



**Russian Convoy Club
of New Zealand**

Newsletter
January/February 2018

Dear shipmates, families and friends

HMS Belfast turns 80



Three days of events will celebrate the 80th birthday of Britain's last big-gun warship – HMS Belfast (above).

The wartime cruiser, veteran of the Arctic Convoys, Normandy landings, battles with Japan and destruction of the German battle-cruiser Scharnhorst, reaches the milestone on St Patrick's Day.

A museum piece on the Thames for the past 47 years, the Town-class ship is undergoing final preparations for the anniversary and those who visit during February can join in the conservation work and talk to experts from the Imperial War Museum about the challenges of maintaining the 11,500-tonne vessel.

The birthday weekend itself (Friday 16 March to Sunday 18 March 2018) opens with a private reunion of former shipmates and a short ceremony. Then on the Saturday and Sunday the emphasis is on visitors and telling some of the stories from the ship's active career – beyond WW2 exploits, Belfast also served in Korea and the first decade or so of the Cold War.

Further details about 80th birthday events will be revealed via Belfast's social media pages where some stories and items from the HMS Belfast archive will be given a rare airing.

<https://www.facebook.com/hmsbelfast>



We offer a warm welcome to John Wyeth as an Associate Member. John's father, Campbell, served as a Gunner in "X" turret of HMS Trinidad at the time of her sinking before going on to Officer training at HMS King Alfred.

Year-end gathering enjoyed by members

On 23 November 2017 members enjoyed an excellent turn out for our traditional pre-Christmas meeting hosted by David Ledson and Barbara at their Otaki home. After brief formalities, a wonderful lunch was provided by Barbara and enjoyed by all on the verandah and around the garden.

After a small exchange of gifts the Christmas cake was cut by Associate member Ruth Allen and shared amongst the members. A warm, sunny day encouraged a walk in the gardens afterwards.

Our thanks go to David and Barbara for a wonderful day.

SS Otaki Remembrance

We have been invited to lay a wreath on 12 March 2018 to commemorate the loss of SS Otaki (below) which was sunk by the German raider *Mowe* on 10 March 1917 after a gallant action.



Captain Archibald Bisset-Smith (right), who went down with his ship, was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.

Very little was known about this action until after hostilities ceased as those who were not killed in the action were taken prisoners of war by the German raider.

In recognition of this action the New Zealand Shipping Company established The Otaki Scholarship whereby each year a pupil from Robert Gordon's College, Captain Bisset-Smith's old school in Aberdeen, Scotland, receives a trip to New Zealand (see over). While this was later continued by the P&O Line, today the pupil's air fare and expenses are met by the New Zealand Government. The head pupil of the school receives the Otaki Shield, presented by Captain Bisset-Smith's family and the school also has the William E. Martin prize, established by the family of Cadet Martin who lost his life on the Otaki – he was not quite 15 at the time.

Anyone wishing to learn more can refer to website <http://navymuseum.co.nz/worldwar1/ships/ss-otaki/>.

We look forward to as many members of the Club as can make it to attend the memorial service. The commemoration will be held on Monday 12 March 2018 at 1030 hrs at the memorial situated in the grounds of Otaki College on Mill Rd, Otaki.



Members are reminded that subs for the year to 28 February 2019 are due on 1 March 2018.

Obituary

Sadly we have to report that the last of our Christchurch members, Robert (Bob) Powell, ex HMS London, passed away on Friday 22 December 2017. Our deepest condolences go to his family.

Otaki Scholar writes about his Kiwi experience



I had the honour to be the 73rd Otaki Scholar, representing the College during an amazing 6-week tour of New Zealand. Each year the Otaki scholar visits 11 different schools across the country, from Kerikeri in the far north to Dunedin in the south.

On arrival I was immediately welcomed to a windy Wellington by members of Otaki College, the first stop, and my 15 hosts (different head boys and girls, prefects, and principals) made me feel at home along the way.

Being in New Zealand I saw the country's deep-rooted love of rugby with the All Blacks proudly retaining the Bledisloe Cup and the Hurricanes – the Wellington region's Super XV team – winning the title. I also had the honour to listen to All Blacks legend, John Kirwan, speak at St Kentigern College, Auckland, on the issue of mental health.

The trip was a fantastic opportunity and I had the chance to try many adventurous things: from quad biking and boxing in Nelson to snorkelling, hunting and skiing in Napier. It was a once in a lifetime experience which, following the 100-year anniversary of the SS Otaki's sinking, I hope will continue for many years to come.

Jamie Seedhouse
School Captain 2015-2016
Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen, Scotland

Dates for your diary

SS Otaki Commemoration and Wreath Laying
Monday 12 March 2018 at Otaki College, Mill Road, Otaki

RCCNZ Meeting
Thursday 22 March 2018 at RSA Lower Hutt

ANZAC Day Wreath Laying
Wednesday 25 April 2017 at Pukeahu Park, Wellington

Convoy Plaque Wreath Laying
Wednesday 9 May 2018 at Wellington Waterfront

Russia National Day
Thursday 14 June 2018

RCCNZ Meeting
Thursday 23 August 2018 at RSA Lower Hutt

Merchant Navy Day Wreath Laying
Monday 3 September 2018 at Hall of Memories, Wellington

RCCNZ Christmas Gathering
Thursday 22 November 2018 at Otaki.

Admiral's flag sells for £300,000

Britain's greatest admiral continues to be the top draw for collectors after they forked out over £1m on Nelson-themed artefacts, mementoes and personal effects in January 2018.

A fragment of a flag flown on HMS Victory on the day of the Admiral's triumph - and death - was bought for just under £300,000, more than three times the sum auctioneers estimated. Not to be outdone, bidders smashed the asking price on a portrait of Emma Hamilton; it eventually went under the hammer for £369,000.

Nearly 50 items linked with the Georgian Admiral went under the hammer as part of Sotheby's 'Of Royal and Noble Descent' auction which raised over £3m for various sellers. The flag segment - 86cm by 92cm - was the jewel in the crown of 18th/19th-Century 'Nelsoniana' made available to buyers.

In the run-up to the decisive clash with the Franco-Spanish fleet, Nelson ordered all British warships to fly the national flags as well as their squadron Colours when they went into battle.

Of the 33 Royal Navy ships which raised the Union Jack on October 21 1805, only two standards are believed to still exist intact: one is held by the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, the other is in private hands having been bought for nearly £400,000 a decade ago.

Pic of the Month



View from the office! HMNZS Wellington navigating through the calm waters of Milford Sound.

An elderly old salt is stopped by the police around 1 a.m. and is asked where he is going at this time of night.

The man replies, "I am going to a lecture about alcohol abuse and the effects it has on the human body."

The officer then asks, "Really? Who is giving that lecture at this time of night?"

The man replies, "That would be my wife!"

Up Spirits!



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