THE ARCTIC CONVOY MUSEUM

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2026



(Issue 26)

'Wars belong in the Museum'

From the Editor

Welcome to our autumn newsletter. It has been a few weeks since we closed for the season and we are sliding seamlessly into winter mode. We have been blessed with beautiful autumn weather this month – payback for the mediocre summer. It is always nice to slow down a bit at this time of year, take stock and plan for the next season. There is still plenty to do in the Museum, changing and improving our displays, cataloguing and researching our collection and responding to enquiries.

In this issue, we report on our 2026 season, which has been an exciting one including a royal visit and some fabulous additions to our collection. You will find information on the events and projects we have been involved in and an update on our accreditation application, which is very close to completion. Thanks to those of you who have emailed to say how much you enjoyed the last newsletter. We are always happy to hear from readers with suggestions for what should be included in the newsletter so please send these to newsletter@arcticconvoymuseum.org

Chairman's Report

Another season has come and gone, and all very quickly it seems. This has been the 10th season since we moved into the former Aultbea butchers shop and I am glad to report that the Museum continues to prosper and enjoys a very sound financial position.

The season kicked off with preparations for the visit of the Princess Royal, which took place on May 12th. The visit was a great success and provided good publicity for the Museum and the other venues she visited that day around Loch Ewe. Thanks are due to Bruce Hudson and David Freeman for ensuring the event went smoothly and in accordance with the requirements of the Royal Household. We later received a thank you letter from Buckingham Palace.

Despite the high cost of petrol and diesel, as a result of the conflicts in the Middle East, and the general economic uncertainties, our visitor numbers held up at 7193 compared to 7383 the previous season. People from 21 countries signed the visitor book and the most numerous overseas visitors came from Australia, followed by the USA and

the Netherlands. Apart from the very positive comments in the visitor book about the Museum, a regular comment is praise for the talks given by the volunteers. The latter play an important role engaging with visitors and we owe them many thanks for their work.

Work on accreditation continues and we plan to submit the application to Museums and Galleries Scotland by the end of the year. Over the winter months we will be looking at increasing the car park space so we can avoid visitors turning away when the car park is full.

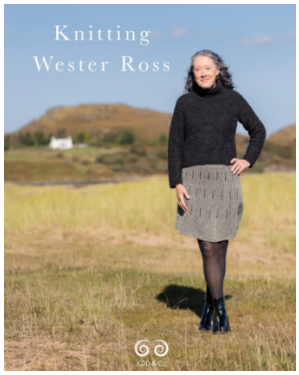
For the last 3 years the Charity has held 'email AGMs' to encourage maximum participation by members in the regular, annual decisions affecting the Museum and Charity. However, recognising that the membership size and profile has changed significantly over that period, the Board have decided to re-introduce the option for members to attend a virtual AGM (via Teams video) as well as voting by email. This will require a change to the Museum's Constitution and current members will in due course receive a request, via email, to vote on this matter. More detail will be provided with the request. Please do vote on what is an important development in the running of your charity.

The Museum is just entering Year 3 of its 5-year strategic plan to cement its rightful position as the UK's premier organisation for the commemoration of the Arctic Convoy campaign. Great progress has been made already; as reported elsewhere, the Museum will shortly be making formal application for accreditation. For Year 3 (Nov 26-Oct 27), the Board has identified the following priorities:

1. **Accreditation.** Submit and complete accreditation process (by mid-period).
2. **Digital.** Subject to a successful funding application, complete the digital programme through the introduction of a new website and database capability. Concurrently develop a cyber policy and training for staff/volunteers.
3. **Infrastructure.** Complete survey of external areas to determine requirements, design and funding path.
4. **Marketing.** Complete a marketing review to identify new target audiences. As a minimum, increase marketing effort to attract road/maritime tourist groups to increase revenue.
5. **Outreach.** Increase outreach to related organisations and museums.

Front of House Matters

Manager Stephen Grant reports that we have had a rather good year, despite the diesel prices. He would like to give a special thanks to Kate Davies Designs, Overside Wool, and John Arbon Textiles who have all contributed to the new knitting section in our shop. This has proven very popular with our visitors and has opened up a new avenue to inform people about the convoys. In particular, Kate Davies book *Knitting Wester Ross* has been an unexpected breakout hit with our customers.



We are happy to announce the return of one of our old shop favourites: *Luck of the Devil*, the Memoirs of Robert La Page, which has returned to our shelves - now in a paperback edition! Robert La Page served on HMS Dasher and HMS Chaser on several Arctic Convoys, and his memoirs provides deep insight into the dangers and challenges of operating the Swordfish Biplane during the rigours of World War 2.



Robert Le Page

We managed Storm Boelo without too much trouble – but the winds were strong enough to flip over one of our benches! Aside from that, there was some minor tree damage, but luckily we were sheltered enough that nothing major came down, and it only took a few hours to clear up the mess.



Storm damage

Visit our online shop to see our full range of merchandise and for Christmas present ideas.

A Message from our Membership Secretary

Since the start of the 2026 season we have acquired seventy-five new members (including joint members). Some have still to set up their standing orders, or other form of bank payment, but most have responded positively on being "chased". If you are one of the few who has yet to set up payment, please could we encourage you to do so – Membership fees play a very important part in keeping the vital work of the Museum going!

And to progress this thought … Please would those reading this, who are not yet Members, consider doing so? We would certainly like to encourage "local" people to consider taking out Membership, as not only would you be helping the Museum, but there are huge benefits for you … like free admission for yourself and a reduced admission fee of £5 for any visitors you bring in with you. Also, a 10 per cent discount for purchases in the Museum shop. But even if you live too far away to visit us, there are advantages for you: you will be entitled to a 10 per cent discount in our online shop, and all Members will be entitled to vote at our online AGM.

Just to remind everyone – Membership of the Museum is £12 per year. For couples, Joint Membership is available for an additional £8 – making it £20 for the two of you.

Thank you again to those who have signed up for Membership, and a "thank you" in advance for those who feel inspired to sign up in the future. Please get in touch with me, Jenny, at jennywiseman47@gmail.com

Curatorial News

A priority for our Curator Karen Buchanan has been working towards the Museum Accreditation deadline in Spring 2027. This has been brought forward due to long awaited changes in the Accreditation scheme which will roll out next year. Fortunately, we are well ahead and at present it is hoped to have our Accreditation application submitted before Christmas. We will likely have a visit from the assessors in the first half of next year and sincerely hope to be able to report success with this milestone at some point in 2027.

In the meantime, we have been thinking ahead to other projects. A funding application recently went in to refresh our website. Many people who follow and support the Museum have trouble visiting us due to our location. We have ambitions to add more digital content to the website so we can override that geographical barrier to bring aspects of the Museum to people's homes via the magic of the internet. The funding we have applied for would help us pay a web designer and a filmmaker to create some unique content around our collections, displays and the people who run the Museum. For now, we are keeping our fingers crossed the application is successful. Karen would love to hear from anyone who might be interested in being involved in the project or has ideas for content. These can be emailed to curator@arcticconvoymuseum.org

As usual, we have had a lot of interesting donations throughout the visitor season. We sincerely value all the objects and documents that are entrusted to our care from veterans and their families.

One very interesting object that has come to us this year is a piece of the anchor chain of the German battleship Tirpitz.



Section of link from massive Tirpitz anchor chain

The plaque was donated by the daughter of veteran Sid Kerslake. Sid wrote the book 'Coxswain in the Northern Convoys about his experiences on the armed trawler HMT Northern Gem. This brave little ship was involved in the Battle of the Barents Sea, during which it rescued more than 80 crew members from the capsized HMS Achates. Sid received the piece of anchor chain from a Norwegian sea captain with whom he retained contact after the war. The plaque previously hung on the wall of Sid's home along with a painting of the Northern Gem as can be seen in the photograph below, showing Sid with Jimmy McHugh – one of the founding veterans of the Museum. It can now be seen by visitors to the Museum in our display on German WWII capital ships.



Sid Kerslake and Jimmy McHugh

Curator Karen is always delighted when objects come to light connected to HMS Helicon and the wartime activity in the Loch Ewe area. This season we received a surprise donation which came to light when the old Post Office in Aultbea was being demolished. Members of the Ladies' Scottish Climbing Club, who own the building, found in the attic a frame used to hang post bags when sorting mail. It still has the names of three of the mine sweepers that operated at HMS Helicon still chalked inside! We are currently conserving the object for possible future display.



Rack from Aultbea Post Office

Our remote volunteers have now concluded their work on the digitised paper files that we hold on convoy veterans. However, with the constant stream of new material we receive on veterans, we are still keeping them busy. We regularly add their work to the Convoys Remembered section of our website, which is an outstanding source of memoires and personal stories recollecting the arctic convoys. It is possible search the repository by veteran name, ship or convoy number.

Anyone who has items they think would be of interest to the Museum is welcome to contact our Curator on the email address above to discuss a potential donation.

We would like to express our thanks to Bamfords Auctioneers and Valuers for providing a valuation of our collection for insurance purposes at a substantially reduced rate. We would like to particularly thank James Lewis, CEO of Bamfords, who undertook a substantial amount of work at no charge, including visiting the Museum and recording the items in our collection. It is very much appreciated.

Out and About

Three of our visitors travelled to Culloden in July to give a talk on the Arctic Convoys to the Inverness and Black Isle U3A. We were pleased to see them later in the summer when they came to the Museum on a return visit.

The Museum held two services at the Arctic Convoy Memorial this year, to mark VE Day and Remembrance Day. We were pleased to be joined by members of the community near and far. Thanks are due to the Reverend Heather Widdows who officiated at these services and to Neil Rathbone for his excellent piping skills.


Wreath laying party, Remembrance Day

Our local high school in Gairloch has a new history teacher and we were delighted when he visited the Museum this summer and invited us to come and speak to his class as part of their studies on World War II. Chairman Francis Russel and Curator Karen spent the morning of Remembrance Day in the school with the pupils of S2 who showed and talked to us about wartime objects from their own families. Two weeks later, the pupils visited the Museum to see our displays and hear stories of the convoys from our staff and volunteers.



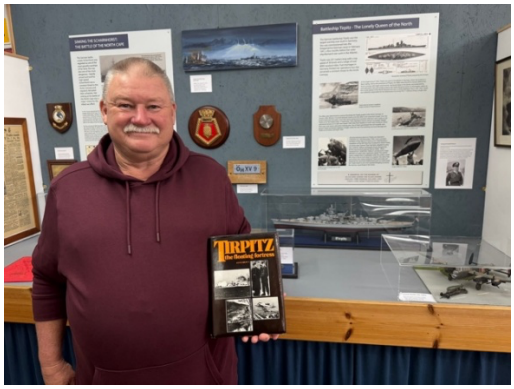
Visitors

In May of this year, The Arctic Convoy Museum was honoured to welcome HRH The Princess Royal to our Exhibition Centre in Aultbea. The Princess Royal was visiting Wester Ross to find out more about volunteer led activities in the area. She was able to meet volunteers and staff, some of whom have been involved in running the Museum since its inception in 2011. Her Royal Highness was given a tour of the Museum's displays and introduced to Trustees and our team of friendly and knowledgeable volunteers, whom she questioned on their roles within the Museum. She showed particular interest in the personal stories of Arctic Convoy veterans behind the objects on display. Her Royal Highness unveiled a commemorative plaque and was presented with a scarf in the Arctic Convoy tartan and a ship's crest for HMS Helicon – the naval base at Aultbea during WWII



HRH with ACM Honorary President Peter Harrison

One of our furthest travelled visitors this year was Joe Jessup who came from Waikato, New Zealand to visit the Arctic Convoy Museum, bringing his father's papers and photographs from his convoy service aboard HMS Berwick. Joe was fascinated to discover that his father's ship had escorted two carrier raids against the German battleship Tirpitz. He described his visit to the Museum as 'quite moving'. During his visit to Scotland, Joe was able to take part in Remembrance Sunday services in Edinburgh, representing the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand. His only regret was not having a white beret to wear for the occasion. He hopes to acquire one in the future.



Robbie from the Liverpool branch of the Merchant Navy Association visited in May and brought with him the special flag of their association, which he had brought with him to pay tribute to all the merchant seamen who served on the Arctic Convoys.



For the fourth year running, Brian Boyd came all the way from Newcastle upon Tyne to join our Remembrance service at Cove. His father Walter was drafted from the Army to the Royal Navy during WWII and served on the castle class corvette HMS Allington Castle which was part of the close escort for several arctic convoys. The Museum had assisted Brian in finding the information he needed about his father's service to apply for the Arctic Star medal, which he wore to the service this year. Brian assures us he intends to return next year to mark the service and sacrifice of those who lost their lives on the convoys.



Your Trustees



Staff and Trustees spruced up for the arrival of HRH The Princess Royal in May

The Board of Trustees has been fortunate to welcome three new members since the AGM. However, there remain vacancies on the Board and we continue to seek talented individuals from the Membership, who are able to spare some time to assist in taking the Museum forward. In particular, we are looking for a new Treasurer, and anyone with experience in marketing or surveying to assist with our immediate priorities going 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 also be co-opted by the Board or fully elected by the charity membership at the AGM. The full list of ACM Trustees is currently:

Francis Russell (Chairman)
Chris Connolly OBE (Vice Chair)
Michael Macleod (Secretary)
Ed Duncan
David Freeman LVO
Andrew Macmillen
Michael Nwajiaku
Dave Bancroft
Peter Harrison remains our Honorary President.

Information about all of our Board members can be found on our website.

Veteran News

The database of names continued to expand over the past 12 months, by some 400, now totaling 6,400. Inevitably we have been advised of a number of Arctic veterans 'crossing the bar, but added two previously unknown ones, both 102!

Amongst the new veteran names added was Stanley Bonnet. Born in 1925 he became a telegrapher aboard the destroyer HMS Virago. Post war he became a reporter, starting at the Slough Observer and later the Daily Mail. He authored the book 'Jump Boy Jump', a novel based on fact about his experiences during the Arctic convoys. Stanley passed away in 1985 aged just 60, his ashes being scattered at sea. His family handed Virago's battle ensign, which just happened to come into Stanley's possession, to the Royal Navy Museum in Portsmouth on his passing.

Visitors to the Museum in July, Cornelia & Alexander Gregory, both had parents involved in the Arctic convoys. Alexander's father was a naval Commander and part of Admiral Fraser's staff aboard HMS Duke of York during the Scharnhorst action. Cornelia's father was a Sub.Lt. with the Fleet Air Arm flying in Swordfish aircraft from the Escort carrier HMS Vindex.

Flight Lieutenant John Allan Purvis was an unusual addition to the database. At the age of 33 he joined the RAF in 1940 and because of his German language skills was soon working at Bletchley Park listening to and translating Luftwaffe radio traffic. As a sergeant he was commissioned and then posted to HMS Ashanti, escorting convoy PQ16. John, with a small RAF team decrypted and translated Luftwaffe radio messages in real time and advised the convoy Commodore when they were likely to be attacked, whether by high level, dive or torpedo bombers and the prevailing weather conditions during the attack. He carried out the same tasking aboard HMS London with convoy PQ17.

The son of Ronald Moss, a FAA Grumman Wildcat (known as the Martlet in RN service) fighter pilot serving with 835 Squadron aboard Escort Carrier HMS Nariana, visited the Museum in October with his wife. He was initially directed towards our current display related to another 835 Wildcat pilot, Alan Burgham. We also already had an entry within our files of his father and a note indicated that he was mentioned by name in one of our Collection library books. Here we found that Ronald was included in a group photo which his son had not seen before. This combination of information created a genuine emotional response from his son, that his father's service was so significantly already preserved at the Museum, a primary purpose of course as to why we exist.

Our remit is not to limit the scope of the personnel we keep records on to purely Arctic convoy veterans, we also include those that actively supported the campaign. Amongst these was Paulene Mary Roper, born December 1919 in Glasgow. Paulene joined as a Leading WREN 'specialist' typist and was posted to HMS Helicon (Loch Ewe, Aultbea) on 27 August 1942. She was promoted to Petty Officer in May 1943 and subsequently commissioned. The Royal Navy WREN's carried out most of the administrative support tasks, including in convoy plotting rooms, and working at

Bletchley Park. Later they also carried out various operational tasks when the ships were in port.

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

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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 £12 a year, become a Member for free admission to the Museum and access to news and information about the Convoys. Visit our website for more information on becoming a member https://arcticconvoymuseum.org/supportus

Photos, articles and ideas contributed by
Francis Russell, Bruce Hudson, Chris Connolly, Stephen Grant 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