

### Potters Bar and H.M.S. Poppy

Throughout the Second World War, The National Savings Movement encouraged the people of Britain to save their money by buying Savings Stamps, National Savings Certificates, War and Defence Bonds, and saving in Trustee Savings Bank and Post Office Savings Bank accounts. The main reason for encouraging this was to stop people spending money. If they were saving, then they were not spending, and this meant that there was less panic/bulk buying and supplies remained available longer in shops; ships would have more room for essential materials instead of carrying unnecessary items but the biggest reason was to stop inflation. When goods become scarce, prices go up, which leads to more panic buying and the whole thing escalates.



Another reason for saving, and the motive for most people in taking part in the savings campaign, was that all of the money saved, either in stamps, certificates, bonds or savings accounts in the two savings banks, was put at the disposal of the government for them to spend on buying war materials, such as aircraft, tanks, ships, ammunition, in fact anything that they needed in order to win the war. This money was not a donation, it was a loan, and people could withdraw their savings, or cash in their saving certificates or bonds when they needed to, and with interest. This meant their savings were safe, even though it was at the disposal of the government.

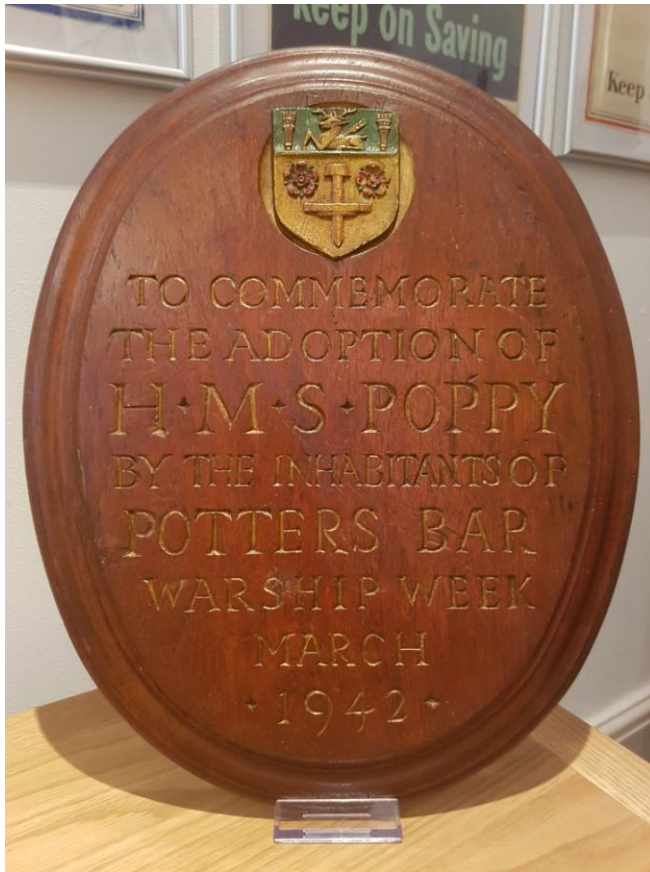
Although the savings campaign continued throughout the war, (it actually ran from 1916 to 1978), each year during the war there was a special savings week organised, in order to energise the public's interest by giving them a specific target to save for in that week, and compete against other Savings Groups in towns and cities throughout the country. Each Savings Group

chose its own week for the campaign that fell within the dates set down by the National Committee, so not all places campaigned in the same week. Billions of pounds was saved by people during the war, although the government would have ordered, for example, Spitfires, whether they had the money or not, being paid for after the war on a contract basis with interest. That however is another story.

The Savings Week Campaigns were as follows:

- 1941: War Weapons Week – To purchase any type of armament.
- 1942: Warship Week – to buy ships and equipment for the Royal Navy.
- 1943: Wings for Victory Week – To buy aircraft and equipment for the RAF.
- 1944: Salute the Soldier Week – To buy tanks, guns and equipment for the Army.
- 1945: Thanksgiving Week – To help rebuild Britain after the war.

This story concerns Warship Week, I will cover the other campaigns in future articles. Corvettes were a very popular ship for Savings Committees, they were large enough to be a lot more impressive than a trawler or motor torpedo boat, but they were not so big that they were out of the reach of smaller villages and towns. Also, Corvettes were in great demand by the Royal Navy as their main job was that of convoy escort and hunting down U-Boats. Convoys were Britain's lifeline, delivering food and war materials from North America and the Navy needed all the escorts it could get.



Potters Bar is a town in Hertfordshire, about thirteen miles north of Central London. They had a Corvette as their 'Warship' Week target in March 1942, which they set at £120,000. It has been my very good luck to have recently acquired a wooden plaque which was made at the successful conclusion of Potters Bar's Week, to be presented to the crew of their adopted Corvette, H.M.S. Poppy.

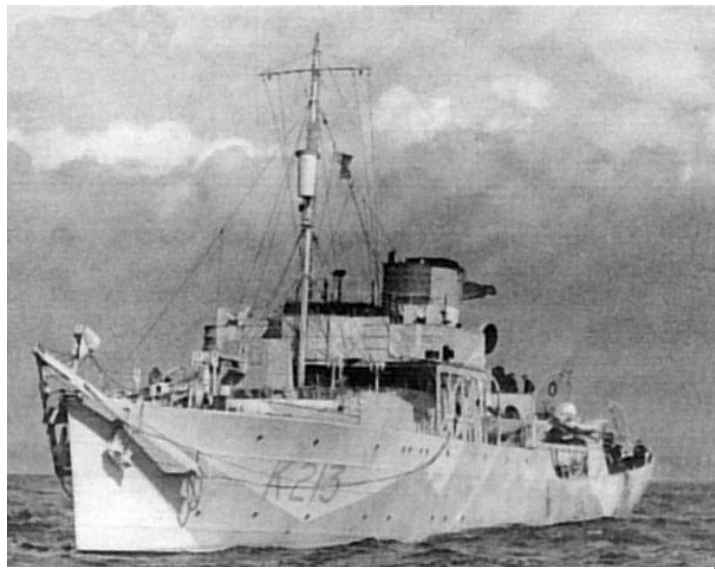
The plaque (*left*), carries the Potters Bar crest and reads, 'To Commemorate the Adoption of H.M.S. POPPY by the Inhabitants of Potters Bar Warship Week March 1942.' While researching this plaque I came across an account written by John Beardmore who was Navigating Officer on Board H.M.S. Poppy during the war. John wrote about his service on the ship, and I have copied a small section of his story *below*, which gives some interesting detail regarding the plaque. H.M.S. Poppy had just returned to port for maintenance after taking part in the infamous Convoy PQ17, I

will let him continue:

*'...It was to be a hurried job as we were soon wanted back on the Russian run. Nevertheless there was time for a short Christmas leave, during which I and another Sub, Denis Brooke, both being Londoners, were asked by our CO. to volunteer to attend an event on Christmas Sunday at Potters Bar, a suburb of North London that had adopted and paid for the building at Aberdeen of our ship The Poppy, for their National Savings Warship Week, when they had raised the sum of £157,000 a lot of money in those days and in excess of the target of £120,000, the cost of a Corvette.*

*The special Gala Christmas Red Cross concert held in the 2,500-seater Ritz Cinema (long since demolished) was indeed a star-studded affair. There was Esmond Knight, well known film actor - who had been blinded when his ship, the battleship Prince of Wales was bombed and sunk in the Gulf of Siam. Still in the uniform of a Sub-Lieutenant, R.N.V.R., he spoke Henry V's rallying speech at Agincourt to great acclaim. There was Naomi Jacob, well known novelist; Robinson Cleaver, the B.B.C. organist; Teddy Brown, the 20 stone xylophonist; there was Wally Patch, Cockney comedian, who with Gordon Harker shared all those Cockney policemen in those 30's films, and many others.*

*During the interval my shipmate, Denis Brooks and I (both then aged 22 and*



HMS Poppy

*already three year veterans of the Battle of the Atlantic against the U-Boats) appeared on the stage flanked by the Corps of the local Sea Scouts and backed by a huge Union Jack (those were really patriotic days) to receive from the Chairman of the Urban District Council an inscribed wooden Memorial Plaque commemorating the Ship's adoption. There was much applause and of course I was expected to reply, so my heart thumping I made my first public speech and told them nothing at all about the PQ17 disaster of course but much about a football match played on a grassless pitch near Murmansk against fleet destroyer H.M.S. Milne with an intense dog fight going on overhead between German and Russian fighters. The audience loved it and us, and all 2,500 of them rose to their feet and sang, "For they are jolly good fellows." Poor Denis and I were quite overwhelmed. It was of course typical of our Nation at a time when communities were drawn together, and to whom not a single member of Poppy's Ship's company could claim domicile, that they should have taken us so warmly to their hearts. Throughout the War prayers were offered up in the Parish Church of St. Mary & All Saints at Potters Bar, where our Ship's Bell and Battle Ensign now hang, and to the words, "and the fleet in which they serve" was added, "and especially our own Corvette, H.M.S. Poppy".'*

On 27 June 1942, HMS Poppy, K213, departed Reykjavík, Iceland, escorting convoy PQ-17, bound for Arkhangelsk, Russia. On 4 July 1942, the Admiralty ordered the convoy to disperse. Poppy rescued 53 survivors from the United States cargo ship *Hoosier*. Poppy survived the war and was sold in 1946 and became a merchant ship, the Rami. She was scrapped in 1956.

It is amazing to think that John Beardmore was talking about this very plaque, and to know that it would have been taken back to the ship and hung up in a place of pride on board makes it a true relic of the battle for the sea lanes.