



## THE H.M.S. HOOD ASSOCIATION

(Official Website [www.hmshood.com](http://www.hmshood.com))

### Message from the Chairman

Shipmates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with regret I have to report two of our veterans have crossed the bar since the last Newsletter. John Kirby died on the 25<sup>th</sup> June. He served in *Hood* as an AB from 25<sup>th</sup> May 1937 to 24<sup>th</sup> March 1938. Cy Thistlethwaite died on 21<sup>st</sup> September aged 94 years. He served in *HMS Hood* from 25<sup>th</sup> May 1937 until 25<sup>th</sup> March 1938 having been promoted to AB on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1938. Cy lived in the USA for many years and returned to settle in Worksop, Nottinghamshire in 2005. He regularly attended our Reunion weekends for many years, even whilst living in America, until his wife became ill in 2007. I have also been advised May Kiddle, widow of Jack, died earlier this year. Jack, a *Hood* veteran and a stoker, had been a member of the Association since its early days in the 1970s.

The Reunion dinner was again held in the Nelson Lounge at the Maritime Club. We followed last year's arrangement of not having a top table with officials spread around the tables. Reports suggested the participants enjoyed the event, but, unfortunately, we had less than 60 attendees, the lowest number in my memory. Lloyd Adams was the Guest of Honour accompanied by his two sons. Lloyd is 96 years old and a veteran of *Hood*. After an introduction by me he was presented with a framed painting of *Hood* signed by Ted Briggs, after which he gave a most interesting thank you speech. He intended hanging the picture in the hallway at his home. Lloyds's wife was unable to attend the Dinner so the Association sent her a bouquet of flowers.

The Dinner was preceded by the AGM held in Brock's Bar. The existing Committee members were all re-elected and Barry Roberts was confirmed as Committee member responsible for public relations. Only 16 members plus the Committee attended this year. We would like to see more members attending in the future to enable their views to be considered.

Most of you will have heard by now that the expedition to recover one of *Hood's* bell from the seabed wreckage in the Denmark Straits was not successful. The operation undertaken by Paul Allen using his 414 ft. super-yacht *Octopus*, equipped with a remotely operated submersible vehicle, was called off in early September after bad weather and deep currents thwarted the attempt. However, wreaths were laid at the site to honour the 1415 men who died when *Hood* was sunk. Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft, was assisted in the attempt by David Mearns and Rear Admiral Wilcocks. The venture, supported by the Association, was authorised by the Secretary of State for Defence and licensed by the Government to recover the bell but not to disturb any of the remaining wreckage. The whole operation was at no cost to the Royal Navy or Ministry of Defence. Paul Allen has said he is still committed to recovering the bell and hopes to try again in the future. If eventually successful, the bell, which remains Ministry of Defence property, will be centrepiece of a memorial to those who died in *Hood* at a new extension to the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth due to open in 2014.

At the last count we had 224 members, of which 31 live abroad. The membership includes 9 veterans and 11 veteran's widows.

God bless you all,  
Peter Heys

### Important Events.

- **2012 Remembrance Service:** 1045 on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November at Portsmouth Naval War Memorial
- **2013 Boldre Church Service:** 1100 on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June
- **2013 AGM/Reunion Dinner:** Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May at the Royal Maritime Club, Portsmouth
- **2013 Memorial Service:** 1130 on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May. Location to be announced

**Boldre Service**

The annual HMS Hood Service of Commemoration for the 1415 ships company who lost their lives on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1941 was held at Boldre parish church of St John the Baptist on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2012 at 1100. The service was conducted by Reverend Frank Willett. Standards were paraded by HMS Hood Association, The Royal British Lymington Branch and the London Sea cadets. First lesson was read by Commodore of HMS Collingwood Mike Mansergh CBE RN and the second by Commander Tony Pearse RN. The sermon was given by The Chaplain of the Fleet Reverend Scott Brown QHC RN and The Act of Remembrance by our President Rear Admiral Philip Wilcocks CB RN. Following the service refreshments were provided by the parish ladies. The service was very well attended by the local community and it was pleasing to see so many members from across the country

**Annual General Meeting & Reunion Dinner**

This year the reunion week end was held in the Royal Maritime Club, Portsmouth 26-27 May 2012 and commenced with the AGM at 1600 in the Brocks Bar. Statutory items were progressed and the current committee were re-elected. Following the AGM members gathered at 1830 in the Brocks bar for pre-dinner drinks prior to the annual dinner at 1900. This year there were only 56 members who attended the dinner the lowest number ever. Our guest of honour this year was one of our senior members Mr Lloyd Adams 96 who was accompanied by his 2 sons and lives at Netley near Southampton. Chairman Peter Heys introduced Lloyd with a resume of his career and presenting him with a framed picture of Hood signed by the late Ted Briggs. In response Lloyd thanked everyone for their kindness and said that he had the ideal place in his home to hang this most acceptable present. On Sunday members walked to St George's church for our annual Service at 1200 which was conducted by Canon Karina Green and our association Chaplain Reverend John Green.



Alec Kellaway, Lloyd Adams & Keith Evans  
Veterans catching up with latest news after dinner



Members gathered after the service at outside  
St George's church with the Tenacity Sea Cadet band

**Commander John Rigge OBE RN 1 March 1918 – 3 June 2012**

It is with regret that I have been informed that another veteran has crossed the bar. John was 94. He served as a Paymaster Midshipman in HMS Hood 9 February to 23 March 1938 with our Vice Chairman Keith Evans and they played squash together in Malta. He was born in Shanghai, educated in Training ship Conway where he was Chief Cadet Captain and awarded the Kings Gold Medal. As assistant Secretary to Rear Admiral Curtis in HMS Galatea which was replaced by the Prince of Wales in the action in the Denmark Strait on 24 May 1941 resulting in the subsequent destruction of the Bismarck. After the fall of France in 1940, as he spoke good French, he was a member of the boarding party to seize destroyer Mistral his prompt action prevented the ship from being scuttled in Plymouth harbour. In 1942 he was posted to Bermuda to set up an office for the newly promoted Vice Admiral Curtis, Senior British Naval officer, Western Atlantic. Accompanied by his wife they were billeted at the Barbizon Hotel. One night Patricia Rigge was woken by flashing lights and woke her husband who recognizing the signals, informed the US Navy who were in the same hotel. It transpired that the Germans were landing spies which were eventually caught a few days later in New York. His action prevented any further action of this nature on the USA. After this posting he remained constantly at sea until 1952 when he became Commodore's Secretary in Hong Kong. In 1964 he was Naval Attaché in Madrid where he continued to live with his family after retiring from the Navy in 1966. His long residence in Spain made him a useful and trusted advisor to successive British Ambassadors.

### *Tribute to those who perished on board HMS Royal Oak*

In May 2012 members Alan Searle and his partner Jill Patience took a cruise around the British Isles with Princess Cruises on the Caribbean Princess, one of their ports of call was Kirkwall where on 21 May 12 they anchored in Kirkwall bay. The day before arriving at Kirkwall a veterans meeting was held on board when the history of the sinking of the Royal Oak and of Hood was discussed. This meeting was well attended with great interest and very much appreciated by all. Knowing the programme in advance Alan and Jill planned to take this opportunity to pay their respects to the ships company of HMS Royal Oak which was sunk by German U-boat 47 on October 14, 1939 with the loss of 834 lives. Leading Supply Assistant Frank Sims was a cousin of Jill's mother, and survived the tragedy after being picked up by the crew of the drifter Daisy2, the fishing boat that saved many lives that night. However his cousin William Sims Engineer Artificer 4<sup>th</sup> class served on Hood which left Scapa Flow on 22 May 41 and was sunk with William Sims on board on 24<sup>th</sup> May 41. Another couple who were paying their respects were Mike and Betty Winfield, Mike's uncle Royal Marine boy bugler Aubrey John Priestly was only 15 years old and went down in Royal Oak. The chairman of the Kirkwall British Legion Malcolm Johnson and Agnes McBarron Orkney co-ordinator of the Royal Oak Survivors Association arranged for a pilot boat to take the two families out to the buoy marking where the Royal Oak now rest. Agnes also performed a short service for the families to pay their respects and laying of wreaths. At the same time tributes were also paid to Hood's ships company.

The families were very grateful to OIC Marine Services for providing a pilot boat and crew to enable them to visit the Royal Oak site. During their time on the pilot boat they were able to see the buoy which marks the wreck, as well as the sheen of oil which still floats to the surface from the wreck below. The couples also got to see the outline of the wreck which showed up on the echo sounder on the pilot boat before the tributes were laid by the families.

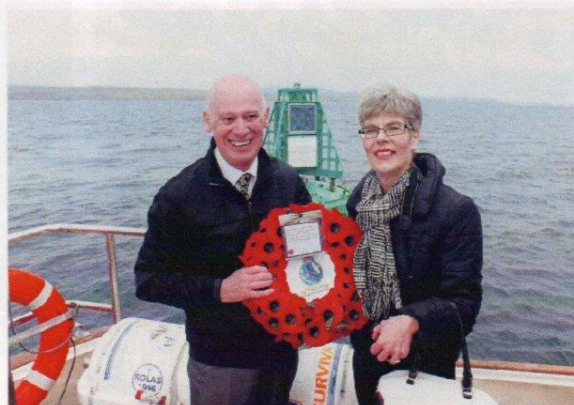
Both families are most grateful to the residence of Kirkwall for making it such a memorable day and for keeping the memories alive of the brave men who gave their lives for their country.



L-R Malcolm Johnston, Agnes McBarron, Alan Searle  
Jill Patience, Mike Winfield and Betty Winfield



Members prior to boarding the pilot boat



Alan Searle and Jill Patience over the Royal Oak prior to casting the Hood wreath

### Recovery of HMS Hood's Bell.

Many of you are now aware that an attempt to recover the Hood Bell was unsuccessful due to the bad weather condition both above and below the search area. At the time the attempt was about to be made the following was a press release by Ministry of Defence Royal Naval.

An operation to recover the bell of the battle –cruise r H M S Hood sunk in 1941 has been agreed by the Government. If recovered successfully, the bell will form a tangible and fitting memorial to the ship and the 1,415 men who were lost in her when she was sunk by the Bismarck in the North Atlantic. Hood is the largest Royal Naval vessel to have been sunk, causing the largest loss of life by any single British warship.

The Ministry of Defence and the Royal Navy are grateful for the very generous offer by the US philanthropist Paul G Allen, to recover the bell at no cost to MOD. Mr Allan's yacht Octopus, equipped with a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) will be used for the operation which will be supported by Blue Water Recoveries Ltd which specialises in the search and investigation of shipwrecks. In a previous expedition which did not disturb the wreck, the bell was discovered and photographed by Blue Water Recoveries. It is lying on the seabed well away from the parts of the battle-cruiser's hull which will not be disturbed by the recovery operation. The recovery is fully supported by the HMS Hood Association whose members include veterans who served in the ship before her final mission in 1941, and relatives of those lost with her.

President of the Association is Rear Admiral Philip Wilcocks whose uncle was among those who died on board *Hood*. Admiral Wilcocks said today: There is no headstone among the flowers for those who perish at sea. For those who lost their lives in *HMS Hood*, the recovery of her bell and its subsequent place of honour in the museum will mean that, well after the remains of Hood have gone, future generations will be able to gaze upon her bell and remember the gratitude and thanks the heroism, courage and personal sacrifice of *Hood's* ships company who died in the service of their country.

If the recovery mission is successful the bell will be put on display by the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) and will form a major feature of the new exhibition hall dedicated to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Navy. It is due to open at the Royal Navy Museum in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard in 2014. It is a fitting location as *HMS Hood* was based in Portsmouth. Commenting on the proposal, Professor Dominic Tweddle, Director General NMNR, said: "It will be an honour and privilege to display the bell from *HMS Hood*. Our new galleries, opening in April 2014 will recall and commemorate the heroism, duty and sacrifice of the people of the Royal Navy in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Hood's bell encapsulates the whole of that story as no other single object could.

The wreck of *HMS Hood* is designated under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986. The Government has licenced the recovery of the bell: as well as providing a memorial, the recovery will prevent it being taken by any illegal operation for personal gain.

Director of Blue Water Recoveries, David Mearns, located the wreck of *HMS Hood* in 2001 and is coordinating the current expedition on behalf of Vulcan. He said today: This is a wonderful opportunity for us to return to the wreck site of *Hood* with camera and lighting technologies far superior to that available to us 11 years ago. Our aim is to conduct a comprehensive, no-intrusive video investigation of the wreckage, which we believe will allow experts to determine what happened to Hood in her final moments before she sunk and answer why the loss of life was so great. Hopefully the weather and subsea conditions will be right for us to recover Hoods bell so that it is protected beyond doubt and returned to the Royal Navy.



Poppy's scattered over Hood's position, one for each member of the ships company.



Crew of M/Y Octopus attending a moving Memorial Service in honour of HOOD



HMS Hood's Bell 1.7 miles down on the seabed

Regrettably the recovery expedition was unsuccessful due to bad weather condition and very disappointing for all involved. Mr Paul Allan has stated that he would like to be involve in another attempt in the future.

**ATTEMPT TO RECOVER HMS HOOD'S BELL – AUGUST 2012 - Rear Admiral Philip Wilcocks**

On August 20<sup>th</sup> David Mearns, James Warren and myself flew into Reykjavík airport to join M/Y OCTOPUS to commence what we anticipated would be a successful attempt to recover HMS HOOD's bell from her debris field. Given the approval of the Secretary of State for Defence, the endorsement of the HMS HOOD Association, the support of the National Maritime Museum of the Royal Navy and the outstanding generosity of Paul Allen our hopes were high although we knew that the conditions would be extremely challenging.

Sailing 2 days later and accompanied by Paul, it took us just under 24 hours to reach HOOD's position and almost immediately the ROV was in the water and on its 2 hour journey nearly 2 miles down to the debris field. The technical challenges became quickly apparent to novices like James and myself – accurately positioning a 9,000 ton ship, 2,500 metres of umbilical cable and then be able to control a small ROV with almost surgical precision. However, throughout the expedition the outstanding professionalism and skills of the team onboard OCTOPUS was so evident and seriously impressive.



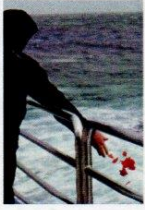
Once the ROV got down to the seabed, we began to see pieces of HOOD as the ROV began its approach to the ship's stern. While I had some idea of the debris field from the video shot during the previous expedition, I found the ROV's slow passage across pieces of steel, electrical connection boxes, wiring etc hugely moving. The scale of the disaster began to become more and more apparent; here was clear evidence of the catastrophic nature of the destruction that led to the loss of so many lives and one of the Royal Navy's iconic warships.

Before long, a large shape began to become apparent on the ROV's sonar screen and then suddenly out of the gloom we saw a pair of large bollards and ever so slowly HOOD's stern loomed in front of us. That beautiful shape that was seen for over 20 years and now stands protruding from the seabed broken off aft of Y turret. And as the ROV moved round from starboard to port we saw the remains of the ensign staff support where the White Ensign would have flown so proudly through so much of her life. One could almost imagine it still flying in the gentle current down there on the seabed. And just below was the port inner propeller that had driven her through the water and the rudder – the latter showing quite clearly that the ship had commenced her turn to port to open her weapon arcs when she was hit and destroyed. Demonstrating so vividly the random nature of warfare – 30 seconds earlier and the battle's outcome could have been so different.



Having left the stern the ROV made its way towards the area of debris where the bell is located – continuing to pass over the scattered remains of the ship. Thousands upon thousands pieces of steel, wiring and more. And then we saw the piece of steel plate against which the bell rested – and the hugely challenging nature of the task facing the ROV pilots became so apparent. Tucked right in the corner looking so small at that depth was the bell – what this expedition was for - and it became so, so clear to me the decision to recover it to be a lasting memorial to the ship and her ship's companies, long after the ship has disintegrated into the seabed, is absolutely right.

Unfortunately, the combination of technical problems and weather conditions precluded a successful recover on this occasion. However, I am so grateful that Paul Allen and the Ministry of Defence remain determined to have another attempt.



The final chapter in this short story must go to the Captain and crew of OCTOPUS who in awful weather conditions conducted a memorial service above HOOD in early September. Wreaths were laid on behalf of the Association, the Royal Navy and James Warren and as a final act of remembrance 1,415 poppy petals were scattered in memory of those who died on 24 May 1941 together with a further 3 petals commemorating the survivors who have now crossed the bar to join their comrades in arms.

**There are no graves amongst the flowers for those who perish at sea.**

**May they continue to rest in peace,  
washed only by the cold, dark currents of the North Atlantic**