

# 1942 to 1944, Wartime Savings

## Introduction

During the Second World War members of the public were urged to save as much as they could by buying National Savings Certificates. This had for some time been the mechanism used by Governments to finance expenditures which exceeded taxation revenues, a funding gap which could become particularly acute during wartime.

To encourage savers further, specific themed campaigns were run over short periods, with local targets being set for every part of the country. The first of these themed campaigns was 'Warship Week', which emphasized the need to replace ships lost while guarding Atlantic convoys, and in other naval battles and actions. It ran from 21 to 28 March 1942, and Axminster district (which included all of the surrounding rural parishes covered by the Rural District Council as well as Axminster itself) was set a target of £75,000. When the money was totted up, this target had been comfortably exceeded.

The following year 'Wings for Victory' week ran from 8 to 13 March 1943. Axminster's target was again £75,000 and this time the sum raised was over £113,000. Then from 29 April to 6 May 1944 the theme was 'Salute the Soldier'. The target was raised to £80,000, and again this was comfortably beaten, with over £112,000 being raised.

An indication of the efforts which were made, and the priority which Government placed on the outcome, can be drawn from the following contemporary press reports. The commemorative plaques which are referred to in the first of these reports are held at Axminster Heritage Centre.

## Plaques and log books

The Western Times edition of 21 January 1944 carried the following report under the heading '*Plaques and Logs: Axminster and Warship Weeks*'.

*"The presentation of Warship Week and 'Wings for Victory' Week plaques, log books and certificates of honour in Axminster Senior School Hall, on Saturday evening, was attended by a large gathering.*

*"The Vicar (Rev F H Sanders), Chairman of Axminster Savings Committee, was supported by Capt Walcot, RN, of Exmouth, representing the Admiralty; Squadron Leader Denton representing the Air Ministry; Mr T Nuttall, President of 'Wings for Victory' Week; Mr H Cawley, Chairman of Axminster Urban Council and of the Publicity Committee for the Savings campaigns; Mr A J White, Vice-Chairman of Axminster Rural Council; Mr L C Russell, Assistant Commissioner for National Savings; Mrs Hesketh, organiser of the campaigns; and Mrs Varley, her successor as Savings Committee secretary.*

*"The Vicar emphasised that far from being a waste of money, such gatherings as that had a great psychological effect and encouraged all to do their very best. Plaques and certificates linked the people with the Services.*

*"Capt Walcot described the motor gunboats, such as the Savings Area had adopted, as magnificent small craft - the finest commands for young naval officers.*

*“He presented to Mr Cawley the plaque given by the Admiralty to the Urban Council, and to Mr White the plaque given to the Rural Council. Both commemorated the adoption of the gunboat, and the second plaque commemorated also the adoption of HMS Scarborough<sup>1</sup> by the rural parishes in the Seaton area.*

*“Mr Cawley presented to Capt Walcot, on behalf of Axminster townspeople, the token of a plaque shortly to be sent to the Admiralty for the gunboat. “We shall be interested to learn not only of the activities of the boat, but also of the captain and the crew, and we hope one day to have them with us and spend a happy time together.”*

*“The rural parishes greatly appreciated the presentation of a plaque, said Mr Cawley. They were desirous of doing what they could for the crew, and he had no doubt that they in due course would get into touch with the Commander and follow the townspeople's lead.*

*“Squadron Leader Denton presented to Mr Cawley the plaque in recognition of the ‘Wings for Victory’ Week achievement: and, in return, Mr Cawley handed him two log books in which will be entered a complete record of the operational activities of particular ‘Typhoon’ aircraft. When the war was over, he said, they hoped to receive the log books back to be placed in safe keeping and handed down to posterity.*

*“Captain Walcot and Squadron Leader Denton presented certificates of honour to the parishes which reached their targets in the campaigns.”*

### **Feed-back from the beneficiaries**

One week before this, the Western Times edition of 14 January 1944 had carried a report under the heading ‘*Like a Mustang: Axminster's Gunboat in Heavy Sea*’. This reported how Sub-Lt P D Watkins of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve had recently written to Mr A J Perry, Secretary of the Axminster Hospitality Committee, thanking him for the Committee's Christmas gift, on behalf of the ship's company of the gunboat which the Hospitality Committee had adopted<sup>2</sup>. His letter was printed, as follows.

*“Since you have so kindly adopted us, you will probably be interested to know something about us and what we do. For obvious reasons I am unable to tell you very much about the boat itself, but I can tell you that it is roughly the length of a cricket pitch, capable of over 40 miles per hour, and armed with cannon and machine guns. Our prime object is to attack enemy E-boats<sup>3</sup>, which are larger than us, and come over to attack our convoys with mines or torpedoes.*

*“It is of necessity a game of waiting, and this boat has never yet had the pleasure of meeting an E-boat. The only action we have had was when we were attacked with cannon fire by three low-flying Focke-Wulf 190s. We gave them all we'd got, and drove them off before they could do any damage.*

*“Our work is almost entirely at night, leaving harbour at dusk and returning at dawn. We in this boat have done nearly a hundred operations since we commissioned, sometimes doing six nights at sea out of eight. Of course the longer the night the longer the patrol, and on a frosty night it seems very long indeed.*

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<sup>1</sup> HMS Scarborough was a ‘Hastings Class’ sloop which had been built in 1930, and which was scrapped in 1949.

<sup>2</sup> The plaque in Axminster Heritage Centre shows that this gunboat was designated simply as HM MGB 40.

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘E-Boat’ referred to a class of fast torpedo boat known in German as ‘S-Boot’ in which S simply signified ‘schnell’ (fast).

*“In rough weather the boat behaves like a mustang. She leaves the top of one wave, hangs in the air for what seems an eternity, then crashes down on to the next one with a bang which breaks a man’s leg easily if he hasn’t learnt to stand – that is, with the knees slightly bent.*

*“We were caught out in a gale not long ago, with both engines broken down, and waited six hours for a tug to arrive. Able Seaman Walmsley was highly commended for his bravery in securing the tow-rope. We got back safely, but not unfortunately without losing one man overboard.*

*“The crew are young – the average age being about 19. I am 22 and my First Lieutenant, Sub-Lieut R A Barlow, RNVR, is 20.”*

In thanking the Hospitality Committee for adopting them, Sub-Lieutenant Watkins wrote *“We like to think that somebody is taking an interest in us.”*

Entries in the on-line London Gazette show that P D Watkins progressed from Temporary Acting Sub-Lieutenant to Temporary Sub-Lieutenant in 1943, and then to Temporary Lieutenant in 1944. R A Barlow progressed from Temporary Acting Sub-Lieutenant to Temporary Sub-Lieutenant in 1944.