By DAVID LAWSON david.lawson@nwn.co.uk

Leader Page

Captain a victim of wartime injustice

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

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 sprayurs.

Advertizer 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 am who captained the ship during one of the most pivotal navalengagements 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 undring respect. That man's

martialled for a decision that cost him his ship but saved the lives of his men, earning their undying respect. That man's mane was Captain Harold Peter Drew.

"It is an honour that Morton Church be asked to become the dians of the standard, explains Elizabeth, "irrepresents comradeship and remembrance of the ship's company of HMS Monotester 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 Whitehosen of Lyndys whose father owned the Whitehosen 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 a n. d. a n d

the family's grave in its church-

the family's grave in its church-rard.

In the First World War, aged just 21. Dre was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in 1917 for 'gallantry during active operations against the enemy at sea. Between the warrs became a gunnery specialist, commended for his work design-ing the new High Angle Gunfire system, which calculated the tra-jectory required to place an jectory required to place an explosive shell in the path of a

explosive shell in the path of a target. Then in 1927, Draw was made Gunnery Officer on the cruiser HMS Surfolk, 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 Monchester.

Desperate

Desperate
By 1941, the Allied's base in
Malta was under siege and its
port, so vital for ships, submarines and airreaft cut off by
enemy blockades, as the months
passed, the situation became
desperate and it became dear
that British would have to get a
convoy through to the besieged
island at all costs, orelse it would
be lost.
The answer was Operation

be lost.

The answer was Operation
Pedestal, a daring and desperate
attempt to charge more than 50
hips straight through the lines
of enemy boots, minefields and
submarines, while taking fire
from enemy bombers, and providing one of the escorts for this
freet was HMS Manchester, with
Drew at the helm

A town-class cruiser.

Drew at the helm
A town-class cruiser,
Mon-hester was 591ft long with
a top speed of 32knots, firstling
with amourment, including 12
six inch and eight four-inch guns
as well as torpedoes, two circraft
and a warrinne erew compliment
of around 900 men. On August 9,
Mon-hester and around 50 other
ships moved into the Strait of
Gibraltar: Operation Pedestal
had begun.

On parade: Below. Captain Harold Drew

attenda a civic eremony outside Oswestry's Memorial Gates

on Church

Gibraltar. Operation Pedestal head begun.

In the early hours of August 13, the own years using the darkness to passe close a civic support of Tunisia, surprising a group of the warm of

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

partment, instantly killing 11 of her men, but while below deeks here was a frenzy of activity to rescue crewmates and secure the ship, outside the engines £ll silent as Monchester stopped, feating dead in the water.

As the crew worked frantically to repair the engines £ll row was left with a desperate decision. It was 1.20am and for now the darkness was offering them limited protection, dooking them from further sitsek, but in a matter of hours dawn would be gone and the stricken ship and her crew would present an easy target. By dom the sky was lightening fast and at 4.30cm, 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 hap-need next remains an anter of

var It was a sad end, but what hap-It was a sad end, but what hap-pened next remains a matter of controversy to this day Brought before the admirally, 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 evi-dence at a court martial hearing. the Admiralty believing that the ship was still navigable and capable of reaching a neutral port.

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 decime snips situation, and his deci-sion to scuttle her, not only sav-ing their lives, but also prevent-ing its sensitive radar equip-ment from falling into enemy hands.

Heavy cost

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 dedded 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 strategy vicines of the Seomid Word War, butcame at a heavy cost, with two warships, an aircraft carrier and more than 400 lives bet. 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 Marija, the Feast of the Assumption, and the convoy is still referred to locally as the Santa Marija Convoy and cele-brated as part of the public holi-

Harold Drew travelled Harold Drew travelled to Bombay and worked with the South East Asian Command from 1943 to 1945. He became Director of Recruting and in 1948 was chairman of the Victory Celebration Committee, awarded the CEE 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 Commodors from 1948-51 and was later involved in the restructuring of the Indian Navy, before returing in 1952.

restricting in 1952.

Peter and his family retired to Oswestry in 1952 and were once again able to attend Morton Church. He died in 1967 aged 92.





CAPTAIN HAROLD DREW, HOME:

LAST TO LEAVE HIS SHIP

THE STORY OF H.M.S. "MANCHESTER"

TALK TO AN "ADVERTIZER" REPORTER

The country owes an eternal gratitude to the men of the Royal Navy and the Merchani Service. When the history of this war comes to be written amongst the epics will rank the convoys to Maha when the Navy escored our ships through helt to secure supplies to that island which has stood up to the enemy on his own doorstep and which his now histing back. The high traditions of the Royal Navy have again been esemplined in the story of the sinking of HMAS. Manchester total us by Cips D rew, and the tribute paid to him by one of the crew speaks volumes.

Capt. Drew is the second son of the late Mr. and Mrs. C. Drew formerly of Plus Wilmot. Oswestry, and a brother of Mrs. W. B. Aylmer Lewis, Park Isa. Oswestry. He maxied Miss Nicholson, a daughter of the late Mr. E. D. Nicholson and Mrs. Nicholson, The Quarry.

When he was a pupil at Oswestry Grammar School, Capt. Drew was a member of Oswald House and the headmaster was Mr. Lloyd Williams. He was a good swimmer, and was frequently in the open-an pool at the school.

Capt. Harold Drew, D.S.C., R.N., commander of the 9,000 tone cruser H.M.S. Manchester , sink by an liadian E-boost in the Mediterranean last August white excerting a convey to Maila, has arrived safely in this country and has joined his wife at the home of her mother. Mrs. Nicholson. The Quarry. Oswestry His safety will he most welcome news not easily to house of people in Oswestry and district but much farther afield, more his explosits are already known to many.

where his exploits are already known to many.

"It was about one o'clock in the morning of August 13th that my ship was terpedoed by an E-boat off the Tuniasan cossi, about rwo milies from and, and it was about three hours before she tank, said Capt. Drew in a talk to an "Advertizer representative," it was perfect weather and nice and warm at the time, and some men were taken off by destroyers, white others made to the Shore is small boats and on rafts, flosts and pieces of wood.

Last to Leave the Ship.

Capt. Drew did not leave the ship until all the more had got away, and he left in a small whaler. E-boats were operating in the vicinity all the time, and the fines and he left in a small whaler. E-boats were operating in the vicinity all the time, and capt Drew, but in the dawness of got after ashore at Kilbna, about 70 miles on the cause opposite blaits.

"The Vally Festich put is in a substanting there usual the evening, when they take as all—about 500 officers and men to a camp about 50 miles to the samb, to Bus Fischs. They were very good to us, showed us every lively. Fles were a terribic plague.

Wireless Boon.

"After a simple of days we were put into a train, and for five days plannessed through Turning letter Alperia and down lets the Sahara desert to Laghtrus, an own in the desert. The

Set Up "University".

"In order to make use of our lessure, continued Capt. Drew, "we started a university" with its various faculties of learning languages, commercial subjects, shorthand and economics to private life. A concert party was got together and gave performances. Races and sports were arranged, and the men played voiley ball a variation of badminion. Until the end of September the weather was extremely het, but it was a dr. heat and not trying. Time did not mean apything to us as we had no future, and it passed somewhat quickly.



programmes. When goed news came through it was written down and passed through the barbed wire and sent to the boys at the hospital. When this particularly good news of the occupation by Allied forces of North Africa came over the wreckes, we wrote it down and passed it through the harbed wire. The French though the harbed wire. The French though we were leg-pulling, and would not pass it on until it was signed by a across officer, so I signed it.

"There is an interesting thing about my room in the prison at Laghouat," remarked Capt. Drew. "I put up on the wall the borough arms and motto of Oswestey, and an artist who was in my ship was very good at murals, and he helped to decorate the room with murals. The French were very pleased with them, and there they will remain."

remain . Their Release.

"The food," said Capt. Drew, "consisted of coffee at six in the morning, a plate of soup in the evening, with a small slice of meat, if we were liseky. Each man had a daily allowance of half a litre of wine, and five men shared a large loaf of bread each day. We were grateful for the parcels of food which came to us through the international Red Cross, and eked out our food applies.

"Sleeping accommodation was bad; 48 men were crowded into quarters meant for 24 men. There were big rooms with stone floors, and the men steps on beds made of wood, each having a paisses of straw which at tomes was 'very lively'. Fles were a terrible plague.

Wireless Boon.

"We had swireless and the men see for men steps on beds made of wood, each having a paisses of straw which at tomes was 'very lively'. Fles were a terrible plague.

Wireless Boon.

"We had swireless set there and we gart our news better than the Fronch and when the atmospheries permitted we heard the Home and Forces."

Alterwards Capt Drew left for Cowestry on Wetherday evening.

A reporter who interviewed some of the survivors of the "Manchester on reaching port, said "Each man I spoke to expressed deep thankfulness that they had had such a man as Capt. Drew with them."

"It would be impossible to overestimate his wonderful leadership and courage," said Master-at-Arms William E. Terry, of London, "He stood by his ship's company all the time. When we were first interned the French started cutting off part of the camp for the captain and others, but they appealed to the commandant and were eventually allocated to huts amongst the rest of us."

"Wrecked Off Spain."

" Wrecked Off Spain."

Captain Drew went to sea in 1911, in the Merchant Service, and in 1912 his ship was wreeked on a reef in Trafalgar Bay, off the coast of Spain, and he was taken off by a Norwegian ship, losing all his belongings save a sheath knife. During the last war, when he was serving on an armed merchant liner, it ran on to the rocks at Mull of Kintyre, near the Ctyde, but was got off the rocks at high water.

Brought Ship, Safely Jan Part

Brought Ship Safely Into Port.

Afterwards Capt. Drew entered the service of the Royal Navy, and served as a "midd" on the bastleshin "Venerable" in 1913. He served on destroyers in the last war. He was in command of the cruiser "Manchester" about 18 months. Last year the "Manchester" was torpedoed in the Mediterranean, about the tame place as it was this year when torpedoed, and Capt. Drew medestly said "It crawled back to Grissitus." It is well known that it reached port only through supecis seamanship.

Capt. Drew prione occasion had the honour of a visit from the King, who inspected his ship the "Manchester," Brought Ship Safely Into Port.

Back in Town for their diamond day-

An Oswestry couple who moved to Scotland three years ago returned to their home town to cele-brate their diamond wedding anniver-sary 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 Oswes-

"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 Advertizer 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

ton and Queen's Park Schools. Capt. Drew grew upat Plas Wilmot, the former home of Oswestry poet Wil-fred Owen, and was a

Captain and Mrs Harold and Isobel Drew.



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

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.

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

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 Inand four years in India, where Mrs Drew was responsible for launching a news-paper for officers' wives. Thirty years later, the paper is still in existence

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.

Border Counties Advertizer 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 coasatal motor-boats off the French coast and was commended for his technical work on the design side of the Navy's high-angle gundire 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.



Capt. Harold Drew, D.S.C., R.N., The Quarry, Oswesiry, 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: "Advertizes."

CAPT. DREW'S DAUGHTER MARRIED

PARISH CHURCH,

A large congregation attended the wedding at Oswestry Parish Church, yesterday (Fuesday), of Miss Daphne Drew, daugater of Capt Harold Drew D.S.C. R.ix., and of Mrs. Drew, The Quarry, Oswestry. The bride has been serving with the W.R.N.S. The bride-groom was Capt. Antiony John Smiciair Crockett. Royal Miarines, son of the late Lieut-Col. B. Sinciair Crockett. D.S.O., and of Mrs. Crockett. Longdowa Cottage, Farnham. Surgey. 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 bridegroomi and the Rev. Preb F. 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 pearis and a diamond and pearl brooch, and carried a sheaf of arum lines. The bride was given away by her father, and she was attended by three bridesmaids.—Miss Elizabeth Bellars, and her cousins. Miss Anne Ayimer Lewis, and Miss Rosemary Nicholson. The bridesmaids wore full trocks of brodeire anglaise, with green belts, and had head-dresses of gardenias. Their boaqueis were of pheasant-eye narcissi, and each maid wore a Royal Marines badge, the gift of the brides going-away dress consisted of a brown corduroy suit, with ice-biae blouse and hat.

Border Counties Advertizer 10 March 1943

100th birthday of former Oswestrian

A FORMER wellknown 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 Association 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.

Border Counties Advertizer 12 May 1993

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Hero's reputation restored

The reputation of an Oswestry-born sea captain shamefully court martialled for scuttling his ship HMS Manchester during the Second World War has been fully restored following a recent examination of the wreck.

Unfortunately the revelations have come too late to comfort Commodore Harold Drew, a member of a leading Oswestry family, who died in Scotland in 1987. But his relatives have welcomed the

Divers working 250ft down three miles off Cap Bon off the coast of Tunisia recently found that the Type 42 destroyer had suffered so much damage in an attack by Italian and German torpedo boats on August 13, 1942 that she had not a "hope in hell" of making land with an enormous hole in the hull and two propeller shafts completely shattered.

Crispin Sadler, leader of the diving expedition, said there had been some talk that the Manchester might have been able to make

a speed of 12 knots and get to port.
"Well, there was not a chance in a million that she could have made 12 knots. You could have driven a car through that hole." he said.

A white ensign, donated by the crew of the current HMS Manchester, was attached to the wreck which is now a designated war maye.

The dive had been timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of Operation Pedestal which was designed to break the siege of Malta through the deployment of a heavily armed and protected convoy.

Only five of the 14 fast merchant vessels made it to port and the Royal Navy also suffered grievous losses including the sinking of the carrier Eagle, the cruiser Cairo and the destroyer Foresight while the carrier Indomitable and the cruiser Nigeria suffered serious damage.

But the relief operation was sufficiently successful to preserve Malta as a base for operations against the Axis forces dominating North Africa.

A year earlier there had been an almost uncannily similar incident when, by damage control and good seamanship Captain Drew had managed to nurse the Manchester into port at Gibraltar after she had been hit by a torpedo dropped from an Italian aircraft.

The divers' preliminary findings confirms what the majority of HMS Manchester's crew knew all along, that their captain was absolutely right to scuttle the Manchester which was a sitting target for any subsequent attacks once the torpedo hit the ship's engine compartment, killing 12 of the crew.

They believe his decision saved hundreds of lives as the Manchester was drifting helplessly

by PETER DANBY

in waters teeming with enemy aircraft and submarines

The Manchester carried a crew of 900 - 500 of them, including Captain Drew himself, were interned in Vichy France and the remaining 400 were rescued by Royal Navy Ships.

But when he returned home to Britain, instead of a hero's welcome Captain Drew was court martialled

and their conclusion, possibly influenced by evidence from a small number of his own officers, was that he had scuttled the ship prematurely.

Captain Drew's daughter Daphne Freeman said her father rarely spoke of the incident and was of a generation that did not complain.

Bombay

"He did speak to the First Lord of the Admiralty, A. V. Alexander, who concluded that nothing could be done. And my father accepted it, provided he was not considered a coward. A tougher man would have demanded on an inquiry," she said.

Although he never received another naval command, the former Oswestry Grammar School boy who joined the training ship HMS Conway at the age of 20, was rehabilitated as far as the establishment was concerned and was given a staff appointment in Bombay in 1943. In 1946 he was director of recruiting, chairman of the committee which



A retired Commander Harold 'Peter' Drew outside his home in Morda Road, preparing to take the salute outside Cae Glas Park, Oswestry, in the 1970s.

organised the victory celebrations and was appointed a CBE to add to the DSC he earned in 1917 for his work with coastal motorboats off the French coast.

In 1948 he was ADC to King George VI and in the same year went back to India as Commander in Chief with the rank of Commodore, playing a major role in organising structuring the Indian Navy after partition in 1947.

He retired in 1952, returning to Oswestry to live at Dunvegan in Morda Road and was president of the Oswestry branch of the Royal Naval Association for 15 years.

He had met and married Miss Isobel Nicholson of The Quarry in 1921 and the couple had a daughter with whom they spent their declining years in Scotland.

After his funeral his ashes were interred in Morton Churchyard and a plaque erected inside the church as a tribute from the *HMS Manchester* Association as a mark of their affection for a brave captain.

Border Counties Advertizer 28 August 2002

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.







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.