



NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2026

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Nec Quisquam Nisi Ajax

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Hello to you all. Before anything else, I must apologise for my absence from the last Newsletter. Mike Cranswick submitted his report of the Association's visit to Ajax and Malcolm, who had been waiting until our return, could wait no longer for other reports.

I must say Mike's report was excellent and summed up what was a trip of a lifetime; the Town Council were amazing, everywhere we visited we were treated so well. To Mayor Collier, his wife Rose, the Councillors, council staff and the people of Ajax, I say, thank you all.

Also, a big thanks must go to Debbie Steer for organising transport, trips and as always, her famous Barbeque. I was so surprised and appreciative of being presented with a Birthday cake at the Barbeque; I recently celebrated a significant birthday!!!



Richard and Lorrie Cooke were as always, so helpful and their friendliness is so warming; again, it was so good to meet old friends, Cherry, Coleen, Jackie and Steve Parish.

The trip was expertly organised on behalf of the Association by Mike Cranswick, ably assisted by his P.A., Kathy. As I said in Ajax more than once, thanks to both of you.

There is one person who deserves a special mention: Mike Fox, or as some know him, Freddie or George or Hinney! Mike did a great job; he transported from England the Ajax Standard, the Rum Bosun's outfit, rum tub, all sorts of merchandise, shirts, hats, pennants and pens. His bedroom,

shared with Peter Danks, looked at times more like a storeroom!

Mike put in hours of his own time ensuring all the gifts to the various people were correct. He carried the Standard at the parade in Oshawa and at the Canadian Legion. His finest hour was at the Mayors Gala dinner, when he donned his Rum Bosun's uniform, ensured the Rum Tub was full and as every guest arrived, served them a "Tot" of "Nelson's Blood". As we all know, Mike is the shy, retiring type who especially doesn't like having his photo taken but despite this, he did have his photo taken once or twice! What does need mentioning is that whilst the rest of us were making merry, dining and dancing, Mike was still serving rum, so on behalf of all us who went on the trip; Thank you. Mike is, as most of us know, a Sunderland AFC supporter, so good luck for the forthcoming season.



How many times do we hear the phrase "What a small world"? As mentioned before, we paraded at the Canadian Legion on June 6th to commemorate D-Day. There were various Standard Bearers, including Bruce Sharpe, the Chairman of the Ajax Canadian Legion. During his speech he mentioned that one of the standard bearers, a lady, was ex-British military. Once the parade was completed, we retired to the Legion's bar, purely for rehydration reasons; well, if it's good enough for the England football team!

As I was sipping on my orange juice, the Standard Bearer Lady came over to me and said "I hear you are from Swineshead" (this is my village just outside of Boston), she introduced herself - Wendy Gannon was born and bred in Boston then joined the British Army. During our conversation I asked her what her maiden name was, "Appleby". "Are you related to Steve Appleby?", "Yes, he is my cousin" she replied. This was amazing; Steve is a good friend of mine; I played in local football teams with him. Steve became a professional footballer and captained Boston United in the football league. What a small World!

That evening at the Mayors Gala I had the honour and privilege to meet Kim Phuc Phan Thi (The Napalm Girl) and she kindly signed my copy of her memoir book "Fire Road"; what a lovely gracious lady – we also met her in 2022.

Overall, the trip was amazing and yet again thanks, to everyone concerned.



Looking to the future, our annual Reunion is in just a few weeks' time and I am really looking forward to it and having stayed at the venue before, I know how very nice it is and I am looking forward to another visit to the National Memorial Arboretum to see our magnificent

memorial and there is always something new on display.

As always at the reunion the AGM will be held and one item always on the agenda is the venue of the next year's Reunion; if any of you have a suggestion, please let us know. Also, if you have any matters for the Agenda, including should you wish to serve on the Committee, please let Malcolm Collis know as soon as possible.

The next event after the Reunion will be the Association parading at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. Having taken part for the last two years, I would thoroughly recommend it, it really is a moving experience and one you should do at least once.

All that remains to say is I hope you have not suffered too many times from heat exhaustion, how often have you heard people say "Isn't it hot" - the next Newsletter will be issued in colder times ... Brr!

Best Regards
Nigel Masters
 Association Chairman

SECRETARY'S REPORT

As part of the recovery process of organising the 2026 trip to Canada (don't underestimate the amount of work that goes into organising such Association events) Kathy and I will be away in our camper in Europe and unfortunately will miss being at the Reunion but hope it is a great success.

I will, however, be organising this year's Cenotaph Parade 2026. For the third year running, the Association will be taking part in the National Remembrance service and parade in London. This year's event is on Sunday 8th November. A hardy group of a dozen veterans will represent your Association with a couple of new faces, commandeered from the Ajax visit.

The majority will travel to London on the Saturday and return home on the Monday; central London accommodation is sorted and a venue for lunch following the parade will be secured.

Usually, our Chairman and his sidekick, Mike Fox, go down to London a couple of days in advance of the main party, purely to scope out security and manage our safety. God bless them.

On a serious note, last year, only 20 veterans from the Second World War were in attendance at the Cenotaph, some 80 years after the end of that war. We must never forget.

Tune in to the BBC coverage and see if you can get a glimpse of your Association, we have had a shout out the past 2 years.

A report will follow in December's newsletter.

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

CROSSED THE BAR:

We were notified of the passing of two Associates and our sincere condolences go out to all the families.

On 22nd June 2026 **Heather Stickland**. Her daughter Jacquelynn writes that she passed quietly with her family around her. Heather was a wonderful 98 and lived in Weymouth. She was the wife of Ajax River Plate Veteran William 'Dick' Stickland who Crossed the Bar in 2004.

There is a St'R'ickland Drive named in his honour in Ajax. The funeral was a quiet family affair.

On 12th July 2026 **Bill Mitchell**. Bill was married to Ros Mitchell who, together with her sister, member Karen Skilling, are the daughters of HMS Ajax River Plate Veteran William Swanston who Crossed the Bar in 2013.

Bill was 80 and lived in Falkirk, Stirlingshire. The funeral was held on 29th July.

NEW MEMBERS:

No new members in this Newsletter period.

BIRTHDAYS

The following Cruiser & Frigate members have celebrated a significant birthday (a 'O' or a '5' ... or 100+) during this Newsletter period, June to August inclusive and we send them our best regards:

CRUISER

Allan Lorrigan	101
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FRIGATE

Dan Sherren	80
Alf Larkin	80
Wilbert Curran	80

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.

Allan Lorrigan – our now sole Cruiser veteran who celebrated his 101st birthday on 21st June. Son Howard reports both mum and dad are doing well with no change since the last update, still plodding along – 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: LLOYDS: 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

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AJAX FIRE STATION VISIT – *Dave Lear*

During the recent visit to Canada, members of the HMS Ajax Association had the pleasure of being invited to the Ajax Fire Station. We were warmly welcomed by the team, starting with our arrival when we were greeted with a magnificent Guard of Honour accompanied by a pipe band. This impressive reception set the tone for what proved to be a memorable and enjoyable day.



One of the highlights of the visit was learning about the appliances and emergency vehicles. We were delighted to discover that several of these had been named after those ships that had fought in The Battle of the River Plate, serving as a lasting tribute to those who demonstrated courage and service during that Battle.



Members received a tour of the station facilities, with firefighters explaining their various roles. They also demonstrated the equipment used during emergency situations and shared details of the training that they undertake to enable them to maintain their high level of readiness. The opportunity to see the vehicles and equipment up close was both informative and impressive, with members given the privilege to climb aboard the vehicles (excellent photo opportunity!).



Being a working station, during the visit the emergency alarm sounded. Fortunately, we had been provided clear instruction on what was required of us and duly stood aside to allow the team to perform their duties. It was a remarkable sight to see the 'Ajax' appliance, together with its crew, spring into action.

The station personnel had kindly catered a generous buffet lunch, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all those present. This thoughtful hospitality provided an opportunity to relax, converse with those that worked at the station and further appreciate the welcoming atmosphere that was present throughout the day. To mark the visit the station kindly presented members with a commemorative coin.



As a mark of our appreciation, the Association presented Chris Porter 'Deputy Fire Chief' with a framed photograph of HMS Ajax arriving in 1976, together with a framed first day cover (stamped envelope) signed by Admiral

Sir Desmond Dreyer. Admiral Dreyer was a gunnery officer on HMS Ajax during the Battle and had officially opened a new fire station, in the Town, during the ship's visit in 1976.

All presentations served as a fitting reminder of the long-standing friendship and shared history between the Association and the community of Ajax. A huge thank you goes to Chris and the whole team, who provided us with an amazing insight into the important work that they preform every day when protecting the community.

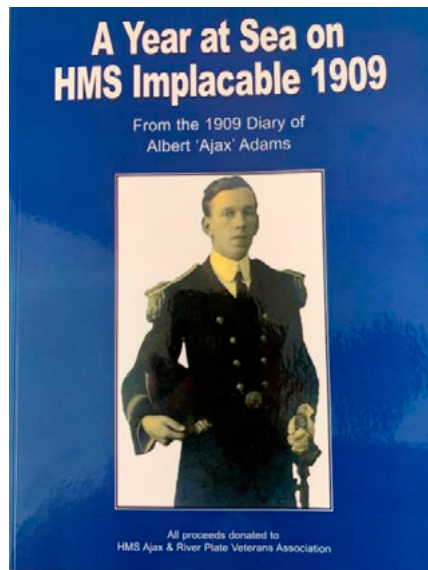
Dave Lear Committee Member



VISIT REPORT – CATCH UP WITH BOB ADAMS - *Dave Lear*

I recently had the pleasure of visiting Bob Adams, a fellow member of the Association, following a request from Debbie Steer to deliver a thoughtful hand written letter to him in Chipping Sodbury. As a reminder, Bob is the son of Albert 'Ajax' Adams who was a British Naval Architect and Constructor. He is celebrated for designing the Royal Navy's Leander-class cruisers, including HMS Ajax and HMS Achilles, together with the York-class heavy cruiser HMS Exeter.

Albert was the first shipwright ordered by the Admiralty to spend a mandatory year at sea before advancing to the role of constructor. His orders were to secure, for the future Royal Navy, the best advantage of his training, knowledge and experience. This time was spent aboard HMS Implacable, during which time he kept a diary. This diary was subsequently published under the title 'A Year at Sea on HMS Implacable 1909'. Bob still has the original photo of his father, that was used on the cover of the publication. This photo was taken by 'The Rock Photo Co' in Gibraltar.

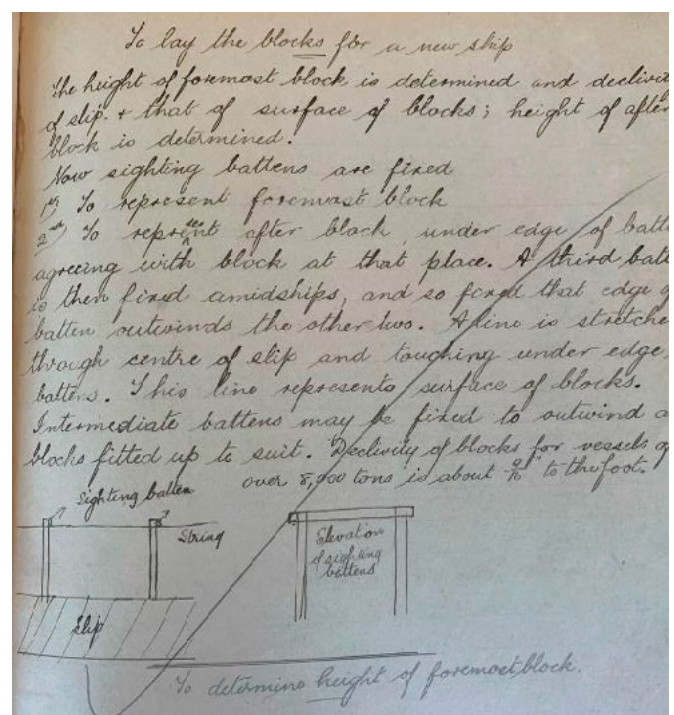


One interesting entry in the book details how a 'Monsieur Bleriot' was the first to successfully cross the Channel (Calais to Dover) in

a monoplane. On landing at the rear of Dover Castle, it broke the front wheels on striking the ground. Later that same day, Albert was able to go ashore and see the plane, which he sketched and included within his diary.

Bob also had a photo of HMAS Sydney built in 1935, which Albert also designed. This ship was sunk in battle with all hands lost, 19th November 1941.

Bob kindly shared his father's original notebooks, which provided a valuable and interesting insight into the work that he completed during his time at the dockyard school at Pembroke. We discussed the historical significance of these documents and



considered how they may be preserved and shared for the benefit of future generations. Lots of ideas were considered, with further thought required to agree the best way forward.

We then broke for lunch, which was enjoyed at the local supermarket café. On return, we sat on Bob's balcony where he kindly catered fresh strawberries, some of which were homegrown, with a hefty dollop of fresh cream. Bob then shared lots of memories of his childhood and reflected on the time that he spent living in Australia. It was lovely to hear of his experiences during the different stages of his life, including his national service. It was also great to hear that Bob is an active member of a local Sea Shanty group, performing at various locations with a community focus i.e., care homes and community centres.



Overall, it was a thoroughly enjoyable day and I would like to thank Bob for his warm hospitality and for generously sharing his memories and family archives. We both agreed that we would catch up again soon.

Dave Lear Committee Member

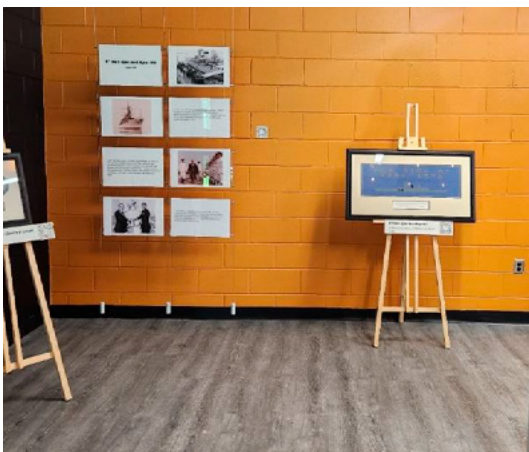
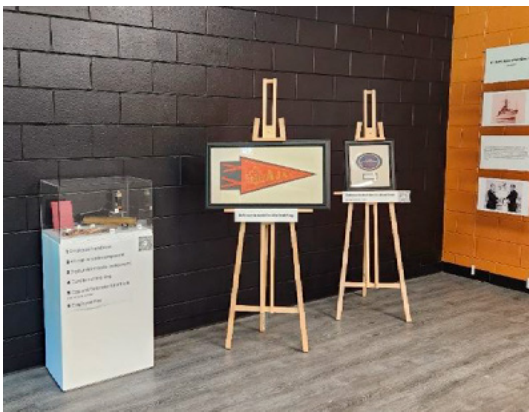
TOWN OF AJAX POP-UP MUSEUM – *Laura McEwan: Ajax Library*

On June 1, 2026, a pop-up museum exhibit opened at 25 Mill Street, Ajax, during a private event attended by more than 70 guests. The exhibit opening was part of celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of the 1976 HMS Ajax Visit which included visitors from HMS Ajax veterans and their families, Council members, and senior Town staff.

Curated by the Archives Services Librarian, the exhibit featured over 40 artifacts and photographs. The collection includes items connected to both the 7th and 8th HMS Ajax, as well as Defence Industries Limited (DIL). Each display is accompanied by a QR code, allowing visitors to access alternative text for accessibility and additional information.

Displays include a map highlighting local streets named in honour of HMS Ajax veterans, serving as a lasting reminder of the individuals whose service is woven into the identity of the community. Also on display is a finely crafted replica of the 7th HMS Ajax, built locally in Durham Region, symbolizing the enduring bond between the ship and the town that proudly bears its name.

Following the opening event, the exhibit offered open house hours for members of the public and hosted class visits from local schools until June 13, 2026.



VISIT TO AJAX TO COMMEMORATE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF 1976 FRIGATE VISIT

Peter Danks

Mike Cranswick has produced an excellent report of the activities of the Association members and families to the Town of Ajax in May/June 2026. This article reflects my experiences and includes details of the speeches which were made at special events and which I hope you will find interesting.

A day trip to Toronto with Nigel, Linda, Mike Fox, Stephanie Pipe and myself proved interesting. After an early boat trip, followed by early refreshments preceded disappointment when a planned open top bus was cancelled due to a small collision between the bus and a car and passenger. A trip up the CN Tower, also celebrating its 50th anniversary, offered the chance to conquer the glass floor, for me at least, while providing some wonderful views. We left it too late to purchase train tickets for the trip home – something we were to regret, when a strict ticket inspector was not interested as to our plea and evicted us off the train with three stations to go. Debbie Steer rescued us, for which we were most grateful.

The first official function was to celebrate the anniversary of the 1976 visit of the 8th HMS AJAX.

After some refreshments at the official gathering at Oshawa Lakewood Park, I was very pleased to receive a Freedom of the Town Commemorative pin from Mayor Shaun Collier. I was not on board the Frigate for the visit in 1976 but had served onboard in the Far East during the Malaysian Confrontation in 1965/66.

Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement recognising the indigenous peoples who originally stewarded a region before European settlement. In Canada, these statements are standard protocol at public gatherings and serve as an act of reconciliation to honour indigenous resilience and territorial rights.

Mayor Shaun Collier began the event with the Durham Region Land Acknowledgement as follows:

The Region of Durham exists on lands that the Michi Saagig Anishinaabeg inhabited for thousands of years prior to European colonisation. These lands are the traditional and treaty territories of the Nations covered under the Williams Treaties, including the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation and the Chippewa Nations of Georgina Island, Beausoleil and Rama.

We honour, recognize, and respect Indigenous peoples as rights holders and stewards of the lands and waters on which we have the privilege to live. In our efforts towards reconciliation, we continue to build and strengthen relationships with First nations, as well as the large Metis communities and growing Inuit communities here in Durham. We commit to learning from Indigenous values and knowledge, building opportunities for collaboration, and recognising that we are all connected.

A visit to the Whitby Yacht club is always a delight but this year strong winds prevented the yachts getting out onto the water. However, to the delight of some, motor boats were able to sail. Personal pleasure for me was meeting Steve Parish, Cherry Seigny, Jackie Lumsden and Colleen Jorden – a tremendous team from the Town of Ajax who had been for arranging visits of Association members and families since 1999.

Thanks to Richard and Lorrie Cooke, a visit to the lovely little town of Port Perry took place on Tuesday. The town is on the shores of Lake Scugog and has been used for film and TV locations; Jack Reacher may be known to readers.

In the evening, an invitation to the opening of a Pop-up Museum saw a wonderful display of work. After the Mayor introduced the evening, Sarah Vaisler spoke as follows:

Thank you, Mayor Collier, good evening and welcome. My name is Sarah Vaisler and I am the Chief Librarian and Executive Officer of the Ajax Public Library. In 2021, stewardship of the

Town of Ajax Archives was entrusted to the library, and we are honoured to share a selection of those remarkable items with you this evening.

Some of the artifacts featured in this exhibit are seldom displayed to safeguard their condition. This exhibit offers a unique opportunity to have a close view of selected treasures from the Ajax Archives. They include items connected to the 7th and 8th HMS AJAX, as well as Defence Industries Limited, whose contribution to the war effort played such an important role in the founding and history of the Town.

There are two elements I would especially like to highlight, each offering a meaningful link between our past and our present. One is the map of street names dedicated to veterans of HMS AJAX, a lasting reminder of the people whose service is woven into the identity of this community. The other is a beautifully detailed replica of the 7th HMS AJAX, built here in Durham Region., which speaks to the enduring connection between the ship and the town that proudly bears its name.

This exhibit has been thoughtfully curated by our Archives Services Librarian and Library team, whose care and dedication have helped bring these stories to life. We are especially honoured to welcome veterans and guests with personal connections to the items on display. Your presence adds meaning to this evening and reminds us that history is not only preserved in records and artifacts, but also in lived experience and shared memory. Thank you for joining us, please enjoy the exhibit, and I hope you will share your stories with us as we reflect together on this important legacy.

As Sarah suggested, many sea faring stories were exchanged between veterans and guests as everyone enjoyed some lovely refreshments.

One impressive exhibit was the model of the cruiser, made from match sticks by Douglas Hoppé – it survived crossing the Atlantic, albeit by air!

Next day, another very hot one, saw the first day of street dedications. A very exciting day for all recipients.

To complete the day, a visit to the Ajax Fire Service HQ took place. Chris Porter, the Deputy Fire Chief addressed us as follows:

I serve as the Deputy Fire Chief here at the Ajax Fire and Emergency Services. Fire Chief Aaron BurrIDGE and Deputy Fire Chief Shain Kimbell unfortunately could not attend today's event but wanted to pass along their well wishes both today and for the remainder of your stay in the Durham Region.

On behalf of Ajax Fire and Emergency Services, it is truly an honour to welcome the members of the HMS AJAX and River Plate Veterans Association, our distinguished guests, and all who have joined us today.

The Town of Ajax is unique in Canada. Our very name is a living tribute to the HMS AJAX, and by extension, to the brave sailors who served aboard Ajax, Achilles and Exeter during the Battle of the River Plate. Their courage, discipline, and unwavering commitment to one another shaped not only naval history, but the identity of this town. That legacy is woven into our streets, our neighbourhoods and our shared sense of pride.

When our department made the decision to place murals of the three ships on our apparatus, it was not simply an artistic choice. It was a promise – a promise to keep the memory of those who served alive, visible and present in the daily life of our community. Every time a truck rolls out of the station, those ships sail again. They remind us, and everyone who sees them, of the sacrifices made by those who came before us. As a paramilitary organisation, we understand the weight of that history. We understand what it means to serve with discipline, to rely on one another, and to place duty above self.

*Our four pillars – **Honour, Service, Teamwork and Dedication** are not just words on a wall. They are the same values that guided the sailors of the Royal Navy and they continue to guide Ajax Firefighters today*

***Honour** reminds us that our actions reflect not only on ourselves, but on the community we serve.*

***Service** reminds us that our work is rooted in helping others, often in their most difficult moments.*

***Teamwork** reminds us that no one succeeds alone – whether on a ship at sea or on a fireground.*

*And **Dedication** reminds us that commitment is not measured in hours or shifts, but in the consistency of our character.*

These values connect us – past to present, ship to shore, Navy to Fire Service.

To the members of your Association; thank you for preserving the stories, the traditions and the memories of those who served. Thank you for ensuring that the spirit of the River Plate lives on in this town. And thank you for allowing us, in our own way, to carry that legacy forward.

We are deeply proud to host you today. We are proud of our shared history. And we are proud to continue honouring the men and women whose courage helped shape the identity of Ajax.

On behalf of our entire Department, thank you for being here, and thank you for allowing us to celebrate this connection – not just as a moment in history, but as a living bond between our organisations and our community.

Enjoy the luncheon and please know that you will always have a home here in Ajax.

Everyone certainly did enjoy a lovely lunch and many photos were taken in front of the Ajax fire engine. [See also report by Dave Lear]

A busy day concluded with a wonderful BBQ at Debbie Steer's house to its usual high standard and which was much enjoyed by everyone. It was nice to see a brief appearance of Julia, Debbie's daughter, with her two lovely children.

Another must on the agenda was a visit to meet schoolchildren. At the Southwood Park Public School we met Sarah Mitchell, the Principal and many pupils. Many veterans addressed the children and Gary Williams' message to the pupils was how important it was to learn a foreign language at school. Sarah thanked the veterans for their visit and bringing things to life. She was fascinated by the accents of the veterans. Tommy was pleased to meet some Canadian schoolchildren who were Everton supporters; I actually met a young Arsenal supporter whose Dad advised him who to support!

The Harwood Sea Cadets play an important part in the Town activities and an invitation to attend their drill evening was well supported. I was delighted to have been asked to be the Reviewing Officer for their ceremonial divisions' rehearsal. Drill with and without arms took place - providing Association members some memories of their early training days in the Service – followed by the Band display. Their performances were well received by those in attendance. It was the first time the drill with arms had been performed in public. It was a pleasure to present the 'Tubby Squires Trophy' to this year's recipient CPO Hibah Ahmed.

The second day of street dedications followed with yet another very sunny day. I felt very honoured as our group met at Danks Ridge Drive. A recurring theme of those having their street dedications was what an honour and privilege it was to acknowledge their award and very many thanks were given to the Mayor and his staff at the Town Office to enable these events to take place.

A visit to Pat Bayly Square was interesting as was the Ajax sign. A Fan Zone for supporters to watch Canada in the World Cup football was established for World Cup Matches. [Didn't the Canadian team do well]

At an evening function at the British Legion it was a pleasure to meet Louise Johnson who had come to Ajax as a 17 year old to work at the Defence Industries Limited. She settled in Ajax and married. She had her 105th birthday on 17th June 2026.

Niagara Falls, after a short stop at Niagara-on-the-Lake, was the venue for a relaxing day on Friday and the opportunity to experience the many attractions in the town was taken.

A service to mark the 82nd Anniversary of D Day on 6th June 2026 involved the veterans and was attended by a large public audience. The Service was conducted by Bruce Sharpe, President of Branch 322 Ajax of the Royal Canadian Legion. Natasha Pierre, an Indigenous member of the British Legion and a proud former medic in the Canadian Armed Forces, read the Land Acknowledgement and we heard ... that it is based on an old tradition or protocol carried out by indigenous communities in Canada. It is intended as a way for guests to show their respect for and pay homage to our First Nation communities with which they are visiting and engaging on our land ...

Bruce conducted the service as follows:

Opening ceremony - Before we proceed to the purpose that has brought us together today, let us pause to think reverently of those comrades who, by sea, by land and in the air, laid down their lives for their Sovereign and their Country. Their sacrifice will ever inspire us to labour on, so that those who survive and need our aid may be assured of our assistance and that the country in which we live, and for which they died, may ever be worthy of the sacrifice they made.

The Act of Remembrance was spoken both in English and in French.

Bruce addressed the audience as follows:

On behalf of our Branch, welcome and thank you for joining us as we gather to honour and remember the Canadians who helped change the course of history on 6th June 1944. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank our Canadian and Allied veterans who are here with us. Your courage, your sacrifice and devotion to this country, will never be forgotten.

I would also like to extend a very special welcome to the members of the Battle of the River Plate Veterans Association and thank them for participating in our parade and ceremony. We are honoured by your presence and thank you for helping us commemorate this important day in our history. I would also like to thank our young cadets for being with us and participating in today's commemoration. Their presence reminds us that the responsibility of remembrance is being passed to a new generation.

Eighty two years ago, thousands of young Canadians climbed aboard ships and landing craft bound for the shores of Normandy. Many were barely out of their teens. Many had never seen any type of combat before, let alone on this scale and the horror they were about to face. Yet despite the fear and uncertainty they moved forward with courage, determination and a belief that freedom was worth defending.

They came from every corner of this country; from the West Coast to the East Coast, from farms and fishing villages, from busy cities and quiet rural towns, and from families who prayed they would one day return home. For many, that return would never come.

At Juno Beach, our Canadian soldiers faced overwhelming resistance. Machine-gun fire swept across the beaches. Mines and obstacles blocked their path. The rough seas and crashing surf worked against them. Yet they continued to push forward.

Step by step, yard by yard, through smoke, confusion and fear: and by the end of that first terrible day, Canadian forces had advanced farther inland than any other allied force. It came at a terrible cost. On D Day alone, Canada suffered 1,074 casualties including 359 young Canadians who never returned home. Behind each casualty was a young Canadian; a son, a brother, a friend, and a future that would never be fulfilled.

Their sacrifice helped liberate a continent and change the course of history. The success of D Day marked the beginning of the liberation of Western Europe. It was a turning point in the fight against tyranny and oppression. And Canada played a major role in that victory. Juno Beach became more than a Battlefield – it became part of Canada's identity. It showed the world that Canada stood shoulder to shoulder with the world's great nations.

Bruce then added the following: *As we gather to commemorate D Day and honour those who served, it is fitting that we first hear from representatives of a distinguished veterans' organisation whose members share a proud naval legacy from the Second World War. We are honoured by the presence of the Battle of the River Plate Veterans Association and grateful for their participation in our ceremony.*

Nigel Masters and Mike Cranswick said a few words before I gave the following address:

On behalf of members of the Ship's Company of HMS AJAX who visited these shores 50 years ago, we are pleased our visit has coincided with your D Day celebrations and we are honoured to be here today, even the weather has behaved itself!

On the 82nd anniversary memories return of the huge contribution made by the Canadian and Allied Forces on 6th June 1944. Bruce has described what the Canadian Forces endured on that fateful day.

Members of our Association visited the D Day Beaches three years ago. In the audience are four members of our Association who live in the town and who joined us for this momentous visit. So the visit to Juno Beach was even more memorable.

Two members of our Association actually took part in the D Day action. Albert Robb, who sadly passed away recently aged 107 served in HMS MENNELL and Alan Lorrigan who recently reached his 100th birthday.

The cruiser HMS AJAX which took part in the Battle of River Plate was involved in the D Day action. Indeed, I am pleased to say, she fired the first shells on to the German installations, wiping out one of their gun emplacements.

Strong ties exist between the Town of Ajax and the Ajax and River Plate Veterans Association. Today's event strengthens the strong bonds which exist between the United Kingdom Armed Forces and the Canadian Forces.

After a quiet Sunday and Monday members returned to the UK after a most enjoyable week for which we are extremely grateful to Mayor Shaun Collier and all his hard working staff at the Town Office for enabling all events to run so smoothly and involved us all in re establishing our wonderful ties with the town.

The following was written by Sam Shale, a River Plate Veteran and tremendous supporter of our Association and who was loved by all in the Town who remember him.

THE GREETING

Yes, here we are once more to say Hello
And we are all fired up and ready to go
There's an extra step you'll find in our stride
For that welcome you give us fills us with pride

This friendly greeting. The special things that you do
Another year passed and we have got older too
And with our thoughts as we go down memory lane
One thing is for sure; we will come back again.

ARCHIVIST REPORT

Firstly, a welcome pat on the back from a research author, David H Lippman – “Just stumbled on your web page. It’s bloody brilliant. It will help me with my project -- a day-by-day history of World War II. You can find the first two volumes for sale on Amazon Kindle.”

WILLIAM WRIGHT

Paul Wright emailed after information upon his grandfather, William (W. B.) Wright, having been told he served in Ajax and was at the Battle of the River Plate. He was born in Birmingham, married Paul’s grandmother Alice and at some stage served in the Suez region.

W. B. Wright appears on the list held by Ajax and is shown as having served in HMS Ajax in 1939 – 42 and would have been at the 1939 Battle of the River Plate. He would also have served in the Mediterranean 1940 onwards.

W. B. Wright appears on the Memorial Wall in Canada and there is a Wright Crescent there named in the honour of eight crew members carrying that name [which includes member Derek Wright from the Frigate who recently visited Ajax with the Association and received a Street Sign at his dedication]

Susan from Ajax followed up but neither of us received a reply ... nothing new there then!

JOHN DENNISON GREGSON

Jo Wood contacted us trying to trace anything about her grandad, John Dennison Gregson, who she believes was an engineer in HMS Ajax at the time of the Battle of the River Plate. She had been told that sometimes in old records initials can be confused, such as an R for a W. He was Scottish but she doesn’t know what year he was born and her mum, his daughter, Jane Dennison Lewis, nee Gregson has passed away. She wondered if we had any record of him.

The only Gregson I have recorded is a J. R. W. Gregson, which accords with what she was saying, and he appears on the list held by Ajax and is shown as having served in HMS Ajax in 1939 through to 1943 and was thus at the River Plate (13/12/1939). Recording errors are not unheard of, bearing in mind many lists were handwritten or copy typed: this is almost certainly her grandfather John Dennison Gregson.

His name appears on the Memorial Wall in Canada as J. R. W. Gregson and the Town of Ajax in Ontario, Canada, has a Gregson Street there named in his honour. Gregson [St - Google Maps](#)

Not sure if ‘Dennison’ is a given name or double barrelled; I suspect the former, but again I only have one Dennison listed in Ajax but serving much later in the war, so not him.

Jo came back almost immediately with her grateful thanks.

W. KINGHORN

Mike Melo was after information on W. Kinghorn. Although initially it wasn’t too clear what the connection was, he came back to me and it turns out he is a resident of Kinghorn Gate in Ajax and he and his son are researching their street. [Kinghorn Gate - Google Maps](#)

Wil Kinghorn, the only Kinghorn, is listed as having served in Ajax in 1940-41, so the commission after the Battle of the River Plate (December 1939) and would have seen action in the Mediterranean.

Besides having Kinghorn Gate in Ajax named in his honour, W. Kinghorn also appears on the Memorial Wall in Ajax.

Mike was encouraged to touch base with Susan Mariglia Bosgraaf at Ajax Council.

FRANK R. PARSONS

Steven Francis Turner emailed to say his grandfather had served in HMS Ajax during the Battle of the River Plate and he wanted to reach out as he is immensely proud of him.

All six listed Parsons served at the Battle of the River Plate (13/12/1939) of whom four were

in Ajax. Of these six, only one bears the initial F (the navy didn't do full names!) which appears to be Frank Parsons, his grandfather who was in HMS Ajax.

His name appears on the Memorial wall in Canada and can be viewed here - <https://www.hmsajax.org/wall-panels> on the fourth panel.

All six are assigned to Parsons Road named in their honour – [Parsons Rd - Google Maps](#).

He was directed to the MoD site should he wish more detail of his grandfather.

JAMES GIBSON

Stuart McCrorie contacted me. He is a RN veteran and regular Standard Bearer for HMS Exeter (Type 42 Destroyer, not the Cruiser) and had just found out that his mum's uncle was a Chief Stoker on Ajax and apparently has a street named after him in Canada. He was interested to find out more, if we could help.

Well, yes, I certainly could help. I responded:

"I have 5 Gibson's listed (3 Ajax & 2 Exeter) and one of them is James Gibson, shown as having served in HMS Ajax as a Stoker in 1939 through to 1943 (not correct) and so would have been at the Battle of the River Plate on 13th December 1939, then in the Mediterranean.

However, the Association's website <https://www.hmsajax.org/ajax-crew-casualties>; the Town of Ajax's biography for him [Ajax Veterans Street Dedication: Gibson Court: Ajax Public Library Digital Archive](#) and a Commonwealth War Graves entry [Stoker 1st Class James Gibson | War Casualty Details 2467694 | CWGC](#) shows that he was killed in action in Ajax at the age of 41, along with six others, on Wednesday 28th May 1941 at the evacuation of Crete. All were buried at sea and are Commemorated at Chatham Naval Memorial – see below extract from the Diary of Ajax:

26/5/41 AJAX & DIDO sailed to join FORMIDABLE

27/5/41 At 06.00 AJAX & DIDO were detached to Alex. arriving later that day

28/5/41 AJAX, ORION, DIDO, JACKAL, IMPERIAL, HOTSPUR, HEReward & KIMBERLEY left Alex. to evacuate troops from Crete. AJAX damaged by a near miss which started a small fire. Signal from C.S. 7 (20. 16): "AJAX hit has internal fire but carrying on". IMPERIAL also damaged & later abandoned and sunk. 4700 troops embarked at Sphakia & Heraklion. Signal from C.S. 7 (21.53): AJAX returning Alexandria passing Kaso 23.00 28 knots".

29/5/41 Air attacked while en route to Alex. ORION & DIDO badly damaged by direct hits & HEReward sunk by bombs. AJAX again damaged by near misses and suffered some flooding and consequently detached to Alex. arriving later that day. In the CinCs opinion, AJAX's damage report to her C.O. was exaggerated and the ship could and should have stayed with Force B. During the battle for Crete AJAX suffered near misses from anti-personnel bombs which perforated the port side of the ship from the bows to the after end of the shelter screen, killing at least six men and severely wounding twenty six others, some of whom subsequently died in hospital in Alex. Near misses by 1000 lb bombs during the same period caused shock damage to AJAX's main engines - this became apparent in August during a run back from a bombardment in support of Tobruk

The Commonwealth War Graves site, above, has this additional information – 'Son of James and Elizabeth Gibson; husband of Ethel M. Gibson, of Stoke, Warwickshire.' This also shows him as Stoker First Class Service Number C/K60034 at the time of his death.

His name appears on the Memorial Wall in Canada and can be viewed here - www.hmsajax.org/wall-panels. He appears on the second panel of the war time list as well as the fourth panel for the River Plate.

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 indeed a Gibson Court there named in honour of all five – have a look at [Gibson Ct - Google Maps](#)

From the Town's Biography Page you will see that a tree was planted next to the Gibson Court Plaque in James' honour by Town Council under the Millennium Tree Planting Project on September 27, 2001."

Stuart came straight back: 'This is absolutely fantastic. I truly appreciate all the information that you've been able to provide for me. I really wish that I knew earlier, when my mum was still alive. He was her uncle, but I could've visited in '97 when I was on HMS Manchester and we sailed as far as Montreal. I guess it gives me an excuse to go back to Canada!'

I did offer to facilitate a visit if required.

AJAX PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM

Graham Watkins, himself an ex-CPO (1963-1975), emailed to say his father had an associate whose gardener was the Photographer in Ajax's first commission and knowing Graham had navy connections, had offered his father the Ship's photo album. Graham wondered if any of our members may wish to view it.

I responded; 'During the first commission of Ajax, 1935 to 1937, only, a ship's photographer was utilised, some say on a light duties posting, to take photos of the cruise. Sailors could subscribe and select a number of images per week, which were added to their album that they received at the end of the commission. During wartime, such images were not permitted.

I said, "I have my father's personal album and I have several others in the archive - many of the images are on the website here <https://www.hmsajax.org/1st-commission-photographs>

I suspect the album you have will be the same as the ones I have but thanks for thinking of us."

I did say; 'A bit of a long shot, but you don't by any chance have a name for the photographer, do you?

A response is awaited!

WILLIAM HARROLD O'BRIEN

I had just left on my African adventure when I received an enquiry from Stephen and Alison O'Brien. Stephen is the son of William Harold O'Brien born 07/01/1921 in Hull and died 29/08/1995 aged 74 in Ormskirk. William was a Boy Seaman in Ajax at the River Plate and was, apparently, the ship's photographer.

They were planning an upcoming Canada trip and hoped to visit Ajax to understand a little more of the history. I facilitated a link with the Town and on 9th September there will be a dedication of O'Brien Court and the usual Town hospitality.

They will let me know how it goes on their return.