

HMS HERO HOLMFIRTH'S WW2 WARSHIP

A BRIEF HISTORY



INTRODUCTION

The cost of running the war in the 1940s was said to be £9 million a day, a phenomenal sum. In order to raise that kind of money the Government organised 'Warship Weeks'. Cities and towns across the country were set the task of raising a set amount of money and if they succeeded they would be granted the honour of adopting a named ship.

The amount depended on the size of the town or city. Holmfirth in 1942 was tasked with raising £210,000. In fact it did better than that. In just one week £231,754 was raised. In 2015 that would be equivalent to around £7.5million. More remarkable still, the people of Holmfirth had raised a similar amount of money the previous year without the incentive of adopting a warship.

This is the story of how they did it and also the story of the memento given to the town for their effort. A memento which is now on show in a public place for all to see in the Civic Hall in Holmfirth.

RAISING THE MONEY

Newspapers from 1942 show that there were a number of public events held in the week commencing 6th February 1942.

These included:

- Whist drives
- Musical concerts
- Dances
- Public meetings with entertainment.

At such places as:

- Conservative Hall, Holmfirth
- New Mill War Memorial Institute
- Honley Palladium
- Valley Theatre, Holmfirth
- Holmbridge Parish Hall.

The entertainment was provided by:

- Phyllis Coleman's Band
- Certa Ceto Orchestra (Royal Corps of Signals)
- Metro Players
- National Fire Service (Holmfirth)
- Holme Valley Red Cross & Comforts - Holmfirth Depot
- H. Swallow's Brass Band.

Entrance fees were between nine pence and five shillings for these events.

It is also believed that there were public collecting points in the valley which were described as large canvas sacks held down at the four corners with wooden posts.

The vast majority of the money was raised by subscriptions to Government issue War Bonds and other savings schemes. The interest rates were as high as 5% over fifteen or twenty years. This was an attractive rate and inspired many to invest. When all the money had been received the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Kingsley Wood, informed Holmfirth that more than one third of the money had been raised by small investors.

The progress of the fund raising was shown on a 'large indicator' outside the Parish Church as well as other indicators outside Martin's Bank, Honley and the War Memorial Institute in New Mill.

One week after the events, on February 14th, £190,000 had been raised. The total went on to exceed the target by more than £20,000, a grand total of £231,754. This secured HMS Hero. A ship which more than lived up to its name.

CHILDREN'S COMPETITIONS 1942

At the same time as the fundraising for HMS Hero in February 1942 there were competitions for children in four categories and three age groups.

The categories were

- Draw a picture
- Make a model
- Paint a picture
- Write a story.

The age groups were

- Under 16 (but over 12)
- Under 12 (but over 8)
- Under 8.

THE PRIZEWINNERS

CATEGORY	AGE	WINNER
Model	Under 16	J. Noble and F.L. Wood
	Under 12	S. Carratt and S.J. Griffiths
	Under 8	Audrey Dodgson
Drawing	Under 16	Jean Gelder
	Under 12	Stephen Carratt & Jean Roberts
Painting	Under 16	Freda Hirst, James Lomas & Derrick Gledhill
	Under 12	J. Heppenstall, Audrey Booth & D. Cartwright
	Under 8	Sylvia Beaumont & Daphne Beaver
Essay	Under 16	Eileen Roebuck (Holmfirth Modern) & Eileen Roebuck (Scholes) & Joyce Whitehead, Mary Wadsworth and Joan Hall
	Under 12	Pat Booth, Nancy Wall, Sheila Denton, Trevor Hopkins and Bruce Wadsworth

Are any of these people still living in the area?

HMS HERO

TECHNICAL DATA

HMS Hero was an 'H' Class Destroyer built by Vickers Armstrong on the Tyne. It was one of eight 'H' Class Destroyers completed in 1936.

SPECIFICATIONS:

She was powered by a Parsons geared steam turbine with two shafts giving horsepower of 34,000 and 36 knots in good weather.

She had three boilers to create the steam for the turbine.

She carried 455 tons of oil which gave her a range of

- 5,700 miles at 15 knots
- 2,400 miles at 20 knots
- 1,120 miles at full speed.

- She cost £300,000 when built
- Had a crew of 145 men
- Was armed with four 4.7inch guns and two quadruple sets of 21 inch torpedo tubes as well as depth charges.

- Length : 323 feet
- Beam: 33 feet
- Draught: 8.5 feet
- Displacement: 1,340 tons

HMS HERO'S WAR RECORD

These events happened before and during Holmfirth's adoptive involvement with the ship.

1939: In the Mediterranean on control and screening duty and later in the Atlantic defending the merchant shipping. In November she was involved in the tracking of the *Graf Spee* off Freetown, Sierra Leone which led to the Battle of the River Plate.

1940: In the Atlantic on convoy defence, Scapa Flow for screening and patrol duties and depth charge attacks on submarines. She was involved in 2nd Battle of Narvik, Norway.

By mid year she was again in the Mediterranean as convoy escort from Gibraltar to the Middle East. She participated in luring enemy ships nearer to allied ships, and in the sinking of the cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* at the Battle of Cape Spada.

She rescued survivors from *HMS Hostile* which had been mined off Cape Bon and sank the abandoned ship by torpedo. She provided cover for the Malta Convoy MW3 (the transit of reinforcements to Alexandria).

1941: More escort action in the Mediterranean usually in convoy with other HMS Cruisers. In April she was on hand at Kalamata, Greece to rescue beached troops who were under attack then deployed in the defence of Crete against invasion by German troops.

She assisted in the rescue of troops from *HMS Latona* which was carrying supplies as well as troops to Tobruk when it came under heavy air attack was disabled and then set on fire.

1942: More escort duties in the Mediterranean, in particular off Malta and Egypt and involved in the 2nd Battle of Sirte. This event occurred more or less at the time when Holmfirth adopted HMS Hero.

She participated in the sinking of U-boat U-568 off Tobruk and then transferred to Aden for convoy defence in the Red Sea. One of her most important operations came when she participated in the hunt and subsequent sinking of U-559 off Port Said.

OCTOBER 30TH 1942: HERO vs GERMAN U-BOAT U-559

Just after dawn on this day an RAF Sunderland patrol plane spotted U-559 off the Egyptian coast. The Sunderland called in five destroyers. The first one on the scene was HMS Hero and it forced the submarine to dive and for the next sixteen hours pounded the boat with depth charges. Damage finally forced the submarine to surface after dark. Unluckily for her she surfaced close to HMS Petard which immediately opened fire with light AA guns. Already close to panic the U-boat men began abandoning ship and in their rush forgot to set demolition charges or open the seacocks. Immediately three men from Petard's crew - one of them a NAAFI canteen assistant - jumped in to the sea and swam to the battered submarine.

Lieutenant Anthony Fasson and Able Seaman Colin Grazier scrambled down into the hull and retrieved the Enigma key settings for October and November, plus the Short Weather code book. They handed these to NAAFI assistant Tommy Brown and then went back to recover the Enigma machine itself. Sadly they were still trying to get the machine out when the damaged U-boat suddenly sank, taking them both down with her. Brown, who had been on the conning tower found himself in the water with the documents. Amazingly he managed to keep them dry. One splash and they would have been useless – they were printed in red water soluble ink on pink paper. However he kept them safe until a boat recovered him and by early November they were in the hands of Alan Turing, the renowned code-breaker at Bletchley Park.

A British success and HMS Hero played a part in it!

1943: Preparing to return to UK via Cape of Good Hope from Egypt, she was deployed instead to escort ships taking ANZAC troops back to Australia. Once back in the UK she was taken in for a re-fit including conversion for use as an anti-submarine destroyer and transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy and then renamed *HMCS Chaudiere*.

1944: More escort and support work around Scapa Flow and Londonderry. She was then deployed for convoy defence in the English Channel and western approaches for the Normandy Landings. After D-Day where was deployed off the Bay of Biscay for operations against U-boats attempting to leave French bases and then assisted in convoy defence in the area around Iceland.

1945: Awaiting a re-fit but found to be too damaged.

1946 : Decommissioned and subsequently scrapped.

HMS HERO:

THE 21ST CENTURY STORY

The story of what happened to the plaque given to Holmfirth by the Admiralty after the fundraising is less clear than the wartime events. Certainly there was a mutual exchange of plaques. There probably was also an exchange of photographs and artefacts. There may well have been the formation of an adoption association between the ship and Holmfirth because that was the promise made at the time.

We don't know what happened to the plaque given to the ship by the people of Holmfirth; perhaps it was scrapped with the ship in 1950. We are also not sure where the HMS Hero plaque was displayed in Holmfirth between 1942 and the early 21st century. It was probably housed in the Holmfirth District Council (later Parish Council) offices for that was where it was known to be around 2007/8. It was then handed over to the Holme Valley Civic Society who placed it in the building known as the Th'owd Towser, situated behind Holmfirth Parish Church. Reputed to be the oldest building in the town, the Towser is only open on two days a year at the annual Heritage weekend.

In 2015 it was decided that the plaque is worthy of a more public place of display and to that effect it was decided to remove, restore and re-hang it. Restoration was needed because the plaque had scratches and scuff marks on it.



The plaque prior to restoration

RESCUE & RESTORATION

David Compston, Holme Valley resident and member of the Holmfirth Freemasons started the ball rolling and was instrumental in securing the funding from the Holme Valley Masonic Lodge to pay for the restoration. He also secured the funding from Sainsbury's - which paid for the accompanying interpretation panel and the use of an easel for display at exhibitions - and from Turner Brothers', Holmfirth and The Old Bridge Hotel in Holmfirth for the creation of a display

case for the plaque. In addition David has done much of the research into the naval history of HMS Hero.

Richard Heald, another Holme Valley resident and a furniture restorer working in Holmfirth, beautifully and skilfully restored the plaque to its former glory. He also made the magnificent display case in which the plaque is housed. The costs of this were funded by the Holme Valley Parish Council.

John Rumsby, former Head of Kirklees Museum Services, did a lot of research into the warships other towns in Kirklees adopted. He tracked down the newspaper reports from the time which so splendidly evoke the effort and enthusiasm which went into the fundraising campaign. Deborah Wyles, also a Holme Valley resident acted as liaison person for the Holme Valley Civic Society, additional researcher and co-ordinator of this project.



The plaque is now on display in the Holmfirth Civic Hall.