



**HMS AJAX & RIVER PLATE
VETERANS ASSOCIATION**

Memorial Service

**TO COMMEMORATE THE 50TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE VISIT OF HMS
AJAX FRIGATE TO ONTARIO**

Held at

**The National Memorial Arboretum
Royal British Legion
National Remembrance Gardens**

Saturday 26th September 2026 12.30 p.m.

**HMS AJAX & RIVER PLATE VETERANS
ASSOCIATION REUNION 2026
HELD AT SKETCHLEY GRANGE SPA & HOTEL,
HINCKLEY, LEICESTERSHIRE
FRIDAY 25TH – SUNDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 2026**

With SF Events tasked with doing most of the organisation we headed for the Sketchley Grange Spa & Hotel, just off the A5 at Hinckley, Leicestershire, where 32 members were booked in; four from Canada had been unable to fly over a couple of days before schedule. Two more would join us on the Saturday.

The plan for the Friday night was to have an informal two-course meal with sale of merchandise, sale of raffle tickets and viewing of auction items that would take place after the meal.

Members Stuart (brother of the late George 'Alan' Phillips, a former committee member) & Sandra Phillips had assisted Alan's widow, Carol, move house which had resulted in a large amount of naval memorabilia for

disposal. The family donated it to the Association and Stuart & Sandra had driven down from West Yorkshire to deliver the items and stayed for dinner.

Raffle tickets went on sale and auction items viewed.

Dining in the Bradgate Suite was informal with no table plan, although members had name place cards with their pre-ordered two courses on the back – very handy!

Once dinner was over, the raffle was drawn, which took a while! Proceeds from the Raffle, £280, will be going to the Royal Navy & Royal Marine Charity who have generously supported us on previous overseas visits, the latest of which was the June 2026 Canada trip.

The auction was then held; not quite up to Antiques Roadshow standards, but most of it went to good homes. Paul Byrne had donated a glass anchor full of rum that went for £65 – thanks Paul. Overall, the auction raised over £300 with the proceeds going to Association funds.

The sale of merchandise raised £154 in sales.

The weather lady had said the weekend was set fair, dry and hot so hopefully the contingency chapel wouldn't be needed at the NMA. Saturday dawned clear and sunny but a little chilly until the sun got to work. Following breakfast, 24 members assembled at 10:00 in Bosworth Room for the Annual General Meeting of the Association.

As we left the AGM, the bus was ready and waiting to take us the hour to the National Memorial Arboretum, recently renamed the Royal British Legion National Remembrance Gardens, at Alrewas. With no SF Events Representative on site, much of the donkey work fell to one individual who had a busy weekend: amongst his many duties was acting as bus monitor ... but he failed miserably and managed to drive off one couple short and didn't realise until the return journey – sorry. I'm pleased to say they were very magnanimous when spoken to; not too sure I would have been so gracious though!

We arrived at the NMA and made our way directly to our Battle of the River Plate Memorial for the 12:30 service. We were joined by members Glyn Seagrave and Steve Cook.

Dave Lear, our March Commander arranged the veteran volunteers into a squad and on the commencement of Hearts of Oak, stepped off, halting opposite the memorial. Nigel Masters, our

Chairman opened proceedings with a welcome speech, followed by Malcolm Collis who gave a potted history upon the creation of the memorial. [which can be found on the website]

Peter Danks read out the names of three members who had crossed the bar since our last reunion: Albert Robb aged 107 HMS Ajax Veteran; Associate member Heather Stickland aged 98, wife of the late HMS Ajax River Plate Veteran William 'Dick' Stickland who Crossed the Bar in 2004; Associate member Bill Mitchell aged 80, son-in-law of William Swanston Ajax River Plate Veteran who Crossed the Bar in 2013. This was followed by the Act of Remembrance.

Dave Lear delivered the Exhortation and the Standard was dipped for the last post and Two Minute Silence. Following Reveille, Mayor Shaun Collier from the Town of Ajax Ontario, together with member Stuart Specke both laid wreaths.

After the National Anthem, the Mayor presented to member Trevor Sharpe his 'Sharp Crescent' street sign that had been scheduled to be presented to him in Canada during the recent visit.

Closing remarks were given by Malcolm Collis which left two and a half hours for members to explore the site before the 15:30 return journey.

The full Order of Service with Facts & Figures on the Frigate can be found on the website <https://www.hmsajax.org/2026>

Our Rum Bosun, Mike Fox had the rum tub ready for 18:30 Up-Spirits together with the wine reception, before with made our way to our tables in the Bradgate Suite, this time in the whole suite with a wooden dance floor now down. Our entertainer, Mikaela, had already set up and then left us in peace to dine. The Chairman welcomed everyone, include two extras joining us, and the three-course gala dinner was served, along with wine proved by the Association.

Port was then served at the end and the Chair gave the Loyal Toast.

Malcolm Collis presented an engraved glass clock to the Mayor of Ajax as a further token of our appreciation of his absolute support over his two terms in the office of Mayor, which is about to end. He suitably replied.

Malcolm Collis also presented to the Town of Ajax, on behalf of the widow of the late George Alan Phillips, HMS Ajax, a large framed display of plaques of the four ships involved in the 1939 Battle of the River Plate to go on display in Ajax.

Mikaela started her first session and although members were slow to get going, she soon had plenty of dancers up – she had a brilliant, powerful voice that was enjoyed by all. With a short interlude, she kept going until 23:30 – many then drifted away to their rooms leaving a few die-hards to prop up the bar, metaphorically

Several people were stopping over an extra night but at the Sunday breakfast we all said our fond-farewells until the next time

A brilliant time had been had by all and we all look forward to the 2027 Reunion.

Malcolm Collis

September 2026

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