

Captain Harold DREW
HMS Manchester
&
Family

Captain a victim of wartime injustice

By DAVID LAWSON

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EAGLE-eyed visitors to Morton Church will have spotted the former flag of *HMS Manchester* hanging from its walls recently.

But why should the standard of a ship sunk during the Second World War have come to rest in Morton? The *Advertiser* went in search of answers.

In the pages of the church magazine, editor and local historian Elizabeth Lawrence has been piecing together the history behind *HMS Manchester*, its flag and its captain, uncovering the fascinating tale of a local man who captained the ship during one of the most pivotal naval engagements of the Second World War before being court-martialled for a decision that cost him his ship, but saved the lives of his men, earning their undying respect. That man's name was Captain Harold Peter Drew.

"It is an honour that Morton Church be asked to become custodians of the standard," explains Elizabeth, "it represents comradeship and remembrance of the ship's company of *HMS Manchester* in the Second World War and the survival of a great majority of these men is due to Peter Drew whose memorial plaque is on the south wall of the church."

Harold was the son of Charles Drew, the owner of a mineral water factory in King Street, Oswestry, and later the Wynn's Hotel in the town. He married Isobel Nicholson of Llyndys whose father owned the Whitehaven Quarry (changing his name to Peter as she did not care for the name Harold). They later moved to Oswestry, but retained strong links with the church, with many items given in memory of family members

the family's grave in its churchyard.

In the First World War, aged just 21, Drew was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in 1917 for "gallantry during active operations against the enemy at sea." Between the wars he became a gunnery specialist, commended for his work designing the new High Angle Gunfire system, which calculated the trajectory required to place an explosive shell in the path of a target.

Then in 1927, Drew was made Gunnery Officer on the cruiser *HMS Suffolk*, overseeing the first of the navy's new eight-inch gun turrets, but his defining moment would not come for another nine years, when in May 1941 he was appointed captain of *HMS Manchester*.

Desperate

By 1941, the Allied base in Malta was under siege and its port, so vital for ships, submarines and aircraft, cut off by enemy blockades. As the months passed, the situation became desperate and it became clear that Britain would have to get a convoy through to the besieged island at all costs, or else it would be lost.

The answer was Operation Pedestal, a daring and desperate attempt to change more than 50 ships straight through the lines of enemy boats, minefields and submarines, while taking fire from enemy bombers, and providing one of the escorts for this fleet was *HMS Manchester*, with Drew at the helm.

A town-class cruiser, *Manchester* was 591ft long with a top speed of 32 knots, bristling with armament, including 12 six-inch and eight four-inch guns as well as torpedoes, two aircraft and a wartime crew complement of around 900 men. On August 9, *Manchester* and around 50 other ships moved into the Strait of Gibraltar. Operation Pedestal had begun.

In the early hours of August 13, the convoy was using the darkness to pass close to the coast of Tunisia, surprising a group of Italian torpedo boats, who launched a speculative attack on the passing convoy.

A torpedo struck *Manchester* hitting the ship's engine com-



partment, instantly killing 11 of her men, but while below decks there was a frenzy of activity to rescue crewmates and secure the ship, outside the engines fell silent as *Manchester* stopped, floating dead in the water.

As the crew worked frantically to repair the engines, Drew was left with a desperate decision. It was 1.20am and for now the darkness was offering them limited protection, dealing them from further attack, but in a matter of hours dawn would break on the horizon, the rest of the convoy would be gone and the stricken ship and her crew would present an easy target.

By 4am the sky was lightening fast and at 4.30am, with no signs of life from the one remaining engine, Captain Drew made the decision to scuttle the ship, launching the lifeboats and setting explosive charges, sending *Manchester* to rest on the seabed. She would remain the largest ship sunk by torpedo boats during the Second World War.

It was a sad end, but what happened next remains a matter of controversy to this day. Brought before the admiralty, Captain Drew was led to believe he was taking part in a straightforward inquiry. It was only at the end of the hearing that he was told he had in fact been charged with negligence and been giving evidence at a court martial hearing, the Admiralty believing that the ship was still navigable and capable of reaching a neutral port.

He was found guilty, reprimanded and dismissed.

News of this announcement came as a huge shock, not least to his surviving crew. While most had been rescued by an Allied warship, some had become prisoners of the Vichy French in

Tunisia, suffering an unpleasant term of imprisonment, but even these men soundly supported their Captain's assessment of the ship's situation, and his decision to scuttle her not only saving their lives, but also preventing its sensitive radar equipment from falling into enemy hands.

Heavy cost

One seaman speaking after Drew's dismissal said: "We were down to 10-15 per cent ammunition, listing at nearly 45 degrees, with one engine destroyed and not much hope of getting the other working. Captain Drew decided his choices were to wait until dawn and get blown up, or to save his men."

The attempt to run the blockade had been one of the most important British strategic victories of the Second World War, but came at a heavy cost, with two warships, an aircraft carrier and more than 400 lives lost. Of the 14 merchant ships travelling under escort, just four reached Malta's harbour, but these

included vital fuel supply ships. The convoy's arrival in Malta on August 15, 1942 coincided with Santa Maria, the Feast of the Assumption, and the convoy is still referred to locally as the Santa Maria Convoy and celebrated as part of the public holiday.

Harold Drew travelled to Bombay and worked with the South East Asian Command from 1943 to 1945. He became Director of Recruiting and in 1948 was chairman of the Victory Celebration Committee, awarded the CBE and Aide de Camp to King George VI. He went on to become Deputy Commander in Chief of the Indian Navy, with the acting rank of Commodore from 1948-51 and was later involved in the restructuring of the Indian Navy, before retiring in 1952.

Peter and his family retired to Oswestry in 1952 and were once again able to attend Morton Church. He died in 1987 aged 92.

On parade: Below, Captain Harold Drew attends a civic ceremony outside Oswestry's Memorial Gates on Church Street.



CAPT. DREW'S DAUGHTER MARRIED

CEREMONY AT OSWESTRY PARISH CHURCH.



Capt. Harold Drew, D.S.C., R.N., The Quarry, Oswestry, greets the bridegroom, Capt. Anthony John Sinclair Crockett, Royal Marines, who was married at Oswestry Parish Church yesterday (Tuesday) to Miss Daphne Drew, W.R.N.S., daughter of Capt. and Mrs. Drew.—Photo: "Advertiser."

A large congregation attended the wedding at Oswestry Parish Church yesterday (Tuesday), of Miss Daphne Drew, daughter of Capt. Harold Drew D.S.C., R.N., and of Mrs. Drew, The Quarry, Oswestry. The bride has been serving with the W.R.N.S. The bridegroom was Capt. Anthony John Sinclair Crockett, Royal Marines, son of the late Lieut.-Col. B. Sinclair Crockett, D.S.O., and of Mrs. Crockett, Longdown Cottage, Farnham, Surrey. The church was tastefully decorated with pot plants and lilies, and the service was fully choral. The Rev. Oliver Crockett, Rector of Pulverbatch tuncle of the bridegroom, and the Rev. Preb. E. Moore-Darling, Vicar of Oswestry, were the officiating clergy. The bride's gown was of lace, cut square at the neck, and having long, close-fitting sleeves. Her tulle veil was surmounted by a coronet of orange blossom and lilies. She wore a string of pearls and a diamond and pearl brooch, and carried a sheaf of arum lilies. The bride was given away by her father, and she was attended by three bridesmaids.—Miss Elizabeth Bellars, and her cousins, Miss Anne Aymer Lewis, and Miss Rosemary Nicholson. The bridesmaids wore full frocks of brodeuse anglaise, with green belts, and had head-dresses of gardenias. Their bouquets were of pheasant-eye narcissi, and each maid wore a Royal Marines badge, the gift of the bridegroom. Lieut. Michael Rose, R.N., was the best man. A reception was given at The Quarry, Oswestry, after the wedding ceremony. The bride's going-away dress consisted of a brown corduroy suit, with ice-blue blouse and hat.

100th birthday of former Oswestrian

A FORMER well-known Oswestrian celebrated her 100th birthday last week.

Mrs Isobel Drew, widow of Captain Harold (Peter) Drew, who lives with her daughter and her family in Scotland, is probably the last of her generation of old Oswestrians.

Formerly Miss Isobel Nicholson, of Park Issa, Oswestry, her father was the owner of the limestone

quarries at Porthywaen, and she was one of six children.

Her wedding at Oswestry Parish Church in 1921 caused considerable interest. Her bridegroom was also a member of a well-known local family, later famed for their large mineral water works in King Street, who lived at Plas Wilmot, former home of Oswestry poet Wilfred Owen.

Promoted

Their only daughter, Daphne, was born in London and five years later accompanied her parents to India where her father, now promoted to Lieutenant Commander, was gunnery officer on HMS Suffolk. The Drews saw service in Hong Kong, Malta and South Africa and on Captain Drew's retirement in 1952 they settled in Oswestry, living for many years at Dunvegan in Morda Road.

Capt Drew was president of the local branch of the Royal Naval Associa-

tion and the RNLI with his wife acting as his secretary.

Later they moved to Scotland to be near their daughter and her husband, an orthopaedic surgeon, but returned to Oswestry in 1971 to celebrate their golden wedding, visiting the parish church and then attending a reception at the Wynnstay Hotel which Mrs Drew's father once owned.

Mrs Drew was born in Llynclys and attended Morton C. of E. School and later Queen's Park School. In her younger days she was a skillful gardener.

Captain Drew died in 1987, aged 92, and was cremated in Scotland but his ashes were brought to Morton Church.

Mrs Drew is now cared for by her daughter and son-in-law and has one grandson, the vicar of a parish in Exeter, two grand-daughters and three great-grandchildren.



Back in Town for their diamond day

An Oswestry couple who moved to Scotland three years ago returned to their home town to celebrate their diamond wedding anniversary yesterday.

Royal Naval Captain Harold Drew and his wife Isobel

were married at Oswestry Parish Church in 1921. They lived at Dunvegan, Morda Road, before moving to live with their daughter, Daphne, and her family near Glasgow.

The couple, who are staying at the Wynnstay Hotel, also

have a grandson, two grand-daughters and three great-grandchildren.

"We always try to come down to Oswestry every year because we love it and miss it. The people here are so nice and we have the Advertiser sent to us every week to keep in touch with what is happening," said Mrs Drew. "We hadn't planned to have a party but my daughter arranged it because she knew we would be staying here over our anniversary."

Capt and Mrs Drew are both natives of Oswestry. Mrs Drew is the daughter of the late Mr E. D. Nicholson, who owned the quarry at Whitehaven, where the family lived. She was educated at Morton and Queen's Park Schools.

Capt. Drew grew up at Plas Wilmot, the former home of Oswestry poet Wilfred Owen, and was a

● Captain and Mrs Harold and Isobel Drew.



Captain and Mrs Drew on their wedding day 60 years ago, in the grounds of Park Issa, home of the bride's parents, now the site of Furrows Garage, Salop Road.

pupil at Oswestry School before joining the navy on H.M.S. Conway. He has been a captain for over 40 years.

During their time in Oswestry, the pair played active roles in the community. Capt. Drew was president of the local branch of the R.N.A. for nine

years and he was president of the R.N.L.I. His wife was secretary.

During his navel career, the couple lived in many foreign countries, including two years in China, two in South America and four years in In-

dia, where Mrs Drew was responsible for launching a newspaper for officers' wives. Thirty years later, the paper is still in existence.

A celebration dinner was held at the Wynnstay Hotel last night, with 20 friends

and relatives from all over the country plus two local relatives, Oswestry solicitor George Lewis and local estate agent Toby Salway.

Capt and Mrs Drew return to Scotland later this week.

BCA - 3 June 1981

Death of Commodore Drew

Commodore Harold "Peter" Drew, a member of one of Oswestry's best-known families died recently at the age of 92.

He was born in Oswestry in 1895 and chose a naval career following his early education at Oswestry School. After a spell on the training ship Conway he joined the RNR in 1915 and transferred to the Royal Navy the following year. He entered the Dartmouth Naval College and soon became a great friend of Lord Louis Mountbatten during their cadet days.

He was awarded the DSC in 1917 at the age of 21 for operations in coastal motor-boats off the French coast and was commended for his technical work on the design side of the Navy's high-angle gunnery control system in 1921. In the early part of the Second World War he was deputy director of personnel services at the Admiralty where one of his first tasks was to commandeer all Billy Butlin's holiday camps for naval establishments. In 1943 he went to a staff appointment in

Bombay and in 1946 he was chairman of the committee which organised the victory celebrations and was appointed a Commander of the British Empire. He became ADC to King George VI in 1948 and in the same year went out to India again where, for three years as Deputy C in C with the rank of Commodore, he played a major role in shaping the organisation of the Indian Navy after the turmoil in 1947 following partition. He retired in 1952.

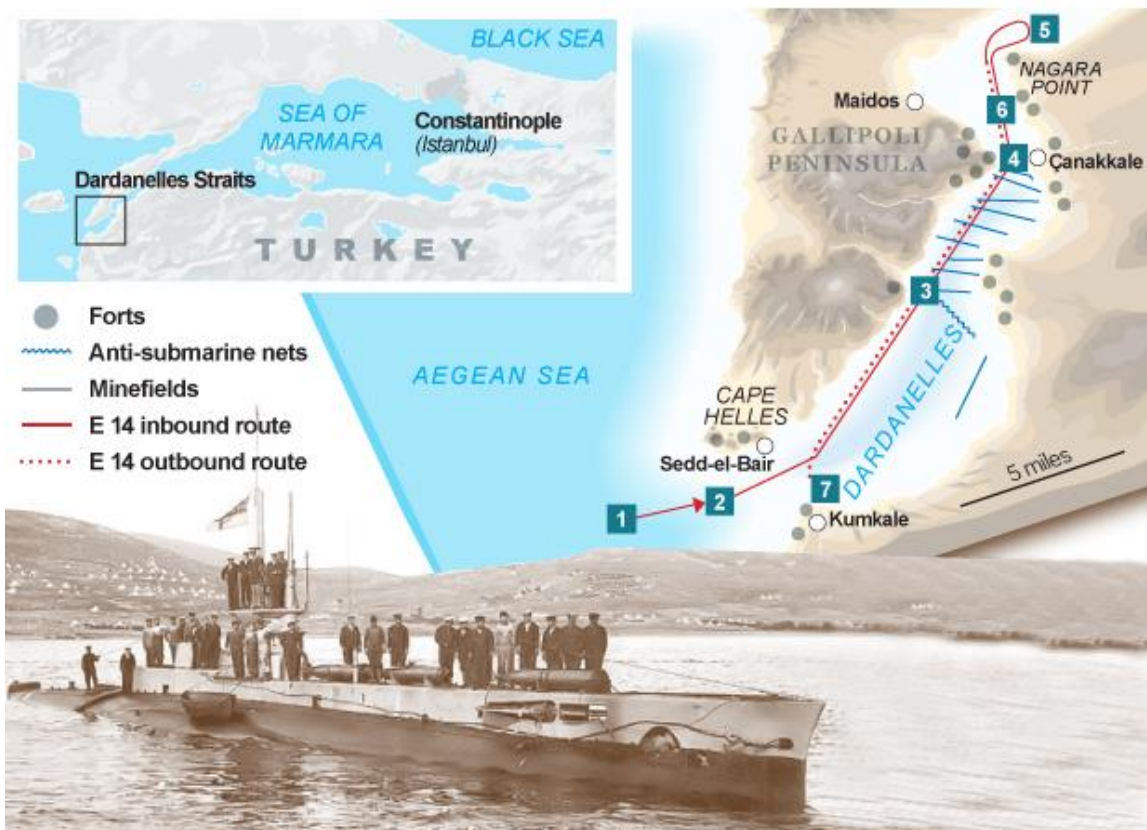
Commodore Drew lived for many years at Dunvegen, Morda Road, Oswestry, but left the town about five years ago to go and live with his daughter, Daphne, in Scotland.

His family once owned the Wynnstay Hotel in Oswestry and later established Drew's Mineral Water Company in King Street. He was also at one time president of the Oswestry branch of the Royal Naval Association, an appointment he held for 15 years. He married Miss. Isobel Nicholson, of The Quarry, in 1921, who still lives with their daughter.

George Montford Drew (Born Oswestry 1894 – Died 28 January 1918, aboard E14 Submarine)

Listed on the Oswestry War Memorial as G M Drew, he was an Acting Lieutenant in the Royal Navy and son of Charles Drew of the Wynnstay Hotel.

 INTERACTIVE



Wreck located in June 2012 off the coast of Turkey.

Remembered on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial / Register
"DREW, Lieut. George Montford
Mentioned in Despatches
R.N.R. HM S/M "E14"
Killed in Action in Dardanelles on 28th January 1918 aged 25.
Son of Charles and Jean Drew of Plas Wilmot, Oswestry.