



THE ARCTIC CONVOY MUSEUM

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2026



(Issue 25)

'Wars belong in the Museum'

From the Editor

Welcome to the Spring newsletter of the Arctic Convoy Museum, as we embark on our 2026 visitor season.

This issue of our newsletter reports on our activities over the winter months when our curatorial team really get stuck in. We will be reporting on the changes to our premises and displays you can expect to see on your next visit, as well as the events we have been involved in during our closed season. There is also an update on our progress towards museum accreditation and convoy related news from further afield for your interest.

Chairman's Report

During the winter closed season, a good deal of work has been carried out in the museum. This includes new story boards and displays. However, the main "event" has been the purchase and installation of an annex to the museum for storage and collections work. To help with the funding of this project we sent an appeal to all those on our E-mail list, and, as a result we received just over £5000 from you, for which we are extremely grateful. The building has

been completed and blends in well with the museum building.



The museum has once again received an award from Trip Advisor for being amongst the 10% of visitor attractions worldwide. This is based on the favourable reports we receive from the public.



I would add, that apart from the museum displays being a draw for visitors, many of the favourable comments mention the volunteers who interact with the visitors and provide background information to them. A well-deserved thank you to them is in order.

The cost of membership of the Arctic Convoy Museum has not been raised since the scheme started. Meanwhile the price of everything else continues to ascend. We are therefore proposing raising the membership fee to £12. We feel that this remains a modest amount. Members will have a chance to vote on this at our forthcoming AGM and we seek your support. Membership is a great way to support the museum and gives the right to vote at our annual AGM on our future direction and activities. The benefits of membership also include free entry to the museum and a 10% discount on purchases in the museum shop and on-line.

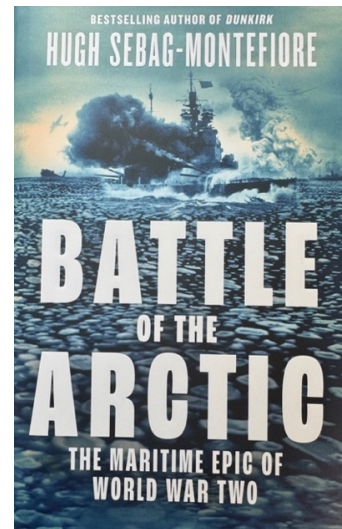
We are delighted to welcome Ken Smith as a local volunteer this year and he has already been hard at work clearing up the garden area and felling dead trees. We are always on the lookout for new volunteers both local and remote. We are not yet always able to have a volunteer in the museum to engage with visitors and help those that have enquiries about relatives who took part in the Arctic convoy campaign. The volunteers who take on this role play a vital part in presenting the museum to the public.

Front of House Matters

Manager Stephen Grant has returned for the new visitor season and has been busy tidying up our outdoor areas, including repairing the inevitable potholes that appear in the car park and the driveway every year. Stephen has also been busy sanding and resealing the benches and tables in our picnic area and repairing the fence so that we make the best impression when visitors arrive.

In the shop this year, we have a range of new Arctic Convoy branded products to

appeal to visitors. And we are pleased to stock the new and well received publication by Hugh Sebag-Montefiore which uses new archival material to document the dangers facing convoy ships and the bravery of the veterans who crewed them. The museum gets a mention as our archive was used to research the book.



Also in our shop are customised knitting kits for the hat and cowl pattern created for us by award winning Scottish knitwear designer in the arctic convoy tartan colours.



[Visit our online shop](#) to see our full range of merchandise.

Curatorial News

The winter months are always a busy period for our curator and the volunteers who help with collections and displays. We have had several collections related tasks on the go this winter.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, we were building our new storage and collections pod. It has made such a difference to the way our curator can work and she would like to add her thanks to those of our chairman to all those who generously donated towards the building costs.

Our uniforms have a new hanging space and there is a lovely, big table for cataloguing and conservation activities, such as stabilising our many ship models.



There have been quite a few donations to work through. Believe it or not, we had 54 separate donations of objects and archival material between April and October 2025. Some donations consist of multiple objects, and each one must be condition checked, photographed, measured, numbered, added to our catalogue and put into storage or on display. It is a very enjoyable but time-consuming activity.

Our curator is also working hard on our application for museum accreditation. This has been delayed somewhat as the application system went down for a full nine months! We have now received a 'pre-invitation' to submit our final application in October and that is a clear priority over the summer.

The winter months have also provided the opportunity to work on our displays. This year we have revamped two of the areas in the exhibition space. We have augmented the section which displays veterans' photographs and medals, displaying some beautifully framed examples that recently came to us. This section can be rotated in future.



Our display on the German capital ships, Scharnhorst and Tirpitz has been overhauled, with two new panels on the history of these ships and their role in the Arctic Convoy story. Other new display panels include a timeline of the Arctic Convoys and the recollections of Loch Ewe residents on the activities there during World War II. Some of these recollections can be read [on our website](#).

Our remote volunteers are still working away on our veteran files, though we have nearly reached the end of the alphabet now and the job will soon be completed. Some of the work they have

done is already published on [Convoys Remembered](#), which is a great resource for veterans' stories and recollections of the convoys. You can search the repository by veteran name, ship or convoy

Rana Brewer has also been working remotely for us over the winter and joined us for a week in February. Rana is a postgraduate student in Museum Studies at the University of Glasgow, and we were pleased to offer her a work placement. She has been linking information about veterans to the objects in our catalogue. This is important work, as it creates context for our collection and uncovers wonderful links and stories that we can use for display and education purposes. Rana hopes to continue to volunteer for us while she completes her course.



Visiting Exhibition

This season we have the privilege of hosting a visiting exhibition on HMS Campania from the [BTNVA Museum](#) – The British Trust for Nuclear Veterans

Association. The exhibition brings to life the role of the escort carrier Campania through WWII, the Festival of Britain and Operation Hurricane – the first test of a British atomic device in 1952. We have worked together with the BTNVA Museum to create special panels on Campania's Arctic Convoy service. Visitors will learn how a single ship was at the confluence of wartime defence, national celebration, and the dawn of Britain's nuclear age.



Out and About

Our curator was pleased to be asked to give a talk on the Arctic Convoys in February to the South Queensferry Rotary Club. The invitation came about thanks to an article written by one of our remote volunteers that was [published in Konect Magazine](#) in November 2025. It is a beautiful piece on the life and service of veteran Adam Lithgow. The evening was well spent in pleasant company with an appreciative audience who were fascinated by the stories of the Arctic Convoys. One of the audience member's father had been on the convoys and donated a book brought back from Russia to our collection.

Visitors

We were delighted to meet two of our remote volunteers in person over the winter. Mary Burnside joined us for our visit to Fort George in November. She updated us on the research she has been involved with, finding out more about Arctic Convoy veterans whose names appear on war and ship memorials. Mary has also been involved in the efforts to gain greater recognition for the crew of HMS Dasher which she writes about on the next page.

Volunteer Dave Cole visited us more recently, all the way from the south of England with family members. It was his first visit to the museum, but it had been on his bucket list for some time. Dave's father Dave's father completed 26 years service with the Royal Navy, including service on the Arctic Convoys on board HMS Orwell between September 1942 and 1944, and was mentioned in dispatches. He also served on HMS Wild Goose and Dave was pleased to see the lovely, scratch built model of that ship that we have on display.



It has been great to put faces to the names of some of those who have been

doing so much work for us behind the scenes.

Another notable visitor to the museum over the winter was welcome top UK auctioneer James Lewis, who offered to help us value our collection for insurance purposes.



James will be well known to fans of Bargain Hunt and Flog It! He has purchased a house in the Loch Ewe area and was keen to assist the museum as he has a personal interest in the Arctic Convoys. James' grandfather served on HMS King George V, which provided critical surface cover for several of the Arctic Convoys. In a video [on his YouTube channel](#), James talks about his grandfather's war and his connection to Loch Ewe

HMS Dasher and the Arctic Star

Special Feature by Mary Burnside,



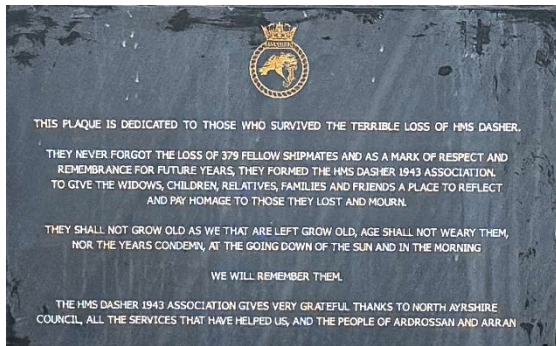
Caitlyn McDonald Photography

The Royal Navy ship HMS Dasher started working life in the Sun Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Chester, Pennsylvania as the merchant ship Rio de Janeiro launched in April 1941. As a major shipbuilding company, Sun participated in the United States 'Emergency Shipbuilding Program' and grew to be the largest in the world with 28 slipways, employing over 40,000 workers. As a contribution to the Lend Lease programme, Rio de Janeiro was converted to become an aircraft carrier at the Tietjen and Lang shipyard in Hoboken, New Jersey by the addition of a wooden flight deck, an aircraft lift and a hangar deck below. In July 1942 she was renamed HMS Dasher (D37) and handed over to the Admiralty and crewed by Royal Navy personnel sent out to sail her to Britain following training and work up.

Already there were some technical issues which prevented Dasher from joining Convoy AT20, but she was finally able to sail with Convoy BX358 reaching the River Clyde in September. While en route to Gibraltar to support Operation Torch in North Africa, Dasher suffered more engine problems but was able to support the Torch landings although in a somewhat limited capacity. She returned to Liverpool for repairs, and in January 1943 Dasher was assigned to join JW53, her first Russian Convoy departing Loch Ewe on 15th February, and Scapa Flow the following day, and into seriously stormy weather. Dasher suffered damage, as did some other ships on the same convoy, and she was directed to Akureyri on the north coast of Iceland for repairs including a split in her hull. Akureyri port could only provide a level of repairs to enable Dasher to return to Dundee for more major repairs, after which Captain L.A.K. Boswell took command and Dasher sailed to the Clyde arriving in Greenock on 23rd March.

On 27th March, flying training had just been completed and the Captain announced there would be shore leave for the crew. Without warning, there was an explosion followed immediately by a second, much more powerful that lifted aircraft weighing two tons sixty feet into the air. Fire took hold and the ship started sinking. Many crew who would already have been below decks now found themselves trapped. Those who could escape went into the water, where they had to battle against burning fuel oil and the pull of the sinking ship. Some survivors were plucked from the sea by ships sent to assist – navy ships from a base on Arran and smaller local ships which tried to help. Captain James Templeton and his crew on the merchant vessel SS Cragman went into the midst

of the burning fuel and oil managing to save 14 crewmen, for which he was awarded the MBE. Ships took survivors ashore for urgent medical attention, along with dead crewmen for burial. The road leading north from Ardrossan was closed for a time as bodies were expected to wash ashore. Very few seem to have come ashore although locals believed many were found on the beach, but only 23 lost crew members were ever given a cemetery burial. There are still unanswered questions about HMS Dasher's sinking.



Caitlyn McDonald Photography

A few short days after HMS Dasher sank in the Firth of Clyde within 8 minutes of two large explosions on 27th March 1943, an enquiry held on her sister ship HMS Archer considered possible causes. One put forward was enemy action but there were no records of any sightings and it was ruled out, as was a possible collision of a plane returning to Dasher, as the Captain had already announced activity had ended for the day. A further option was an explosion caused by fuel leaks or possibly a discarded cigarette getting below decks, but nothing has been proved conclusively. There was a reluctance to blame workmanship on the part of the US shipyards, as equipment supplies were crucial to Britain, and for onward supply to Russia. There was also a point put forward by the Americans that fuel mishandling might have been at fault. It

was certainly true that one outcome of the enquiry was that the Royal Navy reduced the quantities of fuel being loaded onto ships, as did the Americans later. Vapour leaks could and did happen and required investigation and resolving. Whatever caused the demise of HMS Dasher and such large numbers of her crew – out of 528, 379 died – families still feel there is more to discover, including why are there only 23 bodies recorded as buried?

As a member of The HMS Dasher (1943) Association which unfortunately disbanded around 7 years ago, I was involved in research to determine whether Dasher crossed into the Arctic Circle when she sailed round the Northeast tip of Iceland and made her way to Akureyri for repairs. If she did, the crew on board during her first Arctic Convoy would be entitled to receive the Arctic Star. After working more recently with a dedicated group of people and getting help from organisations such as the Scott Polar Research Institute, we were able to determine the position of the Arctic Circle in relation to the position of HMS Dasher, and we gained the support of the Medals Committee, who agreed the crew were entitled to the medal. After recent applications families have started to receive the Arctic Star on behalf of their family member who qualified.

When Dasher sank in the Clyde her logbook and documentation which would have proved her position in relation to the Arctic Circle was lost with her. Visitors to HMS Belfast on the River Thames will see film of Convoy JW53 and the terrible storms they encountered, and in fact captains would provide certificates to record Crossing the Circle, and copies are on display in HMS

Belfast. One other connection which assisted in this achievement for the families was the fact that in all literary references to HMS Dasher, she has the award of the Battle Honour for the Arctic Campaign. So now her crew have that recognition too. At the annual HMS Dasher commemoration in Ardrossan in March 2026 we were honoured to have the presence of HRH Princess Anne who laid a wreath and paid her respects at the Dasher memorial, and then presented the Arctic Star to family representatives of five crew members at an emotional and joyful ceremony. The crew of HMS Dasher are finally receiving their due recognition.



Caitlyn McDonald Photography

Your Trustees

The Board of Trustees has remained unchanged over the last few months. There remain vacancies on the Board, however, and we continue to seek talented individuals from the Membership, who are able to spare some time to assist in taking the museum forward. Trustees meet online every two months; therefore the role may be filled remotely. If you feel you may be able to contribute, please get in touch at any time (see back page). Trustees may be co-opted by the Board or fully elected by the charity membership at the AGM.

The full list of ACM trustees is currently:
Peter Harrison (Hon President)
Francis Russell (Chairman)
Chris Connolly OBE (Vice Chair)
Elizabeth Miles
Ed Duncan
David Freeman LVO
Susan O'Brien KC
Andrew Macmillen

Information about all of our Board members can be found [on our website](#).

Annual General Meeting

Following the success of the last two year's 'email' AGMs, the Board has agreed to repeat the process this year. A significant number of Members were able to take part in the process without having to travel to Loch Ewe or attend via video link. Therefore, Members of the charity will receive an email calling notice in late May, followed by papers in mid-June, with two weeks to respond. Members will have the opportunity to raise issues for discussion at the AGM by responding to the calling notice. This will also be the opportunity for Members to nominate Trustees to serve on the Board.

Veteran News

We now have almost 6,100 names registered within the Arctic Convoys Museums (ACM) database, and all the information compiled has come from the veterans themselves in the past, and now mostly from veteran's families. We at the ACM cannot apply for data through official channels because of the Data Protection Act.

Veteran's information is either within the family already, or certain records like a Royal Navy sailor's Service Record can be applied for. A Merchant Navy sailor's Continuous Discharge Record is his personal record of which ships he served

upon. This along with full name, Date of Birth etc. are input to ACM's database.

Occasionally we come across anomalies to this regular means of obtaining information about a veteran, such as in a recent case. The initial information that came back to us, following a veteran family member's visit the museum, was that although he was a British citizen he travelled to Archangel aboard a US Navy cruiser the USS Tuscaloosa. We contacted the son of the veteran to learn more. He was an Admiralty pilot (as in ship navigation) and was in Iceland following the British occupation of the island (to prevent the Germans doing the same) and was assigned to the US naval forces, as they would have been unfamiliar with those waters. The veteran's son was told of the trip to Archangel and associated anecdotes, including making the acquaintance of Douglas Fairbanks Jr. The families' more recent research seems to have verified that their father did indeed board the Tuscaloosa. We know from our records that some USN ships did provide Arctic Convoy escort during 1942 and 1943, that Tuscaloosa was one of them, and Douglas Fairbanks was a lieutenant aboard that ship.

However when the family applied for the Arctic Star campaign medal in 2014 this was turned down as they could not provide proof at that time. One criteria for the award of the Arctic Star was 'service' above the Arctic Circle for any period of time, and 'service' in Iceland did not qualify as the island lies beneath the Circle, however Tuscaloosa would

have crossed the Circle en-route to Archangel.

From the information provided, we believe the veterans father did indeed cross the Arctic Circle aboard the USN ship and is entitled to the Arctic Star medal, the family/we just have to prove it! They have been in contact more recently with the Naval History Command in Washington DC and it is hoped their records may well establish information for a new application for the medal. As far as the museum is concerned, we will add this veteran's name to our database as we believe he warrants this recognition.

Remembering Veterans

We are still taking orders again for popular ship silhouettes. If you have a connection to an Arctic Convoy veteran and would like to sponsor a ship silhouette to be displayed in the museum, or to have one made to display at home, then please get in touch and e-mail

manager@arcticconvoymuseum.org



Get Involved

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.

Volunteer. We welcome any offers of help, particularly from those able to offer the odd afternoon in the summer to welcome visitors to the Museum.

If you would like to be involved in our project in any way, no matter how small, please give us a call on 01445 731137 or email info@arcticconvoymuseum.org

Make a donation. Help us continue our work by making a donation on [JustGiving](#) or send a cheque made out to “Arctic Convoy Museum”.

Donate 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 or Loch Ewe during wartime and you think it may be of interest to us, then please contact the Curator, Dr Karen Buchanan at

curator@arcticconvoymuseum.org

Become a Member

For just £10 a year, become a Member for free admission to the Museum and access to news and information about the Convoys. Our membership fee is currently being reviewed. Contact manager@arcticconvoymuseum.org for an application form.

Photos, articles and ideas contributed by

Francis Russell, Bruce Hudson, Chris Connolly, Mary Burnside and Karen Buchanan (Editor)

If you would like to contribute to future newsletters (or find any errors or omissions) please contact us at news@arcticconvoymuseum.org