

# HMS OPOSSUM ASSOCIATION



**NEWSLETTER CHRISTMAS 2016**

**1945-1958**

Welcome to our Christmas Newsletter. In this issue:- Chairmans Report, Treasurer's Report, Roll of Honour, Reading enemy signals, The steam ship 'Great Eastern,' Bill Thomas – What is an Archdeacon? Fabian Ware and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Christmas Quiz, Lewis Trinder wartime exploits of HMS Magpie, Sinking of the passenger liner SS Athenia, First Royal Naval casualty of the Second World War, Shipmates Humour, The first time I went to sea [Editor] The new updated HMS Opossum web site - by Sam Edgar, Adventure's more than holidays – Tibet and North Korea {Editor} Employing the Queen's on mass trooping, Photographs of our Staffordshire reunion May 2016, Answers to the Christmas Quiz.

Chairman's Report.

Recently I have been busy having done 14 days collecting for the Poppy Appeal and attending remembrance parades, now looking forward to the festive season and sending all warm Christmas happiness; hoping you are well. Thanks to Eddie for compiling and producing our Newsletter.

Lewis Trinder Legion de Honneur

TO ALL 'OPOSSUMS' - A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY,  
HEALTHY NEW YEAR

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## TREASURERS'S REPORT

Brought forward	£1,422.96
Income:-	Raffle £250, Subs £325, Marg Clout £20, Mitchell family £40, Sam & Rita £100.00
Expenditure:-	£339.00, [Web site upgrade]
Balance:-	£1,818.96

## ROLL OF HONOUR

Ronald Bradley	John Eardly Wilmot	John Cartwright
J W Powell	Albert Corless	Harry Barlow
David Jarvis	Bob Gray	Les Wood
George Scott	John Williams	Ken Harris
Pat Norman	Reg Parker	Harry Roach
Ivan C Haskell	George Fletcher	Fred Thompson
George H Richards	Fred[Mick]Bodel	Fred King
George Curry	Sid Pemberton	John Davison
Cliff Harthill	George Brown	Steven Hart
Stewart A Porter	Arthur Pope	Jack Marshall
Les Dimmock	Dick[Ginger]Bird	Jackie Scholes
Doug Banks	John Bray	Joe Gornall
Harry Woolhams	Cornelious Canon	Jim Tribe
Doug Goulding	John Fraser	Pete Maddox
Bill Bolton	Cyril Mason	John Hardman
Ken Phillips	Mike Swayne	Harry Catterson
Ron Hare	Bill Bovey	Jack Richards
William Wilder	George[Jan]Lobb	Bill Price
Martin George	Ken Slater	Mike Cole
Edward[Ted]Longstaff	Jim Payne	Peter Lockwood
Roy Cope	Ron Blundy	Bert Rimmer
John Blair	John W C Clark	Ken Carson
Charles Parker	Tony Harris	Willy Mitchell
Brian Healey	Alister Hunter Blair	Alan Percival
Stan Oldfield	John Jones	Roy Wood
John Mackenzie	Tom Tolson	Ian Janes
John Owen		

## READING ENEMY SIGNALS



Enigma coding machine

During the Second World War both the Axis and the Allies tried to read each others signal traffic. Britain was aware of the German Enigma coding machine and of it's almost invincible method of keeping coded messages secret. Yet despite the great success of the Admiralty's code breaking team at Room 40, during the Great War this was allowed during the Depression period to fall into decline. Though by 1939 the Navy had at least four codes in operation serving warships and merchant shipping. Germany knew that the Atlantic convoys, with as many as fifty ships in each, where at sea at any one time, perhaps five convoys travelling at intervals in each direction - in ballast from the UK or returning from Canada and the USA loaded with vital food stuff, war supplies and fuel, and toops were the Achilles Heel of Britain, hit them hard and often and Britain would have to capitulate. For the first years of 1939, 40, 41, it hadn't dawned on the Admiralty that in the vast waters of the Atlantic why the U-boats were so successful in meeting convoys and accounting for over a million tons of merchant shipping by 1942. The famous B-Dienst [Beobachtungsdienst] based in Berlin had broken the Royal Naval codes and had been reading/deciphering our signal traffic since the late 1930's; reading every coded signal, almost as quick as the rightful recipients ! Enemy code breaking was centred on Bletchley Park priory, who were desperate to get their hands on an enigma machine. Eventually, the destroyer HMS Bulldog did deliver one complete with code books, when two officers and a canteen assistant boarded a heavily depth charged U-boat in the Eastern Mediterranean, sadly the surfaced U-boat suddenly sank taking with it the two officers, the canteen assistant returned safely. This story is well known and of

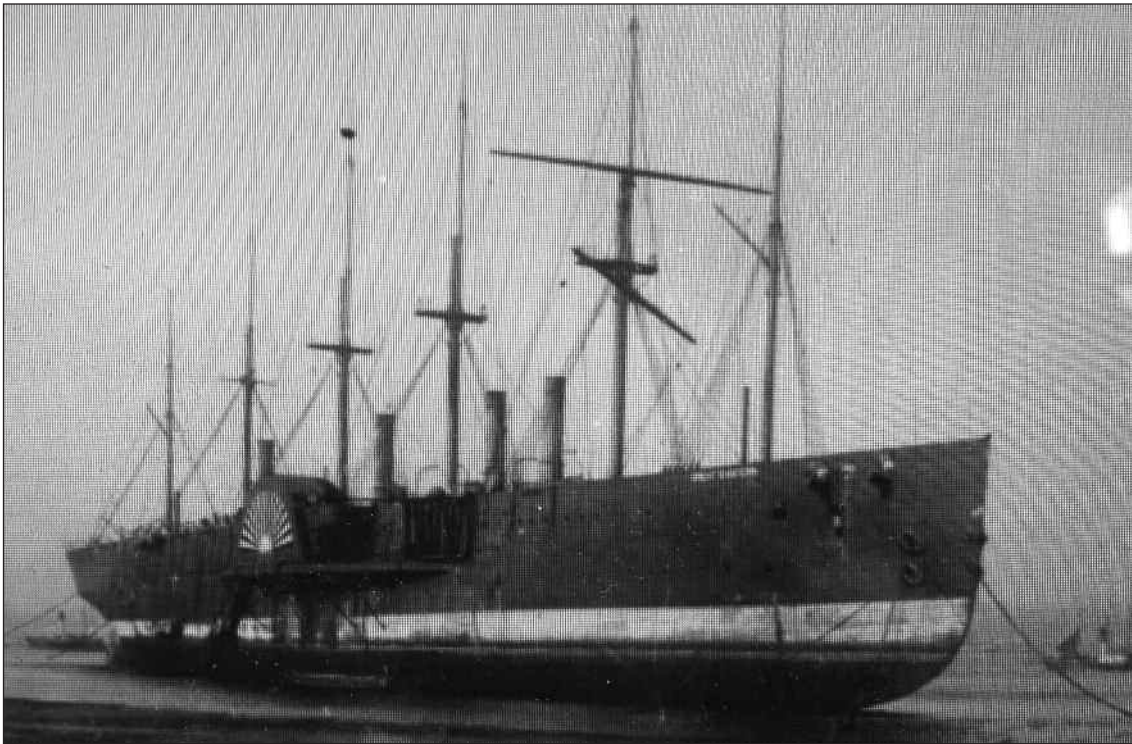
how Bletchley Park built an enormous computer, known as Colossus to help them break the enigma code, that changed daily, a slow process of evaluating and decoding signals quick enough to be of value to the convoy escorts. [Some members may recall the writer Denis Wheatley who among other subjects wrote on the occult. The front cover of a paperback book, "Strange Conflict," published in 1941, featured an inside view of a convoy Captain's cabin as he opens his sealed orders, over his shoulder stands a ghostly figure now also privy to secret information!]

By May 1943 the tide of U-boat warfare was gradually turning in favour of the Allies. It wasn't one single thing but a whole gradual cumulation of new tactics, research and development, manufacture, installation of new weapons and devices such as ten centimeter radar, high frequency direction finding, but most of all long hard experience of the Allied Navies and Air forces working together towards a common goal – defeat of the U-boats. Perhaps the turning point came in the first days of May 1943 with the, in ballast, Liverpool to Halifax convoy ONS-5; with a maximum speed of 8 knots, that had ranged against it 44 U-boats in series of wolf packs. In a week of had fighting, despite the fierce weather conditions, thirteen merchant ships were sunk, but so too were six U-boats with their crews and seven severely damaged boats that limped back to their base in France. So frustrated with their lack of success that German Admiral Doenitz dramatically withdrew his entire U-boats from the Atlantic to their base in Brest.

During the War a total of 774 U-boats were sunk along with their crews mostly, in the Atlantic. Surprisingly most sunk by RAF Coastal Command and their Canadian equivalent, followed closely by the surface ships, especially Captain Walker and his Second escort group of four sloops [similar to Opossum] with their creeping attack method, once in the vice like grip few U-boats survived the experience. Breaking of the enigma code and the speed of decoding and the resulting signals issued to the convoy escorts had played its part.

A distinguished submariner, now a Captain of a destroyer, was carrying out high speed manoeuvres, when another destroyer cut across his bows. Asked how he thought things were going. "I sometimes feel like saying 'Flood Q' [a submarines main ballast tank] "Take her down!"

## THE GREAT EASTERN



The SS Great Eastern, high and dry in the Mersey, about to be broken up, 1889

This ship was the largest man made object for over forty years, well ahead of it's time, the dream of Victorian engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel [1806-1859] Designed by him to reach Australia and India, and return, without the need to refuel. Measurements that were six times larger by volume than any ship afloat would bring huge economies of scale. Ship builder John Scott Russell was appointed, the ship would be built on the Thames and be launched sideways. [Evan today, at low tide, the launch ways can still be see on the Isle of Dogs.] The keel was laid on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1854. Great Eastern would be 692ft. long, have a beam of 82ft, be of 18,915tons and have five tall funnels, later reduced to four. Constructed of wrought iron with a double hull, propelled by two giant paddle wheels of 58ft. diameter, steam engines that could produce 8,000hp. a single screw, at the stern with it's own engine, overall to attain 14knots, and have auxiliary aid from six masts designed to carry 58,000 square feet of canvas. A ships company of over 400 and be able to accommodate 4,000 passengers and provide ample cargo space. Work proceeded slowly, finance being a big problem. A further 3 years passed before a launch could be made, starting in November 1858 only on the forth attempt, after many weeks, was it successful on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1858. Fitting out was another problem! Not until September 1859 was she ready for her maiden voyage, when on passage a disastrous boiler explosion occurred, but her strong construction withstood the damage. The vision of the ship plying the Eastern trade routes was not now viable. So after repairs, in June 1860, almost a year after Brunel had died,

did she set out to cross the Atlantic, making a slow passage of taking 10 days 19 hours for the crossing. Over the years 1860-1863 she made several such voyages but never made the profits expected, while the disruption of the America Civil War [1861-65] didn't help matters. For two years Great Eastern was laid up with no charters. Then she was auctioned off for a paltry £25,000 to three directors of the Great Eastern Steam Navigation company who'd obtained a contract to lay a submarine telegraph cable beneath the Atlantic connecting Britain to the USA. Special machinery had to be built and installed, one boiler room taken out as well as some passenger accommodation to provide room for nearly 3,000 miles of coiled cable. After some setbacks this was successfully laid and at last Great Eastern found a profitable niche to justify her construction. This was achieved in 1865, for the next twelve years further such jobs came her way joining by telegraphic cable many foreign countries to a total of 48,000 miles.

No other ship afloat could carry such lengths and weight of telegraph cable, let alone lay it on the sea bed!

At the end of her cable laying career she was again refitted as a passenger liner,

But yet again efforts to make a commercial success failed! Many years were spent laid up in Milford Haven. Eventually the Liverpool department store Lewis's hired her as a Casino, amusement park and advertising hoarding, also as a sight seeing attraction at a shilling a head. Thus she ended her useful life before being sold to the ship breaking firm of Henry Bath and Sons who took 18 months for the task at New Ferry on the Mersey. It was rumoured that the skeletons of a riveter and his child apprentice were found in the double hull but this was later to be found untrue. The fore funnel blown off on the maiden voyage is now in the Brunel museum in Bristol along with some furniture from the old ship. Outside the Kop End at Liverpool football club is the ships top mast, still used today as a flag pole.

At RNA club a visiting frigate were guests, when the topic of conversation turned to W.W. 2 and long service. Harry, an old salt, was pointed out to have the longest service. A junior officer asked many questions, his last was, "When did you join-up?" With a twinkle in his eye, Harry said, " Can't rightly recall, but I'll tell you one thing, [the junior officer hanging on his every word] Nelson was a bastard for not granting shore leave.

## WHAT IS AN ARCHDEACON?

by Bill Thomas

What is an Archdeacon I was once asked? I replied “An Archdeacon does what ‘Jimmy the One’ did on HMS Opossum, he makes sure the ship is fit for the purpose. An Archdeacon visits every church in his Archdeaconery once a year and carries out an inspection of every aspect of it’s life. He, or she, examines the registers, the history of the property, the buildings, every aspect of church life in the parish. He admits The Church Wardens as the Bishop’s officers, in other words he is responsible for the plant

[The ship.] The Archdeacon is also responsible for the ‘ships company.’ He is the disciplinary officer for the clergy. He presents candidates to the Bishop for ordination and ensures they have been properly trained. If a cleric is accused of a misdemeanor he appears before the Archdeacon as the first court of his trial. Because of his powerful role the Archdeacon has been feared throughout history.

An Archdeacon’s visitation is not welcome. You have never heard of a nice Archdeacon. In literature and nowadays on the ‘telly’ Archdeacon’s are always villains or fools, think of “All gas and gaiters,” “Barchester Chronicals” and more recently, “Grantchester.” The trouble is that he is difficult to get rid of because his job is freehold. You cannot sack an Archdeacon, the only thing to do is promote him. The Bench of Bishops is stuffed with failed Archdeacons. I dare say The Boards of Admiralty are full of failed First Lieutenants!

Three vicars were having lunch. One said, “Since the summer started I’ve been having trouble with bats in my loft and the church belfry, I’ve tried everything noise, sprays, even cats; but nothing seems to scare them away.” Another said, “Yea me too. I’ve hundreds in my belfry and in the narthex attic. I’ve even had the place fumigated and still they won’t go away.” The third said, “ I baptized all mine and made them members of the church. Haven’t seen one back since.”

Singing in the church choir does not require any electronics or expensive power tools, that’s a saving on the family budget.

For fitness buffs singing in the choir is not only healthy for the heart but also the soul, there’s no monthly subscription and it’s a lot easier on the knees than Jogging.

FABIAN WARE  
and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Fabian Ware

Sir Fabian Arthur Goulston Ware [1869-1949], neither a soldier nor a politician was well placed to respond to the public's reaction to the enormous losses of The First World War. His back ground was university educated at London and Paris, ten years as a school master, an occasional examiner to the Civil Service as well as a Schools Inspector. Later Director of Education in the Transvaal. In 1914 he was aged 45, rejected as too old for military service, obtained a post as a commander of a mobile unit of the British Red Cross. Saddened by the sheer number of casualties, he vowed that the final resting place of the dead would not be lost forever. Under his leadership his unit began recording and caring for all the graves he could find, by 1915 his work brought official recognition by the War Office. His vision and determination, against strong opposition, that all dead servicemen were equal be they officer or soldier and that headstones would be uniform regardless of rank or religion, that equality was the core ideology. Cemeteries were not just storage places for the dead but were to be gardens of remembrance. Under his guidance only the best architects and materials were employed setting the highest standards for their work. By 1917 he was head of the Imperial War Graves Commission, established by Royal Charter. After the Armistice once land for cemeteries and memorials had been guaranteed in perpetuity began the enormous task of recording the details of the dead, by 1927, 587,000 graves had been identified, while a further 599,000 casualties had been registered as having no known grave, these figures mostly for France and Belguim but in many counties where British and Empire troops were involved in conflict. By the end of the Second World War, the now renamed, Commonwealth War



Grave Commission cared for 1.7 million graves in 154 countries, at 23,000 different locations.

So much for soldiers and airmen, what of sailors?

After the First World War an appropriate way had to be found of commemorating those members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave, the majority of the deaths having occurred at sea where no permanent memorial could be provided.

The Admiralty committee recommended that the three main ports in Great Britain – Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth – should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, a tall obelisk, about 130ft high, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer, who had carried out considerable amount of work for the Imperial War Graves Commission. Sculptures were by Henry Poole. The Plymouth naval memorial that stands on Plymouth Hoe, overlooking the Sound was unveiled, on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1924 by HRH Prince George and commemorates 7,256 sailors of the First World War and 15,935 of the Second World War. Chatham memorial, the first to be unveiled, overlooks the town of the same name and is approached by a steep path from the Town Hall gardens, unveiling ceremony carried out by The Prince of Wales [future King Edward VIII] on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1924 commemorates 8,517 sailors of the First World War and 10,098 from the Second. Portsmouth's naval memorial stands on Southsea Common overlooking the promenade was the last to be unveiled on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1924 by The Duke of York [future King George VI] and commemorates the loss at sea of 10,000 from the First World War and 15,000 from the Second World War.



Plymouth Naval Memorial, on Plymouth Hoe

## HMS MAGPIE's - WARTIME EXPLOITS by Lewis Trinder



Crowds of naval personnel cheer, as HMS Magpie - enters Gladstone Dock, Liverpool, after successful patrol, during which 6 U-Boats were sunk

[Most of this information is taken from pages of the Daily Express for Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March 1944 and the recollections of Lewis.]

HMS Magpie [U82] left the builders yard of Thornycroft's, Southampton in September 1943, after work-up, joined Captain Johnny Walker's Second Escort Group based at Liverpool for Atlantic convoy duties. In January 1944 Sloops, Starling [leader] Wild Goose and Magpie intercepted and sank U-592. Between February and March, Magpie was involved in destroying U-238 and U-734, four other U-Boats were also accounted for making a total of six in one patrol, hence the joyous reception in the photograph above. Then a change of duties for Magpie escorting Arctic convoy JW58 for Murmansk, the ship closely avoided torpedoes when entering Kola Inlet, then escorted the return convoy RA56. By early June Magpie was off the Isle of Wight for the D-Day Landings, one of the first ships in French waters. Escorted convoys from Plymouth to the Mulberry Harbour, then covering the laying of PLUTO across the Channel, followed by more convoy escort work to Gibraltar based at Greenock. In May 1945 U-249, commanded by Oberleutenant Uwe Kock, surrendered to HMS Magpie. But the highlight of our Chairman's time on the ship was the never to be forgotten homecoming at Gladstone Dock in Liverpool.

## CHRISTMAS QUIZ

No prizes, just for fun, answers on the back page

What was the profession of fizzy drinks maker Jacob Schweppes?

Who had a 1950's hit record with – "Hoots Man?"

What is 13 cubed?

In 1914 which film did Charlie Chaplin make his screen debut?

Astrophobia is the fear of what?

Name the author of the Mr Men series?

What are the Sudanese Dunka tribe recognized to be?

Who invented contact lenses?

Never say die, was the first Derby winner for which jockey?

Who had a female slave called Morgiana?

Name the author of the novel 'The Great Gatsby'?

Light, Home and Third, used to be what?

Harold Lloyd hung from a skyscraper clock, in which film?

What was the name of the first steam turbine driven ship?

The airline Bell-Air is based in which country?

Which language's name means, one who hopes?

What is the capital of Venezuela?

How many cards are there in a Tarot pack?

Which famous falls are on the Zambezi River?

Name the group of islands that includes – St. Martin, St. Mary's and Tresco?

Who wrote about – film critics anecdotes in 'No turn unstoned'?

In which sport is Edwin Percy Baker famous?

What do the letters JB stand for in J B Priestley's name?

If you are crapulous, what are you full of?

First British 'Top Ten hit record for the group Brotherhood of Man?

Who in 1812 said, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous"?

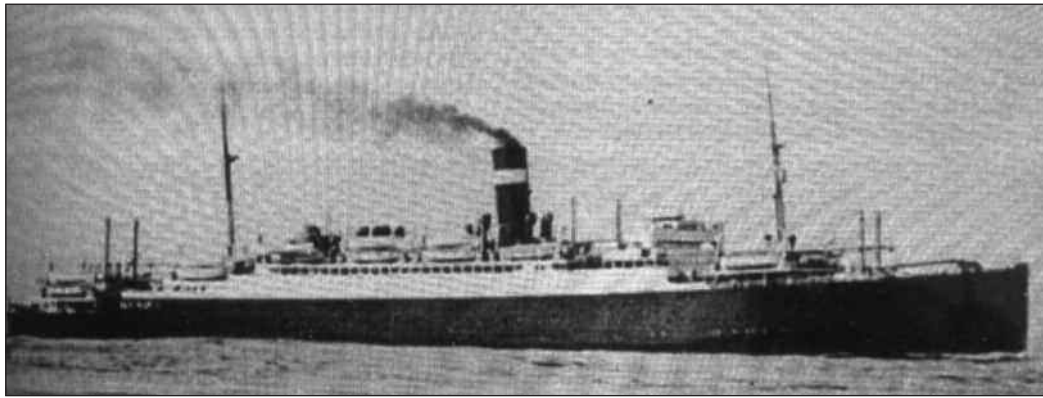
Which shipping forecast is South of Humber?

Name Britain's oldest surviving provincial newspaper?

Where is the tomb of the writer R. L. Stevenson?

In which country was the first FIFA world cup played, what was the year, how many teams took part and which country won the final?

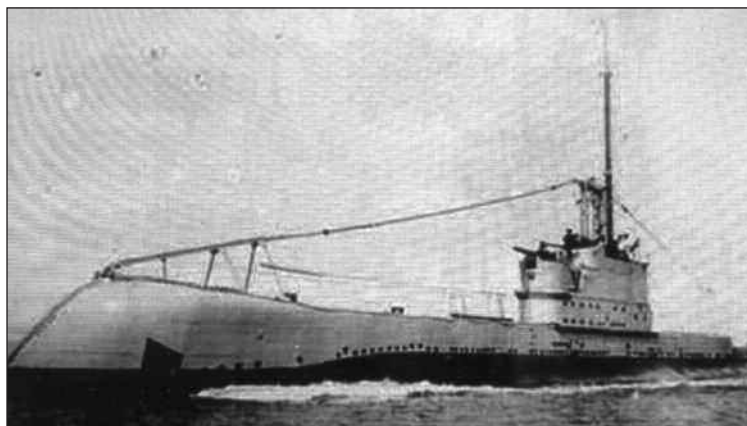
## THE SINKING of the PASSENGER LINER SS ATHENIA



SS Athania

Fourteen U-boats left Germany in mid-August 1939, U-30 patrolled North-West of Ireland with strict instructions to follow the Prize Regulations, signed by Germany in 1936, only warships were to be sunk without warning, passenger vessels were to be allowed to sail on. At 1630, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, the very day Britain declared war on Germany, Lieut. Lemp of U-30 sights a steamer on the horizon this was SS Athania 13,465 tons of the Donaldson Line, bound from Liverpool to Montreal with 1,352 passengers – made up of 500 Jewish refugees, 465 Canadians, 311 USA citizens and 72 UK residents, plus 315 crew. At 1900 the vessels had closed now in the fading light Lemp observed his target was darkened and on a zig-zag course at high speed [Athania's top speed was 15 knots.] He noted she was a passenger liner, but because of her movements she could be an Armed Merchant Cruiser, not covered by the Prize Rules! At 1940 he fired the first of three torpedoes, the first hit the liner amidships on the Port side and brought her to a stand still, the other two failed to explode. Lemp consulted his Lloyds List and was horrified to discover his target was a genuine passenger liner, confirmed by his radio operator who heard in plain language Athania giving out a distress call, giving her position, saying she'd been torpedoed. Lemp did not render assistance as the Prize Regulations required but instead turned and fled away, believing he would be reprimanded for his mistake, so never even informed base of his actions. Ten days later he arrived back at Kiel to make his report, that German command had known of the happening since the incident had been broadcast by the BBC. Hitler ordered the error to be covered up by his propaganda department to alter the facts and blame the British for torpedoing their own ship to gain sympathy from the Americans and bring them into the war. Only at the Nuremberg Trials in 1946 did the Germans admit the truth. The number who perished was 118, most saved by Royal Naval ships but also some by the merchant marine, Athania was the first of 2,341 British merchant ships lost during the Second World War.

## THE FIRST ROYAL NAVAL CASUALTY of the SECOND WORLD WAR



Only three days after the 'Athenia' sinking the Royal navy suffered its first casualty. On 10<sup>th</sup> September 1939 two submarines were patrolling in the seas South of Norway, Triton and Oxley, both with designated areas of interest and in touch every day early in the morning by radio. When at 2100, dark by then with light drizzle, Triton while on the surface sighted a dark shape fine on the port bow. Her captain Lieutenant Commander H P de C Steel gave the order to make the challenge of the day, this was done by lamp at half minute intervals three times- there was no reply! A grenade was fired that burst correctly giving off a bright light. Receiving no answer, the dark shape must be a German U-boat, so tubes 5 and 6 were brought to the ready. According to his report, he counted fifteen, then gave the order to fire. A few seconds after an unreadable intermittent flashing was seen from the sub, then stopped suddenly after a few seconds. The captain ordered bearings to be taken by the O.O.W who reported that Triton was four miles inside their sector. Soon after an explosion occurred. Steel made for the explosion and soon could hear cries of 'Help.' They found three men swimming in the oily waters, they rescued Lieutenant Commander Bowerman and Able seaman Gukes, the third man was Lieutenant Manley RNR who was swimming strongly, then disappeared!

At the subsequent enquiry no blame was apportioned to Triton, while Oxley was found to be out of position and her bridge watch-keeping was found to be at fault for not keeping a good lookout. Blame fell on the unfortunate Lieutenant Manley RNR.

There were only two survivors, fifty two personnel being lost! Strangely on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1944 in the same area of Norwegian waters and similar circumstances to the above, two T-class submarines nearly mistaken each others identity. Tapir, who'd just completed her work-up programme from the builders, obtained hydrophone activity of a possible submarine on the surface decided to pursue gradually closing her quarry when in reply to her challenge Turpin gave the correct response. [Phew!!]

During the War British submarines sank 15 U-boats, while U-boats only sank 3 of ours!

## SHIPMATES HUMOUR [or a man walks into a bar]

A blind man walks into a bar and says to the barmaid, "I've got a really good blonde joke for you." The barmaid replies, "Do you really want to tell this joke, because I'm blonde six foot rugby player, behind you is a blonde shot-putter and you're standing next to a blonde weight lifter?" No thanks says the blind man, "Not if I've got explain the joke three times!"

A giraffe walks into a bar and asks for a pint of beer, "That'll be £30," says the barmaid. The giraffe pays her and she says, "We don't get many giraffes in here." He says "I'm not surprised at these prices,"

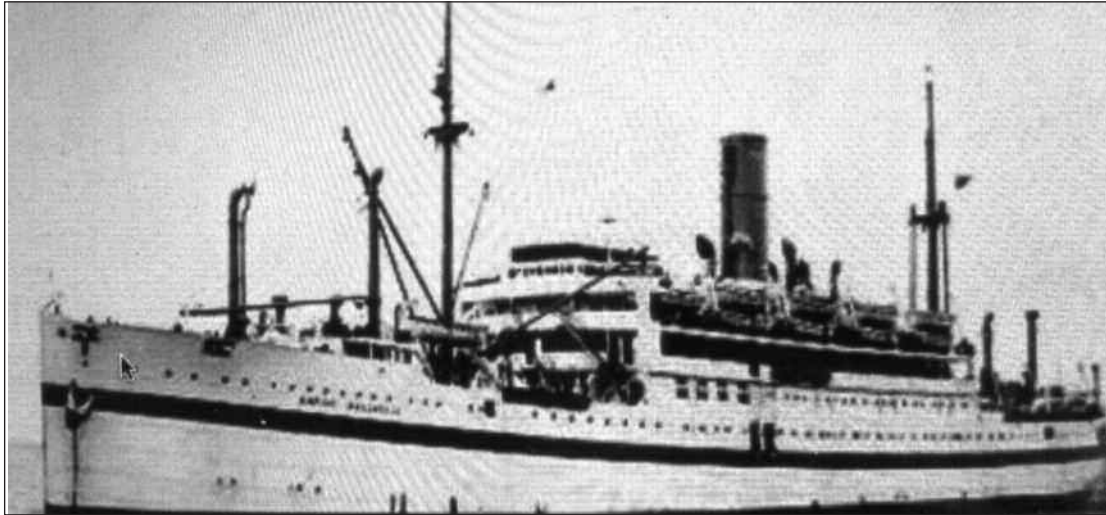
A man goes into a pub and sits down at the counter. "What'll you have?" says the barmaid. "I'll have seven double whiskies," these are set up and he downs them one after another. The barmaid asks, "Why the rush?" He replies you'd drink them fast if you had what I have." "And what do you have?" she asks. He replies, "About .50p!"

A man strolls into a library, walks up to the book counter and shouts, "Pint of larger, please barmaid!" Shocked the lady librarian quietly says, "This is a library, not a bar." Shamefaced the man whispers quietly, "Sorry... pint of lager please, barmaid."

A pub landlord advertises for a new barmaid and receives three suitable candidates. At each interview he asks the same question "If you were cleaning up after the bar had closed at night and found a £10 note on the floor, what would you do with it?" The first candidate replies, "I'd place the money in the till, you've been good enough to give me a job and I'm happy with the wage; the money is yours." The second candidate replies, "I would place the money in the till and take out £5 for myself, that way we are splitting the money and that's only fair." The Third candidate replies, "I would keep the money, it's a perk of doing such a menial job, as such it's my right to keep any money I find." Question: Which candidate got the job? Answer: the one with the biggest breasts.

A man with memory loss walks into a bar and asks the barmaid, "Do I come here often?"

## THE FIRST TIME I WENT TO SEA by Eddie Summerfold



Empire Halladale

Apart from much sailing off Harwich, from HMS Ganges, the first time I went to sea was 22nd August 1954, on passage between Singapore and Hong Kong on board the troopship Empire Halladale. She was one of several large passenger liners commandeered by the Allies after the defeat of Germany in 1945 and converted to troop transport duties. At 14,056 tons, 500ft. long with a beam of 64ft. built in 1921 by the Vulcan Works at Hamburg for the Hamburg-South America Line. Her original name was Antonio Delfino, then renamed Sierra Nevada 34, later Antonio Del-fino. Powered by a six cylinder triple expansion engine, coupled to a turbine, with oil fired boilers, gave her a cruising speed of 14 knots. Painted white all over, with a thick blue line around her hull and a buff coloured funnel. I was among 8 Boy seaman and 30 other ratings who had been flown out from Stanstead airport to Singapore, together with further flights, some by flying boat to re-commission HMS Opossum. Merchant Navy personnel from the Anchor Line were responsible for the navigation and engine room, otherwise the Army ran the ship under a Colonel and his staff. At any one time there were 8 troopers working between Tilbury and Kure in Japan, picking-up and putting down military personnel from whatever Service, with equipment and mail to all garrison ports en route. Conditions below decks were stifling, at night we slept on deck in camp beds. As for the food in the hands of army cooks, best left to the imagination. During daylight hours the Boy ratings were mostly employed as lifebuoy sentries. On schedule after five days at sea, Empire Halladale arrived during a tropical down pour at Kowloon on Friday afternoon 27<sup>th</sup> August. Seen across the harbour to the dockyard could just be made out two Royal Naval warships, the destroyer HMS Cockade and the smaller frigate Opossum. After 33 years service this was the last round trip of Empire Halladale, she was scrapped at Glasgow 2 years later.

## THE NEW UPDATED - HMS OPOSSUM WEB SITE

by Sam Edgar

Paul Carson [Ken Carson's son] together with Charles Parker had done a good job in building and administrating our web site. Sadly before Charles died in 2014 he was too ill to pass on information on how the site was run and what software he was using. At Charles funeral, Eddie and I decided we must keep the web site running of interested to anyone how wants to know about the frigate or submarine. I took on the task and embarked on a steep learning curve. The first task was to get the internet company 'Freeola' to transfer authority of our site to me, they insisted on seeing Charles death certificate, which a helpful executor provided. The next step the purchase of two sets of software, one to transfer the web pages to may computer the other to make changes, this was where the problems begun. The software was not compatible with what Charles had been using, worse still the so called experts I consulted were of no help!!! After many discussions with Eddie it looked as though we would have to abandon the web site, while I was most disappointed that I couldn't make it work.

Then the luck of the Irish came into play. A free local magazine had an advert for a small computer company with an accompanying article making it clear they knew their stuff. After nearly two years of getting nowhere 'Hypersonic Computer Solutions' came to our aid, they understood our problem and knew what was required. A complicated and poorly structured site needed rebuilding that could be accessed from any computer. A service like this would be expensive, but because of who we are they cut the costs to a minimum, provided they could do it as a 'fill in' job during quiet periods. The cost was £360, I phoned Lewis our Chairman and Eddie for their approval and they agreed we should go ahead. Normally, as a committee would not spend this kind of money without your endorsement at an AGM. However, we hope you will accept we had to take the opportunity and more importantly that you like the rebuilt site Rita and I donated £100, so the actual cost to our funds was £260.

A joy to work with was the helpful, knowledgeable Gareth Polkingthorne downloaded from the old site onto his computer and painstakingly rebuilt it on a demonstration site so that I could access it and approve at every stage. Then when we were completely happy, he contacted 'Freeola' to replace the old site with the new. Gareth gave informative instruction on how to add and amend the site and is always ready to help if I get stuck. The terminology for any site is the 'front side' which anyone can see, but nobody can alter and the 'back side' which only the administrator can access to make changes.



Looks completely different, but all the old stuff is still there with the exception of the Guest Book which is password protected. I have tried lots of passwords that Charles might have used, but nothing worked. In the end I had to save it and place a new comment in 'Contact' section. To overcome the problem of idiots abusing this I have to approve every post before it is published.

Your new site has photos of interest plus reunion and copies of Newsletters. The Roll of Honour has been updated and a few submarine photos and documents included. Please let me have anything anything else you would like me to add.

After nearly two years of frustration and disappointment it is a pleasure to have the site organized in a way that makes it easy to work from any computer and one that can be handed over to someone else with little difficulty.

All thanks to Gareth.



Gareth Polkingthorne of Hypersonic Computer Solutions

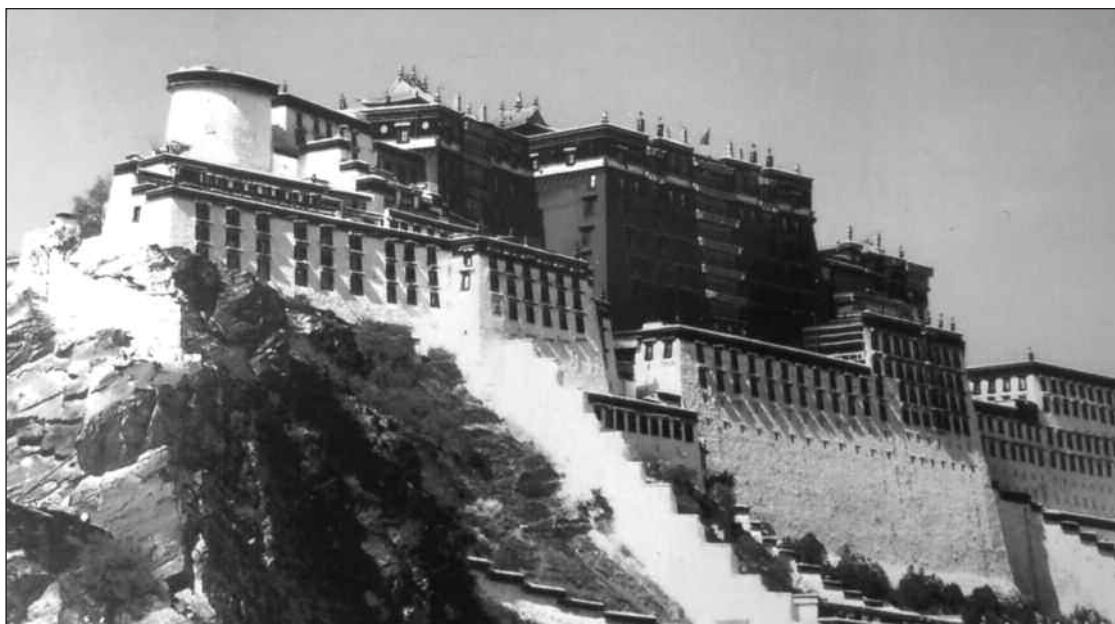
An inflatable RNLI lifeboat arrived in a coastal beach a large crowd gathered round. A small boy in a rubber dinghy had drifted out and on the point of despair had been found by the lifeboatman and brought safely back. A large lady pushed her way through the crowd. "Are you the man whose just rescued my little boy?" The helmsman staring shyly at his boots replied, "You could say that ma'am."

Astonishingly she demanded to know.

"Well where's his hat then?"

## ADVENTURES MORE THAN HOLIDAYS – TIBET AND NORTH KOREA

By Eddie Summerfold



Potala Palace

This year wonder where you went for your holidays? In April I was in Tibet, September, North Korea. Rarely do I visit a country twice and there are many countries I've yet to see, so far the number visited stands at 93. Lhasa, capital of Tibet is quite breath taking at 11,000ft. above sea level. Recall the first evening standing at an open hotel window, with a racing heart, gasping for air!!! None of our small party slept much that first night. Fortunately becoming acclimatized takes a day or two. The following day it was a visit to the iconic Potala Palace, a thousand feet high, the symbol of Tibet and featured on the back of every Chinese bank note. The Palace is very old, 7<sup>th</sup> Century, and added to over the centuries. Today there are many visitors, including hoards of Chinese, all jostling and shoving. For us new visitors climbing the many steps is exhausting!! Inside the are over a thousand rooms with many low ceiling passageways, and a claustrophobic atmosphere with choking incense. Somewhere within the building lie all the past Dalai Lama's. while the current incumbent is in exile in India. Lhasa is a very busy thriving city, with much Chinese construction in evidence, especially of high rise apartments. China view themselves as Liberators, whereas Tibetans see them as oppressors in their own country, out numbered by many times to ensure Chinese dominance further enhanced that only the Chinese language is taught and spoken in Schools! Tibetans are very religious and follow the Buddhist faith, over the years sadly the Chinese have demolished very many monasteris. We do see some and learn of the monk's hard life of fasting, hard physical work, religious instruction and their life long - terms of engagement! On the way to Gyantse by coach we have an armed Chinese soldier on board "a guard" who stays with

us until we leave the country. Once out of Lhasa we are stopped at many check points to have our papers stamped. In the countryside we get to see and meet some real Tibetans and visit a poor family house, where five adults and seven children live on the first floor, the livestock beneath. A smiling toothless lady of the house shows off her shabby kitchen with a dung fired oven, a primitive loom and a spinning wheel from which she makes the children's clothes. A place we all agree is much more interesting than traipsing around more monasteries. She is quite pleased to be given a generous tip from each of the party. Both Gyantse and Shigatse are much smaller than Lhasa, much fewer Chinese but at a Greater altitude, though our small party are all now acclimatized. Then a return to Lhasa and a flight to Chengdu in China, a large city of over 14 million and home to the giant Panda research centre, a sort of Disneyland setting where over 70 giant Panda's live. The popular attraction draws many visitors mostly large groups of Chinese school children.

Arrive by air at Pyongyang , the North Korean capital, from Beijing, it's early evening, the last flight of the day, there's only been three!!!! The airport is very new but handles very little air traffic. In DPRK [Democratic Peoples Republic of Korean] no visitor is allowed to wonder around alone! They must always be escorted by at least two guides and usually a driver. There's a dozen of us who make up a party. We're taken by coach to a very modern Yanggakdo hotel a large building with 47 floors – but only 3 are used! My room is more of a suite, with the usual facilities. Next day, 9<sup>th</sup> September, is "Foundation Day" when usually a special event is held, we are all hoping it's going to be a mass display of choreographed gymnastic and dancing display which the DPRK is renowned for. For some curious reason this is not promulgated, until the last minute!! For some of us, including me, to see such a display is the main reason for visiting DPRK. We are to be disappointed. Instead we do see at least a thousand colourfully dressed young couples do a sort of alfresco old time dancing to piped music, later also in a purpose built auditorium a very professional circus performance, no animals included. Act followed act, of skilled acrobatic displays, jugglers, and high wire trapeze artists going through a well drilled routine of polished balance, flight of breathtaking dexterity; bringing appreciative applause from the large audience. During the Korean War [1950-53] Pyongyang was flattened, so all buildings are post 1954. The roads are very wide, the buildings very tall, perhaps to impress on the populous that they are living in the best place on earth. There are few cars about and many bicycles; 'sit up and beg type.' Public transport is trams, trolley buses all jam packed with passengers ,with long queues waiting at stops. and what our guides proclaim to be the eighth wonder of the world

the Pyongyang metro, 300ft below the surface of the city with 16 stations on two separate tracks. Large chandeliers hang from the high ceilings while colourful mosaics adorn the walls showing how industrious and patriotic the peoples are; a large statue of Leader Kim Il sung looks down. Visitors currency is Euros, Chinese Yuan, U.S dollars, at a push Sterling, never the Korean Won, which says much for the DPRK economy! I was expecting to see more Troops on the streets, but not so, yet this country has perhaps the largest military forces in the world. In all aspect of daily life the State exercises ridged control, travel is strictly limited, marriage is universal and divorce extremely rare. Population of Pyongyang is about a million, the country as a whole maybe 25 million. After the politicians the scientists and highly trained technicians have access to the best rewards of pay, accommodation, health care, nurseries, education and treats such as sky slopes and fun fairs; others may have limited access. Outside in the dark made more so for there's very few lights around the capital. Next day we're taken by coach 130 miles South to Kaesong along a deserted dual carriageway of many potholes. On to Panmunjom and the Demilitarized Zone, see the dividing boarder between North and South Korea and the rooms where the armistice was signed in July 1953.

A secretive country, where everyone is subject to the State, perhaps much like the citizens our party are only shown what the authorities want us to see. A blinkered people who are kept under the rule of the Kim regime that the State knows best. All citizens wear a small metal badge showing the Great Leader Kim Il sung and not the current young incumbent Kim Jong-Un. Unbeknown to us, only discovered on my return home, on "Foundation Day" the North Koreans fire a nuclear missile towards Japan!



The party outside the statue's of Kim Il sung and Kim Jong -il

## EMPLOYING the QUEEN'S on MASS TROOPING



In 1943 the Cunard liners Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth brought over the Atlantic ocean 370,000 U.S and Canadian troops. In one instance Queen Mary carried 15,388 troops as well as the ships compliment of 927 officers and crew. Between New York and Glasgow the ships would bat along at 29 knots plus, on a zig-zag course, perhaps covering 3,500 to 3,800 miles during the 5-6 day crossing. The ships burning a thousand tons of FFO every day. Originally designed to carry just over two thousand passengers, now the Queen's carried eight times as many. Where did the mass of humanity sleep and how were they fed?

Prefabricated 'Standee' bunks were fitted, three and four high occupied state rooms and cabins, any overspill slept on the upperdeck. There were two meals a day each of six sittings beginning at 6am and finishing at 8pm. Day and night emergency drills for fire or abandon ship were practiced regularly, ample boat places and life raft capacity provided to accommodate all personnel.

During wartime Queen Mary travelled over a million miles made 28 crossing of the Atlantic as well as voyages to Australia and the Middle East. The Queen Elizabeth came into service later but still covered many miles of trooping.

All this in complete safety except for one horrific incident not revealed until after the War. On Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1942, off North West of Ireland Queen Mary met her escort of the A.A. cruiser HMS Curacao plus four destroyers. The weather squally, the seas rough but visibility good. Queen Mary and Curacao were on differing anti-U-boat zig-zag courses both driving on at top speed, the liner following in her wake, but gradually the cruiser was getting closer, clearly one or the other must give way. But at 14.02 the liner hit the cruiser amidships and cut her in two! With strict instructions not to stop she sped on towards the Clyde. Only 101 survived, 337 were lost. In January 1947 the courts ruled the cruiser was two-thirds to blame for the collision the liner one third.



Queen Mary Cutting Down HMS Curacao



## REUNION PHOTOGRAPHS – 2016



Eddie Summerfold, Lewis Trinder and Sam Edgar at our AGM



Sam Edgar brings in our Standard



The Scots take off most of the raffle prizes

## REUNION PHOTOGRAPHS – 2016



The Mitchell party [raffle winners] and seated right Ken Hodgkin



Rita Edgar, Pat Armstrong and the back of Tom Quirk's head



Marge Clout, Ve Trinder and our illustrious Chairman Lewis Trinder  
[With thanks to Jan Clout for the photography]



Eddie Summerfold, Ben Berger, Nick Whytock and Dick Wright



HMS Opossum Association reunion attendee's, Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2016  
Tillington Hall Hotel, Stafford

### Answers to the Christmas Quiz

1. Jeweller,
2. Lord Rockingham's XI,
3. 2197,
4. "Making a Living,"
5. Outer Space,
6. Roger Hargreaves,
7. World's tallest people,
8. Adolph E Flick,
9. Lester Piggott,
10. Ali Baba,
11. F Scott Fitzgerald,
12. BBC radio channels,
13. "Safety Last" [1923,]
14. Turbinia,
15. New Zealand,
16. Esperanto,
17. Caracas,
18. 78,
19. Victoria Falls,
20. Isles of Scilly,
21. Diana Rigg,
22. Lawn green bowler,
23. John Boynton,
24. Gross excess of eating and drinking,
25. "United we Stand,"
26. Lord Byron,
27. Thames,
28. Berrows Worcester Journal [1690,]
29. Samoa.
30. Uruguay – 1930 -13- Uruguay