



NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome everyone to the March Newsletter. I hope you all had a fantastic festive period and have survived the winter months without being washed or blown away! Let's hope for a fantastic summer which will lead up to our reunion in September. You should have all received an email from Malcolm with regard to it; the package is what I consider a very good comprehensive deal. I have personally stayed at the Sketchley Grange Hotel and can recommend it; it would be nice to see as many of you there as possible.

Mike Cranswick continues his hard work organising our trip to Ajax, Ontario in May/June this year for the 50th anniversary of the Frigate's visit in 1976. He is liaising with the Town Council and an itinerary is forming which will be circulated when completed.

I also belong to the HMS Ganges Association and by coincidence, this year is the 50th anniversary of the closure of the training establishment; it then became a Police Training Centre and then a Sports Centre.

HMS Ganges was a training ship from 1865 to 1905, first at Newport and then Harwich. The boys aboard were 15-17. In 1905 the ship moved ashore to Shotley Peninsula near Ipswich and was officially commissioned as a shore establishment.

It was famous, you could say infamous, for the Shotley Mast - boys had to climb it as part of training and was also known for its tough discipline, especially pre WW11. Tens of thousands of sailors were trained for the two World Wars and Post War Royal Navy.

I joined Ganges at the end of 1971 and served eleven months there, I must say that for a boy of 15, from a seaside resort in Cornwall, I found the initial weeks extremely difficult, not least the home sickness; at the time there was no counselling so we just had to get on with it - it was seen as a weakness by our superiors. Many of our fellow trainees were from the cities, some were from orphanages and some had been given the option by the courts to either join the RN or go to Borstal! For the boys from my sort of background, we found it difficult to relate to the "City boys". This resulted in many a disagreement and fights - pecking orders were established. Many lads from our recruitment were allowed to leave in the

initial weeks, deemed unsuitable for the Royal Navy. When we eventually left eleven months later for the second part of our training, we were informed that of the 163 who enlisted in our recruitment, only 61 had made it to the end! That, in my opinion, is quite shocking. Having spoken with some of the others who made it through, the general consensus was that if there had been more support from the staff the drop-out rate would have been far less.

My description of Ganges so far sounds very depressing; gradually as we adapted to life in the RN, albeit the Ganges version of it, friendships were formed, characters and potential leaders emerged. If sport was your thing, then you were in heaven; all popular sports were played and if you represented your Division with distinction, you were awarded your "Colours" and if you then went on to represent HMS Ganges, you were awarded establishment colours.

Training was comprehensive. No matter what branch you had chosen, every trainee was trained in basic seamanship, navigation, ships husbandry, electrics & marksmanship. I wonder how many boys of 15/16 could disassemble and reassemble an SLR in two minutes! My chosen trade was as a Cook (The most difficult course in the RN! - no one ever passed it!). The bonus of being trained as a Cook was that you got to eat what you made; one of the most vivid memories of Ganges was always being hungry! Our fortnightly wages were spent very quickly in the NAAFI on food! I recall when we were learning the delights of the world of pastry, making a family size apple pie and devouring the whole thing on the way back to our Mess! The Cookery Instructors were with, one exception, a really nice group of people, I think they realised we could quite possibly be working alongside each other in the not-too-distant future. The one exception, unfortunately, was the Head Instructor. He was a Chief Petty Officer who obviously was not a happy person, either at work and probably not at home! On one occasion he walked into our training Galley and asked one of our Class, a little cockney lad called Talbot, what he was making, Talbot replied "I'm making Choux pastry" - he pronounced it by sounding the 'x'. Well, this incensed the CPO and he proceeded to clout Talbot around the head across the Galley, shouting, "I will give you Choux pastry", with the rest of us trainees and our Instructor looking on horrified! On the day before our final Cookery exam he walked into the Galley and our Instructor informed him what we were preparing - his reply was, "Well I hope they all fail" and walked out - a strange man indeed!

So, after eleven months the remaining trainees who had joined the previous November left Ganges to complete the second part of their training, We Cooks headed for the port of Chatham and the shore base HMS Pembroke, Chatham Dockyard, which is now part of the University of Kent. Chatham Dockyard in 1972 still played a major part in the Royal Navy and was my first experience of a Dockyard; quite a sight and a little bit scary to be honest.

When we arrived at Pembroke we were sent up to East Camp. The camp had been hastily constructed to house men during the First World War; it was only to be temporary accommodation and was still being used over fifty years later! We were greeted by a Chief Officer who welcomed us with, "Another bunch of know alls from Ganges" It became apparent very quickly that Ganges trainees were not liked at Pembroke, the reason being that overall we were better trained than the trainees from Raleigh, just for the fact that we had been doing for nearly a year what the lads from Raleigh had only done for six weeks, and also, we had completed our Cookery Course which we then had to repeat at Pembroke, whereas the lads from Raleigh were just starting. Someone in a high place, on a lot of money, had not thought it through. What was amazing was the freedom we had at Pembroke; we could go ashore, we could go home at weekends, everything was far more relaxed. I experienced my first pint of beer and the joys of a 'hangover'! We also lost some more trainees who decided the Royal Navy was not for them, having gone through all the training at Ganges which seemed such a waste of time and effort.

Eventually, after another two and a half months, and nearly fourteen months of training, we were given our first 'Draft'. I was drafted to HMS Cambridge, a Shore Base just outside Plymouth. This was the Navy Gunnery School. I was sent to work in the Wardroom Galley and so began my time in the "Proper" Royal Navy.

So, it just remains for me to say I hope you all have a lovely spring and by the time the next Newsletter is issued, we will be in Ajax, Ontario. I look forward to reporting back to you.

Nigel Masters
Chairman

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Hello everyone, Spring has Sprung hopefully.

No sooner do we park Christmas and we are steaming into what will be a very busy year for the association.

Plans are now well advanced for the May/June trip to Ajax, Ontario with 52 members and guests travelling. This includes 20 veterans from the Frigate HMS Ajax, 16 of whom were onboard for the historic ship's visit to Ajax 50 years ago in 1976.

It is nice to see many wives, partners and children will be present for the celebratory events and street dedications; it will be a memorable time for sure.

I am delighted to say that following application to the RNRMC and Greenwich Hospital, the Association have received some financial funding to assist us with transportation in Canada. This has enabled us to secure coach travel for a day at Niagara on the Lake and Niagara Falls. A spectacular sight even if you have been before.

Our visit to Whitby Yacht Club has been confirmed for Sunday 31st May and weather permitting, our hosts will get us afloat on Lake Ontario prior to a BBQ and adult refreshments. Guaranteed to increase their bar takings!

Before we head to Canada, it is likely that I will be contacted by the Royal British Legion to see if we wish to be considered for the Cenotaph Parade in London this year. Having participated in the last 2 years, I would like to gauge the expressions of interest/numbers for this year before requesting tickets/places. To that end, anyone who is interested in taking part, could you please email me at mikecranswick@live.co.uk

I don't need a firm commitment at this time; I just need to know whether there is enough interest to take part once more. Appreciate if this could be done now, as ticket requests are made in April.

The Chair has passed comment on this previously, but the Association is thriving where other groups/organisations are struggling. Thanks to all that contribute to making the HMS Ajax and River Plate Veterans Association the success that it is.

Mike Cranswick
Secretary

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

I am delighted to report that, with one or two exceptions, there are no outstanding subscriptions - thanks everybody – this does make life so much easier. If you don't pay by a renewing Faster Payment In (FPI) or Standing Order, just check your last payment date and make a manual transfer to save me having to chase – subscriptions remain at £12 & £18 family. We are encouraging members to select this method of payment as an alternative to PayPal as we do lose out on transaction fees – you can cancel your PayPal subscription and replace with a FPI or SO.

Can you also please remember to update me with any changes in your circumstances such as address, phone numbers and, in particular, email addresses **AND** make sure your next of kin have us listed as someone to contact ... when the time comes!

Should you be struggling to pay the subscriptions in these difficult economic times then please do contact me rather than just not pay – we can work something out.

Veterans and their families ought to be aware of the network of organisations out there that can offer help if required:

SSAFA	SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity
Help for Heroes	UK Armed Forces and military veterans charity Help For Heroes
Royal British Legion	Royal British Legion Armed Forces Charity
The Veterans Charity	https://careaftercombat.org

CROSSED THE BAR:

Delighted to say, nothing to report.

NEW MEMBERS:

We welcome just the one, returning, new member.

Andrew 'Jim' Laker was a previous Association member until medical issues forced him to resign and we are delighted to welcome him back. He was Ajax 3ez mess Feb 1975 - Jun 1976. Andy and his wife Irene live in Lincoln.

BIRTHDAYS

The following Frigate members have celebrated a significant birthday (a '0' or a '5') during this Newsletter period, December to February inclusive and we send them our best regards:

Nigel Harcourt	80
Cliff Pantrey	85
Keith Clayton	75
Michael Harte	85
Gary Williams	70

They should have received an Association birthday card from Peter Danks.

WELFARE & HEALTH UPDATES

As we all get older, bits wear out, stop working or just fall off, and I'm sure all of us of a certain age will have a litany of ailments of varying degrees of seriousness and varying amounts of tablets for breakfast. Should you have something in particular you would wish members to be aware of, then please let me know – I also know how to keep a secret if you just want to make me aware.

Albert Robb – Cruiser veteran Albert celebrated his 107th birthday in September and his granddaughter Viona reports that he's still plodding on the same, staying with her mum, his daughter, at weekends and home during the week. Not much to report, no health issues and is getting around still with the help of his walking frame. Her mum says he's still as sharp as ever. Well done Albert and we send our very best wishes.

Allan Lorriman – our other Cruiser veteran who celebrated his 100th birthday in June. Son Howard reports both mum and dad are doing well with no change since the last update – good to hear and we send them both our best wishes.

Unfortunately, we have several other members either recovering from, undergoing, or awaiting various medical procedures, or just Anno Domini catching up, and we send them all our very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

If anybody wants to make contact with any other member, let me know; I'm sure they will agree to me sharing their contact details, not forgetting WhatsApp direct messaging.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The easiest way to pay your membership dues is by Standing Order or regular Faster Payment (FPI) through our bank and this is the preferred method. PayPal, which is on the Association's website, is another option, but we become liable for transaction fees. These methods automatically renew and saves you having to remember to do a transfer or send a cheque each year ... and will save me having to chase you, should you forget.

Annual subscriptions remain the same: £12 for individuals and £18 for families.

BANK DETAILS: HMS Ajax & RPVA (or River Plate Veterans Association)

ACCOUNT NUMBER: 24865868

SORT CODE 30-99-56

CHEQUES payable to HMS Ajax & RPVA and sent to me at:

Malcolm Collis, The Bewicks, Station Road, Ten Mile Bank, Norfolk, PE38 0EY.

I can then pay them in electronically on-line.

Please let me know if there are any changes to your address, phone number or email, so that I can keep the membership records up to date. Also contact me in cases of hardship.

Membership Secretary

Malcolm Collis h.m.s.ajax.rpv@gmail.com

01366 377945 +44 7717559594

ROYAL VISIT TO HMS AJAX

Associate Colin Barnard contacted me to say, “Don’t know whether this is of any interest, I am currently reading Christopher Hitchens’ biography ‘Hitch-22’. Between pages 84 and 85 there are a series of photographs, one of which is captioned as on the deck of HMS Ajax. The date would have been before December 1936 as the occasion was a visit by the ‘future’ King George VI and the Queen” (he came to the Throne 11/12/1936 & Coronated 12/05/1937). Hitchens’ father, Commander Eric Ernest Hitchens who he refers to as The Commander is in the picture on Ajax but his ship was HMS Jamaica”. The book also suggests he was on a ship with Mountbatten on D-Day.



King and Queen. The Commander (far right) welcomes the future King George to the HMS Ajax. The woman in the picture was to become the last Empress of India.

I went back to Colin – I’ve done a bit more digging but things are still unclear. HMS Jamaica didn’t enter service until 29th June 1942 and was part of the force that sunk the Scharnhorst 26th December 1943.

Regarding D-Day landings, I don’t think Mountbatten was present, let alone on a ship, so wouldn’t have been with Commander Hitchens on Jamaica or any other ship, it seems? June 1944, HMS Jamaica was “Deployed at Scapa Flow with Home Fleet units to provide Distant Cover if required to support NEPTUNE operations should any

enemy surface forces attempt interference via NW Approaches”, apparently.

In the Jamaica ship’s history it documents, “6th June 1945 Embarked HM King George VI and Queen Elizabeth at Portsmouth for visit to Channel Islands” and this is probably the subject of the photograph, which is looking more than likely to have been miscaptioned as Ajax. Don’t think the two ships ever met up and as I said, the only Royal visit to Ajax was an informal one in build in 1935, April 4th, before they became King & Queen in December 1936 (See image)



1935



VISIT OF THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF YORK TO HMS AJAX, APRIL 4TH 1935

lady.
Almost the only event of importance was the visit of T.R.H. the Duke and Duchess of York to launch the liner *Strathmore*. After a hitchless ceremony, their Royal Highnesses paid a visit to *Ajax*—an *Ajax* chastened by the concentrated attack of an army of charwomen. If the ship did not exactly glister in the early April sunlight, at least it was clean enough for a Royal Inspection—the first honour that was paid to us. None of us who shook hands with their Royal Highnesses could foresee that within two years the Duke and Duchess of York would have become the King and Queen of England, through the death of one king and the abdication of another.
In those days indeed King George V was in sound health, and conversation on leaving Harrow dwelt often on the coming Jubilee, which brought such a spontaneous demonstration of loyalty to the Throne and such unforgettable scenes in London. Some of us went up to Town from Portsmouth for Jubilee night, and will long remember the half-hour it took us to drive along Piccadilly, the amazing sight of a Bond Street festooned and closed to traffic, with peanut-sellers doing

Account from “Grippa” on the Royal Visit

AJAX VISITORS

This image was posted on one of the Facebook pages and shows Prince Charles (Now King Charles 111) and Lady Diana, the Prince and Princess of Wales, having been piped aboard HMS Ajax in Venice May 1985 when Ajax acted as escort to the Royal Yacht Britannia on the tour of Italy, including Venice.



GREETINGS FROM THE GRAF SPEE ASSOCIATION

The following was received from Honorary Member Enrique Dick:

Buenos Aires, January 5th 2026
To all the members of HMS Ajax & RPVA
CC. Malcolm Collis

Dear comrades

It is my wish, in my capacity as outgoing President of the Admiral Graf Spee Comradeship Circle, to extend to you a deeply heartfelt Christmas greeting and to mark the resolute and inexorable march into the year 2026. I shall mention several events, among them the departure towards the infinite oceans of three of our dearly loved sailors: Inge Nedden-Langsdorff, Guillermo Bräutigam and Sonni Schmidt, who leave behind a firm, sustained and spiralling wake of smoke, signalling high speed towards distant confines where we have never paused.

The Admiral Graf Spee Comradeship Circle has recovered a substantial part of the Graf Spee's motor launch (the ship originally carried three). The project now underway is its restoration, which we can already anticipate will be unparalleled. We have also published the book 'Y se dio a la fuga' [And He Escaped], of which I am the author, recounting the dramatic escape of two officers who, upon their return to Germany, re-joined the forces engaged in battle.

Another on-going effort concerns the recovery and organisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs database. Mónica Voigtlander devotes a significant part of her time to completing a series of histories that at times draw closer to, and at times move away from, the Graf Spee, with the ship serving both as backdrop and as protagonist.

On a personal level, life goes on, and the country does so with effort.

With our best wishes

Yours sincerely
Enrique Dick

The HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association have sent our very best wishes to Enrique and his Association. We also look forward to future updates on the projects Enrique mentions.

HMS AJAX BRASS PLAQUE

I was contacted by a Mark Gawel who was an Executor of an Estate which has, and he quotes the deceased, a “Circular brass plaque of Ajax mounted on an oak shield which was from the original HMS Ajax which took part of the Battle of the River Plate during World War Two. This came into my possession via the previous owner of my house whose son, Captain Jack Slaughter, served in the Royal Navy.”

Mark offered this item to the Association.

As the Badge looked a little too old for the WW11 Ajax Cruiser, I did a little digging on the internet on the ‘Royal Navy Officers list for 1939 – 45’

I updated Mark that Jack Etheridge Slaughter was actually a midshipman in HMS Ajax 15-05-1923 to 14-03-1924, his first listed ship. However, this is not the one at the River Plate in 1939 (a Cruiser) but the previous Ajax (Battleship) which fought at the Battle of Jutland in 1916 - have a look on our website here <https://www.hmsajax.org/previous-ajax> - on there, in the photo taken early 1923, you'll see one of my great uncles who was a chief petty officer in Ajax, so may well have bumped into midshipman Slaughter on board?



Caption placed on Archive Item

SLAUGHTER Jack Etheridge "Jackie"    officer	21 05 1905 Reading Berkshire	Book 10 00 1923 PLSM 18 06 1926 SJA 30 08 1926 Lt. 30 12 1927 Lt.Cdr. 30 12 1929 Cdr. 30 06 1940 ACapt. 27 04 1944 Capt. 21 12 1948 (retd 07 01 1988)	050 - 09 05 1940 successful submarine operations against the enemy (investiture 18 07 1941)	Education: Radford College, Farnborough. 09 1920 - entered RNR 18 00 1923 - 04 1923 HMS Ajax (Battleship) 14 03 1924 - 01 1925 HMS Valiant (Battleship; Mediterranean) 01 01 1926 - 04 1926 promotion nurse RN College, Gosport (RMS Fleetport) 18 02 1927 - 07 1927 HMS Tiger (Battleship; sweeping gunnery flag ship) (Portsmouth) (temporary) 21 11 1927 - 04 1928 submarine course, Portsmouth (RMS Dolphin) 18 04 1928 - 04 1928 HMS L 22 (submarine) (2nd Submarine Flotilla, Portsmouth) (transfer to HMS Fleet) 04 06 1929 - 04 1930 HMS Olan (submarine) (2nd Submarine Flotilla) (China) (transfer to HMS Mallow) 09 1930 - 01 1932 First Lieutenant HMS Oryx (live gunboat) (China) (no appointment listed) 08 1933 - 01 1934 First Lieutenant HMS L 27 (submarine) (2nd Submarine Flotilla) (transfer to HMS Mallow) 12 08 1935 - 02 1938 Commanding Officer, HMS Sturgeon (submarine) (3rd Submarine Flotilla) (transfer to HMS Taurus) 02 12 1938 - 04 1939 HMS Malaya (Battleship; Mediterranean) (ship commissioned 20 03 1937) (no appointment listed) 25 09 1939 - (05 1940) Commanding Officer, HMS Sunfish (submarine) (32 1941) HMS Caroline (RN base, Belfast) * 09 05 1941 - (12 1941) Executive Officer, HMS Adamant (submarine depot ship) (till 10 01 1942 in charge while under construction) 15 03 1942 - (04 1944 HMS Cyclops (depot ship) (for submarines) 27 04 1944 - (07 1945) Commanding Officer, HMS Wolfe (destroyer depot ship) & as Captain (S/M) 2nd Submarine Flotilla (04 1946) HMS Cyclops (depot ship) * 26 06 1947 - 07 1948 Commanding Officer, HMS Sturgeon (depot ship) 11 11 1948 - 08 1950 Chief Staff Officer to Flag Officer (Submarines) (RMS Dolphin (submarine depot, Gosport) (08 1951) - 08 05 1953 Second Naval Member, New Zealand Naval Board 02 1954 - 04 1955 Commanding Officer, HMS Firth (submarine depot ship) & as Captain (S/M) 1st Submarine Squadron.
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BUGGEY LANE, AJAX

Member Dorothy Bugghey, daughter-in-law of Sidney and Nora Bugghey, was hoping to join the Association visit to Ajax in 2026 but due to a number of factors, decided to withdraw.

Bugghey Lane in Ajax is named in honour of brothers Henry and Sidney, also known as ‘Little Bugs’. Both served in Ajax, overlapping in 1940, with Henry (1937 to 1941) seeing action at the River Plate as one of the youngest onboard at just 18 as Boy Seaman 1st Class in the foremost gun turret.

Henry (1921 – 24/07/2006) and his wife Irene visited Ajax 2nd July 1998 when Bugghey Lane was dedicated.

Sidney joined Ajax in 1940 following his first ship HMS Bagshot; he went on to join the Commandos from 1943 to 1946.

In 2001 Sidney (11/07/1922 – 05/04/2012) and his wife Nora (d 15/05/2021) also visited Ajax when his plaque was placed besides his brother’s and their tree.

Henry, Sidney & Nora were all members of the Association, as is Dorothy.



Mayor Steve Parish presents Henry Bugghey with his Street Sign



Sidney and Dorothy Bugghey at Bugghey Lane



Road name tribute to brothers

VERY few people can claim the honour of having a road named after them, even fewer can claim to have a road named after them in another country.

But that is exactly the claim to fame that 83-year-old Sidney Bugghey, from Sherbrooke Road, Scarborough, has - in a small town in Canada.

The Great War veteran was recognized by the Canadian town of Ajax for his heroic service during the Second World War.

The town, which was only built in 1941, was named after the HMS Ajax and all of its streets were named after the ship's crew, of which Sidney and brother Henry were members.

At 18, these were not enough streets to mark every crew member, but in 1998 when a new road was built to the town's golf club, it was named Bugghey Lane, after the brothers.

Sidney served on HMS Ajax in the Mediterranean around Malta, Greece and Italy, and during the Battle of River Plate in 1939, off the coast of South America.

Two years later, the Canadian town of Ajax, which has become an important steel-making plant, keeping the war effort, and providing jobs for 8,000 people.

When the town was built four years later, it was decided to mark the fact that it had a war-born community, and the town of Ajax was chosen as it had become synonymous with courage and determination after the Battle of River Plate, the first significant naval victory of the war.

After finding out that he had a road named after him, Sidney visited the town the following year to see it for himself.

"I just felt so proud," he recalled. "I did feel so proud. It is a wonderful feeling that there are people there who can go to the bother to remember a British ship."

He and wife Nora's visit coincided with anniversary of the battle, at which Sidney was presented with a Bugghey Lane sign, which now has a plaque placed in his honor. A tree was also planted in his and his brother's honour and a plaque placed underneath.

Having been back to the town again in May 2001, Sidney now has to put a special band with the people of Ajax, on the edge of Lake Ontario.

"It's a wonderful town and the people could not do enough to make our visits memorable," he said. "Everyone made us feel so welcome, and they were all really interested in us and what we did during the war."

Sidney hopes to return to Ajax with Nora again in 2026 for the 80th anniversary of the building of the town.

PROUD MOMENT: Sidney and Nora Bugghey under the Bugghey Lane sign

The town of Ajax in Canada honours the ship's company of HMS Ajax

RESTORATION OF THE GRAVE OF ADMIRAL SIR HENRY HARWOOD

By Ben Harwood

Earlier in 2025 I visited the St Thomas of Canterbury church in Goring-on-Thames to attend the funeral of a longstanding client. This provided the opportunity to take some time to visit the grave of my grandparents, a place that holds particularly personal and historical significance for the Harwood family.

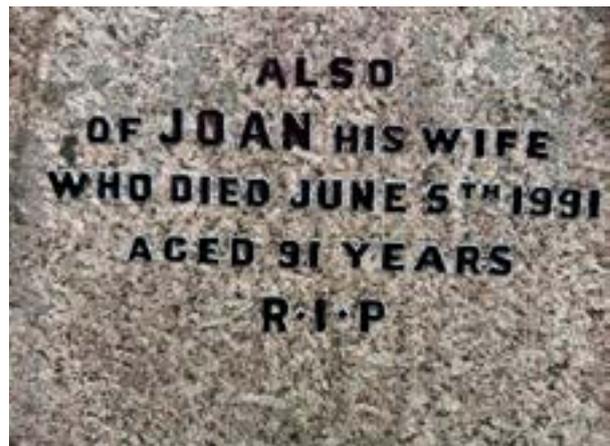
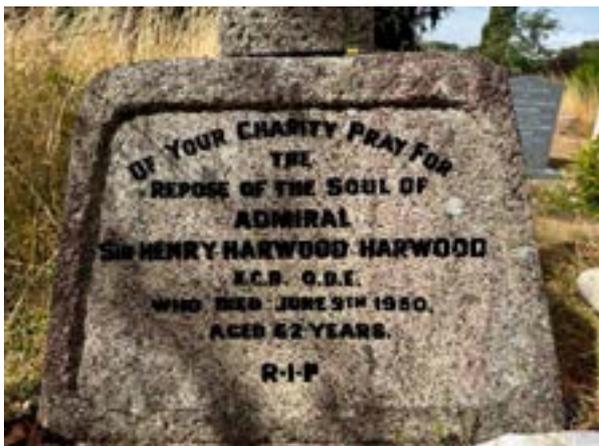
My grandfather, Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, was buried in the churchyard some 75 years ago, and my grandmother was laid to rest in the same grave following her death in 1991. Over the years, the gravestone had suffered from subsidence, and the once clear lettering had become worn and faded through time and exposure to the weather.

On seeing the condition of the headstone, my sister, Frances, and I (pictured) felt it was important to take remedial action. We met up in Goring on a rather damp August day and carefully repainted the lettering, restoring the legibility to the inscription, while taking care to maintain the appearance of the headstone.

Having completed the painting, we decided to deal with the subsidence. I obtained a quote from a local company and after liaising with my cousin Jonathan concerning the cost, we instructed professional stonemasons to undertake the necessary work to correct the subsidence and properly reset the stone. This specialist work has ensured that the memorial is now secure and protected against further movement.

This work was completed earlier this month (December 2025) and the grave has been restored to a condition befitting both its setting and the memory it represents for the Harwood family and all those associated with the HMS Ajax and River Plate Veterans Association.

Ben Harwood



I'VE HAD AN IDEA!

I also had one in 2016 which ended up with the Association trip to South America in 2019 for the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of the River Plate – I've now had another!

2029 will see the 90th Anniversary and whilst that sounds a while off, I know it all takes a lot of planning if we are to do something special.

I appreciate we will all be ten years older but hopefully our travelling days won't be over, with or without Zimmer frames, and we ought to mark this significant anniversary.

As a complete hairbrained idea, how about a return trip to South America? I'd probably drop Chile and concentrate on Uruguay & Argentina, say a week in each but less intense than before?

Those who went in 2019 will know it was a brilliant trip – for those who didn't, read all about it here [South America Trip Report.pdf](#)

At this stage, it's just a germ of an idea but would be interested in seeing what the likely interest would be, before I do any work on it.

If you are half interested, drop me an email malcolm.collis@gmail.com

Malcolm Collis

[The Falklands has also just popped into my head!]

Hopefully someone will see sense and talk me out of this really stupid idea?

2026 ASSOCIATION REUNION

As previously advised, SF Events are handling all aspects of our 2026 Reunion to be held over the weekend of Friday 25th to Sunday 27th September at the four star Sketchley Grange Hotel & Spa in Hinckley [Sketchley Grange Hotel & Spa | Countryside Hotel Near Leicester](#).



Full details were emailed out to all members 8th January together with a link (second one – ignore the first one I circulated) to book your place visit <https://sfevents.wufoo.com/forms/hms-ajax-and-river-plate-veterans>

On the **Friday** evening we have a 2-course informal meal with merchandise sale and raffle;

On **Saturday** morning - AGM followed by coach to the NMA before returning for later up-spirits & wine reception with 3-course Gala dinner **plus** live entertainment.

It may sound a long way off but book early - just a £10 deposit secures your place and at least we can get a feel of numbers.

Car parking is free (unlike Portsmouth that cost me £30) and for the one or two of you who like a small tippie, there is a 10% discount on drinks, all weekend.

Malcolm Collis

RUM BOSUN

Posted by our very own Rum Bosun, Mike Fox:

What is the role of a rum bosun?

A rum bosun, more commonly known as a rum ration petty officer or a rum bosun's mate, is a naval rating responsible for managing the rum rations on a ship. Their primary role is to oversee the storage and distribution of spirits, typically rum, to the crew.

Historically, the rum ration was an integral part of British Royal Navy tradition, where sailors received a daily allowance of rum, known as a "tot." The rum bosun would measure and distribute the rum to the sailors, often in a ceremonial manner. While the tradition remains in some form, the practice of issuing a daily rum ration has largely been phased out in modern naval forces*.

In modern times, the role might involve more administrative tasks, such as inventory management and ensuring compliance with regulations related to alcohol on board. The position still holds a certain nostalgic value, reflecting the rich maritime history and traditions of naval culture.

*[*31 July 1970, a day known as "Black Tot Day" in the Royal Navy. At 11:00 am, the final "Up Spirits" call was made, marking the end of a 300-year tradition]*



THE MEANING OF DREADNOUGHT

The below was posted by Peter Danks:

Most people think “Dreadnought” means “Big Ship”

It actually means “Only Big Guns”. The HMS Ajax, a King George V-class battleship (not to be confused with the later WW11-era class), is seen here entering Malta’s Grand Harbour around 1920. Commissioned in 1913, she was a quintessential “Super-Dreadnought.”

While the original Dreadnought changed the world with its 12-inch guns, the Ajax and her sisters stepped it up to 13.5-inch, all mounted on the centreline. This layout allowed for “superfiring” (one turret firing over the top of another), maximising the ship’s broadside power. By 1920, when this photo was taken, the term “dreadnought” was beginning to fade as these ships became the new standard of global naval power.



AJAX IN MALTA

Member Bob Chalmers shared this lovely, colourised, image of the HMS Ajax Cruiser at Malta. Date unknown but probably later in her Mediterranean campaign as her planes have been removed, so after October 1942.



DAILY ORDERS – 3RD JANUARY 1946

A Mike Hawkes posted on Facebook this original ‘Daily Orders’, exactly 80 years to the day after it was issued on 3rd January 1946. His father was on fleet repair ship in the Med during the war & joined Ajax just before Christmas 1945. He could have demobbed but went on the goodwill trip to South America & demobbed on return. This would have involved the escorting of the Highland Monarch.



[TAKEN FROM AJAX DIARY
 10/45 – 1/46 AJAX refitted at Malta
 5/1/46 Left Malta to undertake a flag showing cruise of S. America
 8/1/46 Arr. Gib.
 9/1/46 Left Gib. & arr. Freetown 15/1/46
 16/1/46 Left Freetown
 23/1/46 Arr. Santos
 26/1/46 Left Santos for Rio de Janeiro.
 Admiral of the Fleet Sir James Somerville hoisted his flag in AJAX
 27/1/46 Arr. Rio de Janeiro
 6/2/46 Left Rio de Janeiro for Montevideo
 11/2/46 Left Montevideo for Buenos Aires
 16/2/46 AJAX took up escort duties to HIGHLAND MONARCH en route for Montevideo. HIGHLAND MONARCH embarked 845 crew members of GRAF SPEE who had been interned in Uruguay & Argentina. AJAX escorted HIGHLAND MONARCH to Freetown
 25/2/46 Arr. Freetown sailing later same day for Lisbon
 5/3/46 HIGHLAND MONARCH embarked a group of German internees at Lisbon prior to sailing to Bilbao
 9/3/46 AJAX off Bilbao - HIGHLAND MONARCH entered Bilbao & took on more German internees. AJAX escorted HIGHLAND MONARCH as far as the Needles & then sailed to Devonport while the cargo liner went on to Hamburg]



HMS Ajax photograph signed by the Captain JOHN WILSON CUTHBERT CAPTAIN OF HMS AJAX from 8 SEPTEMBER 1944 to 19 MARCH 1946



ARCHIVIST REPORT MARCH 2026

A steady trickle of enquiries during this Newsletter period.

HERBERT 'BERT' KEMP

James McDonald contacted me after information regarding Herbert 'Bert' Kemp, whom he refers to as his son's great grandfather, who served in Ajax pre-war, at the River Plate and later in the Mediterranean. He advised he had his diary from the River Plate action which he wanted to share.

I confirmed we have a H. J. Kemp, the only 'H' of the four listed Kemp's. He is shown as having served in HMS Ajax 1939 to 1942 and may well have been in Ajax prior to the war in the first commission. The Battle of the River Plate took place in December 1939 which confirms Bert was there. We have one surviving veteran, 107, who was in Ajax at the same time as Bert in 1940/41 plus another, 100, later in the war. I also advised that there was a Kemp Drive in Ajax named in his honour.

I requested to see the diary.

Susan from Ajax also sent him the article she had on record, taken from Facebook post by a group called, "Faversham 1939-45".

This enquiry came in November 2025 and I have chased for a response and learned that Bert's son had died and the diary has yet to surface. Once it does, it will be copied to me.

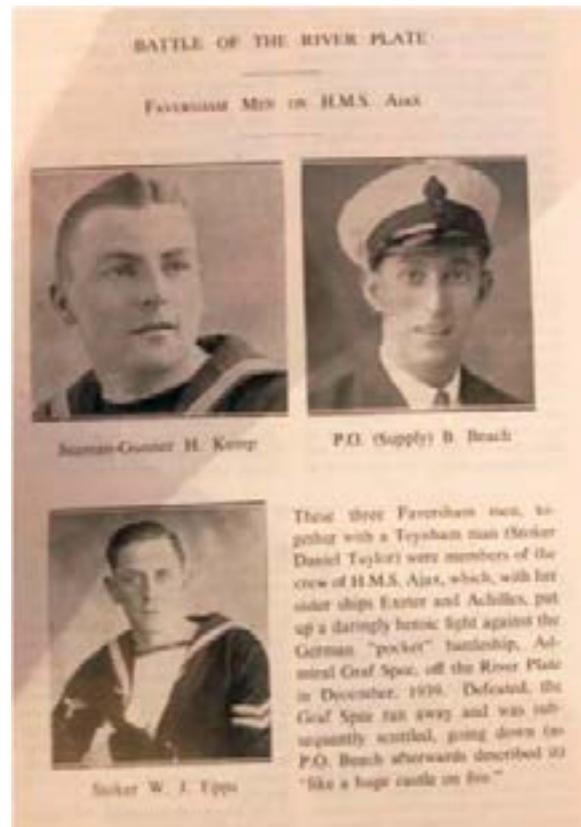
PHILIP MILES

Ian Miles contacted me after any photographs of his uncle, Leading Seaman Philip Miles who was in Ajax at the time of the River Plate. He was born in 1912 and died June 1943. His name appears on the Memorial Wall and there is a Miles Drive named in his honour in Ajax.

Looking on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission site there is a Philip Miles listed in the War Dead (see [Leading Seaman Philip Miles | War Casualty Details 2824841 | CWGC](#)) showing he was a Leading Seaman C/ JX130496 listed with HMS Ajax at the time of his death on 10th June 1943 aged 31. He is buried in Dover (Charlton) Cemetery S 2.V. Joint Grave 5 (See image taken off that website). He was the son of Frank and Helene Miles from Dover.

On Friday 1st January 1943 Ajax was badly damaged at the Port of Bone in Algeria which resulted in seven deaths. Ajax was so badly damaged that she eventually made her way to New York for repairs and did not sail again until October 1943. The fact he was buried in his home town, I suspect, and this is pure speculation, that he was severely injured in the bombing in Algeria and was sent home but later died of his injuries – later information proved this to be incorrect.

Further enquiries by Ian with RN Records added to the intrigue and revealed that he joined the crew of Ajax on January 11 1938, and served on her until his death in June 1943. It doesn't



state that he was caught up in the action of January 1943 but that he was “invalided” January 29 1943 and died from

Pulmonary TB and a Brain Abscess; his body was returned to the UK for burial. It is unlikely that he was in active service on 1st January 1943.

JEREMY MICHAEL PORTER CAPTAIN HMS AJAX 1981 – 1983

Lauren Porter emailed me after information about her grandfather Jeremy Michael Porter, Captain HMS Ajax 4th April 1981 to May 1983. He was born 02/01/1937 and died 04/05/1984. Lauren says, “I sadly never had the chance to meet him, and my father was only 16 when he passed away. My dad shares what he can, but because he was young, at boarding school and his father was often away at sea, he has only a few stories. It would mean a great deal to my father and uncle to learn more about their dad from anyone who served with him or knew him professionally.”

Lauren was directed to the downloadable website document giving biography details of the captains of the Frigate, including her grandfather, which can be found here: [HMS AJAX Frigate Captains2.pdf](#) as well as the unofficial diary of the life of the Frigate which can be found here [Frigate Diary2.pdf](#).

Whilst we have a good number of Frigate crew as members of our HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association, besides many Associates of the wartime cruiser and frigate, surprisingly there is only one listed as having served for part of the commission of her grandfather (he was unable to supply any anecdotes)

Lauren had also ordered an Association beanie hat and I did suggest that joining the Association would be a good idea – she said she would leave that to her brother to join up their father ...!

THOMAS ARTHUR NUNN

Stuart Nunn was after information about his grandfather Thomas Arthur Nunn (C/MX 47560) who served in Ajax 1938 to 1942 and was born 12th July 1909. His name appears on the Memorial Wall in Ajax.

He was aware that a report on Thomas, resulting from contact by another grandchild, Romany Chapman, had appeared in the December 2025 Newsletter and that she had sent me copies of his photograph album. He believed she was a second cousin of his but did not wish to be put in touch with her.

I sent him a file containing said photographs for which he was very grateful having never seen images of his grandfather in the War.



FRED PATMORE

John Cowie enquired about a Fred Patmore having recently acquired a photograph which he believes to be of Fred Patmore, a crew member of HMS Ajax during WW2, but could not confirm.

I replied that whilst I had an extensive list of Ajax crew for the War period there is just the one Patmore but with the initials V. W.; having said that, the navy were great ones for nicknames and the like and this could well be Fred? I have him serving in HMS Ajax 1941-43. The blacked-out cap band would suggest the photo was taken during the war when ships' names were not displayed.

Not too sure what the connection was between John & Fred and I never heard any more from him.



THOMAS "TOM" SMITH

John Biggs was after his deceased uncle's military service history. Thomas was from Paddington and died in Peebles, Scotland.

Unfortunately, I was unable to help him as the majority of listed names are just initials and whilst there are 41 'Smiths' listed, of whom 29 served in HMS Ajax, surprisingly, there is no 'T' Smith.

WILLIAM CAPELL JUDGE

Andrew Simpson emailed after information regarding his great uncle, William Capell Judge, born 22/02/1901 – he also mentioned HMS Spree. William C. Judge does appear on the list held by Ajax and is shown as having served in HMS Achilles at the time of the Battle of the River Plate in December 1939. His name appears on the Memorial Wall in the Town. Achilles was on loan to Royal Navy New Zealand Division from 1 October 1936 but retained the HMS title until she was eventually commissioned into the Royal New Zealand Navy on 1 October 1941 and became HMNZS Achilles. In 1939, much of her crew were New Zealanders but William appears to be British having the Portsmouth number P/K 58252; he is recorded as being a Chief Mechanician (he would have been 38 at this time) I did not have much luck with HMS Spree; only HMS Spey came up on a search; there was, however, the German Battleship at the Battle of the River Plate called the Graf Spee?

PATRICK HARMON

Tony Harmon was after photos of his father Patrick Harmon, Acting Leading Stoker (Service Number P/KX 75383) on the Royal Navy cruiser HMS Achilles during the Second World War and was in Achilles at the River Plate December 1939. He has some photos of his father dressed in his summer uniform and also some photocopied articles from the Birmingham Mail October 1956.

Patrick H. P. Harmon does appear on the list held by Ajax and is shown as having served in HMS Achilles at the time of the Battle of the River Plate in December 1939, serving as an Acting Supply Petty Officer. His name appears on the Memorial Wall in Canada and there is a street there named in his honour, although he is assigned to 'Harman Drive', rather than 'Harmon Drive', along with a G. W. Harman who was also at the River Plate, but in Ajax.

I advised, 'Your father had a Portsmouth Rating number although a large proportion of Achilles crew were New Zealanders because, although she was Commissioned on 10 October 1933 into the Royal Navy, she was on loan to Royal Navy New Zealand Division 1 October 1936 but retained HMS title until she was recommissioned on 1 October 1941 as HMNZS Achilles on the formation of New Zealand Navy. She served until she was decommissioned 17 September 1946 & returned to the Royal Navy. However, she was then sold to the Indian Navy in 1948 and continued in service as the INS Delhi until she was finally scrapped in 1978.

Although I requested copies of any photographs he had as well as the Newspaper article, I heard nothing further from him.

THOMAS PRIOR

Andy Prior, whilst researching his ancestors, was after information on Thomas Prior, a carpenter on Ajax but gave the year as 1805.

I sought confirmation of the year but if it was 1805 then he would have been in the second Ajax:

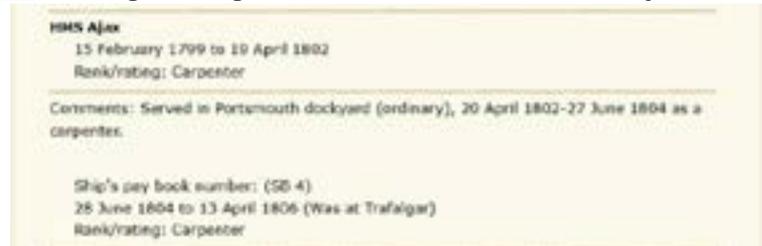
The second Ajax was a 3rd Rate 74 gun Ship of the Line and was launched on 3rd March 1798 on the Thames and commissioned in June of that year. 1953 tons; length 182ft; Beam 49ft. Armament: 28x 32 pounders; 30x 24 pounders; 16x 9 pounders.

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, off the Spanish coast at the entrance to the Mediterranean. 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.

Andy replied and sent me the link to 'The National Archives Trafalgar Ancestors' <https://share.google/k0QYQmjgCOro21CJB> which pulled up Thomas' record. It showed he joined HMS Ganges 11 March 1793 and left the navy 23 September 1835, during which time he had served on 11 other ships, plus some shore establishments.



WILLIAM ARTHUR UPCHURCH

Leanne Upchurch was after information about her great uncle Willian Arthur Upchurch, born 19/01/1921 in Sevenoaks, Kent, who was in HMS Ajax at the Battle of the River Plate.

All her grandad could remember was that he was on HMS Ajax and after the war he moved to South Africa and married a lady called Joan. William died in Durban, South Africa.

W. A. Upchurch does appear on the list held by Ajax and is shown as having served in HMS Ajax in 1939 and was thus at the Battle of the River Plate in December 1939.

His name appears on the Memorial Wall. The Town of Ajax in Ontario Canada being named after HMS Ajax has most of its streets named after Ajax and River Plate veterans. There is an Upchurch Avenue there named in his honour – Leanne was delighted to find this out.

Malcolm Collis Archivist

