



RACP NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2023 ISSUE 21



Welcome to the Winter newsletter

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News

V.E. Day Memorial Service

On Saturday the 13th of May we held a memorial service at Rubha Na Sasan, site of the Russian Arctic Convoy Memorial stone. We were delighted to be supported by Cadets and the local community. We hope to see everyone again next year.



The parade at the memorial stone

In 2024, RACM will be working towards Museum Accreditation status. Can you help?

2023 has been a great year for the Russia Arctic Convoy project, with visitor numbers and income achieving record levels. It has been fantastic to see

so many people coming through the doors of our Exhibition Centre and leaving with a sense of Loch Ewe's importance in WWII and the sacrifices made by the Arctic Convoy veterans.

With our Exhibition Centre flourishing, we have turned our attention to securing the future of our Museum and its collections. In 2024, RACM will be working towards achieving formal Museum Accreditation status. The Accreditation scheme ensures UK Museums meet an agreed standard in:

- How they are run
- How they manage their collections
- How they engage with their users

Gaining accreditation status will show that RACM is being properly managed and governed and is looking after its collections according to the industry standard. Gaining this accolade is likely to be a two-year process and RACM has employed a Curator for that period to assist the Board of Trustees and other volunteers.

Dr Karen Buchanan is an experienced Museum professional who is delighted to be working with RACM towards this goal.

This is an exciting time for RACM and we are always looking for new volunteers to help run the



One of our regular volunteers, Archie, working with some of our archive materials

Museum and give the Loch Ewe Convoy heritage the prominence it deserves.



Francis, Karen and James at the Museum

If you would like find out more about what RACM does or have a chat about becoming involved as a volunteer locally or remotely, please contact us by phone on 01445 731137 or by email at info@arcticconvoymuseum.org. We will be delighted to hear from you!



Remembrance Day Services

We were happy to participate and lay wreaths at both services held respectively at the Poolewe Memorial and Rubha Nan Sasan Arctic Convoy Memorial, Cove. These services are arranged by the local Community Council and demonstrate the continued efforts to remember those who served aboard the convoys.



Cove Memorial Service

The 'Way Ahead' Project

When the Russian Arctic Convoy Project was set up 12 years ago, its Vision was:

A multi-site museum in the North-West Highlands of Scotland, centred around Loch Ewe. This will incorporate items from our collection on display in several local venues, the preservation of local sites and structures of interest, a virtual presence and

ultimately a state-of-the-art exhibition centre built in Aultbea on the site of the wartime naval base.

Mission accomplished! So, what next?

The Board of Trustees has been looking at how we take RACM forward, to ensure best use of the existing and new facilities, to achieve the necessary accreditation to cement its position as the UK's premier Museum dedicated to the Arctic Convoys and to enhance our online presence as a source of information for veterans, families and researchers, at the same time developing further our links with the local community and preparing for the future.

The 'Way Ahead Project' will address all these issues. The recent purchase of extra land around the museum will provide the opportunity to enhance our car parking area and enable the development of an educational pathway as an external part of the Exhibition Centre. This pathway will lead to a new war memorial with disabled access. Space will be allocated for a future museum extension, the exact requirements for which will be determined in due course. The appointment of Dr Karen Buchanan, our new Curator, is a key element of this development.

The tragic events in Ukraine are a daily reminder of the futility of war. Therefore, the Memorial will reflect the entirety of losses in the Arctic Convoys, at sea and in the air and, significantly, from both sides of the battle. This will not take anything away from the existing Convoy memorial at Cove, which will remain the centrepiece for our annual May event, but it will provide a readily accessible focus, year-round, to



Wreaths at the Poolewe Memorial

remember those lost in that most dreadful theatre of war.

RACM will remain the name of the Charity, but the new trading name will be the Arctic Convoy Museum, which better describes who we are, and which will encompass the Exhibition Centre, the new external pathway and

memorial, the Wartime Trail and our online presence. The new name will in due course be reflected in all social media and on the website.

The next step will be to develop the concept further and speak to our members at our AGM in the New Year.





Proposed new logo

This is an exciting time for the future of the Museum. We will keep you posted on developments and thank you for your continuing support.



Reports

Chairman's Report

Museum Operations

Despite the difficult economic conditions affecting the spending power of many, the museum had another record year, with income up 15% to £64,500 and visitor numbers up 3% to 7518. The museum also received donations totalling £4,561. The visitor number growth was smaller this year as tourist numbers to the region have suffered from higher fuel costs. This year we increased the entrance fee to £6 which has contributed to our income growth performing better. Overseas visitors continue to increase and the comments in our visitor book remain overwhelmingly favourable. Perhaps as a reflection of this, the museum received a Travellers Choice award from Trip Advisor, which mentioned that the museum was in the top 10% of most commented-on visitor attractions globally, not bad for a small outfit in a remote but beautiful part of the UK!



The mosaic designed with pupils of Gairloch Primary

New Members of the Museum Team

In October we appointed Dr Karen Buchanan to be our curator, an important step for the museum and its strategy for the future. Karen was previously curator of the award winning Gairloch museum and was instrumental in raising funds and setting up the museum in its current premises. We also have two new trustees; Alice Nicaudie who has a financial and

governance background and Ed Duncan who has an IT background. We remain very conscious of the fact that in a small community finding trustees and volunteers is difficult, but it is a critical aspect of ensuring a viable future for the museum. So, if you are interested in joining us in some capacity, please contact francis.russell@arcticconvoymuseum.org. Our current team of volunteers either do a three-hour morning shift (10:00-13:00) or the afternoon shift (13:00-16:00). Our volunteers play an important role in the museum making visitors have a memorable time and it is this interaction with visitors which has helped to make the museum the success it has become. Many visitors come to the museum because they have a relative who took part in the Arctic convoys, and we now have a data base of some 5500 veterans and this number continues to rise. Other visitors include those who know about the convoys, those who are curious to see what it is all about, including one person this year who wanted to know where all the Russians were!

The War Time Trail

Last year I mentioned that the mosaics made with the help of the Banaluib, Gairloch, and Poolewe primary schools, had been awarded the Grand Prix in a competition held in 2020 by the Northern Convoys



The Plaque at Gairloch Primary

International Centre in Russia. Unfortunately the situation surrounding the war in the Ukraine delayed them receiving the award. This year we finally received plaques and certificates which have now been handed over to the schools.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow trustees and our volunteers for their help and support this year.

Bruce Hudson Visits Two Arctic Convoy Veterans



In October I was invited to visit Arctic convoy veteran Eddy Tann at his home in Addlestone, Surrey, and took the opportunity to also visit John Shannon in Harrogate on the occasion of his birthday.

I travelled south from Aultbea to visit John on 1st October, the date of his 107th birthday. He was a RN Lieutenant based here at Loch Ewe (HMS Helicon) and captained one of several requisitioned yachts which were used to guide merchant ships from the Minch, through the anti-submarine boom, to their allocated anchorage in the loch, prior to their sailing to Russia in convoy.

John came to RACM's attention in 2019 when he wrote

to the Gairloch Times with an enquiry to anyone who might have recollections of that time, and in particular the military unit that occupied the now Caravan Club site in Poolewe. This matter was partially resolved, but opened up an ongoing channel of communications with RACM as to his



John Shannon

experiences while he was stationed up here, along with his young family. They lived in the small cottage almost opposite Inverewe Gardens.

Since 2019 John has imparted many stories of his time at Loch Ewe, and several have been published in the local Gairloch District Times. In 2017 John, at the behest of his family, privately published 'A Memoir' of his long and varied life story to date. Now, six years on, he still has stories to tell.

I left John in good spirits to then travel on south to visit Eddy. In the company of his son Andrew we talked of his Arctic convoy experiences aboard the cruiser HMS Suffolk, on which he served as a gunner between April 1942 and August 1945. During this time Suffolk along with HMS London and HMS Norfolk provided part of the cruiser cover force for convoy PQ18. We jointly



Eddy Tann

looked through his memorabilia and documents and I noted items of interest for the RACM files, before I started my journey north again.

Where possible RACM tries to maintain contact with surviving veterans by sending both birthday and Christmas cards where we have their date of birth and postal addresses. Currently we have some 60 on this contact list, many of whom are now over 100 years old.

Bertie Visits the Hebrides

Back in 2020 we ran a fundraising campaign for a trailer to allow Bertie to travel further afield so we can raise awareness of the convoys, and meet veterans and their families. In August 2023 Bertie set off aboard his trailer to do just



that. He visited the Isle of Lewis on a 6 day trip. We chose the Isle of Lewis because many of the Arctic Convoy sailors during WWII were from the Hebrides. The trip was a chance for their family members to visit Bertie and give details of their veteran relatives to add to the our archives and to supplement the Convoys Remembered pages of the museum website. We logged 216 visitors to Bertie over the four days we were open to the public.



We kicked things off on Wednesday 23rd at the Kinloch Community Hub, in Balallan. Thursday he visited Comunn Eachdraidh Nis, in Ness. On the Friday at Lews Castle we were visited by the Lord Lieutenant Iain Macauley, the MSP Alasdair Allan and the Council Convenor Kenneth Macleod. On Saturday he remained at Lews Castle and it was our busiest day.



We took information about 18 Arctic veterans, some of whom we were already aware of, some are new to us. We also struck up connections via the museums we visited to keep an eye out for other Arctic veteran stories that may cross their paths and to let us know of these in the future.



The trip was a great success and everyone was pleased to see Bertie in some new locations. We hope to return to the Hebrides and visit Harris, The Uists and Benbecula. Keep an eye on the Facebook page for updates.

New Veterans added to Convoys Remembered

Over the past 12 months we have added 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@arcticconvoymuseum.org to have your relative included. You can browse the entire archive at <https://racmp.co.uk/history-learning/convoys-remembered/>



Charles William Mark Macham



Eric Peter Molyneux



Geoffrey Pitt



Joe Smith



Arthur Henry Sanders
13/05/1924 - 18/7/2011

Arthur Henry Sanders



Alec Wear



Peter Hugh Quincey Carter



Robert H. Bruce



Patrick Gerard McAleer



Alec James Charlwood



Philip Jack Webb



Alexander MacLennan



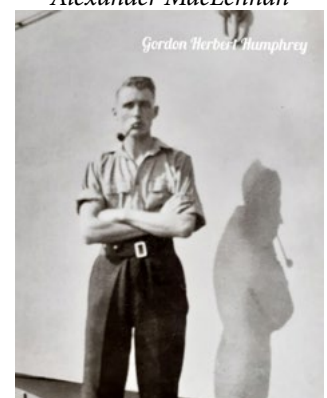
Henry Walter Paris



Stanley Godfrey



William Sidgwick



Gordon Herbert Humphrey

Pavel pays a visit to Gairloch

The Gairloch and Loch Ewe Acton Fourm (GALE) held its Annual Christmas Tree Competition at the GALE Centre in December.

We were delighted to receive an invitation for our mascot Pavel to attend and turn the lights on. Assisted by his merry Elf, Pavel travelled down from Bear Island in the Arctic Circle and enjoyed his outing very much. He met some of the talented pupils from Poolewe Primary School, pictured below.



Poolewe Primary's tree was cut from Beinn Eighe as part of tree removal project. The children hand made decorations in the traditional Victorian style alongside dried oranges. The children have been learning about the origin of a Victorian Christmas and have really enjoyed making decorations. They even used their joinery skills to make the stand for their Christmas Tree! Their tree is called "Back in time for Christmas" and Pavel was very impressed.

Collection update



Booklet 'HMS Bluebell and the Arctic Convoys' by Lady Eileen Gershon.

This privately published item was donated in September by the niece of Lieutenant Geoffrey Walker, commemorating his loss when the Flower class corvette Bluebell was sunk by U711 on 17th February 1945. He was aged 30. There was only one survivor from this loss.



Pencil sketch of Empire Flint under attack, by K. Taylor.

This item was donated in May by the grand daughter of Captain John H. Flockhart, who was Master of the Empire Flint during its voyages to/from Murmansk in February 1945. The northbound convoy (JW64) came

under sustained air attack, depicted in the sketch. Two merchant ships were lost during this convoy.

A commemorative ship silhouette to the Captain and his ship is on display in the museum at Aultbea.



Royal Navy white ensign flown from Motor Gun Boat (MGB) 319.



This ensign was donated by Mr. Keith Allan in October, having originally been owned by Ernest Davis who was a crew member of MGB319. This item is of particular interest as it supports the belief that these small RN patrol craft were in fact supplied to the Soviet Navy. Similar US Navy ships of this type are known to have been provided and transited to Russia as part of at least one convoy.

Feature Article



Victoria Cross Trust

We were delighted to receive an update last January from [The Victoria Cross Trust](#), who have been very busy stabilising the grave of Robert ((Rupert) Sherbrooke VC at Oxton. Sherbrooke was awarded the VC for his actions during the Battle of the Barents Sea on board HMS Onslow. Keith Lumley, the Chair of Trustees explained that the Trust originally cleaned the grave in 2021, but since then the ground it was situated on had subsided, causing damage to the cross, which was in danger of snapping. Following an assessment it was determined that a new base was required. Once the new base was formed the next step was moving the cross which was fraught with danger. Half a ton of



stone with a crack in it. One wrong move and it would simply snap in half. The cross base was lifted slightly on bars to break the seal with its original collapsing base. The plan was to winch the cross base with a ratchet set and use a huge Oak tree as an anchor. We then slowly ratcheted the strapping and pulled the cross-back inch by inch into its new position without incident. On its new level base, the cross shaft slipped back into a vertical position, and all was good.

The shaft of the cross had then to be tended to. The column was cracked through, and a previous repair was now failing. The crack was ground out and then filled with bonding solution to maintain the columns



integrity. The cross and those of his relatives were then all cleaned using our Doff system. This emits low pressure high temperature steam to clean without abrasion.

After we had cleaned and repaired, Barrie from the team presented Andrea O'Donnell (grand daughter of Robert Sherbrooke VC) with a commemorative plaque made by us at the VCT.

Congratulations to the team for a job well done.



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@arcticconvoymuseum.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.hudson@arcticconvoymuseum.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:

RACP
C/O Pool House
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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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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 Gairloch 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



www.racmp.co.uk

