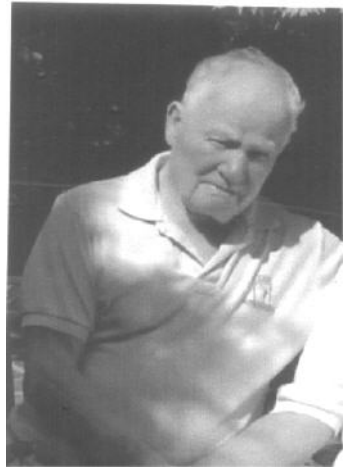


HMS Phoebe Association Newsletter October 2006



Peggy (Kesterton) Mason
1922 - 2006



S/m Frederick James Silk
1920 - 2006

We start this edition with some news of shipmates and friends who are experiencing ill health:

S/m Peter Taylor is getting accustomed to a hip replacement, but also informs me that Cancer has returned and is now affecting both lungs, his wife Jo is now undergoing surgery for a cancer problem too. Their 10 year old grandson had a brain tumour and during the operation something happened which will probably result in brain damage, what a dreadful thing to happen to one so young. Peter says that much to his disappointment he will be unable to attend next years reunion.

Our thoughts are with you and your family Peter and hope you, Jo, and your grandson respond to treatment and make a full recovery.

Our thanks to S/m George & Josie White for visiting Peter, and for taking him to his meeting, it cheered him up no end.

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Our thoughts are also with Chris Dunne who sent a message to say his mother Olive is now suffering from Alzheimer's which must be very distressful for him and wife Sam. We hope Olive will get well again soon and make a full recovery.

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I spoke to S/m Bill Grahame and asked after his grandson, the boy is out of hospital and has recovered from his back and head injuries, but still has his leg in a metal braces, However he is getting about ok. Bill and sons are ok and looking forward to the reunion.

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S/m Roy Addison has got over his broken leg and hobbling about again. By the time you read this Roy & Mo will have returned from their cruise round the UK. Hope it was not too rough a voyage.

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Lil & I met up with S/m Jimmy Sutcliffe at Birmingham Crematorium for Peggy Mason's funeral. There were lots of people in attendance to pay their respects and give Peggy a good send off..

We did not go to the reception as it was in what we knew was a small Common Room where Peggy lived, and it would have been crowded.

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Sadly I report another shipmate has crossed the bar.

S/m Fred Silk had been suffering with cancer for a number of years.

At 6 am on August 4th Fred passed peacefully away.

The funeral was held at Barham Crematorium on 14 th August at 1200.

The HMS Phoebe Standard was paraded by S/m Derek West, and S/m John Barrett RM paraded the RM Standard.

In attendance were: S/Ms Jim Hutchinson, Roy & Lil Pavely.

A wreath on behalf of the Association was laid. Fred's sons and daughter from Canada and USA arrived ok despite the terrorist emergency. A reception was held at Fred's house after the funeral, Jim, Lil and I attended. Our thanks to Irene and family for their welcome.

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Unknown to us S/m Walter Thompson moved into a residential home in December, we have been sending his newsletters to his old address, whether he received them or not we do not know. But a kindly lady who now lives in Walters old house phoned us to tell of his move but did not know the name of the residential home. Thankfully, when asked, Josie White did a spot of detecting and found where Walter now lives. We will try and get in touch with him at the home.(New address page 7).

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S/m Neil Avery has been in touch by email from Cyprus, he and Gwen have now settled in at their new home. They still have some work to catch up on, but like its been here they have had two months of 40c heat, so work did not get done. (40c + 40c +28 = approx 108 F). But their electric and water got connected, and the inevitable swimming pool is almost finished. (Once everything is completed maybe Neil will invite us to have a reunion there)?? I expect Neil will send his address sometime and a welcome to any shipmates visiting the island. This is his new email address: cyprusneilavery@gmail.com

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S/m Harry Blackhurst, suffering from Alzheimers took a downward turn and has been placed in a home where the treatment and care he needs can be administered. His wife Claire is also not at all well and has spent a while in hospital. Knowing Harry will be safe and well looked after has given Claire peace of mind.

What War?

(Vic Chanter

You're 18, with your life ahead of you, but there's a war going on; what do you do? That's exactly what we did. WE, being men of the Royal Navy. Whatever one's age, however, off duty or ashore on leave, Life was to be lived to the full.

So, during the last months of 1939, crew members of HMSs Southampton, Edinburgh and Galatea, of which I was one, joined in the hostilities raging up and down the coast of Norway, Holland and Denmark. Working out of Rosyth we traversed the North Sea. Working out of Scapa Flow in the Orkneys we patrolled the regions into the Arctic. But, you don't want to know about that! Like all matelots, we did our fair share of 'dripping' at the time.

Back in Rosyth, we could make up for all the hardships, and we did. If time was short, we'd finish up in Dunfermline (Dumps). Given more time, some of us would get to Edinburgh where, despite the black-out and the war - or perhaps because of them - entertainment was plentiful. We took full advantage, whilst we could, enjoying the castle and its grounds and the facilities of Princes Street. My favourite haunt was a ballroom called Fairley's, where you could listen to great music played by some of the best bands, and hold a girl in your arms at the same time. The last waltz was always, 'Who's Taking You Home Tonight?' Those moments of complete relaxation, so few, were all the more treasured.

Came our defeat in Europe and the evacuation at Dunkirk, and the off-duty times became all the more precious. By now, I was back in HMS Pembroke, Chatham. During the last months of 1940, I was up in Scotland again. A large contingent traveled from Chatham to comprise the main crew to commission HMS Phoebe.

Amongst that first commission were: Jack Clay RM., Bob Harvey Tel., Silvester McDonald SBA., Norman Masters Boy Sea., Fred Silk Ldg. Sto., and Ken Kent Ldg. Sig., none of whom I knew. I didn't hear of anyone meeting up with an old shipmate; I certainly knew

no-one aboard. This was not a bad thing, as we had no previous friendships or cliques, just a group of lads thrown together to get on with it.

New ship, new watches, new routines and new friends.

The Visual Signal branch proved to be a mixture of likeable lads. This was my first association with HO's (Hostilities Only ratings). One other regular service lad, skinny like me, was someone from Yorkshire. There is a saying that you don't have to ask a Yorkshireman where he comes from. He'll tell you!

Ken Kent was not only from Yorkshire, but he shared my fondness for music, which was mostly big band arrangements.

There was one senior hand who 'disliked' me (the feeling was mutual), so Ken and I were put in separate watches. With some probable malicious thought in mind, he detailed Ken and me to take a load of flags to a hotel in Glasgow and decorate the concert hall for a performance by Leslie Henson and his show. With the aid of an elderly female assistant, Ken and I decorated the hall overall with the draped flags. I think there was slight disappointment that we didn't have a Union Flag and /or an Ensign, but, because of the size of the bunting from our flag lockers, we had enough trouble manhandling the flags that we'd brought. At some point, Leslie Henson, who was already a somewhat faded musical comedy star, but making a welcome comeback with fundraising wartime gigs, entered and introduced himself to Ken and me. After making several suggestions regarding the decor, he asked us for a little assistance.

At sometime in his show he would be playing the grand piano, and would like it placed so the audience could see him. Ken and I proceeded to move the piano about the stage whilst the star shouted instructions from the auditorium. He would then mount the stage and sit on the piano stool to check his view of the proposed audience and the suitability so he would not be obscured by the dancers. This continued for sometime until the piano was to Mr Henson's liking, and Ken and I realised that the piano was back where it had started! Leslie Henson was either a stickler for detail or having fun at our expense.

Ken and I were given invitations to attend the concert and meet the girls. It was a great disappointment, but not surprising, that I suddenly found that I was on duty that evening. Ken also decided to stay aboard.

During the evening, we received a shore-to-ship telephone call from the hotel asking why we were not at the concert and party afterwards. Leslie Henson had promised the girls a couple of sailors. Meanwhile, aboard, there was chaos everywhere as workmen were trying to put together a fighting ship, whilst we were having to dodge cables on deck and were compelled to use the improvised heads on the dockside. With these hardships, we took every opportunity to bus from Govan to Glasgow for the night life, which to those like Ken and me was for the music and dancing at Green's Playhouse and Barrowland, calling at a pub or three on the way to get our bearings. Of course Sauchiehall Street was always a magnet for visitors.

The American influence had reached the UK, and my previous visit and experience in the States gave me the chance to join in the new craze, which was called, at the time, jitterbugging. It was ok if you weren't too good at chatting, but it didn't compare to holding a girl close in your arms and whispering in each other's ears. There was always the Last Waltz, but by that time it was a bit late to start making any liaisons. Eventually, HMS Phoebe passed her sea trials, and was handed over to the Royal Navy and History.

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Thank you Vic your tales are very welcome, keep them coming. The same goes for all of you. There must be lots of tales you can tell, if you do not want anyone to know you wrote it we will make it anonymous. Its surprising how easy it is to remember things once you start writing.

Change of address: S/m Walter Thompson BEM
 Thurleston Residential Home
 Room 8
 Thurleston Lane
 Ipswich Tel: 01473 462763
 IP1 6TJ

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Sadly Ex Member, S/m Jimmy Dunlop, crossed the bar on Friday 25th August. Many will remember Jim for his sense of humour, sadly Jim was diagnosed with terminal cancer with only a short time to live. Jim decided to settle his affairs, one decision was to cancel his membership, that was two years ago, although he still phoned me sometimes, he always asked after shipmates and the Admiral, his favourite name for Lil.

Jim was laid to rest on Friday 1st September. We could not let him go without our wishing him Bon Voyage. Flowers were sent on behalf of all shipmates.

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Reunion Hotel Reservations:

PLEASE TAKE NOTE:

Your room reservation form and deposit must be sent to the hotel and not to me. We are getting reservation forms sent to us along with cheque's made out to HMS Phoebe Association, when you do this it means we have to bank the cheque into the Association account and make a new cheque payable to the hotel, then send your form and new cheque on to the hotel, this takes time to do which could make a difference in the type of room available at the hotel. Treasurer (Lil).

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NB

You may not have noticed but the reservation form has the wrong dates on it, it should read Friday 11th May to Monday 14th May, if you want to you can insert the proper dates or leave it for the hotel to sort out. It was a mistake made by the hotel and not mine, (Makes a change). The hotel reservation office do know of the mistake and have changed the dates on the reservation forms they have so far received. (Sec).

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Please take note of the following:- Lil and I will be absent from the 21st September to 23rd October. Unfortunately this means we will be unable to attend the TS Phoebe Trafalgar Night Dinner on 21st Oct.

I will still be able to receive, and answer emails as normal, although they may take a bit longer to answer. Send letters to:

C/O BALANKAN Cottage.
Crowes an Wra.
Penzance.
Cornwall.
TR19 6HU

Phone: 01736-810168

A note from S/m Tom Bateman to thank all shipmates who helped to look after wife Pat at Scarborough while he was indisposed. Tom said he has recovered and is back at work, he has also taken up his hobby again, I wont tell you what it is you will see what at the next reunion.

S/m Joe Sutton says he will look into hotels in Blackpool, although we have already looked into that area he may come up with one that would suit but must have at least 40 rooms and free parking.

There are still quite a few subscriptions to be paid in, surprisingly some are members that are usually first in line. Holidays or health could be the reason, but we hope its not through bad health.

I have looked at other ships association web sites and have read their newsletters, some of them run a buy, sell, & give away column, might be an idea for us to run one, but no junk, or wives & husbands. Any shipmate who has a computer they do not want, another shipmate may find it useful.

A phone message from S/m Mary Bagness to tell me that S/m Laurie had a fall indoors, Mary could not get him up and called the paramedics in, they got Laurie into bed then called the duty doctor who after attending Laurie for an hour arranged for him to go into hospital where he now is. Laurie is suffering with an internal complaint, Mary does not know how long Laurie will be in hospital for. We hope your recovery is quick Laurie, and you are well enough to return home soon.

My daughter Sharon who some of you met at the last two reunions, (the one with the raucous laugh)! Wanted to write a piece for this newsletter but her work load has prevented her doing so, so she asked me to express her, and husband Pats thanks to everyone that made them welcome. They made friends with a lot of you and hope to see you all at the reunion next year.

March to Phoebe music

This march music many of you know about, for those who do not, it is a piece of music written to commemorate the adoption of HMS Phoebe by the Borough of Bournemouth in 1942, it was at first organ music but later it was re-written as Brass Band music and as such we have in our possession the full score, a sheet for each instrument.

Over the years both S/m Vic Chanter and myself have tried to get a recording made by a brass band, but have had no success, we do have the organ version on tape, but do not think it does the tune justice.

I have now been in touch with the RM Band office, and told them what we have and asked if there was any possibility that the music could be of interest to them, much to my surprise, a phone call from the RM officer concerned told me that he is already re-writing the organ version into silver band music. However, Our music being for brass would not be useable for the RM band, the notes would be different to silver band notes, but he has asked for a copy of the 1st Cornet music and a copy of the organ music cassette. (Been Posted)

There is no definite date when the music will be ready as he can only do the re-writing between priority jobs. It all takes time to do, but when it is done he hopes to have a recording made by the RM Band and we will get a copy.

Cheers to S/m John Barrett for his help.

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Lil and I stayed overnight at the King Charles Hotel on 9th Oct so we could be at Chatham barracks early Sunday morning for the Re-dedication of the Drill Shed Memorial Plaque, it was a great turn out, hundreds of ex Chatham ratings either marched or lined the terrace for the parade. S/m Derek West carried our Standard, it looked great against the dark blue of all the other standards. Although it was the first time for Derek he carried it off without a hitch, and looked very smart. The drill shed is now the university library. Very surprised to meet S/m Roy Wright there, he was an association member for a time. We met up with Jim Hutchinson, who video recorded the event, he will be making a copy for us, it will be available for members to borrow later on.

The following is what the dedication was about.

Royal Naval Barracks - Chatham. (HMS Pembroke).

Construction began in 1897, on the site of the old convict prison.

The complete works were completed by December 1902, on April 30th, 1903 the men moved in.

The cost, £425,000. 4,742 officers and men could be accommodated.

The Drill Hall is about 250 yards long, and 25 yards wide, brick walls, offices one side large windows opposite, with a quarter inch thick glass roof covering the whole length of the hall.

Throughout its life the drill hall had been used as a temporary overflow dormitory when the accommodation blocks were full.

In September 1917 the problem of housing the men was heightened by two unanticipated events. Firstly. the men earmarked to join the battleship HMS Vanguard were forced to remain in barracks after Vanguard had been sunk at Scapa Flow in July. Secondly, an outbreak of 'spotted fever' (Cerebro-spinal Meningitis) in the barracks meant sleeping accommodation had to be increased to avoid further infection. It was this that precipitated the saddest episode in the history of the Drill hall.

On the night of Monday, 3rd September 1917 around 900 men were sleeping or resting in their hammocks in the Drill Hall.

The weather was fine with some cloud and a slight wind, 5 German Gotha planes set off for the Medway from Belgium at about 9.30 p.m. One turned back over the Channel with engine trouble, the other four, each loaded with 300 lb bombs, continued their run. The Gotha was a giant biplane, a wingspan of 77 ft, body length 40 ft, height 12 ft. with two 220hp Mercedes engines, the same as used in super-Zeppelins, with a crew of three men. It carried 14 bombs.

Loaded it did about 80 mph, unloaded at least 90-100 mph, it normally flew at 12/15,000 ft, only the most powerful AA guns could reach them.

At 11:p.m. the four aircraft flew over Eastchurch, (Sheerness). and followed the moonlit River Medway towards Chatham, the planes flew unchallenged, the town fully illuminated and completely unprepared for an attack. Germans had only attacked in daylight previously, but huge plane losses had made them decide to attack at night. This was the first time night bombing was being tried and took the Medway towns completely by surprise, no AA guns fired, and no fighters intercepted the four German bombers, communication between key authorities was dreadfully lacking. A practice alert earlier in the evening meant that telephone warnings of a real raid, intended to notify the electrical department and a power station to extinguish all lights at once, were not taken seriously and ignored. Local people had even been warned to expect the

testing of the night air defences, and would naturally have assumed that the actual raid was just a practice alert. In one Chatham cinema, just as the raid began, a notice flashed upon the screen telling people not to be alarmed.

With only primitive bomb sights and target locators, bombing was to some degree indiscriminate. The bombers would go on to drop 17 bombs in the districts of Chatham and Gillingham. Two 50 kg bombs made a direct hit on the Drill Hall, crashing through the glass roof and exploding on the concrete floor, little damage was done to the floor the exploded force was expended upwards lifting the glass roof up which then fell inwards in thousands of pieces onto the sleeping men below, it was the glass that did the most damage. Most of the men were asleep and wearing just their night attire, they could do little to protect themselves from the lethal shards of glass, the result was horrific. O/Seaman Fred Turpin rushed to aid the injured he recorded in his note book, "It was a gruesome task. Everywhere we found bodies terribly mutilated, some with arms and legs missing, some headless, gathering up dismembered limbs was sickening". Officers and survivors who were able to tore at the rubble with bare hands in their effort to find men buried beneath the debris. Work continued through out the night until seventeen hours later, on Tuesday afternoon it was completed.

Another rescuer wrote: " I shall never forget that night, the lights fading, the clock in the tower stopped at 11:12 p.m. The rescuers placing body parts in bags, bodies being brought out still in hammocks and laid on the parade ground, most were unidentifiable. I carried one sailor to the sick bay his clothes torn off, his naked body riddled with shrapnel. It was terrible to hear the crying and groans of men who ten minutes earlier had been fast asleep.

Attending to the injured taken to the Gymnasium an attendant wrote: 'Some had never woken up; apparently the shock had stopped there hearts. They were laid out, white, gaunt, drawn faces, with eyes bulging out, others were greatly cut up. mangled, bleeding and some were blown limb from limb'.

The wounded were attended to by Medical Officers and Sick Berth Attendants before being taken to local hospitals, such was the severity of their injuries that they succumbed shortly after, most were hopeless cases.

It was estimated that 90 men were killed in their hammocks, another 40 or so had been so seriously injured they were not expected to survive. The death toll was announced as 98, but with so many others seriously wounded, some of whom would surely die the final figure was nearer 135.

The bitter sense of injustice at the slaughter of so many men unprepared for conflict was well expressed by a rating who survived the raid.

***"It's rotten to think of our chums dying like that...
If they had to die they wanted to die fighting***

On Thursday 6th September, eighteen lorries draped with Union Jacks drove 98 of the dead ratings to the cemetery in Woodlands Road, Gillingham, where they were to be buried with full military honours.

They were followed by a huge procession of marching soldiers and sailors, with many thousands of local residents lining the streets to pay their last respects as the cortege passed.

Gideon Gardiner attended the funeral and recalled the scene in a letter to his mother:-

The funeral took place on Thursday. I've never seen such in my life. The procession was estimated to be between two and three miles long. There were eighteen vans, with six bodies on each. Each man had a separate coffin and grave, and his own Minister. I might say that I went to the funeral. My word it was a solemn sight, I only counted five happy faces along the road. Another impressive part was when the Commander, at the close, called the 'Ships Company' (there was about 5,000 present) to Attention, and the band of buglers played Last Post over the bodies of their old chums and shipmates.

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The wording on the memorial plaque reads:

THIS PLAQUE COMMEMORATES THE LOSS
OF THE LIVES OF SOME 130 ROYAL NAVY
RATINGS WHEN, AS THE DRILL HALL OF
RN BARRACKS CHATHAM, HMS PEMBROKE,
BOMBS WERE DROPPED ON THIS
BUILDING THE NIGHT OF
3 SEPTEMBER 1917

UNVEILED BY REAR ADMIRAL PHILIP WILCOCKS DSC
AND REDEDICATED ON SEPTEMBER 10th 2006