‘Exmouth’ association response:

Representatives of the Cairn Housing Association.
Invited guests.
Residents of ‘Exmouth’ house.
Members of the HMS Exmouth Association.
Townspeople of Wick and the surrounding area.

Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for allowing the following words to be read aloud on this auspicious occasion.

I would like to start by congratulating ‘Cairn Housing association’ on the completion of this splendid project. It is a credit to your company, reflecting your commitment to provide quality, affordable accommodation for the general public. On behalf of our members, we would like to wish the residents the very best of health and happiness in their new homes.

I know that I speak on behalf of all the members of our association when I say that we are truly honoured to be afforded this opportunity of having these apartments named in memory of our ship and her crew.

The affinity our members feel with your town, some of whom are living in far off countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the USA, as well as those residing in the United Kingdom, brings great comfort knowing that the memory of the ship and the ultimate sacrifice made by the crew in our country’s hour of need, will live long in the memory through this kind gesture.

When the ship was sunk by enemy action 20 miles off the coast back in January 1940, the entire crew of 189 sailors were lost. A week after the event a number of bodies were washed ashore to be discovered by a local lad Donald Sutherland aged just 10 years old, who had wandered out on the Shaltigoe wall that day whilst playing truant from school. Despite wartime restrictions, it was reported in the ‘John O’Groat Journal’ that hundreds of people lined the streets to pay their respects as the sailors were laid to rest with full military honours.

The wreck lay on the bottom of the Moray Firth for some 60 years before she was ‘discovered’ by the Extreme Dive Team based on Orkney.
From that point in time surviving relatives of the crew were contacted, to date approx. 60 crew members relatives have been found, and attended an emotional service, both out at sea over the site of the wreck and in the old cemetery where 18 of the bodies are buried. This was followed by a remembrance service in the Wick St Fergus church and a reception in the church hall below. It was here that we first experienced the warmth and generosity of spirit from the townspeople of Wick, we were made to feel so very welcome.

Whilst we travelled to Wick back in 2001 with heavy hearts to pay our respects to our relatives, we went home with our spirits lifted in the knowledge that the memory of the ship and her crew would endure.

In 2005 we were able to raise enough funds to have the plaque in the church installed with the names of all 189 sailors, this has become a focal point for our members and for people visiting Wick to learn more about their relatives, and we are grateful to the church for it’s safekeeping.

Today, with the unveiling of the plaque on the refurbished flats naming them ‘Exmouth House’, our association is truly honoured, and this most generous gesture will help ensure that the memory of the ship and her crew live on, long into the future.

We, in turn, would like to give a symbol of our gratitude to the good people of Wick and ask you to accept this tree as a token of our appreciation. Our hope is that as the years pass, it will flourish and mature and that each spring the blossom will bring some enjoyment to the residents of Exmouth House.

Finally, to finish, I would like to ask you in joining me in a time honoured tradition by giving 3 cheers in memory of HMS Exmouth and her gallant crew……

Hip Hip…..