

HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 5



THE HARBOUR IN THE WORLD WARS

BEFORE 1914

Warships were frequently seen in the Firth in the years immediately prior to World War One although the main base was at Invergordon on the Cromarty Firth. The Inverness Firth was too shallow for the 'capital' ships, so the visiting warships were the smaller destroyers, frigates corvettes, sloops, or gunboats. From 1909 Destroyer Flotillas were formed consisting of a light or scout cruiser, a depot ship, and a destroyer squadron.



1

The fleet circa 1910 off Fortrose

This clipping from the Ross-shire Journal was found by Grace Mackenzie. While it concerns Avoch, the flotilla would have stretched between the harbours of Avoch and Fortrose and doubtless both were used for 'liberty'.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1910.

FAREWELL—AVOCH.

(By John Ibbett, H.M.S. Patrol.)

When the flotilla sailed south from Moray Firth,
On the village of **Avoch** pier
The lasses heaved many a weary sigh,
And many an "och" so drear.

We looked from the waists of our several ships
As we steamed farther away,
And thought of the folk we'd left behind,
And we hope to go back some day.

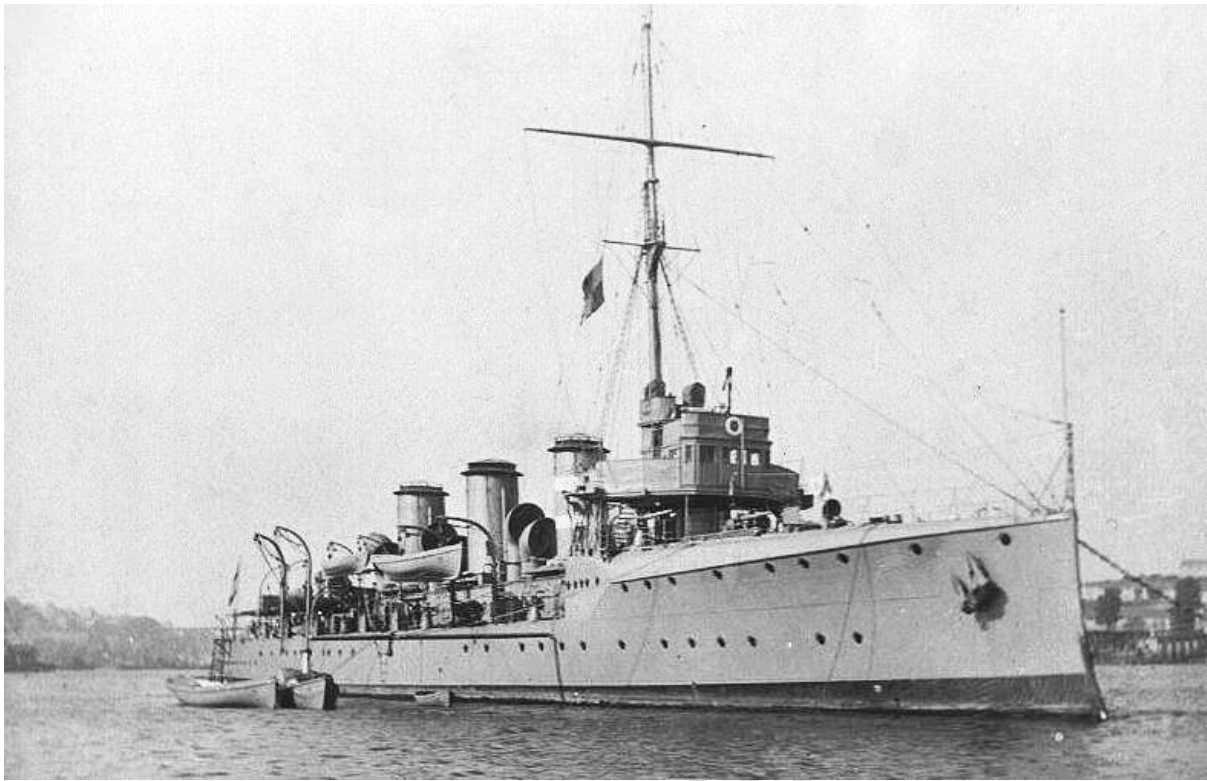
For the people of **Avoch** are kind and true
To the sailor when he's ashore;
He likes to feel that he has friends—
He's a man, and nothing more.

We remember the girl who makes the scores,
The lass who mends her net,
The piper, the reeler, the moonlight walker,
Oh! who shall ever forget.

P'r'aps when the winter's come and gone.
Who knows, and who can tell,
We'll turn our faces north again,
Till then, sweet **Avoch**, farewell.

Clearly **John Ibbett** was taken with Avoch (certainly the lassies). It is interesting to note the reference to the 'winter's come and gone' – the flotilla deployments were a summer and early autumn activity. **HMS Patrol** was one of two Pathfinder-class scout cruisers which built for the Royal Navy. During 1910 she was part of the 3rd Destroyer Flotilla. She saw action in late 1914 off Hartlepool where she was damaged by the cruiser *Blücher* and had to be beached.

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HMS Patrol (archive)



2

This photo, possibly taken in 1912 or 1913 (see below), shows a small launch, possibly a '**jolly boat**' approaching the outer landing stage. Within the flotilla there are 2 tall masts and even at the outbreak of World War

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One, many older and smaller **naval vessels still carried sails**. The vessel berthed at the intermediate landing stage appears to be the *Dispatch*.

It is now clear that the growth of German sea power was a major concern to the Admiralty in the years leading up to 1914 and the outbreak of World War One. The 1889 naval defence act aimed to build 70 new warships and maintain the '2 power' standard (ie the strength of the Royal Navy would equal the combined strength of the 2nd & 3rd largest navies in the world). From 1901, the Royal Navy changed emphasis from a global fleet to one focused on the North Sea. Clearly from these photos the navy was 'showing the flag' in the area and some idea of the naval activity can be gleaned from the record of **Charles Lewin** who was in the Royal Marines Light Infantry (RMLI) from 1905 to 1922. His 3rd ship was *HMS Ringdove*, a gunboat of 805 tons and 165 feet long. In **June 1910** she visited Aberdeen, Invergordon and '**Fort Rose**'.

On 9 June, *Ringdove* left '**Fort Rose**' for the Shetland Isles where she stayed until the end of the summer. In September, *Ringdove* left Lerwick for Fair Isle and proceeded to Wick and Aberdeen. The next month, she went north again, to Helmsdale, then back to Cromarty, Invergordon and '**Fort Rose**' and across the Moray Firth to Fort George. Between November and January (1911), *Ringdove* cruised between Fort George, Inverness, Invergordon, '**Fort Rose**', Aberdour, Aberdeen, Helmsdale, Macduff and Buckie. *Ringdove* continued about 'Fort Rose', Golspie, Inverness, Invergordon, Peterhead and Aberdeen before returning to Devonport in March. *HMS Ringdove* was a **Redbreast Class** of gunboat and was composite in that she was built of iron and wood. The class dates from 1888 and was barquentine rigged but with a steam engine capable of driving her at 13 Knots. *Ringdove* became a salvage vessel on 7 December 1915, renamed *Melita*. She was sold to the Ship Salvage Corporation on 22 January 1920-and renamed *Telima*; she was broken up in the second quarter of 1926.



HMS Sparrow – a sister ship to *HMS Ringdove*(archive)

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The fleet (**2nd Destroyer Flotilla**) was certainly off Fortrose in the summer of **1912**.



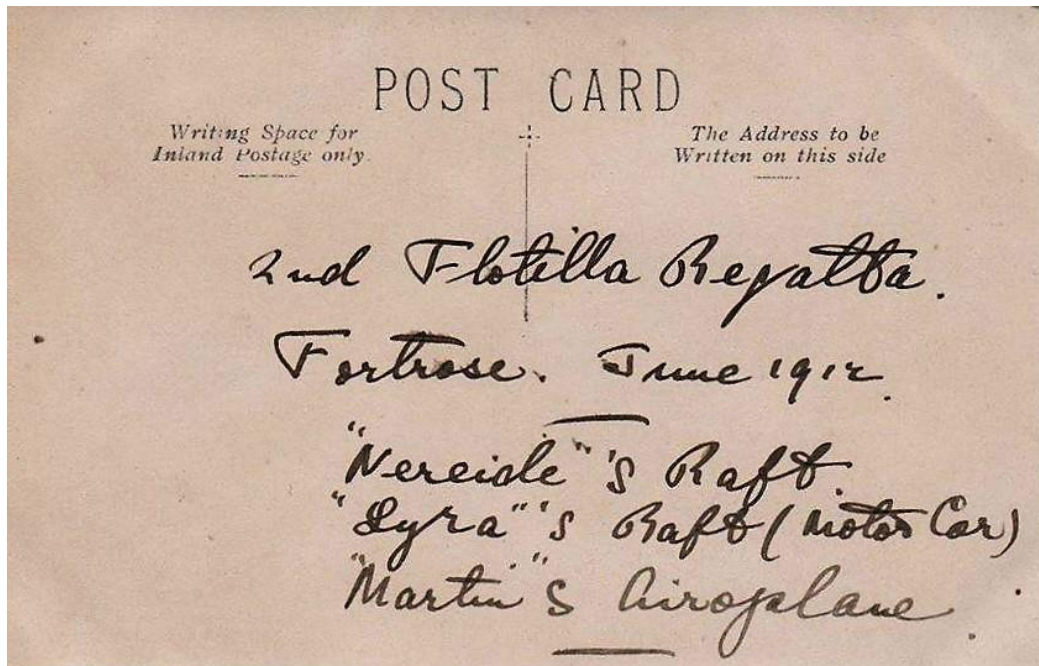
This post card shows a raft race with the nearest 'monster' raft displaying a placard with 'Our Navy 700 Years (missing 'Ago?')'



3

HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 5

The photo could have been taken almost anywhere but the reverse is annotated:



The names are of 3 Acorn class destroyers: *HMSs Nereide, Lyra and Martin*, all part of the 2nd Flotilla in 1912.



HMS Lyra (Acorn class – archive photo)

Returning to the photo on page 3,



HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 5

it is possible that the destroyers in the picture are Acorn class destroyers so could this also be from 1912?

Records of **bicycle hire by sailors** from the premises just behind 'Quay House' (see Part 3) gives details of the naval vessels anchored of **Fortrose in 1913** in August & September. In all **44 vessels** are named! From the cycle hire records, it seems that the vessels came and departed the moorings in groups (probably destroyer flotillas) and were almost certainly involved in the Grand Fleet manoeuvres of the summer of 1913. While 44 vessel names can be identified in a 2-month period, not all entries in the hire records are decipherable (part of the challenge is in recognizing what might be a ship's name – for example *HMS Scourge*, *HMS Grasshopper* or *HMS Racoon* – but these are the names of real ships whose sailors hired cycles at the harbour) and of course some vessels may not have had cyclists among their crew and therefore are not recorded.

On **2 August**, sailors from *HMS Amethyst*, *Aquarius* & *TBs 25, 26 & 32* (torpedo boats) all hired cycles.



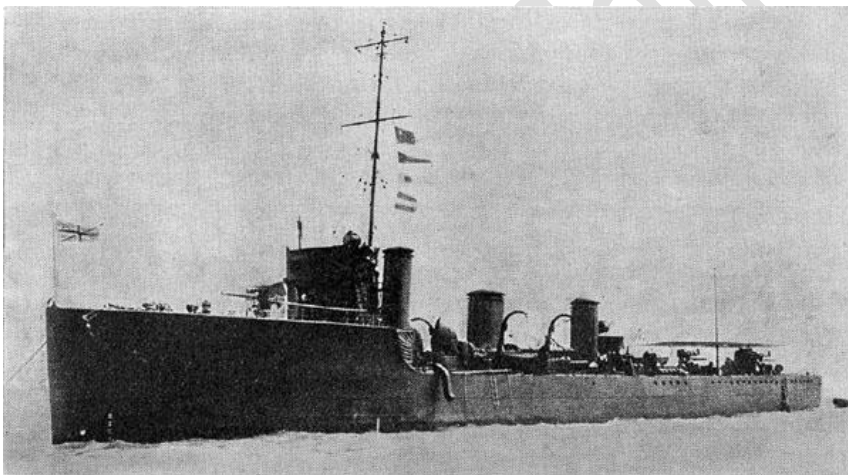
HMS Amethyst, a Topaze Class protected cruiser (archive)

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Torpedo Boat 32 (archive)

On **23 August** it was the turn of sailors from *HMS Nubian*, *Spitfire*, *Maori*, *Shark*, *Acasta*, *Hecla* & *Zulu*.



HMS Shark (archive)

HMS Acasta, *Shark* & *Spitfire* were Acasta class destroyers. *HMS Shark* was sunk at the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916.

HMS Nubian and *Zulu* were Tribal class destroyers and had a rather intimate future as a result of *Nubian's* bows being destroyed by a German torpedo while *Zulu* had her stern blown off by a mine!

HMS Nubian was a Royal Navy Tribal-class destroyer. She was launched in 1909 and torpedoed in 1916. With her bows blown off, the wreck was used to create a new ship by joining the bows of another

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damaged destroyer of the same class, **HMS Zulu**. The resulting ship was given the portmanteau name **Zubian**. She went on to sink the U-boat **UC-50** in 1918 and was scrapped in 1919.⁴



Tribal Class Destroyer (HMS Amazon - archive)

Saturday 2nd August 1913

No.	Name	Ship	Dep. Time	No.	Name	Ship	Dep. Time
1	Guan		5/- 1-30	11	A. Willett	Amethyst	5/- 4-30
2	Edwards	Amethyst	5/- 1-30	12	B. P. P. Lyth	Amethyst	5/- 6-30
3	W. H. Anderson	"	5/- 1-30	13	L. H. L. L.	Amethyst	5/- 6-30
4	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	14	A. Campbell	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
5	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	15	A. Campbell	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
6	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	16	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
7	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	17	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
8	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	18	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
9	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	19	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
10	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	20	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
21	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	22	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
23	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	24	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
25	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	26	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
27	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	28	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
29	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	30	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
31	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	32	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
33	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	34	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
35	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	36	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
37	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	38	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
39	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	40	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
41	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	42	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
43	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	44	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
45	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	46	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
47	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	48	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
49	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	50	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
51	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	52	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
53	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	54	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
55	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	56	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
57	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	58	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
59	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	60	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
61	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	62	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
63	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	64	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
65	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	66	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
67	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	68	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
69	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	70	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
71	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	72	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
73	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	74	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
75	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	76	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
77	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	78	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
79	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	80	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
81	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	82	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
83	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	84	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
85	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	86	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
87	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	88	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
89	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	90	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
91	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	92	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
93	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	94	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
95	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	96	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
97	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	98	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30
99	W. J. L. L.	"	5/- 1-30	100	W. J. L. L.	Factory Road, Amethyst	5/- 6-30

A typical page from the cycle hire register⁵

⁴ From Wikipedia

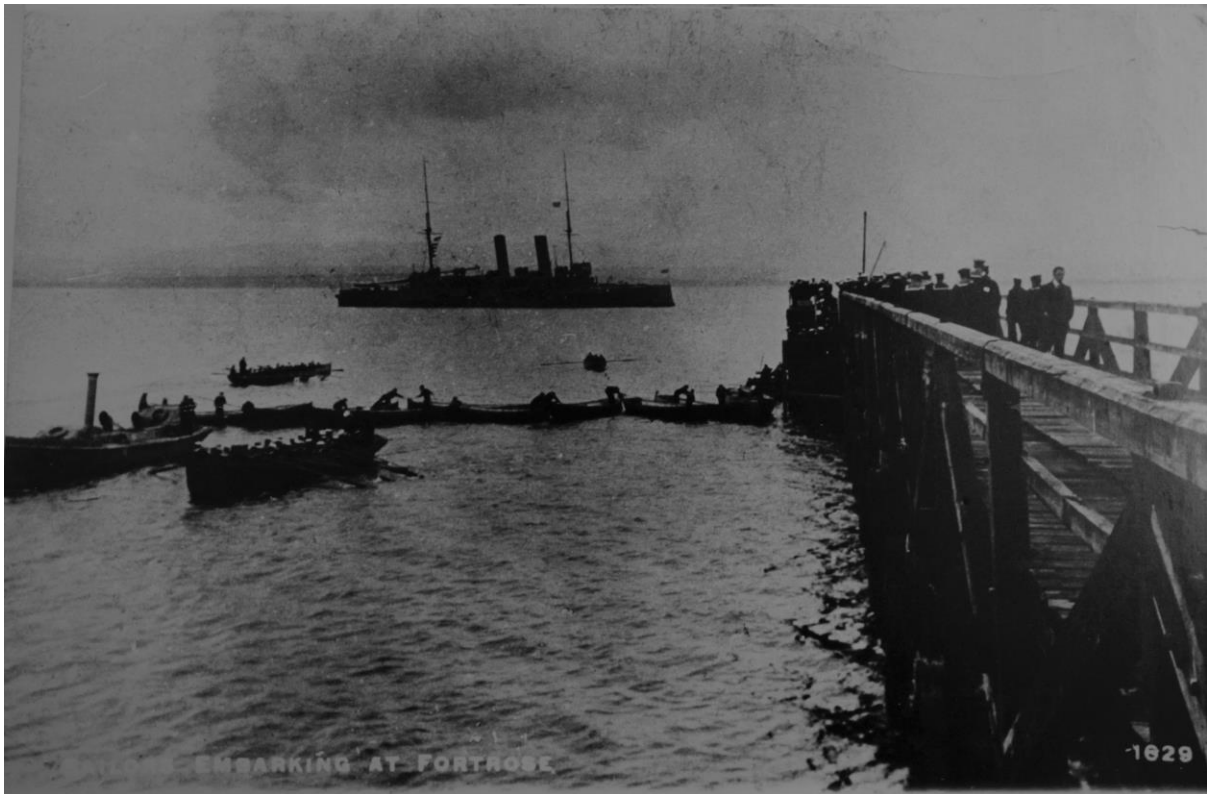
⁵ From Groam House Museum archives

HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 5

HMS Blenheim was originally a Blake Class first class protected cruiser launched in 1890 but re-designated a destroyer depot ship in 1908. Some of her crew hired cycles on **Sunday, 14 September 1913** together with sailors from a number of Beagle class destroyers.

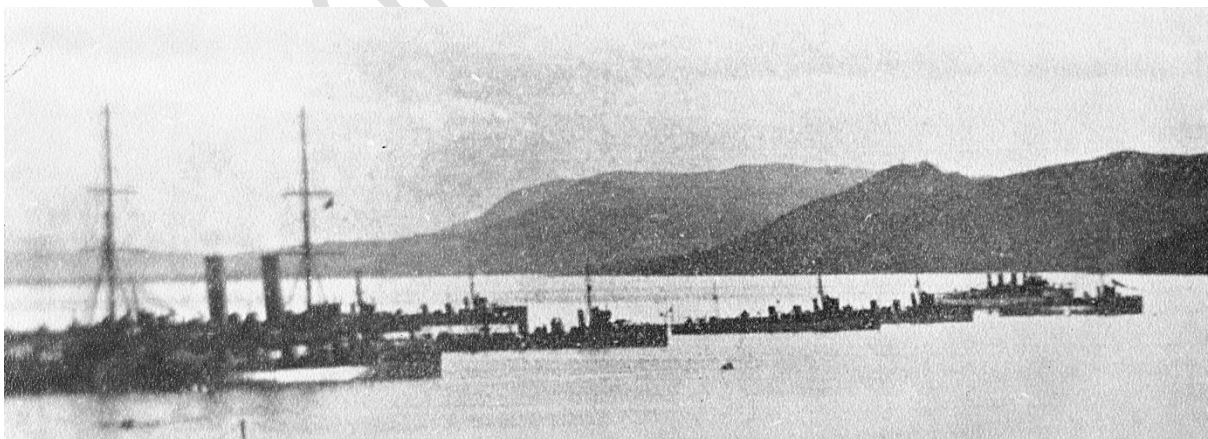
Saturday 14 th 1913					Sunday 15 th 1913				
No	Name	Ship	Dep	Time	No	Name	Ship	Dep	Time
86	Young	Plantain	7	1-30	47	Landier	Plantain	5	5-00
82	Bill	"	7	"	86	Barker	Plantain	5	6-00
85	Leane	Racon	5	"	81	Barr	"	5	"
84	John	"	5	"	21	Ryan	Plantain	5	6-30
83	James	Grasshopper	5	1/2	48	Barrie	"	5	"
82	James	Grasshopper	5	1/2	54	Richardson	Plantain	5	6-30
84	Stephen	Grasshopper	5	1/2	38	Archibald	"	5	6-30
Sunday 14 th 1913					11	Byford	"	5	6-30
14	St. Humphrey	Foxhound	5	2-0	36	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. Andrew	Nautilus	5	1-30	49	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. John	"	5	2-0	133	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. James	"	5	2-0	12	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. George	"	5	2-0	28	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. Michael	"	5	2-0	10	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. Peter	"	5	2-0	25	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. Paul	"	5	2-0	74	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. John	"	5	2-0	44	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. James	"	5	2-0	Tuesday 16 th Sept 1913				
14	St. George	"	5	2-0	49	Wells	Plantain	5	6-30
14	St. Michael	"	5	2-0					
14	St. Peter	"	5	2-0					
14	St. Paul	"	5	2-0					
14	St. John	"	5	2-0					
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14	St. Peter	"	5	2-0					
14	St. Paul	"	5	2-0		</			

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This photo shows scores of sailors embarking off the pier with a Blake class depot ship in the background.

The large 2 mast, 2 funnelled, ship in the 'Jolly Boat' picture (page 2) could possibly be *HMS Blenheim* (ie in 1913) or *HMS Blake* (depot ship for the 2nd Flotilla in 1912).

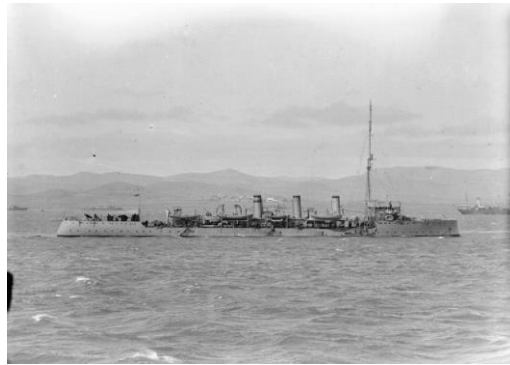


The other ship's name on the same page is *HMS Forward*, the **3rd Destroyer Flotilla fleet leader in June 1913** and a scout cruiser with 3 funnels; possibly the distant ship above.

HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 5

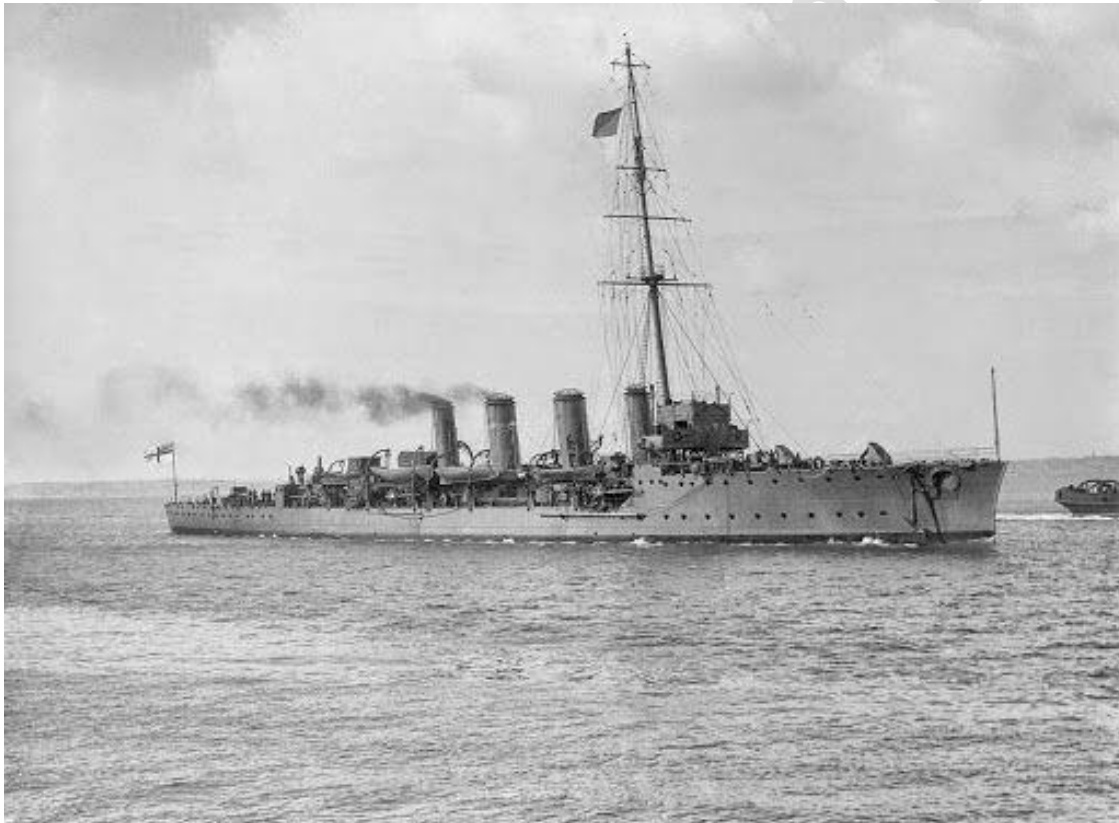


Beagle Class destroyer



HMS Forward (archive photos)

Alternatively, the cruiser could be **HMS Active** known to be the 2nd Destroyer Flotilla leader in 1914 and possibly also in 1912; while she has 4 funnels and the cruiser in the image above looks to have only 3, the forward funnel was narrower and close to the bridge:



HMS Active (archive photo)

HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 5

The cycle hire records continue to the end of September 1913 with most activity at weekends. Other ships' names recorded are *Achates*, *Afridi*, *Amazon*, *Ambuscade*, *Basilisk*, *Beagle*, *Bulldog*, *Cockatrice*, *Contest*, *Cossack*, *Crusader*, *Lurcher*, *Mohawk*, *Mosquito*, *Oak*, *Pincher*, *Renard*, *Ringdove*, *Saracen*, *Scourge*, *Swift*, *Tartar* & *Wolverine*.

For ease of reference the **full list of vessels identified in the 1913 hire records are tabulated below** alphabetically.

Name	Class	Notes
<i>Acasta</i>	Acasta Class Destroyer later 'K' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913
<i>Achates</i>	Acasta Class Destroyer later 'K' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913
<i>Afridi</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913
<i>Amazon</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	
<i>Ambuscade</i>	Acasta Class Destroyer later 'K' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913
<i>Amethyst</i>	Topaze Class Protected Cruiser	
<i>Aquarius</i>	Built 1902 as <i>Hamstead</i> became destroyer depot ship in 1907	
<i>Basilisk</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913
<i>Beagle</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla July 1913
<i>Blenheim</i>	Blake Class Protected Cruiser becoming destroyer depot ship 1908	Probably the depot ship for the 3 rd Destroyer Flotilla
<i>Bulldog</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913
<i>Cockatrice</i>	Acasta Class Destroyer later 'K' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913
<i>Contest</i>	Acasta Class Destroyer later 'K' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913. Torpedoed & sunk by U boat in Western Approaches 18 September 1917
<i>Cossack</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913
<i>Crusader</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	

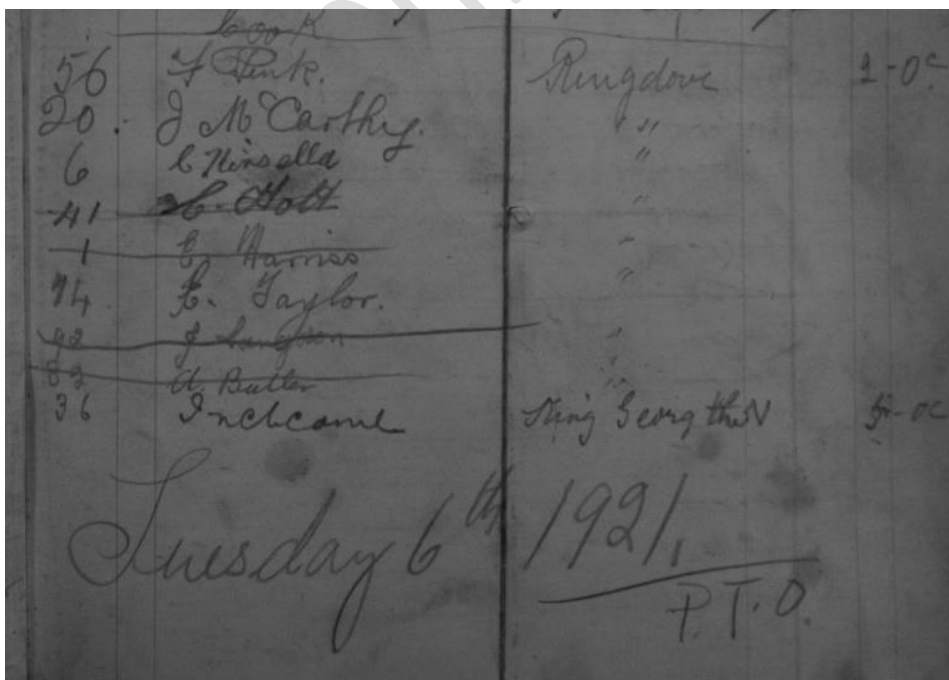
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Name	Class	Notes
<i>Forward</i>	Forward Class Scout Cruiser	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla fleet leader June 1913
<i>Foxhound</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913
<i>Ghurkha</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla in 1913
<i>Harpy</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913
<i>Hecla</i>	Built 1878 as <i>British Crown</i> modernized in 1912 and became destroyer depot ship	
<i>Lurcher</i>	Acheron Class Destroyer late 'I' class modified	<i>Lurcher</i> & <i>Oak</i> were 2 of 3 modified 'Acherons' capable of greater speed (<i>Lurcher</i> could make 35 kts!)
<i>Maori</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	Sunk by mine 7 May 1915
<i>Mohawk</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	
<i>Mosquito</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913
<i>Nautilus</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913
<i>Nubian</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	Damaged by torpedo 26/27 October 1916 – became part of HMS <i>Zubian</i>
<i>Oak</i>	Acheron Class Destroyer late 'I' class modified	<i>Lurcher</i> & <i>Oak</i> were 2 of 3 modified 'Acherons' capable of greater speed
<i>Pincher</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid-1913. Wrecked 24 July 1918
<i>Racoon</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid-1913. Wrecked 9 January 1918
<i>Renard</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913
<i>Saracen</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	
<i>Scorpion</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913
<i>Scourge</i>	Beagle Class Destroyer later 'G' class	3 rd Destroyer Flotilla mid 1913

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Name	Class	Notes
<i>Shark</i>	Acasta Class Destroyer later 'K' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913. Sunk Battle of Jutland 31 May 1916
<i>Sparrowhawk</i>	Acasta Class Destroyer later 'K' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913. Sunk Battle of Jutland 1 June 1916
<i>Spitfire</i>	Acasta Class Destroyer later 'K' class	4 th Destroyer Flotilla 1913
<i>Swift</i>	Destroyer Leader – unique class	Possibly 4th Destroyer Flotilla fleet leader in 1913
<i>Zulu</i>	Tribal Class Destroyer later 'F' class	Damaged mine 8 November 1916 – became part of HMS <i>Zubian</i>
<i>TB25</i>	Torpedo Boat	
<i>TB26</i>	Torpedo Boat	
<i>TB32</i>	Torpedo Boat	

The 3rd Destroyer Flotilla ships make up most of the names recorded for the 2 weeks following 14 September 1913 with *Blenheim* & *Forward* appearing frequently along with most of the rest of the Beagle Class destroyers. *HMS Ringdove* appears as almost the last vessel in 1913 to permit sailors to hire bicycles but intriguingly the very last entry before the page takes a break until "Tuesday 6th 1921" (probably September from later entries) is for "**King George the V**" which as a super-dreadnought would be an unlikely visitor!



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THE FIRST WORLD WAR

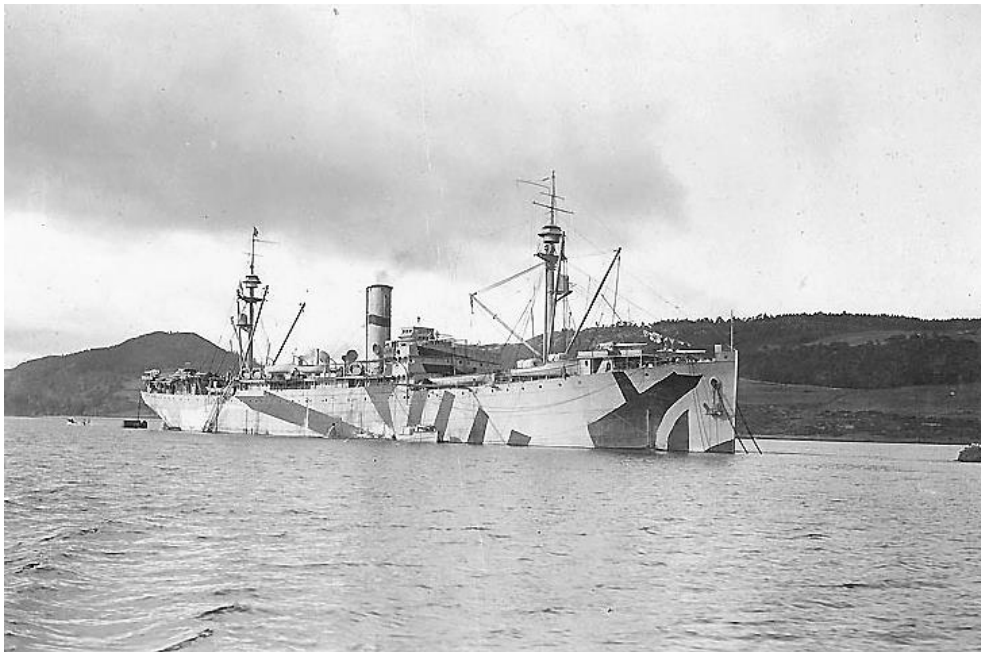
The major force that was known to use the Firth in world War One was **Mine Squadron One, United States Navy**, dual based in Inverness (US Naval Base 18) and Invergordon (US Naval Base 17) in 1918. Mine Squadron One began operations in June 1918 to lay a barrage of mines 200 miles long and 30 miles wide across the North Sea (the Northern Barrage) from Orkney to Norway aimed at sinking German submarines. While the larger mine laying force was US Navy (capable of laying 6000 mines at one 'planting' – each mine containing 300 lbs of TNT) it was directly protected by a flotilla of British destroyers (the 14th Destroyer Flotilla) and screened by battleships and cruisers of the Grand Fleet. Operations were completed in late October 1918 just in time for the Armistice (11 November 1918). Much of 1919 was taken-up with a joint sweeping operation to remove the mines.

Fortrose pier had been visited in late 1917 by a Royal Navy committee preparing for the arrival of the US Navy and was considered to be in too bad a state of repair to use. Nevertheless, US Navy ships would have been very visible from the harbour using a number of mooring buoys. Captain Belknap USN records in his book 'The Yankee Minelaying Squadron' that

'bands from our bases and from the San Francisco were in great demand through all the neighboring country....After the Black Isle fete, at the ancient little town of Fortrose, the manager wrote that the San Francisco's band had bought in £27 from the sale of programs alone, and the whole intake was more than double the previous year's'.

It is likely that the band would have arrived by boat and used the harbour. 'Liberty' from the moored ships would most probably have been via the harbours of Avoch and Fortrose.

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This is the *USS Black Hawk* moored between Munloch Bay & Avoch. She was the depot ship and the flagship for the US admiral (photo USN).

It would seem likely that the pre-war anchorage off Fortrose would have been used occasionally by the Royal Navy. This is corroborated by George Taylor's recollections of his mother, Catherine Gordon, who was a Post Office Telegraphist working in the Fortrose Post office from 1916. George recalled her telling him that the sailors would call in for the Fleet Mail. One of the ship's names, ***HMS Curacoa***, had stuck in George's memory because his mother told him that the sailors had trouble pronouncing it. *HMS Curacoa* was a Ceres Class cruiser of 4300 tons built by HM Dockyard Pembroke and launched on 5th May 1917. After completion on 18th February 1918 she served with the 5th Light Cruiser Squadron, Harwich Force. She had a tragic ending in World War Two in late 1942 when she was sliced in two and sunk by the liner *RMS Queen Mary* that she was escorting.



HMS Curacoa (archive photo)

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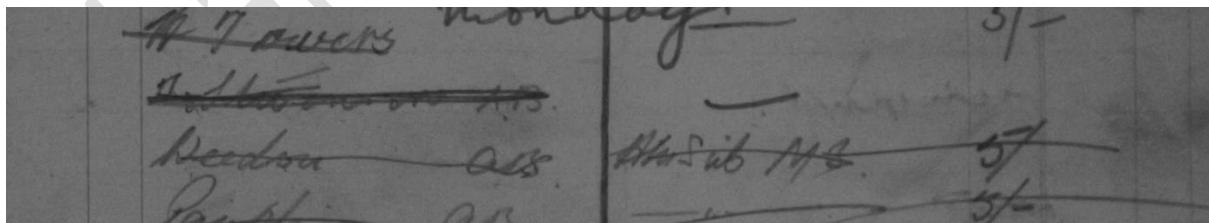
BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

The bicycle hire book re-starts on **6 September 1921**. The first ship recorded is *HMS Maidstone*. *Maidstone* was a depot ship dating from 1912. On the 18 September *HMS Alecto* joins *Maidstone*. *Alecto* was another depot ship; laid down in 1911 she was eventually scrapped in 1949. *HMS Pandora* appears on 24 September 1921 alongside further entries from *Maidstone* & *Alecto*. *HMS Pandora* was yet another depot ship dating from before World War 1 originally the *Seti* (1902). She was renamed *HMS Dolphin* in 1924 and sunk by a mine in 1939 (at the time she was under tow and destined to be sunk as block ship at Scapa Flow). In 1921 she was a **submarine depot ship** and it is probable that *Maidstone* & *Pandora* were also submarine depot ships at this time. Also, on 24 September there are hires by sailors from *K2* and *K12*. These were '**K**' **Class submarines** laid down in 1916 and scrapped in 1926.



K2 (archive)

The next day there is an entry for a sailor from *HM Sub M(3?)*:



And a clearer entry on 27 September 1921 for **M1** together with several 'Ks'.

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[illegible]

M1 was one of 4 submarines built during World War 1 with a **12-inch gun** designed to be used against surface ships. She was nearly 300 feet long and was sunk with the loss of all hands in 1925 following a collision of Start Point with a surface vessel while she was submerged.



M1 (archive)

HMS Inconstant also appears on **24 September** and was an Arethusa Class light cruiser from 1914. After World War 1 she was attached to the **1st Submarine Flotilla** until February 1922.

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Arethusa Class light cruiser (archive)

Other submarines recorded in October 1921 are **K6, H52 & M2**. On 5 November 1921, *HMS Caledon* is recorded for the first time. *HMS Caledon* was a 'C' Class light cruiser (Caledon group) laid down in 1916. She saw active service in both World Wars. In August 1921 she was re-commissioned for the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron so it is not clear why she was present with what appears to be the 1st Submarine Flotilla.



HMS Caledon (archive)

On 9 November 1921, the cycle hire record is annotated "**Pandora sailed 0830 am**". The immediate following entries are for soldiers: 2nd Gordons, 2nd Seaforths, from Fort George and the next date is "Apr 8" (presumably 1922).

In **1922** starting in April there is a single entry for **HMS Conquest** followed by numerous entries for **HMS Pandora** evidently back again.

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HMS Pandora? with submarines rafted (archive)

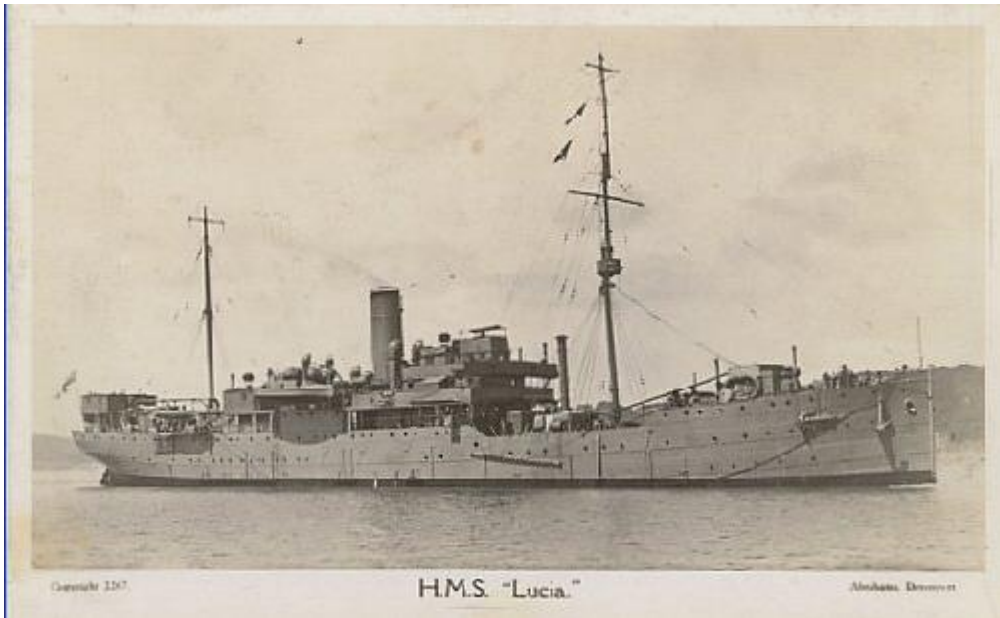
HMS Conquest was, like *Caledon*, a 'C' Class light cruiser and dated from 1915. The 'C' Class was a group of different 7 different types of light cruiser and *Conquest* belonged to the Caroline group which had 3 funnels unlike the *Caledon* group's 2 funnels.



HMS Conquest (archive)

Conquest had been re-commissioned in February 1922 to be the **flagship of the 1st Submarine Flotilla**. On Thursday, **31 August 1922**, *HMS Lucia* is recorded. *HMS Lucia* was another submarine depot ship that had started life as a civilian vessel in 1907 as the *Spreewald* liner of the Hamburg-Amerika line and had been captured in 1914 and converted to submarine depot duties. She survived World War Two despite being bombed by Japanese aircraft in 1942. She was retired in 1946 and broken in 1951.

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HMS Lucia (archive)

There were no submarines recorded in 1922.

From this point in the records, cycle hires are by civilians and soldiers from Fort George (who would be able to use the ferry from Ardersier to Chanonry Point). The next and last ships' names in the records (which then have an entry of fuel for the ferryman, Chanonry Point before skipping to garage records from 1939) appear on or after 19 September and are *Viceroy* and *Voyager* and one other entry that has yet to be deciphered (see below):

No	Name	Ship	Depo Time
13	V Swallow	Reg	5/-
9	M Keller	HB	5/-
	B. Sawyer		
	G. Ireland		
	G. Gundersen		
	G. Smith		
	J. Brown		
	B. Brown		
	Bairns		
	Johns		
	Green		
	Victory		5/-
	Victory		5/-
	Minnie		5/-
	Minnie		5/-
	Minnie	LT	5/-
	Minnie		5/-
	Wager		
	Wager		
	Wager		
	Wager		

What is the ship's name that appears 4 times in a row between *Viceroy* & *Voyager*?

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HMS Viceroy & Voyager were closely related destroyers from World War 1. *Viceroy* was a 'V' class destroyer and *Voyager* started build as a 'V' class but was completed with triple rather than double torpedo tubes and was officially designated 'W' class.

Could *Viceroy*, *Voyager* and the undeciphered third ship be the subject of the intriguing photo below?



HMS *Viceroy* (archive)



Unidentified destroyer from above

Is the structure in the water (with the hand drawn arrow on the original) the outer landing stage – minus the rest of the pier? For comparison:

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If this is correct it would place the partial destruction of the pier before 1927 as previously thought.

The picture⁶ below is also a bit of a mystery. The pier is visible in the background. Could the vessel be a naval steam pinnace or picket boat?



⁶ D Pocock Collection (Davidson Silver Tone Ideal Series)
Third revision, March 2021
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THE SECOND WORLD WAR



In August 1939 – the 14 000 ton Polish liner *M/S Pilsudski* of the Gdynia – America Line diverts to the Inverness Firth on a voyage from New York because of the threat of war, and anchors off Fortrose. She was fully lit at night and her band could be heard playing on the deck. She departed (for Rosyth) on 1 September 1939 as Poland was invaded. She was converted to a troop carrier on the Tyne and was sunk on 25 November 1939 off Yorkshire by 2 German magnetic mines.

George Taylor, living close to the harbour at Craigwood, was 9 years old when war was declared in **September 1939** and remembered listening to the Prime Minister's broadcast on the wireless⁷ informing the nation that yet again we were at war with Germany. He recalled the town soon filling with troops and empty houses and hotels were requisitioned as accommodation. However, it was 1943 before the harbour was to have an active role.

From March 1943 to August 1944 the harbour was part of **HMS Monster** supporting secretive combined operations training for the D-Day Landings. The Captain of HMS Monster and Captain Landing Craft Bases, North, is listed as **John Ignatius Hallett CBE DSO** (1886 – 1969). Captain Hallett had joined the RN in 1905 and was awarded the DSO in 1917 for action against enemy submarines. He retired in 1932 but was recalled in 1939. After command of an armed cruiser which had to be abandoned on fire in heavy weather in the North Atlantic, he served in Singapore before becoming The Naval Officer In-Charge at Chittagong (Ceylon, now Sri Lanka) where he earned a Mention in Despatches for bravery followed by the CBE 'for zealous and valuable service'.

⁷ Recalled during reminiscence recording on 6 December 2011

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This is from the Burgh minutes (HAC):

16 Dec 43 (meeting as Harbour Commissioners). Following the Town Council Meeting the Council sat as Harbour Commissioners and had submitted to them letter from the Senior Surveyor of Lands the Admiralty intimating that the whole of Fortrose Harbour was required to meet urgent Naval needs. The Commissioners instructed the Clerk to intimate that they had no objection to the issuing of a formal Requisition Notice under the Defence Regulation.

There was a lot of road traffic:

13 Mar 44 Traffic Regulation. The Clerk reported that the Officer Commanding of the R.M.E. Detachment had suggested that the Shore Road between Mackenzie Lodge and Fortrose Jetty be made a one-way street in order to avoid trouble at the blind corner half-way down the hill. The Council agree that this was a good proposal and recommended it accordingly to the Magistrates.

Serial	Beach	Number of Berths Available.	Time each Berth is Available. (Hrs.)	Number of Craft which can be loaded per tide.*	Number of Vehicles which can be loaded per tide.	REMARKS.
1 A	NIGG(East)	2	6	8	80	Some swell on a calm day. Exposed. Strong currents close inshore. Rocks both ends.
1 B	NIGG(West)	3	6	12	120	Loading not quite dryshod at L.W. (1'6" at door). Pier can be used for L.C.L. at all stages of tide. Sand. Could be increased to 3 berths if approaches are made. Naval camp blocks way. Sand.
2 A	CROMARTY (East)	2	6	8	80	Sandbar off beach. Pier to be extended 30 yds. Rocks and Shallows West of Wreck. Sand.
2 B	CROMARTY (West)	-	-	-	-	Exposed. Could be increased to 6 (2 L.C.T. between 4 and 5 and 5 and 6) if risk of damage is accepted. No loading possible in winds of force 4 or above, or in heavy swell. Small shingle. Clearance work required on posts on groynes.
3	NAIR	4	6	16	160	If tanks only, then 120 Churchills or Shermans or 48 S.P.s + 60 heavy tanks. Large shingle pebbles. Numbers will be reduced near spring tides. Low water. Owing to Proximity to fort walls which are washed near H.W. parts of beach vary. Load from 1/2 hr. before L.W. Sand.
4 A	FORT GEORGE (West)	6	6 but 4 1/2 two days either side of springs.	24	240	Loose sand near H.W. Fine sand below. Shingle approach. From 1/2 hr. before L.W. to 1/2 hr. before H.W.
	FORT GEORGE (East)	9 +4	3 1 1/2	18 4	180 40	Large shingle pebbles. Some rocks at L.W.S. From 1 hr. after L.W. to 1/2 hr. before H.W.
5 A	CHANONRY (East)	30	6	120	1200	
5 B	CHANONRY (West)	21	4 1/2	63	630	

* A loading interval of 1 1/2 hrs. has been allowed for turn round of each craft.

This is the Admiralty survey of beach capacities for loading landing craft and the bottom 2 rows show how important Chanonry Ness was.

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7. Holdfasts should be provided between strips and beach roadways wherever possible to assist in maintaining accurate beaching and to avoid delay in loading timetables if cross winds are blowing. These should be close above H.W. level and in the form of a stake or pole over which the eye of a rope may be quickly placed. In the interests of economy one midway between strips could suffice.

This refers to the pairs of mooring posts ('holdfasts') still to be seen on the Ness. They are formed from tram rails encased in concrete.



HMS Monster was supporting '**Force S**' destined to land on SWORD beach in Normandy in June 1944. Force S was headquartered in this period in Cameron Barracks, Inverness and was commanded by Rear Admiral Arthur George Talbot⁸. The 3rd Infantry Division was the main force destined to land on SWORD beach and trained extensively in the Beauly, Inverness, Cromarty and Moray firths.

There were several different types of landing craft used but the main stay was the Landing Craft Tank Mk IV and 12 of these were moored in Fortrose

⁸ From telecon R Jenner with ex WREN Jean Gadsen October 2010
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Bay. This is a description of the **LCT Mk IV** from the Combined Operations web-site⁹

'Approximately 730 Mark IV vessels were constructed in the UK. These landing craft had a hull length of 187 ft 3 in and a beam (width) of 38 ft 9 in and their displacement was 586 tons. The forward draught was 42 inches and they could carry a maximum load of 350 tons made up of five large tanks, seven medium tanks, or any other combination of military vehicles

The vessel was operated by a crew of twelve including two officers. The engines were two Paxman Ricardo diesels, each driving a 21-inch propeller. They could drive the craft at eight knots over a range of 1,100 miles. Twin rudders were provided for steering. The armament consisted of two 20 mm Oerliken guns, two Parachute and Cables (PACs) and two Fast Aerial Mines (FAMs). All of this was intended to be used defensively against aircraft attacks.'

This account evokes the teamwork need to operate these ungainly but highly effective vessels¹⁰.

'The Mk IV LCT, reverberating like a biscuit box, with five Sherman tanks jammed into her hold, their engines roaring for a sprint start, their guns, together with the oerlikons from the wings of the bridge, firing at the beach ahead. The discipline and teamwork required to deposit those five tanks on the beach, in the two or three minutes which elapsed, after the kedg anchor had been dropped, was breath-taking. The first tank was moving before the door was down, the last tank was leaving the door as it came up, and the LCT was sliding astern into deeper water.'

This is the account of a LCT Squadron Commander, **Lieutenant Commander Maxwell Miller RN**, who commanded T Squadron on D-Day which had been based at Inverness¹¹. It will strike a chord with Chanonry cruising sailors who have struggled to pick-up their mooring in strong winds or who have mis-timed the tide through the Kessock Narrows.

'I was a bit shaken, in the March of 1943, when I found myself appointed in command of a squadron of Tank Landing Craft. I was still more shaken

⁹ http://www.combinedops.com/LCT_980.htm

¹⁰ WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar. From: The Sixtieth Anniversary of D-Day: Memories of Landing Craft by friendlyjohnrushton

¹¹ From 'the Miller Report' passed to Chanonry SC by Lt Ricky Peel RNVR Ret'd

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when I saw my first vessel. It is usual for the sailor to tell the enquiring landlubber that the sharp end of a ship is the 'bows' and the blunt end the 'stern', but in the Tank Landing Craft, or LCT, you had to reverse your ideas. The stern drew in to a very narrow counter and the bows broadened out to allow for a door, hinged at the bottom edge that lowered down onto the beach and was wide enough to allow a large tank – of which the craft carried seven – to waddle out onto the beach. When I had cleared up that rather important point, I tried to take one to sea and very quickly found it wise to discover some other urgent business that forced me, reluctantly(!), to hand her over to her proper captain.

There were other peculiarities. In an ordinary ship, the propellers are large and do from thirty to one hundred and fifty revolutions a minute; moreover, if there are two of them, they turn in opposite directions to make for ease of handling. In an LCT, the propellers were small, turned at seven fifty to twelve hundred revolutions a minute and they both turned the same way! This was to help the manufacturers, but it considerably complicated the job of the captain.

If you add to this the facts that the craft was of very shallow draught and flat-bottomed so that she had very little hold on the water and sailed in a wind like a yacht and that her rudder was so small that it had no effect at all unless the propellers were turning and turning fast, it will be easy to see that taking a landing craft out of a congested harbour was no job for an orthodox naval officer. Fortunately, command of individual craft during the war was the exclusive preserve of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) and, as a very experienced salvage officer once said to me, 'The first thing I do when I get to a wreck is to send for a ship commanded by an RNVR. You can tell them to do anything you like and they don't know enough to know that it's impossible, so they go ahead and do it!' And, by Jove, if they did not do it, they were in for trouble.

In the late autumn of '43, the Admiralty started to form the three forces for the invasion of Normandy and I went to Inverness at the beginning of December to take over command of a squadron of LCT that had begun to form there. I arrived in a thick fog and drove over icebound roads to Kessock, the suburb of Inverness and there I installed my staff and myself in a group of uncompleted council houses. I suppose shells of council houses would be a more accurate description because the lack of window frames and fireplaces made rather a mockery, during that bitter winter, of the traditional staff luxury in which we were accused of indulging by the crews of my LCT moored out on the water.

In the Beaulieu Firth, a trot of buoys had been laid where the LCTs, about fifty of them, moored up in pairs with the bows of one pair touching the stern of the next, and whenever I had any time and energy left over from

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obtaining stores and fuel, organising repairs and attending planning conferences, I used to take them to sea to practise manoeuvres and station-keeping. On Christmas Eve, having about a dozen craft available, I boarded the nearest one and, slipping at about six pm, led them out to the Moray Firth for a night's exercises.

It was not a very wise move as the rising wind and the falling glass (barometer) should have warned me of the North-Easter and it made me turn back at midnight. However, it blew us home through the Inverness Firth and at about 2am we arrived at the Kessock Narrows on a full ebb tide. We had a maximum speed of some seven knots, so it took us the best part of an hour to clear the Narrows against a five and a half knot stream and then we found ourselves in Beaully Firth with the buoys somewhere away on our port bow. The night was pitch black, we were not allowed to show any lights, there was nearly a full gale blowing and a three knot tide running down the trot that had half-submerged the buoys. My own job was easy. All I had to do was to flash a signal down the line 'Secure in your previous berths', and then sit back and watch the fun, or rather, listen for the crashes because I could not see a thing. They all got there, of course. They always did. My own captain had three shots at picking up his head buoy and took the best part of two hours over it, so next day, as a Christmas present; I relieved him of his command on the grounds of inefficiency.'

Lieutenant Commander Maxwell Miller RN again on some of the peculiarities of the Mk IV LCT resulting from the need to reduce draught following the Dieppe Raid when the Mk IIIs could not get close enough in to shore:

'...it is scarcely too much to say that, if it had not been for the Mark IV LCT, the Allies would not have been in Berlin yet. Unhappily, it was the very qualities that made her such an ideal landing craft for the army that led to her dislike by the Navy. The essential thing, of course, was that she should carry the same load as her predecessors on a shallower draught and the only way to do this was to increase her beam and make her scantlings (beams/struts) lighter. The increased beam and shallower draught made her practically unmanageable in a wind and the lighter scantlings made her waggle.

That waggle was the most extraordinary thing that I have ever seen in a ship. The craft was built rather on the lines of an oil tanker. The bridges and superstructure were right aft and the tank hold stretched away forward with a narrow catwalk, about 5 feet wide, running either side as far as the forecastle which rose a few feet to make room for the heavy winches that raised and lowered the tank door. The result was that the hold formed a sort of beam with heavy weights at either end and the

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rigidity of the craft depended on the strength of the beam. In the Mark IV LCT, the beam was pretty weak, and when you steamed into a head sea, the fo'c'sle waggled at you. There was no other word for it. You could stand on the bridge and watch a ripple start at the after end of the catwalk and move forward until the whole fo'c'sle waggled. It was a most terrifying sight to anyone unfamiliar with ships and still more terrifying to someone who was familiar with them.

Of course, if you drove a craft into a head sea too hard or for too long, something had to give. What did give was the catwalk. Luckily, at the after end of the hold, there was a watertight bulkhead that stretched the whole breadth and depth of the craft because, when the catwalk split, the bows were inclined to drop off!

However, it took more than a little contretemps like that to disturb the equanimity of the RNVR. After all, as far as the crew was concerned, they were still left with a watertight bit of ship, complete with engines, propellers and rudders, and all they had to do was shore up the bulkhead and steam home, towing their bows astern of them if the weather permitted. Brought up in Harry Tate's Navy, as they had been, the crews used to view this proceeding as just one of those things that happened at sea, but the Army complained bitterly about it. Quite rightly, too, since it was their end of the ship that used to drop off.'



Model of an LCT Mk IV

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A Mk IV unloading¹²

Landing craft based at **Fortrose** were used to land troops and equipment for training on the beaches on Chanonry Ness and troops and tanks were embarked at Chanonry Point to be landed at Fort George and all along the coast to Burghead. Valentine tanks were modified to have a wading capability and disembarked from the LCTs would wade the last bit to the beach; this was very hazardous and several tanks remain underwater off the beach between Findhorn and Burghead with one of them listed as a war grave.

Arthur Walter was the First Lieutenant of an LCT based at Fortrose; this is his recollection¹³

'Regarding Fortrose Harbour, the 47th LCT Flotilla was based there from 17 February to 13 April 1944. I was a young midshipman, the first lieutenant of LCT 627, and Lieutenant John Pointon RNZNVR, was skipper. LCT 627 was the leader of the 12 craft in the flotilla and Lt Cdr Basil Cooke was the flotilla officer.

We spent a hectic two months here in intensive training, involving beaching and unbeaching, embarking and landing troops and vehicles, around the Inverness/ Cromarty / Burghead area, working up for D Day. Although based at Fortrose for two months, I remember very little of the town/village, rarely going ashore except for visits to the shore base by

¹² Photo from Nevil Shute Norway Foundation

¹³ Email Arthur Walters – R Jenner 12 October 2010

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the jetty. I don't even remember the pubs, but of course we did carry our own plentiful supply of suitable refreshment - duty free!

The military constructed a **scaffolding pier** (the jetty referred to above) during this period along the line of the original wooden pier.



This is the only known photo of the World War Two scaffolding pier. The Admiralty offered the pier to the Council after Force S had departed:

11 Dec 44 Jetty. There was submitted letter from the Admiralty Surveyor offering the Town Council the temporary jetty constructed at the Harbour for Military training purposes, the price to be a nominal one. In view of the temporary nature of the construction of the jetty and the unlikelihood of any use arising from it, the Council agreed that they could not accept the offer.

The pier (known as pier 2) was removed in 1949 by William Tawse Limited who acknowledged the receipt of £1251 from the Fortrose Burgh Council on 29 October 1949 for carrying out the work involved¹⁴.

¹⁴ Original photo and provisional order to remove the jetty with the receipt are in the Groam House Museum archives

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9B

JETTY NO. 2 - FORTROSE HARBOUR.

2 copies

No.	Description	Rate	Amount
1.	Break up and remove to point on shore concrete on steel troughing, 6" thick overall, forming decking on tee-head. 67 Sq. Yds.	15/-	50 5 - ✓
2.	Dismantle and remove to point on shore to be pointed out, all steel or iron in troughing, channels and angles in ties and bracings, etc. steel ladders, tubular hand rail timber in fenders, distance and packing pieces, etc. used in the construction of tee-head. Sum.		125 - - ✓
3.	Withdraw or cut at ground level 20 No. Box Piles 9" x 7" and remove as above. Sum.		350 - - ✓
4.	Dismantle and remove as above all angles, channels, timber decking, tubular steel in hand rails, vertical members, side braces, ties and cross braces, etc. forming approach arm. Also tapered wood pieces forming footings to sidebraces and any concrete or other material above ground level at base of vertical or side members. Sum.		800 - - ✓
	Lift, roll up and remove as above armoured lighting cable lying alongside harbour parapet and throughout length of approach arm and tee-head. Sum.		10 - - ✓
	Sum.		6 15 - ✓
	Sum.		20 - - ✓
	£		1362 - - ✓
	£		134 - - ✓
	£		1496 - - ✓
	£		225 - - ✓
	£		1271 - - ✓
			20 - - ✓
			£1251 - - ✓

No. 21071 PUBLIC WORKS CONTRACTORS, ABERDEEN 22nd October 1919.

Received from Burch of Fortrose

the sum of One Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty One Pounds

by Cheque For WILLIAM TAWSE LTD.

£ 1251: 0: 0.

Less Item 7. Provisional sum
Burch Maclean, Burch Surveyor

However, a few bits still remain on the seabed (March 2011):

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George Berry also served on LCTs at Fortrose. He joined the RN aged 17 ½ and was too young to be an Able Seaman so was rated as an Ordinary Seaman. After his seaman's course he completed a commando course in Plymouth before being sent to Scotland for Combined Operations arriving in Invergordon in February 1944 to join LCT 1067. The only problem was that no one seemed to know where LCT 1067 was and it was 2 weeks before he joined her at Fortrose. He remembers that they carried out highly secretive trials with DUKWs ('Ducks' – a Sparkman & Stephens design – more famous for America's Cup yachts) which were amphibious trucks destined to be used for the Rhine Crossings. He was billeted on board the LCT and they used the DUKW as a tender. His LCT was in the first wave to land on SWORD beach on 6 June 1944 (D-day) and he made 26 crossings with her. She was one of the LCTs to break her back – in her case off Lowestoft¹⁵

¹⁵ Telecon George Berry – R Jenner October 2010
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This recent photo (2011) shows a **brick repair** to the inside of the harbour mole. Apparently, a small landing craft, in the harbour for mechanical repairs had been started 'in gear' and struck the wall which was then repaired with brick. Allegedly George MacFarlane had been assisting with the work and was not allowed to forget the incident!

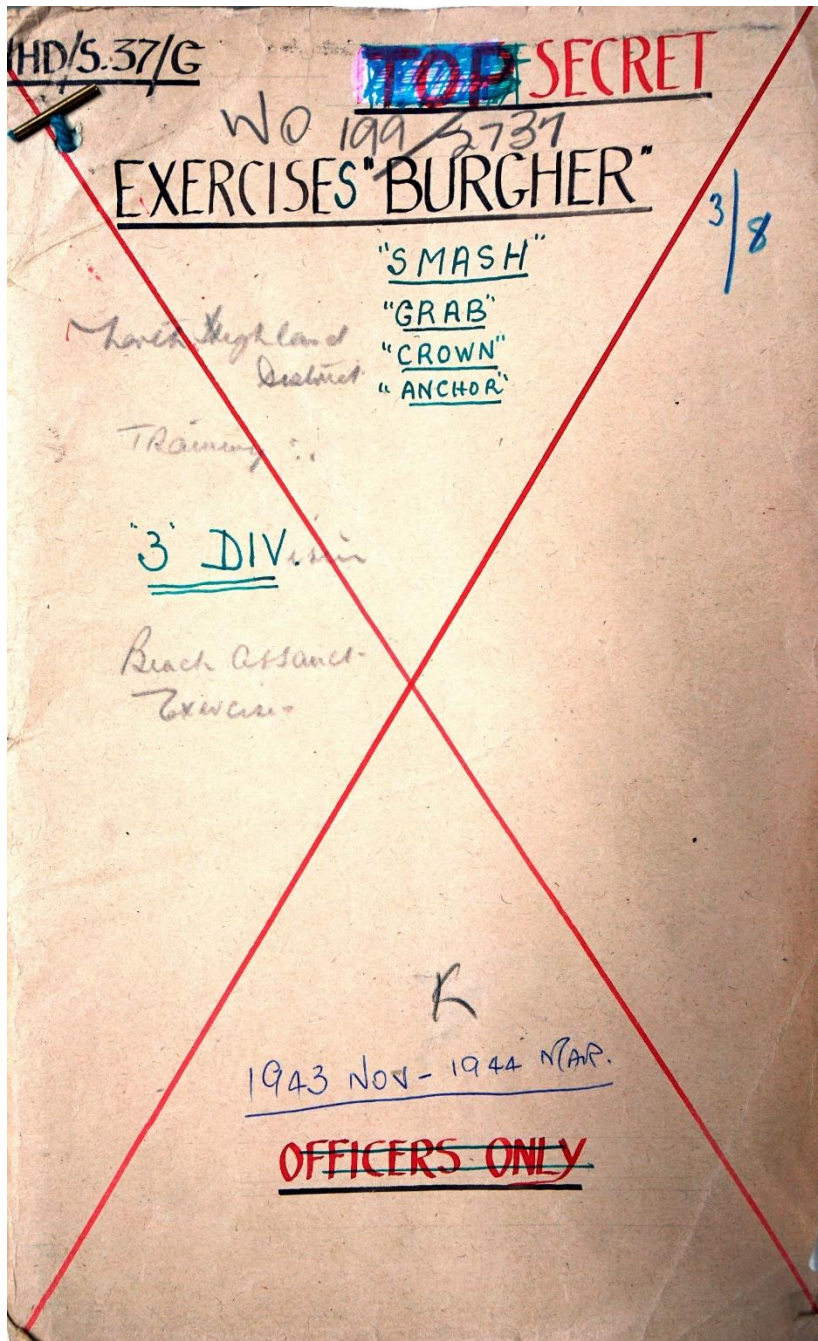
There was insufficient accommodation for LCT crews ashore, so they lived on the craft even though they had not been designed for this. **A lack of heating was a serious issue.** Lieutenant Commander Maxwell Miller RN again:

'During that bitter winter at Inverness, this [lack of heating] became such a menace to the health and comfort of the crew that stronger and stronger representations eventually persuaded the Admiralty to authorise the installation of coal-burning stoves on landing craft mess decks. I can still remember months after D-day the pleasure with which I read in Fleet Orders that these stoves were now available and would be supplied on demand. However, as the order reached me when I was sweltering in more than a hundred degrees of moist heat in the Southern India en route for Japan, I had to discourage my stores offer's enthusiasm for demanding stoves, as he said, 'just to teach the Admiralty a lesson'.'

Lieutenant Frederick (Ricky) Peel RNVR, Captain of LCT 462 based at Fortrose, remembers that winter well and the training which involved loading tanks at Fort George in the evening then steaming around the Moray Firth in the dark to simulate a long channel crossing before landing

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the tanks between Culbin and Burghead. Generally, he would be on the open bridge for 16 hours at a time. He remembers little about the town though. As he said: *'Spent months at the Trots, 1944. Hardly ever ashore at Fort Rose; too much work and what little free time was spent in Invergordon.'*¹⁶



These were the exercises – National Archives.

George Taylor also recalled a large ex-French liner called *'La Largs'* anchored off Fortrose during the D-Day work up with a communication

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cable and power cable laid to it from the army HQ in St Anne's (a requisitioned house on Canonbury Terrace)¹⁷. Research has confirmed her to be **HMS Largs**. *HMS Largs* was built in France in 1938 as the *MV Charles Plumier*, a 4504-ton fruit carrier. The French Navy requisitioned her in 1939 and converted her to an armed cruiser. She briefly returned to fruit carrying trade in 1940 after the fall of France before being appropriated by the Royal Navy in Gibraltar. She then served with the Royal Navy as *HMS Largs* until 1945. Initially she was employed as an Ocean Boarding Vessel before being redesignated as a **Landing Ship Headquarters (Large) (LSH(L))** in 1942 to provide a combined operations communications headquarters for the army, navy and air forces during landing operations until suitable alternative facilities could be established on shore. She served at most amphibious landings during World War Two and was the command vessel for SWORD beach on D-Day.¹⁸



Archive picture of *HMS Largs*¹⁹

***HMS Largs* is confirmed to have been off Fortrose on 3 occasions:**
11.2.44 - 15.3.44; 16.3.44 - 22.3.44 and 24.3.44 - 28.3.44²⁰.

After the war she was returned to France and operated under her original name until 1964 when she was sold to a Greek company as a cruise ship, renamed *MV Pleias* before retirement and the breaker's yard in 1968.

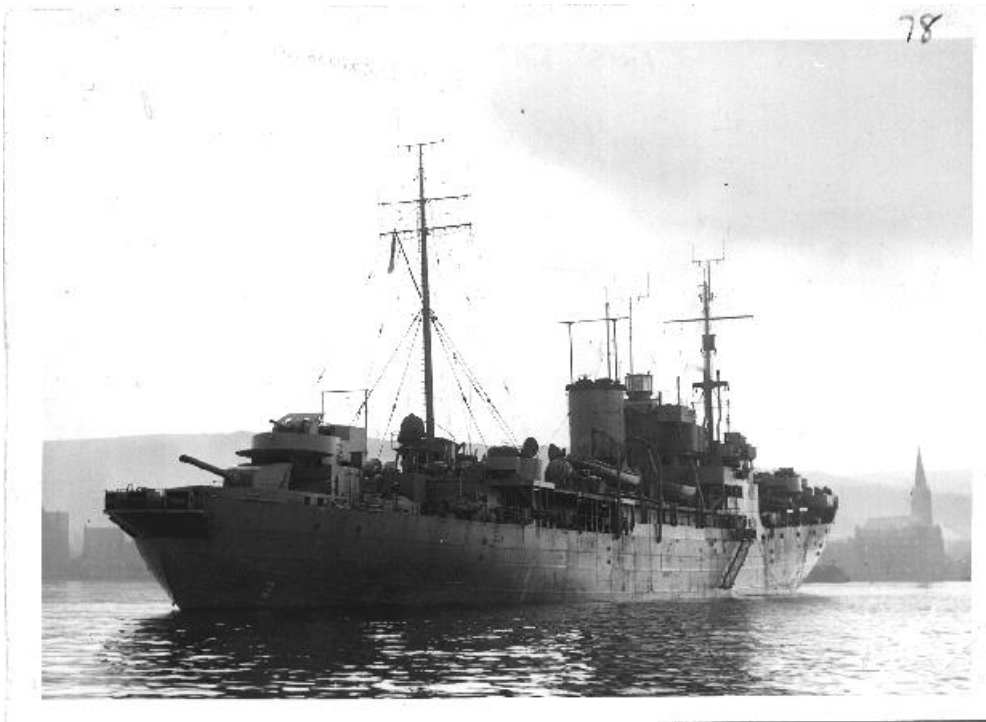
¹⁷ Recalled during reminiscence recording on 6 December 2011

¹⁸ From Mike MacKenzie, Largs and District Historical Society

¹⁹ Largs and District Historical Society

²⁰ From Mike MacKenzie, Largs and District Historical Society

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*HMS Largs off Largs*²¹

To accommodate HMS Monster and to provide some shore facilities for sailors serving on the LCTs, **Nissen huts** were constructed around the harbour and the footings of several of them are still visible in the car park (there was already one large Nissen hut present that had been built to provide ablutions for sailors on shore leave – the water outfall pipe is still visible near the top of the east slipway). The huts continued along the shore-line towards Avoch and covered the ground where Meikle Mee stands now.

George Taylor and his sister Kate (around 4 years old at the time) recalled waking up one morning in 1944 and seeing a firth suddenly empty of landing craft and other shipping; Force S had sailed south for a final work-up and D-Day. Kate also recalled that their mother who had been a Post Office Telegraphist could read the morse being flashed by lamp between the landing craft but apparently no secrets had been given away. The Moray Firth area had provided a good simulation of the passages and landing grounds for D-Day but it is also likely that their presence in Scotland contributed to **Operation FORTITUDE NORTH** which was an elaborate deception plan to convince the Germans that landings in Norway were possible. As a consequence, there were still 13 German Divisions based in Norway in the Spring of 1944.

²¹ Largs and District Historical Society
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The sailing of Force S did not mark the end on the military use of the Nissen Huts. As the end of the war in Europe approached, the huts became a **Prisoner of War (POW) camp**.

Kate Mackenzie (nee Taylor) remembers about 50 young Germans whom she didn't think had seen action. They would march to the RC Church (this may refer to the Drill Hall which became the RC Church well after WW2) on Sunday, held parties for the children (including a Christmas party) and worked on the land (*this was quite common for other ranks POWs and not against the Geneva Convention provided they did so willingly - they were paid standard workers' rates*). The Italians came later, and she remembers they made wooden toys.

One of the soldiers, Siegfried Schmit, took English lessons from Kate's mother who was considerate to the prisoners - her son Sandy was in the Seaforths and her view was she hoped someone would be kind to him if he were captured. Siegfried Schmit later became an English teacher in Germany and returned to Fortrose in 1974 and met up with the Taylor family again - they got on such good terms that Marnie Taylor went out to Germany (Waldmichelbach near Frankfurt) to visit them.

Apparently quite a few Germans did not go back home after the war (*this was not unusual if their home area had fallen under Soviet domination and they became Displaced Persons*). Kate was too young to remember precise dates but in general the first German repatriations were in 1946 so the POWs could easily have spent a couple of years in Fortrose. Once empty many of the huts were broken up with the spoil being dumped on the shoreline.

The Council made claims for compensation (from the Burgh minutes):

12 Mar 45 Harbour. Sitting as Harbour Commissioners the Council received intimation from the Admiralty that the Harbour excluding the ground occupied by huts would be released from requisition as from 2nd April, 1945, and that the requisition of the ground occupied by the Huts had been transferred to the War Department. It was agreed that a claim should be submitted for damage to wooden fenders and to the bulwark in front of the Shore houses.

9 Apr 45 Damage to the Bulwark at the Shore Fortrose:- The Council approved the lodgement of a claim amounting to £10 in respect of the damage to the concrete coping of the bulwark at the Shore, Fortrose, destroyed during Military operations.

9 Apr 45 Harbour Damage:- Sitting as Harbour Commissioners the Council approved the lodgement of a claim amounting to £57:10/- plus 6%

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Surveyor's fees plus the usual legal expenses in respect of restoring damage caused to the Harbour during operations by the Military Authorities.

9 Jul 45 Harbour. Thereafter the Council sitting as Harbour Commissioners had before them a letter from the Senior Surveyor of Lands to the Admiralty offering the sum of £46:10/- in full and final settlement of the Council's claim for compensation for damage done to the Harbour during the recent period of requisition. The Clerk was instructed to ask the Surveyor for further information regarding the sum offered.

10 Dec 45 Harbour. It was reported that the Harbour Committee had met a representative of the Surveyor of Lands from the Admiralty in order to discuss the claim for compensation in respect of damage to the Harbour amounting to £61. It was explained that part of the claim included an item of £5 for the removal of gates, posts and wire at the approaches to the Harbour which apparently was the responsibility of the Military Authorities and not of the Admiralty. The claim was thus reduced to £56. The Admiralty representative had offered a lump sum of £50 to which he subsequently added £2:10/- for Engineer's Fees making a total of £52:10/-. [accepted in full & final payment]. It was explained that on the occasion of the Admiralty representative's visit his attention had been drawn to the accumulation of sand at the mouth of the Harbour due to the sinking of a barge during the Invasion Exercises and probably added to since by the Admiralty jetty acting as a groin. [Admiralty suggests to remove sand with one of their dredgers] However: 14 April 47, the Admiralty are unable to dredge the harbour but offer £100 in compensation which was accepted

9 Sep 46 Bathing rafts. It was agreed to offer the Admiralty the sum of £4 for four rafts lying at Fortrose which were regarded as suitable for the use of bathers at Fortrose and Rosemarkie.



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The **war surplus motor torpedo boat** in the harbour belonged to Raymond Graves. She was a Fairmile 'D' type (with a length of 115 feet) and had no engines; he hoped to convert her into a houseboat. She had seen war time service with the Norwegian Navy based in Shetland who would disrupt shipping off the coast of Norway or land or extract agents. She was removed from the harbour around 1956 when the present sailing club formed. This photo²² dates between 1949 when the harbour store was demolished and 1956 when the first bungalow was built. If you look carefully at the Club car park today you can see the brick and concrete bases for the 3 Nissen huts in the picture.

After the war the large Nissen hut closest to the harbour wall was used a fire station from 1948 – 68.



Harbour with a Nissen hut used by the Fire Service.