



RACP NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2022

ISSUE 20



Welcome to the Christmas newsletter

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News

Merchant Navy Day

We are proud to take part in Merchant Navy Day every year on 3rd September. The day is marked all over the UK by flying the Red Ensign to honour and remember the sacrifices of the Merchant Navy and remind ourselves of our dependence on their very important work, which is responsible for over 90% of the UK's imports. Find out more about the campaign on their website.

<https://www.theseafarerscharity.org/merchant-navy-fund/merchant-navy-day>



Our Red Ensign flying outside the Museum

New Centre Manager

In August 2022 we said goodbye to our Centre Manager, Kyle Mathieson, who has gone on to pursue a new career with the Forestry Commission. He did a wonderful job and we wish him all the best for the future. Our new Centre Manager, James Brown gave an interview for the Gairloch and District Times when he started, explaining what drew him to the role and what he hopes to achieve with our team. The interview is reproduced below:

1) What interested you in the Russian Arctic Convoys in the first place, and how did you come to apply to be Exhibition Centre Manager?

I have previously holidayed in the area, but finally decided to move here permanently in 2021. I have lived and worked in the area since then. I was fascinated by WWII gun emplacement site at Cove and its history, but mainly the beautiful scenic area and rural pace of life, surrounded by sea on one side and woodlands on the other. It is the complete opposite of the city life that I was previously used to.

2) How do you see the Arctic Convoy Museum developing in the future?

The Arctic Convoy Museum can play an important part in further developing the tourist trade and bringing more visitors into the area. Situated on the North Coast 500 route we are ideally placed to welcome touring coach parties in the future. We need to tell the Arctic Convoys story to keep the memory of the veterans alive, and educate future generations about the sacrifices made by the service personnel.

3) Covid caused many in the tourist trade significant problems. Will the Arctic Convoy Museum be able to bounce back?

We have already seen significant numbers of visitors returning. Visitor numbers are approaching pre-pandemic levels, and will hopefully continue to grow



into next season. Many visitors to the Exhibition Centre are from other countries. Overseas tourists are already coming back.

4) *What plans do you have for the future of the Exhibition Centre?*

I don't want to give too much away! We are planning to develop further links with other local tourist attractions at Inverewe and the Gairloch Heritage Museum. In addition to developing the trade with tour parties, internet marketing is already a significant part of the business. This can grow further making more extensive use of other channels such as social media.

Watch this space for further updates.



Bertie The NAAFI Van Update

Our Austin 8 NAAFI Van, "Bertie", was featured in the Special 40th Anniversary Edition of *Classic Military Vehicle Magazine*. Wonderful to see him in print as we try to spread awareness of this one-of-a-kind wartime vehicle, which is the largest item in our collection. The feature was in the April 2022 issue, and if you would like to find out more about this magazine, take a look at the website.

<https://www.keymilitary.com/classic-military-vehicle>



Bertie's Feature

Memorial Service: 8th May 2022

We had a wonderful turnout at our memorial service at Rubha Na Sasan, site of the Russian Arctic Convoy Memorial stone. The Cadets did a wonderful job and the weather was cooperative. We hope to see everyone again next year.

Feature on Radio 4

The Russian Arctic Convoy Museum was featured on an episode of Open Country on Radio 4. Helen Mark visited the Scottish Highlands to explore some of its attractions, including the "lost" village of Balblair, the spectacular Corrieshalloch Gorge and us. If you missed it, you can listen again here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0019z2v>

Donation to the Museum

We would like to say a huge thank you to James and Jo Struthers of Loch Ewe Brewing Company Ltd, who presented us with a cheque from the proceeds of the sale of their Arctic Convoy IPA. If you get the opportunity to try their fabulous beers then don't miss out. You can find out more about their products here: <https://www.ewebrew.beer>



Jo and James with Francis

NC500 Podcast Feature

Our museum was also featured on the wonderful NC500 Podcast. Pennie Stuart and Dan Holland were exploring more local attractions, including Inverewe Gardens and daring sea-cliff climbs. In the podcast, Dan visits our museum and dives into the remarkable history of one of the most daring allied operations of World War 2. If you missed it, you can listen on catch up here:

<https://link.chtbl.com/NC5003>

Young People's Museum Pass

This year, Gairloch Museum and ourselves were allowing free admission to our museums for holders of the Young People's Museum Pass. These were distributed through local schools, including Gairloch Primary, Gairloch High, Shieldaig Primary, Applecross Primary, Poolewe Primary, and Balnaluib Primary. These passes allowed holders free entry as many times as they wished until the end of 2022.



Cove Memorial Service

Reports

Platinum Jubilee Tree Planting

The weather tried its best but didn't stop a rather special tree from being planted at Inverewe Gardens on Wednesday 26th October 2022. A new specimen tree, *Davidia involucrata* 'Sonoma', was chosen by Head Gardener, Kevin Ball.

Also known as the 'handkerchief tree', A deciduous, conical tree to 15m tall with broadly ovate, sharply-pointed, red-stalked, mid-green leaves. Selected for its ability to produce the small, dark green flowers from a very young age, sometimes after only two or three years, and these are held within noticeably long, large, creamy-white bracts during late spring, followed by small, ovoid fruits.

The tree was sponsored by the Russian Arctic Convoy Museum at Aultbea. To commemorate the Arctic Convoys and the personnel who made the ultimate sacrifice during World War II, and in the year of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee, it was the perfect opportunity to plant a specimen tree which will hopefully be part of Inverewe's unique botanical collection for many years to come.

The tree was planted by Kevin Ginty, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, and Kevin Ball, Head Gardener at Inverewe. It also reflects a developing link between the Russian Arctic Convoy Museum and NTS Inverewe. The donation is recorded in the Donations Register at the Gardens.



The Western Highlands weather did its usual thing! It poured with rain during the morning, and the planned visit of a number of Arctic Convoy Museum team had to be postponed. We will return at a later date, and in finer weather! Our new specimen tree didn't mind a bit.

Kevin Ginty said, "It's a great honour to be able to plant a

tree to commemorate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee, and the Russian Arctic Convoys and what they achieved in the most difficult of circumstances."

Francis Russell, chair of the Russian Arctic Convoys Museum said, "It is a unique opportunity both to commemorate the platinum jubilee and the Russian Arctic Convoys. We are delighted to build on our links with Inverewe going forward."

Chairman's Report

Despite the Covid pandemic 2022 has been a busy year for RACP Museum Operations

Despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the negative effect this has had on the UK and other economies globally, the museum has enjoyed a record year in terms of visitor numbers and income. Fortunately the museum's "Russian" connection does not appear to have had any discernible effect and this can probably be explained by the fact that the vast majority of visitors to the museum and our web site understand the reason for the connection. In addition, the statement we issued immediately following the invasion severing ties with Russian diplomatic and other institutions was welcomed by many.

Since the museum opened in May 2017 in Aultbea the progress it has made can be seen in the following figures:



Year	Visitor Numbers	Income
2017	5,550	£28,597
2018	6,331	£36,283
2019	6,033	£36,766
2020	1,322	£9,703
2021	6,430	£46,714
2022	7,823	£54,002

In addition, the museum received donations totalling £4,574. One of the donations for £150 was from Jo and James Struthers of the Loch Ewe Brewing Company.

The four months of 2021 were exceptional and this can partly be explained by the freedom people experienced from the relaxation in Covid restrictions. This year the very high cost of fuel clearly resulted in less travel within the UK, but there was a welcome return of visitors to the UK. Word of mouth continues to be an excellent way to spread the word and the Museum received an award from Lonely Planet. The Museum was featured in August on the Radio 4 programme 'Open Country' and also in a NC 500 podcast.

In the past year we have received visits from pupils of the Bualnaluib and Ullapool primary schools, which were really appreciated by us and we hope to encourage other schools, both locally and further afield to come and visit the museum.

At the end of August Kyle Mathieson left us to pursue

a new career with the Forestry Commission and we thank him for his time with us and wish him well for the future. In his place we now have James Brown who was working in the Isle View nursing home. James, who is from Stoke-on-Trent, has brought new ideas and new stock to the shop and is proving to be a valuable member of the team.

We have recently carried out a full review of our Health and Safety procedures to ensure that we continue to be compliant with the current regulations. We have enlisted the help of Rachael Thomas to work on the process of obtaining accreditation from Museums and Galleries of Scotland and the first step of accreditation will be submitted shortly.

The War Time Trail

The mosaics designed by Carola Smith and Sally Purdy and made with the help of the children of the Bualnaluib, Gairloch and Poolewe primary schools were submitted to a competition organised by the Northern Convoys International Foundation in Russia. The latter subsequently announced that the mosaics had been awarded the Grand Prix; however, a combination of delays due to the Covid pandemic and the invasion of the Ukraine resulted in it not being possible to receive the prizes. We have now been told that the prizes are to be delivered to the museum and we will pass them on to the schools.

75th Anniversary Event

Following the cancellation of the event we had planned to hold a video-linked event in London, Edinburgh and the museum, but this was cancelled as a result of the events in the Ukraine.



Cove Service

This year we held a small VE day event at the memorial stone at Cove attended by the Lord Lieutenant and military attaches from Canada and New Zealand plus a representative from the Royal Marines. We intend to continue holding these events.

Looking Ahead

Last year we submitted an application to the Community Renewal Fund for £113,200 and unfortunately the application was turned down. This did not come as a surprise given the huge demands on funding bodies for Covid related recovery projects. Since then we have taken the decision to put the projected extension to the museum on hold in view of the difficult economic conditions and the substantial increase in building costs. Instead we will continue to make maximum use of the space we have and look at the proposed extension when conditions become more favourable.

We are in the process of purchasing the land to the North and East of the museum for additional parking and the creation of a memorial garden. The purchase has taken longer than expected owing to minor discrepancies in the boundaries of the land, but we expect matters to be concluded shortly.



Trustees and Volunteers

Donald Matheson stepped down as a trustee this year and we thank him for his help over the years. We are fortunate to have a new trustee who joined the board in July. He is Barry Sturman-Mole who lives locally and works for the UK Atomic Energy Authority. We now have six volunteers who interact with visitors and help them with their enquiries when necessary. However, there continue to be times either in the morning or afternoon when there is no one covering the museum and we are always on the lookout for more volunteers to do a three hour morning or afternoon shift. If you would like to help in the exhibition centre during the 2023 season commencing in April, or in another capacity, please contact us.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow trustees, our band of volunteers and the shop staff for all their support over the past year.

Francis Russell

Chairman

Reader Contributions

Two World's Collide – Patrick Shirley

We would like to say a huge thank you to Patrick Shirley for contributing the following article. It is a summary of a much more detailed account from his book, *Two Worlds Collide: A Richly Illustrated True Story of the Arctic Convoys and the German Submariners in WW2*. It was published this year and is available on Amazon.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Two-Worlds-Collide-illustrated-submariners/dp/1398424048>



Herbert Lochner

It is wonderful to have a German account of the convoys.

The opportunity to finally compose this true story came during the Coronavirus pandemic and the 75th anniversary of VE Day. It seemed an appropriate time to compile in parallel two accounts of the

New Veterans added to Convoys Remembered

Over the past 12 months we have added a huge number of veterans to our Convoys Remembered archive. We are delighted that it is inspiring so many submissions of stories and superb images. Personal accounts really help those of us who weren't there to get a sense of what it was like. If your relative served on Arctic Convoys and shared any memories or anecdotes with you, please consider sharing them with us in our archive. It has grown into a wonderful resource for researchers and historians. In some instances we are able to link to scanned war diaries or other media, making it an ever more valuable source of information. Please help us grow it further if you can. Contact veterans@theracmproject.org to have your relative included. You can browse the entire archive at <https://racmp.co.uk/history-learning/convoys-remembered/>



James B. C. McDougall



Robert Hendry



Paul G. Gill



Bernard Smalley



Colin Horner



Donald Griffiths



Donald Robert Hancock



Stuart Bryson



Lawrence Richard Heron



John Harvey



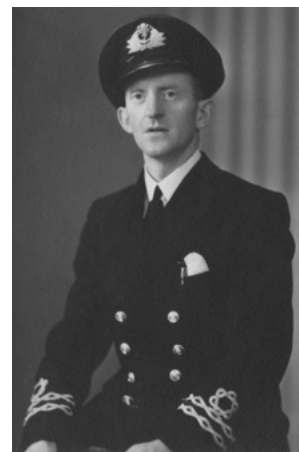
David Desmond Lloyd



Sidney Rotheray



Murdo Macdonald



James McIntyre Thoms



Murray Shaw



Norman Macleod



Leslie Setford



Kenneth Wilson



Michael Francis



Percy Edwards



Herbert Lochner



John Jack Shirley

WW2 Arctic maritime conflict. This was a war that any participant was very fortunate to survive; battling the enemy and also the sea and elements. The two narrators are my father, John or “Jack” Shirley, a second lieutenant in the Royal Navy serving on the corvette K-405 Alnwick Castle and the Mechanical Engineer, Herbert Lochner, serving on the U-boat U-425. This is a story of their relative experiences of war from a very young age; both were close to their 18th birthdays in 1940, through to their relative survival of the war, with a common conclusion, that they were the “lucky” ones.

It seemed to make sense to start with my father’s account up to the sinking of U-425. I have then introduced Herbert Lochner’s account prior to the sinking. The two accounts of the sinking are then presented in parallel when both their worlds ‘collided’. Finally, their separate accounts following this event that brought them together and their separate histories to the end of the European conflict are included.

It remains to sincerely remember those on both sides that died in this conflict and pray that there is no repeat in any of our future generation’s lifetimes.

Convoy RA64 (16 February 1945) HMS Alnwick Castle
The convoy emerged from the Kola Inlet in the early morning, having received early reports of U-boat activity outside. The late night was black, and a slight sea was running.

We were in company with HMS Lark. An asdic contact was made by Lark. It was passed on to Alnwick Castle. We mounted a ‘squid’ attack. After a short interval, the U-boat began to surface, conning tower first, visible in our searchlight. Men were emerging, some diving into the water, others seemed to be trying to man the gun. Tracer was fired at the conning tower – it was stopped when the activity stopped. Men in the water were calling out. Some had yellow clothes, some blond hair.

We launched our ship’s boat, first lieutenant in charge. The wooden snow cover had to be removed first. The sinking U-boat was perhaps two cables away (400 yards). The men in the water were disappearing fast. When the boat returned, one survivor had been picked up alive.

The survivor was taken, unconscious, to the sick bay. His clothes were cut off (several layers). He disclosed his U-boat’s number (U-425), that is all.

He was called Herbert Lochner. The SBA was able to resuscitate him by massage. The sole survivor of U-425 was Herbert Lochner. He was a technician

petty officer whose hometown was Danzig. He was a prisoner of war until May 1948. Many years later, he wrote an account of his experiences and I was shown a copy by a naval officer who was researching these wartime events. On the whole, the account is objective, but I felt it obliged me to write the account of the action as I observed it. Herbert Lochner did appear to believe that the British could have done more to save his comrades, even though he seemed to be fully aware of the extreme Arctic conditions on the night in question. Herr Lochner wrote an article for

a German magazine in 1993, not long before his death. We were privileged to meet his widow Frau Lochner in 1996.

The following is a precis made from Herbert Lochner’s account:

“At 10 pm we were lying on the surface. On receiving a radio message, we dived to 40 m. It seemed the Red Army were approaching Danzig, my hometown. Lying on my bunk. Oxygen problem in the U-boat. Under silent regime. Dozing. Soon after midnight, propeller noise heard above. Also enemy asdic transmissions for some time. Suddenly,

depth charge explosions – the lights went out. Tilted 40–50° towards the stem. I went forward to torpedo compartment to repair a leak. Emergency lights came on. Faces of my comrades showed pale in the light. Depth meter showed we were lying below 200 m (I went paler!). My young apprentice sat between the tubes, looking frightened, with wide eyes, rosary in his hands. Silence, straining to hear from control centre.

“Then, order came ‘All hands to forward end’, water had flooded main engine and electrical compartments in stem of sub. Trim was not greatly improved by crew moving forward. Then, more depth charges – sinking confirmed. Waiting helplessly. No panic. Sound of creaking in hull, due to water pressure at depth. Smell

of gases from damaged batteries. I sat on my bunk, took out my diving rescue kit from its bag, remembering training at Pilau Sub.

School (in favourable water conditions, and only 40 m depth!) – ‘Come up, slowly.’ But U-boats normally operate below 100 m. Thinking and hoping!

It is possible to use compressed air to bring the boat to the surface, before sinking has happened, in fact. The commander knew this was the only hope of rescue. Crew collected in HQ area below conning tower. Compressed air brought boat to surface, slowly, very slowly. Relief showed on the men’s faces, as ascent showed on gauge. 18- to 19-year-olds looked old and haggard. Commander: ‘We’re coming up... get out as



John “Jack” Shirley



quickly as possible... don't forget your rescue kit.'
"A few minutes to surface – hatch opened – fresh air entered noisily. All realise, little time left for survival. We put on lifebelts, ran to hatch – no panic I was about 35th out. Sub lay stricken stem down. Commander stood by binocular stand, flung distress flares into water. Men standing on conning tower and storm deck. Oerlikon tracer fire still from British. Firing ceased after flare hit water. Many men in water. Next me, a security officer did not know how to use



*Sinking of U-425 at Midnight 16th-17th Feb 1945
By HMS Alnwick Castle*

his lifebelt. I helped him, but his compressed air cylinders were empty. Some tried to launch rubber dinghy. Water already reached guns. I climbed to the bridge, with two others. We were the only ones left. I remember the advice when I served in a destroyer, 'Stay on board as long as possible.' When the bridge submerged, we swam for our lives. The sub sank, bow in the air. Obersteerman, who had been witness at my wedding, was without lifebelt; he held on to my shoulders for some time, then I realised he was no longer there. A few men were still swimming, shouting 'Help'. Some tracer shots were still fired, but why? The water was very cold; my legs became stiff. I took photos from my pocket and threw them away, to prevent them falling into enemy hands. I had a few words with my friend, Mayazusieke, 'Maybe will make it?' Then calmness, in the foamy water, for how long? "I opened my eyes. I was lying in the bottom bunk of the sick bay of the corvette (Alnwick Castle). Quickly conscious. White sheets. Several seamen in waterproofs were in the room, looking curious. I was well cared for."

An Amazing coincidence

On December 5th we received an email from a Norwegian who lives in Edinburgh, with a request. Her son Harald is in P7 at school in Edinburgh and is learning about World War 2 and had chosen the Arctic Convoys for his research project and she wanted to know if we could put him in touch with a veteran to learn about his war time experiences. We contacted

John Paterson, a veteran to whom we were preparing to send a card for his 99th birthday, and he agreed to talk to Harald.

Harald spoke to him on December 8th and here is his account of their conversation.

"I was amazed when it turned out that Mr Paterson knew my great grandfather, James Hogarth and my grandpa (who was also in the Navy, but that's not where they met). After being in the Navy, Mr Paterson was a postman. My great grandfather ran the post office at Sanquhar (the world's oldest post office) and when postmen there went on holiday Mr Paterson was the one who would come and cover for them. Here is some of what Mr Paterson told me about his time on the Arctic convoys.

He was one of two Royal Navy members that were on a Russian ship, as signalmen on a small submarine chaser. So that was probably a unique experience. They spent about a month at the ship repair yard at Fort William and became good friends with their Russian crew mates even though they couldn't speak Russian. He went on convoy JW61 in October 1944. He told me nothing spectacular happened and that earlier convoys had a much harder time because the Germans had more planes stationed at Narvik in occupied Norway earlier in the war. Still they had to be on guard against attack from the air and U-boats. He emphasised that the sea and weather were also enemies. The convoys could get better protection from air attacks during the dark winter months, but that is when you have the worst of the weather. So it's kind of which enemy would you prefer? And if you did survive a torpedo attack it wouldn't be for very long because you would die of hypothermia in the sea.

They were on a small ship and if they had ever gone on the upper deck they would have been washed away. They were on call 24 hours a day and had to snatch a bit of sleep when they could and didn't have time to take their clothes off. When they were needed the Russians called for 'Ingliski Signalski', but it was mostly false alarms.

The convoy took six days from Loch Ewe to Murmansk. He did say he was relieved when they reached Murmansk, but the officer on board did not know what to do with the two foreigners and took them to a communications base at Polyarno. He described Polyarno like a town in cowboy films (but probably colder), with wooden buildings and board walks and dirt streets. After a few days they got on a ship, HMS Walker, which took them back to the UK.

Mr Paterson said that going on the convoy is a great memory for him and he does not regret it at all. He



would like to have met his Russian ship mates again, but he never did. However, he enjoyed going to Iceland to the Arctic Convoy Club there and several Russian days in Edinburgh.

He was back in Britain when the war ended, based in Northern Ireland and on patrol. One U-boat surrendered to them, but he did not meet the Germans on it.

He said that although his experience was not as bad as earlier convoys, it was still dangerous and he was glad to have survived. He said that Churchill was quite right when he described the Arctic convoys as 'the worst journey in the world'. He has been proud to wear the medals he got, which include the Arctic Star and the Ushakov medal. He said that with medals you often wonder whether you deserve them, but when he wears them he feels he represents all the people who did not return from those treacherous journeys". I would like to thank Harald for his 'report' and wish him well for his project. I hope that he will be able to visit the museum next year.

Collection update

HMS Belfast model

This excellent model was donated by Simon Hunter who's cousin Ian MacDonald was an accomplished model maker and ex-crew member of HMS Belfast.



HMS Belfast on display

Unfortunately Ian died in early 2021 before he could complete a model of the Scharnhorst, which was also donated. It is being completed for us and we hope to have it on display in the museum during 2023.

Get Involved

How else can I help?

Spread the word. Tell people about our project and help us find more people with stories to share. We are always looking for new stories, accounts and anecdotes to put on the "Convoys Remembered" page of our website, which you can see here: <https://racmp.co.uk/history-learning/convoys-remembered/>



Volunteer

We welcome any offers of help, particularly from those able to offer the odd afternoon in the summer in our Museum.

If you would like to be involved in our project in any way, no matter how small, please contact Elizabeth Miles at info@theracmproject.org

Donate/loan an item to the collection

Many fascinating items in our collection have been donated by veterans or their relatives. If you have an item relating to the convoys that you think may be of interest to us, then please contact Bruce Hudson at bruce@theracmproject.org

Make a donation

Help us continue our work. You can find our Just Giving page here: <https://www.justgiving.com/russianarcticconvoymuseum/Donate/> or, if you prefer to donate by cheque, please make it out to: "Russian Arctic Convoy Project"

Address:

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Don't forget you can gift aid it too.



Follow us online

RACP often post updates, news stories and event details online. If you want to keep up to date with our progress then you can follow us on the following sites:



[Russian Arctic Convoy Museum](#)



[Arctic Convoy Museum @InfoRACM](#)

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Photos and articles contributed by Nicky Ellakirk, Natasha Ellakirk, Bruce Hudson, Francis Russell, James Brown and Kevin Ginty.

Special thanks to Patrick Shirley for sharing the story from his book.

If you would like to contribute to future newsletters (or find any errors or omissions) please contact us at admin@theracmproject.org



“Arctic Convoy Mosaic”

Designed with the pupils at Balnaluib Primary, realised by Sally Purdy & Carola Martin-Smith

Remembrance and all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year

*From all at the
Russian Arctic Convoy Project*



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