742] Thos. J. Wiborg & Son's full-rigger *Karmø*, at 1,431 net register tons, fell within the remit of these negotiations.



Picture 7-2. The full-rigged ship *Karmø* during the First World War.
Source: Courtesy of Skudesneshavn Museum.

Karmø was by far the largest ship owned by the company.[743] It was taken over in Denmark (in Korsør) in July 1916. It was built of iron, was in good condition and could carry all kinds of cargo all over the world.[744]

Two of the company's first four ships, the two smallest sailing vessels (*Bethel* and *Eglantine*), were built in timber and were almost 50 years old and probably obsolete or about to become so when Wiborg bought them.[745] They were only allowed to carry the cargo that was considered the easiest to carry, such as timber, coal, grain or ice, and could only

742 Ibid.

743 Lloyd's Register (1916); Tandberg (1999); Røijen (1958); Sjøhistorie.no, *full-rigged ship Karmø*.

744 Røijen (1958). At the outbreak of war, *Karmø* was in Chile in South America, and in 1915, it was loaded with wheat in Portland, Oregon, on the American west coast, bound for Dublin in Ireland. The vessel used 84 days to complete this voyage.

745 Most of the vessels were certified following a condition status assessment and allocated a 'Class' by Det Norske Veritas, the Norwegian classification society. The *Karmø*, however, was similarly certified by the British Lloyd's Register.

carry the cargo within certain areas, mainly within Europe.[746] At 47 years of age, the steamship *Renen* was still in relatively good condition and could carry all kinds of cargoes to destinations throughout Europe.[747] The *Karmø* was too large to be used in the North Sea trades that Wiborg was familiar with. The ships were bought during the wartime boom, when it was not unusual to create and lose fortunes overnight.[748] The purchases have been described as boom-time speculations, and this seems plausible, given the type, age and condition of the vessels.[749]

The madness of the war was reflected in the fate of the *Bethel* and the *Eglantine*, as well as that of the schooner *Amanda* (a Swedish ship the company retained on time charter).[750] They were all sunk by German U-boat. The *Amanda* was set on fire and sank without loss of life on 16 April 1917 on a passage to West Hartlepool with a cargo of pit props. The *Bethel* suffered a similar fate on 13 October 1917, on a similar assignment. The *Eglantine* was shot at until it sank on 20 June 1918, during its voyage from West Hartlepool with a cargo of coal. Eight of its nine crew members perished.[751] The Thos. J. Wiborg & Son chartering journal contains an annotation related to the *Eglantine's* last voyage, in which T. J. Wiborg wrote, *'the crew shot down outside Hartl.(pool) by German pirates'*.[752] The steamship *Renen* was seized by the UK authorities in April 1918. It suffered a collision and sank almost immediately after it was released at the end of the war.[753] The total resulU-boatt was an almost complete cessation of the company's shipping activities in 1918.

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746 Det Norske Veritas. Ship Register (1915).
747 Ibid. (1916).
748 Kolltveit & Bjørklund (1989), p. 179.
749 Taken from an interview with Thomas Johannes Wiborg's great-grandson.
750 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920), p. 102; E-mail from Tomas Johannesson, editor of *Båtologen*, member magazine *of Klubb Maritim Sweden* (18 November 2021).
751 Sjøfartskontoret (1918). vol. 3, pp. 167–170 (*Bethel*) and Sjøfartskontoret (1918). vol. 4, pp. 158–160 (*Eglantine*).
752 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920), p. 106.
753 Sjøhistorie.no website

The war generated a boom in shipping with ample opportunities for financial gain. But the trading situation was complex since international transport by ship from Norway had become a very hazardous undertaking.

For the ice industry in general, and Thos. J. Wiborg & Son in particular, export volumes went into decline from an almost normal situation in 1914 to a virtual complete standstill by 1918. The first downturn arrived in 1915, when the German authorities declared UK waters to be a war zone. In the following year, exports plummeted as the UK Government banned imports of ice to Britain and Ireland. The company turned to Scandinavian customers and limited its exports of ice to Sweden and Denmark, which were outside the war zone.

Embarking on shipping required specific information and skills, which the company accessed through the captains, engineers, crews and external agents and brokers. For Thos. J. Wiborg & Son, these connections undoubtedly eased the company's expansion into shipowning.

Thos. J. Wiborg & Son expanded its shipping and shipbroking business during the war. Arguably, the first two purchases of ships were 'boomtime speculations' in sub-standard vessels. Some of the company's ships were sunk by German U-boat and eight lives were lost. By 1918, the sinking and seizure of ships had brought the company's shipping business to a virtual close.