

25 St Peter's Court
Broadstairs
Kent CT10 2UU

22nd August, 2001

Dear Friends,

Final Plans for HMS Exmouth Memorial Weekend in Wick

First of all sincere thanks for all of the wonderful photographs, copies of newspaper articles and other information many of you have forwarded to me.

I would like initially to introduce two fellow relatives who have been extremely helpful and involved in raising awareness and making arrangements for the Memorial Weekend. They are David Ellis of Gosport, Hants and Alex Morrison of Stornoway, Isle of Lewis. Together, we intend to set-up and inaugurate the proposed 'HMS Exmouth 1940 Association' in Wick during the Memorial Weekend and it is hoped as many people as possible will join. The aim of the Association will be to share and disseminate information between interested parties. I.e., assist in the purchase of videos of the memorial service, finalise future plans for a permanent memorial in Wick Church, etc. Contact details for both David and Alex are provided at the end of this letter. It would be helpful if people could respond via myself, David or Alex, according to who they originally made contact with.

The final arrangements for the Memorial Weekend are set-out below:

Saturday 1st September -

The Exmouth 'Meeting Place'/Hotel for the weekend will be The Norseman, Riverside, Wick. This is one of the larger British Trust Hotels in the town. The Norseman management have agreed to provide us with a Reception Area during the day time of Saturday 1st September, where relatives who have already arrived in the town can call to register their details in order to join the Association. It is hoped as many as possible will do so on the Saturday in order to minimise 'congestion' and administration procedures during the more official proceedings of the following day. We hope people will agree to pay a £5 annual subscription for membership to cover administration costs.

It would also be helpful if people could each prepare and bring with them their own name badge for the weekend. A simple badge or sticker detailing name and relationship to your loved-one (or interest) will give others an idea of your identity during social times. I.e., after the memorial service, I will wear a badge stating 'Sue Eastwood – Granddaughter of Able Seaman Walter Andrews.'

Thank you to the many, many relatives who lobbied the MoD/Navy for assistance with our plans. Unfortunately, the Navy are unable to meet our request for a vessel, although they are able to enhance our plans for the official proceedings at the memorial service in several different ways.

As a result, our plans for the Saturday will go ahead in a slightly different form. Local seaman have very kindly offered to take *some* relatives out to the site of the wreck. Wick Harbour Master, Malcolm Bremner, has been working hard to make arrangements for us. These plans will obviously be totally reliant on '*weather conditions permitting*'.

Mark Reeves from the European Technical Dive Centre in Orkney has maintained his generous offer of the use of his vessel, The Loyal Mediator, on that day. Although Mark is no longer permitted to dive on this occasion, a minister will accompany us for a short service and people will be able to lay flowers on the water. It will take approximately two hours to reach the site and another two hours to return. I am already aware that some of our more senior members would prefer not to attend as it could be too tiring. The journey could be quite arduous and we will be totally reliant on the goodwill of other people. There is always the possibility of unforeseen local circumstances necessitating the last minute withdrawal of an offer to help and we must accept and be prepared for any such changes on the day. At this stage it is hoped it will be possible for each family to nominate two members to participate in this aspect of the weekend. *It is imperative that relatives telephone either myself, David or Alex to confirm the number and names of those who wish to represent their family on receipt of this letter.* We must give clear details to The Harbour Master as arrangements need to be in compliance with strict safety regulations, so an immediate response would help make our task easier. Once names/numbers have been confirmed, those involved should meet at 9.30 a.m. at The Coast Guard Station, Wick Harbour.

The Norseman Hotel will also be the meeting place for relatives after dinner on this same Saturday evening. Apparently there is a lounge area and bar we can use and it will give us an opportunity to meet before the events of Sunday. It doesn't matter where you are staying – everyone is welcome to gather and socialise at The Norseman so do please come along!

Sunday 2nd September –

10.00 a.m. at The Old Cemetery, Inverness Road, Wick (walled cemetery on right hand side just as you enter the town – **not at same site as Church**). A chance for close relatives to attend a service at the cemetery around the graves of the 'unknown' from Exmouth. This will be conducted along the lines of a funeral and will provide an opportunity for quiet reflection away from the public eye. It will be possible to lay wreaths and flowers on the graves. There will be hymns, Last Post, etc. *(We are endeavouring to make British Legion 'crosses' usually associated with Remembrance Sunday available for those who are unable to lay flowers).*

11.30 a.m. The Old Parish Church (Church of Scotland), Miller Avenue, Wick. Formal Memorial Service during which there will be official Naval and local representation. There is expected to be a strong local attendance and interest in proceedings, plus attendance by Sea Cadets, British Legion and the Inverness Royal Naval Association. Again, there will be appropriate hymns, Last Post/Flowers of the Forest, 2 minutes silence, wreaths on communion table, etc. The service will be conducted in a spirit of remembrance and healing.

Flowers/Wreaths – Relatives can choose to lay flowers at either or both of the above opportunities or may prefer simply to lay the British Legion Cross or make a contribution to the special causes for the day. (See telephone numbers for Florists at the end of this letter).

*Specially Designated Causes – After/during the church service, as is usually the case, there will be an opportunity to make a monetary donation. It is proposed that any amount raised be split between two causes. As a small gesture of our enormous gratitude to the people of Wick for their continued generosity and understanding, half of the sum raised is to be donated to the **Local** Wick Lifeboat Fund *(not into the central national fund)*. The local*

lifeboat crew made great efforts to get to the scene in 1940. If people agree, the other half of the money will be given to 'The King George Fund For Sailors' which supports all who dedicate their lives to the service of the sea – naval, merchant, fishermen etc.

After the service, a light lunch will kindly be provided by the church. Mark Reeves will show his video footage of the wreck of HMS Exmouth and talk about this. Maritime wreck researchers Bob Baird and Kevin Heath will also make a presentation focusing on their investigations and findings. Again, there will be a chance for relatives to socialise.

Many thanks to those of you who have already sent donations towards flowers to decorate the church – these have been forwarded to Wick. There is still time and any other donations would be gratefully received by the Minister. I apologise if I have not responded directly to recent communications but things have been very hectic! Everything received has been greatly appreciated and we hope the proposed association will help us to share information collected.

I am sorry this has been such a long letter, but it was necessary to raise a number of organisational issues. We would appreciate an *immediate response* in relation to the opportunity to go out to the site of the wreck by boat on the 1st September.

I know David, Alex and myself are very much looking forward to meeting the many people we have spoken to on the telephone in person in Wick. We are sure the weekend of 1st/2nd September will finally provide an opportunity to lay our men to rest with dignity and honour and will prove to be a memorable occasion for all of us.

Very best wishes,



Sue Eastwood.

Contact Information:

Sue Eastwood, 25 St Peter's Court, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 2UU – Tel: 01843-604816 (I can be contacted up until Tuesday 28th August)

David Ellis, 54 Redhouse Park Gardens, Gosport, Hants PO12 3EQ – Tel: 02392-503534

Alex Morrison, 6 Melbost Borve, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis HS2 ORR – Tel: 01851-850301

Florists in Wick – 'Flower Patch' (01955 602211) 'Flower Shop' (01955 603969)
'Four Seasons' (01955 603139)