

HMS WESSEX OLD AND BOLD NEWS

Issue 2 July 2006

Editorial

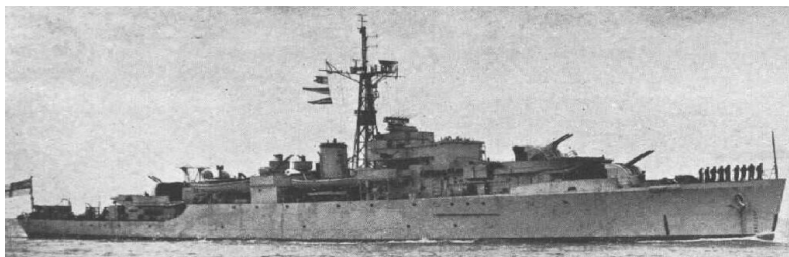
Rather as I expected, the response to my request for copy was underwhelming and as a result it was necessary to scratch around looking for suitable material to put in this issue. Much of it comes from my memory, which is gradually failing, so I hope what has finally emerged is to your liking. If so, or even if not, there is always "Letters to the Editor"—you can be as complimentary or as rude as you like - I have a fairly thick skin, and you can write in on any topic. Letters will be printed with your agreement but may need to be slightly abridged.

But what I should really like is material which will interest at least some of the readers – reminiscences, funny stories, bits of history and so on. Come on chaps and you girls too, let's have something soon, and lots of it. My deadline for the next issue will be early October

HMS Wessex

We all remember the shore headquarters at 50 Berth in the Docks – after all it's only twelve years since it closed down. But how many of you remember any of the three previous headquarters slips?

Before Wessex (shore) was Wessex (ship) actually **HMS Erne**, a modified Black Swan sloop of the same class as the Amethyst of "Yangtze Incident" fame. She was originally 1250 tons dwt and 283ft

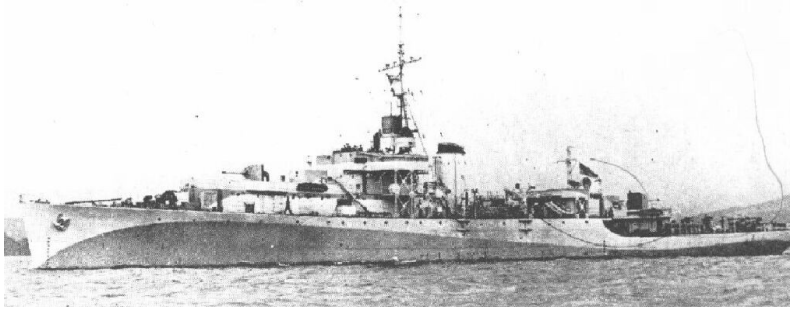


long x 37½ ft beam but with the armament removed and the boiler rooms stripped out she was a lot lighter when we got her. Built in 1940 by Furness Shipbuilding, she was very slowly converted (it took nearly four years) into a drill ship for us and finally arrived at 14 Berth in the docks in June 1952.

What an improvement on her predecessor! The interior was really very good with decent lighting and sensible messes, offices and instruction rooms at last. She had two Richardson Westgarth steam turbines, which had been opened up and the casings lifted for instructional purposes. This arrangement was an excellent educational tool but it was never used by the RNVR, as steam training was abandoned almost immediately. However MN engineers studying for their tickets at the local Tech made instructional visits for years! With the boilers gone, two large spaces were available, the after one being fitted out with several plot tables for training Wren Plotters - who remembers *that* Branch? However I cannot remember anything about the use made of the for'd boiler room space. A 0.22 shooting range was created out of the starboard oil fuel tanks which Roy Prowting can remember, but didn't actually use - it must have been pretty noisy anyway - think of the reverberation inside a steel box!

Oldsters may remember the wardroom deck close to the bar used to wobble around somewhat. This was either (a) to make officers think they were at sea or (b) make them think they had had enough to drink already! Mess dinners were held in the junior rates mess forward where there was plenty of room. Erne's greatest claim to fame was being towed to Spithead where she anchored for the Coronation Fleet Review in 1953. She finally left us on the commissioning of 50 Berth in September 1963 and was broken up in Antwerp in 1965.

Her predecessor was **HMS Derg**, a River class frigate built by Henry Robb Ltd in 1941. She displaced 1460 tons, was 301 ft long x 36 ft beam, and was allocated to Solent Division as the first real HQ ship in



April.1947, although it was always known that she would be replaced by a properly thought-out conversion in due course. The first recruits to the Division came along in late summer 1947 – (your Editor joined as a young ERA in January 1948 with ship's book number 52). She had two triple expansion reciprocating engines, which, together with the

boilers, were left intact. Throughout her time with Solent the boilers were kept pumped up to WW (engineers will understand) the engines were turned manually each week, and she was theoretically on 72 hours notice for steam – some hopes! It took a bit of organising to bring her into use as a drill ship including removing the cylinder top relief valves and decking over the engine tops to make a microscopic drill hall! General facilities on board Derg were, at best, rudimentary, but she was well loved by those who served in her.

At that time there was a gun shed ashore at 14 Berth for training DEMS (defensively equipped merchant ships) gunners. This was eventually stripped out for use as an RNVR drill shed which increased the space available, and not long before Erne appeared, the shed was replaced by a purpose-built facility, to be used for Divisions, general and engineering training, and for social events etc. Derg left us in April 1952 and went to South Wales Division where she was renamed HMS Cambria. In 1959 she joined the Reserve Fleet at Penarth and was finally scrapped at Newport in 1960.

The first ship stationed in Southampton, before the Division really got going, was **HMS Zetland** a Type 2 (Blankney) Hunt class destroyer built by Yarrow in 1942. She spent only a short while at 14 Berth, from December 1946 until April 1947, being there primarily to provide a naval presence in the port before the arrival of Derg and there was no attempt to turn her into a drill ship. A Commanding Officer, Captain Strowlger DSC RNVR (who remained in command of Solent Division for about five years) was appointed, but it is believed there was only a skeleton staff on board, comprising an RN Staff Officer, a clerical officer and a couple of ship keepers. One or two recently demobbed RNVR officers were recruited for the future, but it is understood that the few ratings that turned up were directed to Sussex Division! On leaving Solent she was turned over to the Royal Norwegian Navy and renamed RNNS Tromso, after which her fate is unknown. I cannot find a photograph of her or any other Type 2. If anyone has one. I should be pleased to print it next time.

Blue Ensign

Did you know that two of our members hold Blue Ensign Warrants? Roger Keyzor flew the Blue Ensign in his Wightlink ferry before he retired recently and Peter Tambling flies his in ss Shieldhall when he is sailing in her as Master.

Data protection / privacy laws.

I hold contact details of all members on my computer and receive a number of requests from other members for addresses, phone numbers etc. It is assumed that you are willing for this information to be disclosed *unless you specifically request otherwise*

If you live within reasonable striking distance of Southampton, why not consider joining the Southampton Royal Naval Officers' Association (unless of course you are already a member). About 85 strong, with many being ex-Wessex, the Association meets on the first Monday of most winter months for an evening lecture and convivial get-together at Thunderer Squadron's HQ in central Southampton. (a part of the Royal Military College at Shrivenham) where the many navy, army and air force undergraduate engineers at Southampton University do their service bit – rather like URNU but the Midshipmen, etc. are already in the service and therefore on pay!). The wardroom bar is excellent and SRNOA holds various functions including Trafalgar and Annual Dinners to which ladies may be invited, subject to numbers. It's great! Enquiries to the Editor or Ray Hunt on 02380 447349

Ship's Company News

Many of you will know that Peter Scott's son Michael, a helicopter pilot in 771 Squadron at Culdrose, was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Bravery in the Air for his great work in rescuing people at Boscastle. Now congratulations are due to him and his partner Claire, also a helicopter pilot who has recently been on the staff at Dartmouth, on the birth of their daughter – another pilot of the future?

Another naval dynasty is headed by Terry Morgan, who was an ERA in the RN before being commissioned in the RNR. His son Ed served as an ERA/MEA, and now his grandson Ashley is presently training as an Observer at Culdrose

I recently received a long letter from Sandra Snelling (nee Lusby) telling me that she was once again in permanent residence in Gloucestershire. For a number of years she and husband Peter have been spending six months of each year in Australia, but they have now decided that running two homes in widely separated continents is just too much of a chore. She sends regards to all who know her, and now she will be here each winter, hopes to attend the Reunion planned for February 2008

Readers will be pleased to learn that Alan Seeley OBE, was given a well deserved award as one of two Citizens of Honour at a special ceremony at Fareham's Ferneham Hall on 10th May. Alan was nominated for the award on the strength of his work with the Scout movement and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. He joined the Scouts in 1942 and served for a total of 54 years, mostly as a Scout leader. He has a seat on the Hampshire executive panel of the Voluntary Service Overseas organisation, assists in raising funds and is well known for his dedication. His medal was presented by the outgoing Mayor, Cllr. Leslie Keeble as his last duty before handing over to the new Mayor, and attended a formal lunch with the latter on 11th May. Well done Alan!



Letters (and e-mails) to the Editor

Dear Glutton for Punishment

I enjoyed reading the first Old and Bold News and thank you for the effort. Your recommendation of the Ton Class Association was good thinking – I find their magazine is always interesting reading and well worth the annual subscription

DMcC

Dear Alan

A Bravo Zulu for the Wessex Old and bold Newsletter. You certainly have hidden talents - I always thought that only Pussers were able to read, write and put more than two sentences together

RHH

The Lay Apart Store (*for bits and pieces with no other home*)

Most members will have either an RD or a VRD but do you have one issued at the end of Geo VI's reign with the cipher GviR on its face? If so please contact the Editor,

Does anybody know the present whereabouts of either Bob Cope or Paddy Beazer? If so please let the Editor know. News of any other ex-Wessex officers is always welcome

Many members will remember HMS Diligence across the water at Hythe, with the trots of "arked" CMS's in Southampton Water. The base ran from 1953 until 1960 as an RN establishment and was then operated by civilian contractors for the next few years. The US Army then took it over for the repair of their watercraft until this year when it was handed back, would you believe, to the RAF. It transpires that all this time it was actually an air force base – RAF Hythe! Next they'll be saying that HMS Sultan is still RAF Gosport...

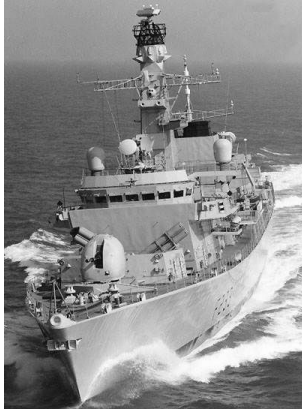
Southampton Sea Cadets received a royal accolade on 23rd May, when the Duke of York, the Admiral of the SCC, paid a formal visit to TS Southampton. He was greeted by the County Lord Lieutenant, Mrs Mary Fagin, who is an honorary Captain RNR, and the Commanding Officer, Sub-Lieut (SCC) Mark Lampert RNR. Ray Hunt was Chairman of the unit for some seven years, followed by a spell as Hon Treasurer, and Gerry Draysey has also served as the Chaiman in the more recent past.

Members who served in coastal forces craft will be interested and possibly saddened to learn that the Coastal Forces Veterans' Association, which has been running successfully with many hundreds of members worldwide for sixty years has finally decided to call it a day and disband after the next AGM in April 2007. The national standard will be handed over to the Commodore of the Hornet Sailing Club for safe keeping, and will be placed in a glass case along with other coastal forces memorabilia. Membership has been declining for obvious reasons for several years and many of the local branches have already been forced to lay up their standards and shut down due to the very low numbers and advancing age of members - it comes to all of us in time I suppose.

If you received this by "snail mail" and have an e-mail address please let me have it and I will send it to you electronically. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, again, please let me know. Both these measures will assist in keeping down my costs!

The State of the Fleet

On 13th June the Daily Telegraph reported that there are now considerably more ships on the disposal trots at Portsmouth than there are runners. Apparently there are 19 ships including Fearless and Intrepid,



three Type 23s (picture at left), three Type 42s, several Hunt and Sandown MCMVs and some RFAs either awaiting scrap or being sold to other unsuspecting nations. Many of the ships are reputed to hold significant amounts of asbestos, and can only be dealt with in specialist ship breakers. We are no longer permitted to let the Indians or the Chinese take their chances with them. That probably means they will continue to rot in



Portsmouth for years, since we are also no longer omitted to take them to sea and sink them as gunnery targets. (Give me your views on H & S and environmental issues)

A spokesman (presumably for CinCFleet) said that the situation arose because more ships were at sea than usual, carrying out exercises, courtesy visits (see below), in the Gulf or controlling shipping lanes against terrorism, piracy and other illegal activities. She claims there are 47 Portsmouth ships, of which 27 are currently at sea (these numbers must include every PAS boat and possibly dinghy in the Navy), with four undergoing refit. HMS Invincible (above right) is mothballed and does not seem to appear in any of the figures.

One such courtesy visit, made by HMS Iron Duke to St Mary's in the Scillies hit the press the day after this report appeared. It seems she called in to enable to ship's company to watch the England-Paraguay football match on the large screens in the five local pubs. Although most of the sailors got back on board without trouble, a small nucleus went on a drunken rampage. The following morning the five culprits were marched through St Mary's to apologise at the pubs, the police station and the town quay after having been fined £80 each. One native is believed to have commented "We thought the Navy was supposed to protect us from terrorism and other illegal activities!" It could never have happened with an RNR sweeper.....nor could it?

Obituaries

I am pleased to tell you there are none. Please do your own level best to keepit so!

Sick Report

However, I am sorry to have to report that Terry Morgan is in hospital having had an emergency operation to remove a colon obstruction. It turns out that he also has something similar in the small intestine which will be dealt with once he has got over the first op. He is slowly recovering but is not yet up to visitors, but I have sent our best wishes for a swift and complete recovery.

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