



## NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2019

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1935 - 48



1963 - 85



*Nec Quisquam Nisi Ajax*

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Hello to you all.

I had prepared a Newsletter Report for this period but sadly an event occurred which I know will have affected anyone who knew Judi Collis. Judi, wife of Malcolm, passed away on 21st August at her home in Norfolk with Malcolm at her side. Judi had taken the difficult and brave decision to go home from Hospital three weeks before so she could spend her final days with Malcolm and where her family could visit her in her own surroundings. Judi had been diagnosed with Ovarian cancer five years ago and had battled all the way, taking part in two lots of clinical trials at Cambridge, hoping of course they would help her but typically of Judi knowing if they didn't help her, it could benefit others. As we all know, Judi and Malcolm are the backbone of the Association, yes she had a title "Membership Secretary" but she was far more than that to us. It will be impossible to replace her.

**Judi Collis 23rd May 1956 – 21st August 2019**

**Rest in Peace**

Other matters seem trivial but I will mention that our Reunion takes place on the weekend of October 4th staying in Sittingbourne, Kent, with the memorial service being held in Chatham; there are plenty of spaces available. It is quite a concern for us that this year's event will not be so well attended as last year's in Plymouth. We would welcome your thoughts on the future of the Reunion, e.g. venue, what form you would like it take, less formal maybe or something entirely different - it is the members' choice.

Finally a mention of Malcolm's fantastic efforts with regard to the South American tour in December. Despite all his personal problems he has continued at a pace to arrange, email, video phone, "Whatapp" people all over the world to make the trip the success I am sure it will be, we fellow travellers will be eternally grateful.

*Nigel Masters*

*Chairman*

## SECRETARY'S UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2019

It is time for our Annual Reunion next Month and with it our AGM. Please read the agenda as this is your opportunity to make the Committee aware of the way you would like to see the Association going. In particular, the subject of future reunions will be discussed and on this subject, how do you regard it? The number planning to attend this year is not very high and I am not sure the reason for this. If you think it outdated, what would you like to see in its place? I am conscious we have a growing number of Associate Members and this is a very pleasing trend. Do you appreciate the annual change of venue? With this year's Reunion in Kent it is hoped to see many of our Members at one of the functions over the weekend. I and the Committee members look forward to catching up with as many of you as possible.

Members of the Association will soon be leaving on what promises to be an historic trip to Chile, Uruguay and Argentina.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Malcolm for his outstanding and brilliant work in creating an excellent programme of events in all three countries. His contribution cannot be understated; his patience in dealing with the South American authorities is to be highly commended. The other members of the Committee have also been working very hard on their respective jobs toward the trip.

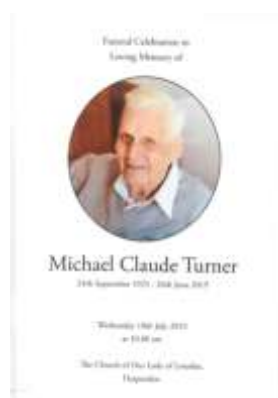
*Peter Danks*  
Secretary

## MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2019

Regrettably this report will be short and sweet: as you will have picked up from the Chairman's report my dear Judi passed away on 21st August and even in her final days she was anxious to do her report but never got round to it.

Judi's funeral is to be held on Wednesday 11th September 2019 at St Mary's Church, Denver, Downham Market, Norfolk at 2pm. If anyone would like further details please contact me. I shall give a full obituary in the next Newsletter.

## CROSSED THE BAR



**Michael Turner.** Mike crossed the Bar on Wednesday 26th June 2019. He died peacefully at the age of 93. Mike served in Ajax 1946 - 47 as a PO Radar Mechanic and diver. Mike was a true gent and was very supportive of the Association. The funeral was held in Harpenden on Wednesday 10th July and together with Peter Danks and Alan Phillips, Judi and I were so pleased to be able to attend the funeral in his memory even though we only landed at Stansted at 2.30am that morning. We later joined his wife Ann, son & daughter Paul & Helen, grandson Michael who is an associate member, and the rest of the family at the Harpenden Golf Club. Turnerbury Avenue in Ajax is named in his honour. He will be missed.

**Stanley James 'Jim' London.** The death of Jim came in just as the newsletter was going off to the printer and full details will appear in the next edition.

Jim passed away on Sunday 25th August having been admitted to hospital following a fall and subsequent complications.

Jim was a HMS EXETER River Plate veteran and was looking forward to receiving his Queen's telegram for his 100th birthday on 2nd October. Jim lived in Worcester.

Whilst the Association was in Ajax in 2016 we dedicated London Lane in his honour.

## New members

Quite a haul in this Newsletter period when we welcome aboard five new members including three Ajax & Achilles cruiser veterans. What other organisation can boast recruiting a 100 year old and two 97 year olds in a few months!

**Anthony Jones** joins us as an Associate and is from Perth, Western Australia. He is the grandson of Taylor Simm Beckett who died in 1955; he served in HMS Ajax in 1942 and his name appears on the Ajax Memorial Wall. Whilst trying to research his grandfather Anthony joined us.

**Albert Edward Robb** was born on 13th September 1918 and at 100 he has just joined us.

The below is as appeared on his application form -

Served on the Ajax from 19/03/1940 to 22/11/1941. Official no: c/SR 16343, Ajax rating Petty Officer (ordnance artificer). Left Ajax in Alexandria for a UK Draft called in New York & brought over the first American troops after Pearl Harbour, arrived UK Feb 1942. After foreign service leave, draft to hunt class destroyer Meynell 6th March 1942, convoy duties in home waters for 3½ years which included arctic convoys to Russia until coming south to take part in Normandy landings on D day, Then constant convoys to France until France was cleared of Germans, after that convoys to Antwerp. Made Chief petty Officer December 11th 1942, finished with the Navy 18/12/1945. I have 13 decorations, all are government issued, 7 UK, 3 Russian, 1 Malta, 1 Greek, 1 French. The Russian one being the Ushakov, one of Russia's highest naval awards. The French one being Appointment Chevalier of the order national de la legion of honour which is France's highest order of merit which makes me a knight. I was mentioned in despatches whilst in the Arctic. I have written my memoirs, a copy which in the Admiralty archives.

**Kathleen Butler-Donnelly** joins as an Associate. Her father was Lt John Donnelly who was Admiral Harwood's coxswain. Kathleen joined us for the 75th Anniversary luncheon in Portsmouth.



**Robert (Bob) Batt** has been made an honorary Association member. Bob served in HMS Achilles at the River Plate and has visited Ajax in 1999 and Uruguay.

I had given up trying to establish if there were any Achilles survivors until a chance Facebook encounter lead to me making contact with his daughter, Fiona Dryland, to find he is very much alive and well and living in Whakatane New Zealand. He was 97 on 15th August.

The newspaper cutting is of Bob at the last ANZAC Day parade.

His son Douglas and his wife are now joining us in South America.

**John Thomson.** As a result of my communications regarding Bob Batt I was contacted by **Lieutenant Commander Roger Saynor MBE RNZN** to say there was in fact another **Achilles River Plate veteran alive and well and living in Robina, Queensland, Australia** with his wife. I wrote to him on behalf of the Association as well to make him an honorary member.



## 5.

### **Happy Birthday to the following Crew Members who had birthdays in this Newsletter period (June - August incl.)**

As part of our Data Protection Policy we now just put ages rather than birth dates.

William Parker	Cruiser	1945-46	98
Robert 'Bob' Batt	Achilles	1939	97
Richard LLeuwellyn	Cruiser	1943-44	94
Reginald Gilbert	Cruiser	1943-45	94
Allan Lorrigan	Cruiser	1943-46	94
Don Birrell	Cruiser	1946-47	92
Peter Buckingham	Cruiser	1946-47	92
Fred Coates	Frigate	1974-78	80
Peter Jim Danks	Frigate	1965-66	80
Robert (Bob Mac) McMorran	Frigate	1968-70	79
David Johns	Frigate	1963-65	78
Wilbert Adam Curren	Frigate	1967-68	78
John Victor (Vic) Wilson	Frigate	1963-65	74
Malcolm (Alf) Larkin	Frigate	1976-78	73
Dan Sherren	Frigate	1977-79	73
Martin Roland	Frigate	1967-69	70
Robert James Taylor	Frigate	1973-74	69
Alan James Styth	Frigate	1974-77	62
Kevin (Scrumpy) Syder	Frigate	1975-79	60
John Galway	Frigate	1977-79	60
Mark Sheldon	Frigate	1982-85	57

### **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Annual subscriptions for both crew members and associates stay the same at £12 with a rate of £18 for family membership at same address.

**Judi spent much of her time sending out polite reminders by email, letters and notes in with the postal newsletters, that certain members were over or very overdue on their subs and very often she never got a response. She was very very patient with members, particularly the older veterans but got quite despondent when she was just ignored, often multiple times. I or whoever takes over as Membership Secretary need to be a little tougher with errant members and I shall be raising the matter at the October AGM as to how we should deal with them rather than waste our time – they are getting the benefits without paying the £12. If you think you may be one of them please contact me urgently.**

Electronic means of paying are by using the subscribe button on the joining page on our website [http://www.hmsajax.org/?use\\_flash=1#/joining/4560949163](http://www.hmsajax.org/?use_flash=1#/joining/4560949163) – you can do it when you join or as an existing member. Future payments are taken out on that anniversary and we are notified by PayPal that the payment has been made. Single payments for any amount can be made by using the donate button and overdue sums can be paid this way.

Bank Transfers or standing orders can be set up using the details below.

**Bank details: HMS Ajax and River Plate Veterans Assoc**

**Account no. 24865868, sort code 30-99-56.**

**Cheques payable to HMS Ajax & RPVA and sent to:**

Membership Secretary, The Bewicks, Station Road, Ten Mile Bank, Norfolk, PE38 0EY

If you pay by bank transfer please email me as there is a delay before I see the statements.

**IF YOU PAY THROUGH PAYPAL PLEASE ENSURE YOUR PAYMENT BANK CARDS HAVE NOT EXPIRED – IT'S SIMPLE TO UPDATE.**

*Malcolm Collis*

Temporary Membership Secretary

01366 377945 - 07717559594 for texts (land line best for calls) [malcolm.collis@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.collis@gmail.com)

## AJAX CONNECTION TO CHILE NAVY

The second Ajax was a 3rd Rate 74 gun Ship-of-the-Line and was launched on 3rd March 1798 on the Thames and commissioned in June of that year. 1953 tons; length 182ft; Beam 49ft. Armament: 28x 32 pounders; 30x 24 pounders; 16x 9 pounders.

She was part of the 1801 Egyptian Operation and took Battle Honours at the Nile; likewise, at the Battle of Cape Finisterre in 1805 she received Battle Honours.



Ajax was part of Admiral Lord Nelson's fleet of 27 ships-of-the-line that on 21 October 1805 took on a combined French and Spanish fleet of 33 ships-of-the-line at Cape Trafalgar. The Battle of Trafalgar saw 22 Franco-Spanish ships lost without a single British vessel being lost. Ajax received honours.

In February 1807 Ajax was part of the Dardanelles Operation near the Turkish island of Tenedos when, for some reason, she caught fire on 14 February, ran aground and blew up next day.

Whilst proof reading a book about all the Ajax one name in the Second Ajax section jumped out: Alexander Cochrane was the Captain of this Ajax and you may recall in the June 2019 Newsletter a piece on the renaming of a building at Portsmouth Harbour in honour of Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane who founded the Chilean Navy. Was there a connection?

A bit of research on the internet reveals that about this time there were several Thomas Cochranes around, some with naval connections, just to muddy the waters:

Thomas Cochrane, 8th Earl of Dundonald, born in 1691 and died 31 October 1778, was a Major in the Royal Dragoons. He had six sons, one of whom was Alexander Cochrane.

Sir Alexander Inglis Cochrane, Captain of HMS Ajax 11, born 3rd April 1758 and died 26 January 1832, went on to become an Admiral and had a son called Thomas John Cochrane.

This Thomas was Sir Thomas John Cochrane GCB, born 5th February 1789 and died 19th October 1872. He too joined the navy and as a midshipman transferred to HMS Ajax 11. He later became Admiral of the Fleet.

The other Thomas was Admiral Thomas Cochrane the 10th Earl of Dundonald, Marquess of Maranhão, GCB, ODM, OSC, born 14th December 1775 and died 31st October 1860, and it was he who founded the Chile Navy. Despite being dismissed from the Royal Navy for Stock Exchange fraud he was eventually pardoned by the Crown and reinstated as Rear Admiral of the Blue and died with the rank of Admiral of the Red.

These two Thomas' turn out to be cousins and Alexander was the uncle of the one who founded the Chile navy and also served under Alexander in the HMS Hind.

A very successful family you may think although The Earl of St. Vincent wrote of the Cochrane brothers in 1806, "*The Cochranes are not to be trusted out of sight, they are all mad, romantic, money-getting and not truth-telling—and there is not a single exception in any part of the family.*" – don't think he liked them!

## BATTLE HONOURS – HOW THEY WORK

The other day I was doing a little more digging into the Ajax Battle Honours. I have several lists with varying number of Battle Honours for Ajax and differing names for individual Awards.

In the Association's library, aka my hall cupboard, I found a book entitled Badges and Battle Honours of H.M. Ships by Lt. Cdr. K.V. Burns D.S.M., R.N. published in 1986 ISBN 0-907771-26-2 which explains the confusion – you may well be aware of this book.

In it he explains that prior to Admiralty Order 2565 of 1954, when they issued an official list of Fleet Actions and Campaigns for which Battle Honours had been awarded, honours were displayed on ships solely on the authority of the commander – presumably the more awarded the better he looked! They could and were awarded for involvement in any conflict, regardless of degree of involvement, by the captain.

Not only did the Admiralty issue an official list but they also removed a large number previously displayed awards and going through that list every single one of Ajax's honours is omitted!

However, as the author goes on to list every HM ship, along with Battle Honours, he does list Ajax as:

St Vincent	1780
St Kitts	1782
The Saints	1782
Egypt	1801
Trafalgar	1805
San Sebastian	1813
Baltic	1854-55
Jutland	1916
River Plate	1939
Mediterranean	1940-41
Malta Convoys	1941
Matapan	1941
Greece	1941
Crete	1941
Aegean	1944
Normandy	1944
South of France	1944

... and so it seems the Admiralty order is still ignored! Reassuringly this list is the same list as on the website.

*Malcolm Collis*

## CHALKE VALLEY HISTORY FESTIVAL

Member Ben Harwood visited the Chalke Valley History Festival, near Salisbury, on 30th June 2019 and introduced a talk by Peter Hore, who in 2018 published “Henry Harwood Hero of the River Plate”, a biography about his grandfather.

Ben was delighted to introduce Peter Hore to a full house of 200 attendees and what made it a special day was both that the talk was about his Grandfather and the company he has worked for, for many years, Quilter Cheviot, sponsored the talk.

Other family members attended, namely Katie Harwood, Jono and Sue Harwood, Claire More and Frances Scott-Dickins.

The talk was limited to 30 minutes and Peter Hore concentrated on Henry Harwood's upbringing, his early career in the Royal Navy and the Battle of the River Plate. As a boy he attended Stubbington School and Peter Hore highlighted how many pupils from this school became highly decorated officers in the services.



Henry Harwood became a naval cadet in 1903, specialised as a torpedo officer and was awarded an OBE in 1919 for his services in the First World War. He gained first class passes in all his examinations and at the Imperial Defence College and made a study of international relations. He was therefore well qualified when in 1936 he was promoted to Commodore and Commander of the South American Division of the America and West Indies Station. During these interwar years he learnt Spanish and spent

time meeting and greeting and improving relationships with Chilean and Uruguayan dignitaries, which was to pay dividends after the Battle of the River Plate when he was able to influence and positively affect the outcome of the diplomatic part of the Battle.

The story of the Battle has been well documented in a number of books, but Peter Hore was delighted to meet Andrew Wimble, a friend of Ben and Katie Harwood's. Andrew spoke to Peter Hore and mentioned that his mother remembers Rex Miller, who was head of British Intelligence in Uruguay following the Battle and he became a great friend of Andrew's grandfather after the war. Andrew related an anecdote that his grandfather sailed in the yacht Achenar with Rex Miller whilst the Graf Spee was in Montevideo and helped to provide intelligence to Commodore Harwood who was concerned that the Graf Spee would escape from the River Plate estuary under cover of darkness.

Andrew also related a story that at the 1937 Spithead review the Admiral Graf Spee represented Germany and china bowls with the ships name were exchanged between the officers of the Graf Spee and HMS Britannia. Andrew's uncle is currently in possession of a china bowl, but unfortunately the whereabouts of the bowl from HMS Britannia is unknown other than it is probably with the family of the 1937 Captain of the Graf Spee.

Unfortunately time did not permit Peter Hore to talk in further detail about Henry Harwood's career following the Battle of the River Plate and in particular his actions in the Mediterranean. Perhaps that could be the subject of a talk at the Chalke Valley History Festival another year?

*Ben Harwood*

## WHO FIRED THE FIRST SHOTS AT NORMANDY?

Whilst officiating at the recent National memorial Arboretum service for the 80th River Plate and 75th D-Day anniversary I made mention that HMS Ajax fired the first shots of the D-Day campaign. I know this to be true as it says so in my many archive papers!

However, I came across an HMS Belfast newsletter the other day in which they too claimed that honour taking out German gun battery at La Marefontaine. However, Lieutenant Peter Brooke Smith, who was serving on board HMS Belfast, recorded in his diary that another cruiser to the west fired first at 0523. The entry in HMS Belfast's log records that she opened fire three minutes later at 0527, 'with full broadside to port.'

HMS Warspite also claims to have fired first. What really matters is that it was a team effort leading to a successful assault'



Richard Llewellyn, an 18 year old midshipman in HMS Ajax at the time, describes the thunderous explosions rolling along the shore as every ship in the Allied fleet was blazing away. The enormous firepower sent shells pounding into the cliffs, churning earth, rock, and entire landscapes.

Richard compares the scene to watching a spectacular firework display. The warship guns belched out enormous orange balls of flames and mustard coloured smoke. Some of the battleships fired 16-inch shells, almost as heavy as a car and so big they could be seen as they went past.

"The noise was just unbelievable. One of the things that I remember afterwards more than anything else was the noise," said Richard. "If you go to the cinema and you hear a lot of noise and gunfire and so on, it doesn't really register. But if you are actually there the whole air is vibrating all the time."

### **ACHILLES DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL – WILLIAM R. HEADON**



Thanks to member Alan Phillips for spotting this item in the July 2019 edition of the Medal News magazine. These medals were awarded to Petty Of?cer W. R. Headon, who served onboard HMS Achilles at the Battle of the River Plate. The DSM was awarded for Gallantry whilst onboard HMS Achilles during the River Plate action. The group which included a quantity of related material, including the brass rum measure from HMS Achilles, were recently sold at auction for £9,600.00 (Estimated at £4,000-£5,000) The catalogue entry did not mention the act of gallantry for which the DSM was awarded. However, a search of the London Gazette revealed the following citation:

Page 1060 SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 23 FEBRUARY, 1940

William R. Headon, Petty Officer; who, though early in the action several splinters struck the Gun Director Tower at once, killing three men and wounding two others inside the tower, kept up an accurate output for a prolonged action of over two hundred broadsides. He was faced with an especially difficult task in hand training with large alterations of course at full speed and with wide angles of rudder. During the lull he helped to remove dead and wounded.

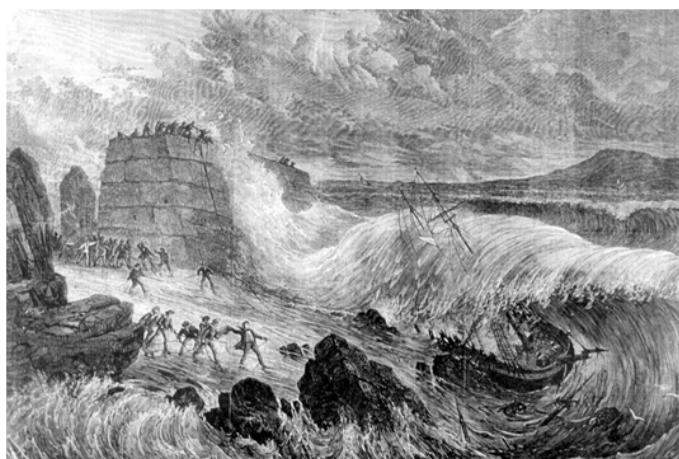
## THE BOYD DISASTER



The third *Ajax* was a Vengeur class 74 Gun 3rd Rate Ship-of-the-Line launched in May 1809 at the Isle of Dogs. After seeing service in the Mediterranean she was converted to a coastal defence vessel and in 1846 took up the role of guardship in Queenstown (Cobh) in Ireland where she stayed until the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853. After the War in 1858 she returned to guardship duties in Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire) near Dublin.

One of the worst storms on record there began on Friday 8th 1861 and continued to blow with increasing severity for two days. Northerly gales are a rarity on the east coast of Ireland and those that occur usually do so suddenly. At around midnight on the 8th the wind had swung around to the north east and by the early hours of the following morning it had increased to strong gale force directly from the north. Many ships were lost around the bay.

*Ajax* under the command of Captain John McNeil Boyd from County Derry, went to the assistance of two in particular, the *Neptune* and the *Intrepid*. Both ships were lost despite heroic attempts taking not only their crews but also six men from *Ajax* including Captain Boyd who in one of the ship's boats were attempting a rescue. This became known as the “Boyd Disaster”.



## D-DAY 2019 – RICHARD LLEWELLYN

Two years ago, Victoria Phipps, Secretary of the Charity D-Day Revisited, had a dream of creating a Garden for the Chelsea Flower Show to commemorate those who took part in the Normandy landings 75 years ago. Her determination, hard work and communication skills brought together a well-known Garden Designer, a renowned Sculptor and a team of other



workers to make her dream become reality. Depicting the contrast between war and peace, storm and calm or even black and white and incorporating living veterans of that amazing day of 6th June 1944. I was one of those Veterans and took a 'part' in the Garden on Press Day and the first 2 Members' days. Crowds came to see the Garden and were impressed and even moved by what it symbolised and many I spoke with said they thought it was the best garden in the Flower Show. After the Flower Show finished on Saturday a team of

volunteers and Royal Engineers, under the direction of the Designer completely dismantled the Garden, packed it into three low loaders and took it to Normandy where it was rebuilt on the high ground above the town of Arromanches.

A week later we were on our way to Normandy via Portsmouth. We spent a day at Portsmouth Dockyard where the ex-Naval MGBs, HSLs etc. and other small historic boats are moored. Now joined with a new arrival that was a veteran of D-Day having led the American Landing craft, etc. into Omaha Beach on D-Day.

This is MA/SB 27 the hull of which was acquired by D-Day Revisited 3 years ago when it's remains were about to be destroyed. It was a project of John Phipps MBE, Chairman of D-Day



Revisited, who decided to restore it to its original state when it was first handed over to the Navy, in time to go to Normandy this year. It was a massive job but the job was achieved, sea trials completed in time and she crossed the channel at 26 kts. and we met up with her again on the Orne River at Pegasus Bridge

We were entertained to a farewell Dinner at Southwick House near Portsmouth where D-Day was planned and the final decision to 'go' was made by Eisenhower.

Returning to Normandy this year was somewhat different to previous returns, mainly due to each event being more of an occasion, taking up more time, thus leaving less time for the small visits to schools, cemeteries, and so on. On the way to Ouistreham we had a wreath laying ceremony 7 miles from the Coast which was where landing craft were detached from the 'Mother ships' to make their own ways to their allotted Beach. The ceremony was held on the Quarterdeck of Brittany Ferries 'Mont St. Michel'. Since it was announced over the Ship's PA system and we had



two Pipers and a QA Sergeant with us the Quarterdeck was packed with other passengers. There is an art in throwing a wreath over the side of a fast moving vessel on a windy day to ensure it doesn't return flying high overhead!

We were a group of about 100 in two coaches which included 38 Veterans, about the same number of carers, a group of 6 volunteer QA Nurses, a couple of volunteer Doctors and a few other helpers, one of whom was Henry Montgomery, Grandson of Monty! Apart from our own two Pipers we were accompanied by the Jedburgh Pipe Band who were voluntarily with us most of the time and who delighted the crowds who came to greet us everywhere. It was a fairly whirlwind 5 days which included wreath laying at Ranville Cemetery as well as at the American Cemetery at Collville-sur-Mer. We attended a Service at Pegasus Bridge with no less than three different Bands and then had a picnic lunch provided in the Garden of Café Gondree close to the spot where the first Glider landed alongside the Bridge just after midnight on the 6th June.

We visited the Normandy Institute in their rather grand Chateau which Rommel once used as his HQ and where we were entertained to a display of drumming by the Band of the Royal Marines before being led into a 3 course lunch which luckily kept us out of a downpour. On the whole we were lucky with the weather as we had reasonably warm and sunny days, unlike UK which was rather wet! Needless to say we went to the Service at Bayeux Cathedral on 6th June, our two coaches being led by Blue Lights, even though all main roads were empty having been blocked to all traffic without specific access passes. Afterwards we walked up the hill on the little road to the Service at the Bayeux Cemetery where the great and the good were dutifully present. Neither service was a long one, but each remembering those hundreds of men who were the first to land on the beaches where they had been slaughtered by machine-gun, rifle and mortar fire.

Wherever we went we were welcomed with genuine enthusiasm, kindness, applause, bands, crowds, and so on, but also by the media who were everywhere endlessly filming, taking photographs, wanting interviews, etc. We had a busy schedule with late nights and early starts and although it was a little tiring at times all veterans showed they were as capable of coping as anyone younger.

I mentioned earlier that the D-Day Garden'75 left the Chelsea Flower Show when it ended and was transported to a site on high ground above the town of Arromanches, looking seaward over Gold Beach. During the afternoon of 6th June we were taken to the Garden where there was a brief ceremony handing over the Garden to the Mayor and citizens of Arromanches who have agreed to take it over and look after it as a permanent living memorial.

We visited two schools to meet the children, one at a small town called Thury Harcourt where we have got to know the Mayor and children over the years. The latter sing our National Anthem perfectly in English and the Mayor gave us an excellent Buffet lunch. The name Harcourt is connected to the Harcourt family, two of whom came to England with King William in 1066. One of the brothers stayed in England and settle in a village which bears the name of Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire and the other returned to France and settled in Thury Harcourt. The family had a beautiful Chateau on the edge of town which housed all the family records and treasures but the Germans decided to burn down as they retreated from the advancing British Army in June 1944. Interesting reading in Wikipedia.

On our last night we gathered for a meal in the *Salles des Fetes* in Arromanches where we were entertained by the 'D-Day Darlings', a talented group of female singers with a great sense of Fun. On our way to the return Ferry we called in at another school where the children had written lovely messages for each of the Veterans and they read a poem they had written. Finally we marched with the Pipe Band through their pretty little village to be fed and watered in the School Gymnasium. Altogether a very special, and possibly final visit to Normandy since D-Day Revisited is being wound up after 10 years. Very special thanks to the Phipps' Family, especially to Victoria and John Phipps.

*Richard Llewellyn HMS Ajax Midshipman*

## MARJORIE CORBETT LAMB: WREN

Member Bill Mitchell spotted an article in his local Glasgow paper concerning Marjorie Corbett Lamb who at 99 has written an account of her life as a cipher officer for the Women's Royal Naval Service during the Second World War.

Aged just 19 she signed up for the service in 1939 at the outbreak of the Second World War. Now, 80 years later, she has written a book about her life during the war, in which she travelled across the world from a remote port town in the Highlands all the way to the Middle East.

As a cipher officer, her job was to decode messages coming in from allied ships who were fighting German U-Boats, such as those in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Ciphers were little groups of four figures "so you didn't see any wording at all and you converted the figures into messages.



The paragraph that grabbed Bill's attention was:

*"Although the Wrens were mostly accepted by their fellow sailors, Mrs Corbett Lamb said they did encounter some hostility. During one nightshift aboard the HMS Ajax, she [and Helen] could hear a disgruntled sailor complaining about them from outside the cipher room. "He said, 'It says in the King's regulations that women are not allowed to do this' We winked at each other, my friend opened the door and she said, 'Any chance of a cup of tea?' He got the shock of his life," she said.*

In the book *In Peace and in War* [John A Gurr] there is reference on Saturday 26th April to:

*"... went to Raphris, a tiny place 25 miles N.E. of Athens, after midnight and in pitch darkness with enemy troops barely three miles away, Ajax picked up 2,560 soldiers – Australian, New Zealanders, British and Greeks, and three women in battledress ..."*

I wonder if Marjorie was one of them? However, it does sound as if she was actually drafted to Ajax and I wonder also if any member can shed any light on the matter of women serving onboard?

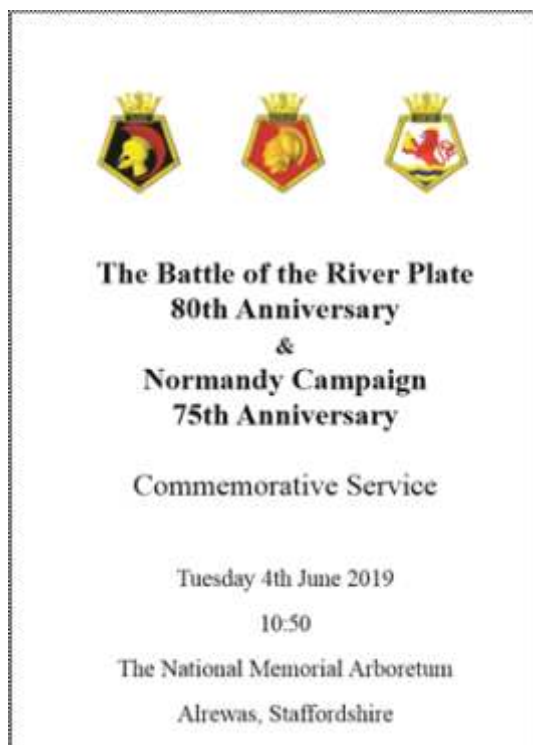
I did try to contact the reporter in order to speak to Marjorie but with my usual luck with the media!

*Malcolm Collis*



## NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM - 2019

### Service of Remembrance 80th Anniversary of Battle of the River Plate 75th Anniversary Normandy Campaign.



On Tuesday 4th June 2019 over 40 members and guests gathered at the National Memorial Arboretum. We were keeping a close eye on the weather that threatened to dampen proceedings as it had in Plymouth last October. Although we had a contingency plan we really wanted to have the services round our Memorial and the Normandy Campaign one.

At 10.50 a.m. proceedings started at our very own Battle of the River Plate Memorial with Chairman Nigel Masters welcoming everyone to the NMA. Malcolm Collis gave a brief overview of the Battle 80 years ago. Member Reverend Tim Flowers conducted the service and the Exhortation was delivered by veteran Denis Talbot. Our very smart Bugler Antonio Socci played the Last Post as our Standard was dipped by Alf Larkin for the two minute silence. Reveille marked the laying of the wreath by member Stephen Harwood, son of the River Plate Commodore.







At the conclusion of the 80th Anniversary service the congregation made its way to the Normandy Campaign Memorial some 300 metres away, stopping off at the nearby Land Army Memorial where Membership Secretary Judi Collis laid a wreath in honour of her mother and Malcolm Collis read out a poem by Rose Perritt.

At the Normandy Campaign Memorial Malcolm Collis explained the significance of being here for the 75th Anniversary of the start of the D-Day landings that started on 6th June. Ajax had been one of the support vessels and had fired the first salvo of the campaign aimed at a gun emplacement at Longues-sur-Mer, some seven miles away, destroying it within eight minutes. Also present was an Ajax veteran from D-Day, Jack Richardson and he was welcomed to our gathering.



Secretary Peter Danks read the Exhortation followed by the Bugler's Last Post. The Standard was dipped until Reveille when the wreath was laid by Dennis Talbot. The National Anthem, played by the Bugler, was sung.



That concluded the first of our three 2019 80th Anniversary events, the next being the Reunion at Chatham in October and our visit to South America in December.

Shortly afterwards it started to rain!

*Malcolm Collis*

## **GRAF SPEE ARTEFACT TO BE SOLD**

Some of you may have seen in recent press reports that the Uruguay Courts had ordered the government to sell the bronze eagle salvaged in 2006 from the stern of the Graf Spee in the River Plate.



Considered divisive due to the Nazi symbol the artefact has been kept hidden inside a sealed crate in a Uruguayan navy warehouse for more than a decade.

The court ordered that it must be sold and the proceeds split equally among the investors who organised the effort to recover the eagle from the bottom of the River Plate.

Encouraged by one of my Uruguay contacts I wrote to the UK Ambassador in Uruguay to facilitate a private

viewing for our group. Ian Duddy has been most supportive of our visit and cleared our secret viewing with the Jewish Community and has now approached the Uruguay government for final clearance. If and when approved I shall somehow weave it into our time in Montevideo – it should prove to be a fascinating element to the trip.

*Malcolm Collis*



## TIMOTHY MICHAEL BEVAN – OBITUARY

### CAPTAIN HMS AJAX 7 JULY 1980 - 3 APRIL 1981

Rear Admiral Bevan C.B. was born in London on 7 April 1931 and was educated at Eton College before joining the Royal Navy in 1949, when he entered the Britannia Royal Naval College. His early years of service under training were spent at sea in the cruiser HMS Glasgow, operating in the West Indies, and the cruiser Superb, off South America. As a Sub-Lieutenant he served in the aircraft-carrier Illustrious.



Promoted to Lieutenant he was posted to the Royal Yacht Britannia during her first commissioning in 1954, before he served as Flag Lieutenant to the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, Admiral Edwards.

Specialising in Anti-Submarine Warfare, in 1958 he became the Torpedo and Gunnery Officer of the frigate HMS Londonderry early in 1960, again in the West Indies and South American waters, and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Commander during this time.

After a course at home in 1964 he joined the Leander frigate HMS Naiad as First Lieutenant for her first commission. Some other interesting jobs he had up until then included Navigating Officer of a coal-burning Island class trawler, and First Lieutenant of HMS Reclaim, the last ship in the Navy fitted with sails.

Promoted to the rank of Commander in 1966 he commanded the destroyer Decoy which was then a trials ship; and Caprice in 1967, then in the Far East and Home waters. A further course followed in August 1968, before taking up an appointment on the Planning Staff at the Ministry of Defence, London.

He returned to sea in 1971 to take command of the frigate Minerva, serving in Home waters and the Far East. In 1972 he became a member of the Directing Staff at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. He was promoted to the rank of Captain in December 1975.

Captain Bevan took command of HMS Ariadne for the first time in April 1976 to November 1977. At that time the ship was the half-leader of her squadron, serving at home and in the West Indies, and was present at the Silver Jubilee Fleet Review in July 1977. After a further appointment at the Ministry of Defence on the Policy Staff, he took command of **HMS Ajax** and F8 in July 1980, until the ship's refit at Gibraltar in mid-August. Upon arrival at Gibraltar he and the ship's company transferred to HMS Ariadne, this time as Leader of the Eighth Frigate Squadron, in July 1980 to April 1982. He was appointed in command as Captain Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth in June 1982 until September 1984. At some stage he was advanced to the rank of rear-admiral and was awarded a C.B. in June 1986. He retired on 16 May 1987. He died on 6th June 2019 aged 88.

*Peter Danks*

## BLACK TOT DAY – ALAN PHILLIPS

On the 30th July 2019 my son Sam and I attended a Black Tot Day lunch on HMS Belfast, organised by the RNA & RNRMC. The rum was supplied, in great quantities, by Messer's Pussers. We met at the Belfast gangway around 11:30, walking straight onboard and making our way to the Jr Rates Dining Room where many RNA & RNRMC were already gathered and swapping sea stories. At our table (nearest to the bar) we were joined by a couple of "airey faireys" (Fleet Air Arm chappies) a few more RNA members and two RNA HQ ladies, Mrs Sarah Clewes and Mrs Chrissie Hughes, both ex-RN.



At the bar were about 15 trays, each with 10 Pussers Rum tin mugs, containing a tot of rum.

"Up Spirits" piped, each table had a rum bosun who collected the trays and, eventually, everybody had their tot. We toasted Her Majesty and our table also toasted HMS Amethyst, 70 years to the day she broke out of the Yangtze River. We were then served a three course luncheon and I must say one of the best meals I've had at an Association function.

After the meal and speeches we were given a tour of Belfast. I had great pleasure in showing Sam where I was billeted when I served on Belfast in 1970 (3G mess). She was HMS Bellerophon in those days, HQ of the Reserve Ships Fleet.



I took him down to the forward boiler room to show him where the "elite" stokers worked. A bit of an eye opener for me too, as the boiler room when operational was pressurised, so entry was via an air-lock. All the ships I served on had non-pressurised boiler rooms with the combustion air being ducted down to each boiler and no air-lock for entry.

The event was labelled as a "dry run" for next year's 50th anniversary of the withdrawal of the daily rum issue. So look out for information on the RNA web site.



*Alan Phillips – Ajax 1965-66 MEM*



## SOUTH AMERICA TRIP UPDATE

By the time you read this there will be less than three months to go and to think I first had the idea of going to South America just after Christmas 2016.

Most of the itinerary is finalised with just the navy in Valparaiso and Uruguay to commit to their promise of help – seems you cannot rush the navy!

32 of us arrive at Santiago mid-morning Monday 2nd December and have a 3 hour City tour scheduled for later in the day.

The following day we take a coach trip into the Andes to Valle Nevado, a ski resort in their winter, returning for an evening drinks reception with the UK Defence Attaché.

Wednesday 4th sees us taking another coach to the Pacific coast to Valparaiso where Ajax & Exeter were berthed when the earthquake of January 1939 happened. Here we tour the city and surrounds and meet the Head of the Chile Navy when we are there.

On the 5th we fly down to Concepción and after lunch the Mayor will greet us outside the Cathedral before we make our way to nearby Talcahuano for a tour and visit to the Huascar, a surviving ship of the war of the Pacific 1879 – 1883. In the evening we have a Civic Reception with the Mayor of Concepción at the private Concepción Club.

The following day we are on a municipal coach to Iglesia Saint John's Church to view memorial to Admiral Cradock from the Battle of Coronel followed by Jonathan Harwood's very relevant talk, "Battle of Coronel & Falklands" at the City Library. Afterwards we have a walking tour of the city lead by Professor Armando Cartes. In the afternoon we take a coach down the coast to the town of Coronel.

Saturday 7th sees us flying back up to Santiago for transfer to our flight back over the Andes to Montevideo. Whilst in Uruguay we are joined by other members taking our numbers to 43 over the next few days.

On the Sunday we take a three hour City tour in the morning and in the afternoon there is an optional visit to the Silver River (Rio Plata) Masonic Lodge where they will make presentations to visitors – our host is also the barman there!

And on Monday 9th we take a full day trip to the old colonial town of Colonia del Sacramento situated some 112 miles further up the River Plate.

Feeling that the group deserve some down time the Tuesday is a free day although in the evening we have been invited to the Ambassador's Residence for a Reception. I shall be offering an optional visit to the stadium of the very first football world cup. I have arranged to go on a bird watching tour.

Another busy day on Wednesday 11th with an early start off to Punta del Este 80 miles in the opposite direction to Monday's trip. The plan, still awaiting confirmation, is to board the Uruguay Navy frigate together with a flotilla of ADES (the equivalent to our RNLI) boats out onto the River Plate to just off Isla de Lobos where the closing stages of the Battle were played out. If not the navy we will board the smaller ADES boats. Hopefully we will see some of the many thousands of sea lions and fur seals and possibly some of the huge elephant seals that reside there although we do not land. It was reported that many thousands of them, startled by the gunfire from Achilles, panicked and flung themselves off the cliffs to their deaths!

Situated not too far from our hotel on Thursday 12th we shall make our way to the Museo Andes 1972 Exhibition and learn all about the terrible plane crash of 1972 and the survival of some of the passengers as portrayed in the book and film “Alive”. In the afternoon a local historian will take us on a historical tour of the City. During this time I am hoping to arrange to see the Graf Spee bronze cross [if not then possibly on the 10th]. In the evening we join the British Society for a 3 course dinner reception at which Jonathan Harwood will give his River Plate talk.

Friday 13th December 2019 is the actual 80th Anniversary day and has proved to be a challenge to organise but at 10am at the Templo Inglés (The Cathedral of The Most Holy Trinity) a commemorative service begins during which we shall lay wreaths at the River Plate memorial board – we shall present a commemorative Association board. The British Ambassador will speak.

Following light refreshments we make our way firstly to the Cementerio Británico (British Cemetery) where we shall lay a wreath at the common grave of three of four Achilles crew who were buried at sea but tragically washed ashore at Pando, not far from Montevideo – only two could be identified. Here the New Zealand Ambassador will say a few words.

It is then onto the Cementerio del Norte where the 36 Graf Spee crew are buried and where we will lay a wreath at the Graf Spee Memorial. I have invited the German Ambassador to speak here and he has accepted.

I still await confirmation that the Uruguay Navy will take us out to the wreck site of the Graf Spee some 4 miles off Montevideo. This will make a long day but worth it.

The kudos of this day and indeed the whole trip is epitomised by the fact I have NINE ambassadors on my invitation list together with a host of other dignitaries including the daughter of Captain Langsdorff, Inge travelling over from Germany; she is also joining us in Buenos Aires – after a slow start the day is snowballing!

Our time in Uruguay is all too soon over and on Saturday 14th we take the Buquebus Fast Ferry over the River Plate to Buenos Aires; the journey takes 2hrs 15min. The original ferry we hoped to take no longer runs on a Sunday and rather than take an earlier one that involves a long bus journey to the port of Colonia we are now booked on the evening sailing, the only direct one on a Saturday. This means our optional session with the Graf Spee Association and the Jonathan Harwood talk that afternoon has been rescheduled to 2.30pm on the Monday after the City tour.

The president of the Graf Spee Association is the organiser for the commemorative event at Captain Langsdorff's grave on the Sunday together with the British Legion and we shall lay a wreath. We will also lay a wreath on the grave of J. T. Frederick, an Exeter crewman, the only one buried in Argentina – it appears he was probably taken there from the Falklands by the British medical team from Buenos Aires but did not survive. Following this we all gather for a luncheon reception at Graf Spee Association – the menu sounds fantastic!

On Monday 16th we have a 9am 3 hour City Tour with the optional afternoon meeting and in the evening we take in the almost obligatory Argentine Dinner & Tango Show at La Ventana.

With the holiday/trip coming to a close Tuesday is a free day allowing people to relax, go shopping or generally do their own thing before setting off early next day. I'm off birdwatching again!

Wednesday 18th and it is off to the airport for the return flight arriving home on the 19th for a well-deserved rest – just in time to get ready for Christmas!

*Malcolm Collis*

## ARCHIVIST UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2019

As usual, a steady trickle of emails during this newsletter period, several Facebook enquiries and several duplicates. In most cases I suggest enquirers visit the MoD via [www.gov.uk/guidance/request-records-of-deceased-service-personnel](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/request-records-of-deceased-service-personnel) and also advise that I will include them in the Newsletter to see if anyone remembers them and also include them on the “do you know” page on the website for general circulation. I also encourage them to join the Association.

### JAMES SALISBURY MARPLES

Not strictly an Ajax enquiry but Andy Taylor inherited some photos from his Grandfather's estate, who he did not know very well as he was divorced from his grandmother. He was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1910. They are of the Graf Spee scuttling. His granddad was a wireless operator in the merchant navy and his grandma told him he was a British spy! He would like to know why he was potentially in Uruguay at that time.

I replied, *“Unfortunately I don't have access to any Merchant Navy lists but can tell you that that of the 8 merchant ships sunk by Graf Spee all the crew were removed before they were sunk with no loss of life. Many were transferred to the support ship Altmark and were finally released when the ship was captured in Norway trying to get back to Germany; several were put on life boats and sent on their way if close to land; some were transferred to passing neutral ships and quite a few, mainly captains and senior officers and injured were kept on board the Graf Spee as prisoners. These were all released at Montevideo when Graf Spee anchored there following the battle of the River Plate prior to being scuttled. I do not have him listed as one of those but who knows, he may have ended up there in such manner? ... or indeed he may have worked for the British government out there as there was quite a network of British there at that time. I've had a quick look on the internet for Merchant seaman records but couldn't find anything helpful but that might be the best avenue to continue your researches.”*

Andy was able to establish from the National Archives he was awarded the following: Atlantic Star; Africa Star; Pacific Star; Italy Star and was a casualty in the Atlantic.

The photos turned out to be widely available stock ones of the Graf Spee at anchor and of the scuttling and so didn't help with solving the possible mystery.

### SYDNEY RENNIE

Donna-Marie Rennie was told by her nan that her granddad Sydney Rennie had served in the navy on the Ajax. He was from Liverpool and married Violet and she is trying to find out about him and whether she has any more family. Unfortunately S. Rennie does not appear on the River Plate list nor on any of my other lists that only go up to 1943. Lists were notoriously inaccurate and this doesn't mean he wasn't necessarily on Ajax at some time or he could have been later in the War.

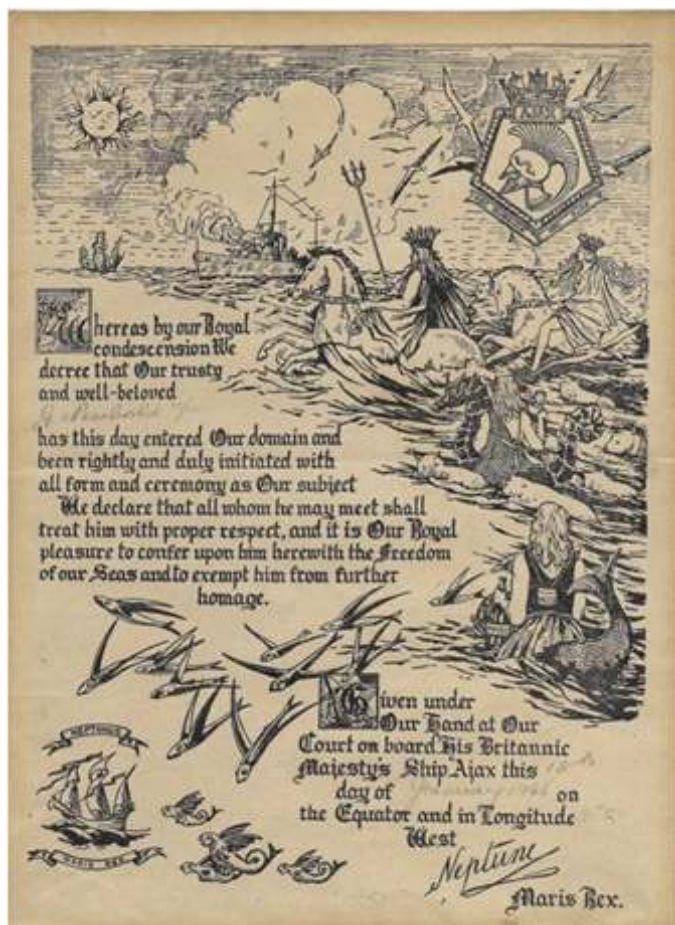
### FRANK IVOR SHAW



Michael Burke MBE contacted me to say he had read about our forthcoming reunion and wrote to advise that his late father-in-law Frank Ivor Shaw was an ERA in Ajax at the River Plate and was present at the Guildhall Luncheon. He had taken lots of photographs that were donated to the Imperial War Museum.

I replied, *“I have had previous exchanges with two grandsons, Jeremy Shaw back in July 2014 and Simon Shaw in February 2018 and I have a full set of the various photographs from them, sent to the museum and personal ones, which are now in our archives. I did do a short entry in our Newsletter - March 2018 page 23 and September 2014 - copies can be found on our website I assume you are aware there is a Shaw Court named in his honour in the Town of Ajax, Ontario and that his name appears on their Memorial Wall - details on our website”*

## GORDON NEWBOLD



Eric Holmwood, the Social Secretary for the Wrexham RNA received a “crossing the line” certificate dated 18/01/1946 from one of his members, who apparently has more material.

I responded, “As you may know *HMS Ajax* took part in the *Battle of the River Plate* in December 1939 and following that she returned to the UK for repairs and saw out the rest of the war in the Mediterranean and France. The only time after that when she entered the southern hemisphere was when she sailed to Buenos Aires and Montevideo to escort the *Highland Monarch* transporting repatriated *Graf Spee* crew back to Germany. She sailed from Freetown Sierra Leone on 16/1/1946 and arrived Brazil on 23/1/1946 having crossed the equator on the 18/1/1946 according to the crossing the line certificate”

Eric has now sent me the the additional items.

## ARTHUR CLARENCE WOTTON

Michael Wotton was after information on his grandfather Arthur Clarence Wotton who was a CPO Stoker and was present at the scuttling of the *Graf Spee* and has a set of photos showing the *Graf Spee* crew ashore. Unfortunately Wotton, or any derivative, does not appear on any of my lists.

He did come back to say he had his service record already, J104254 and joined the *Hood* 17/05/1929 and finished on the *Asturias* [armed merchant cruiser] but doesn't mention any of the ships about the time of the River Plate. He joined the Fleet Reserve in 1936 and saw service throughout WW11.

I still await further information.

Malcolm Collis – Archivist



## STANDARD BEARER REPORT SEPTEMBER 2019

Over the weekend of 22nd to 24th June the Weymouth Armed Forces Celebrations were held attracting visitors from all over the Country. The Sunday started with the Armed Forces Service with a fine turn out of Standards including Alf Larkin with the Association's Standard. This was



followed by a Parade of all Veterans along the Weymouth seafront together with the South Wales Police Band, Wessex Military Band, Dolphin Marching Band & the Guards Division Corps of Drum Association.

The parade was followed up by a Historic Military Vehicle Convoy and the Royal British Legion Riders Branch.



Our standard was one of four which were paraded on the Sea Sunday Service at All Saints & St Edmund Church Wyke Regis on 21 July. Reverend Betty Port presided over an excellent service and asked that the Standard



Bearers describe to the congregation what the standards represented. Dan Sherren was very happy to do so and indeed they were applauded by those present when they marched out of the church.

“It was great to inform the congregation of the history of our association, even if I did go on a bit! At least the story was told to a wider audience and appreciated especially when I covered the street naming part.” Said Dan. A super event.



Alf also attended the funerals of ex-Navy veterans on 2nd July and 27th July.



