

SAWBRIDGEWORTH HISTORY.

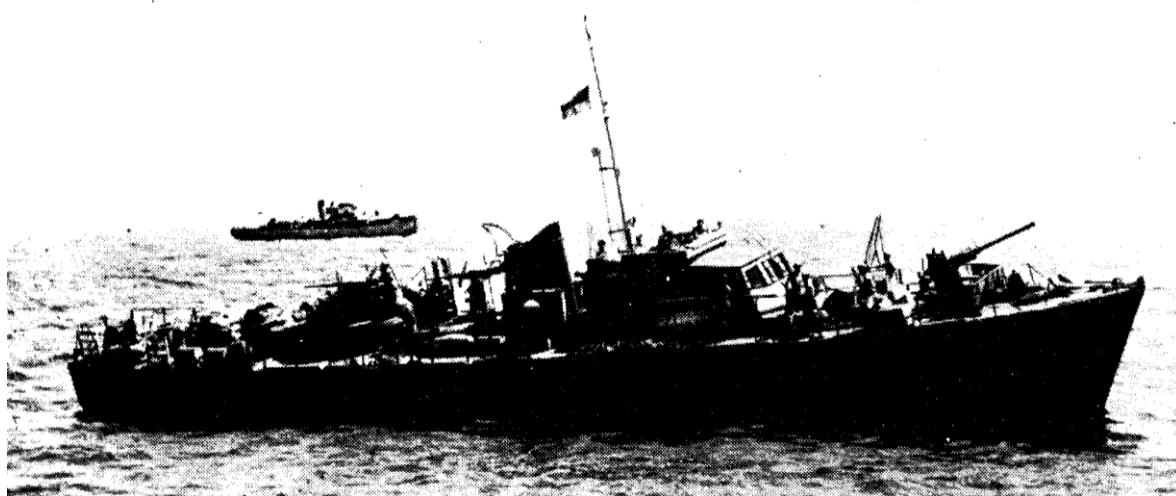
HIS MAJESTY'S MOTOR LAUNCH 146.

The Story of Sawbridgeworth's 'Own' Warship.

His Majesties Motor Launch 146 (HMML 146) was a Fairmile 'B' Type motor launch used by the Royal Navy in World War 2. She was one of well over a thousand small coastal gun boats used during this conflict which included the more well-known and 'glamorous' Motor Torpedo Boats (MTBs).

HMML 146 was ordered by the Royal Navy on 8 January 1940. She was built by Frank Curtis Ltd. at Looe in Cornwall and was commissioned into service on 1 March 1941.

As with all Fairmile 'B' Type boats, HMML 146 was 112 ft long and displaced 65 tons. She was armed with a single 40mm gun and three smaller 20mm guns plus four machine guns. Her 1,200 B.H.P engines gave her a maximum speed of 20 knots. The naval complement was 16 to 18 personnel.

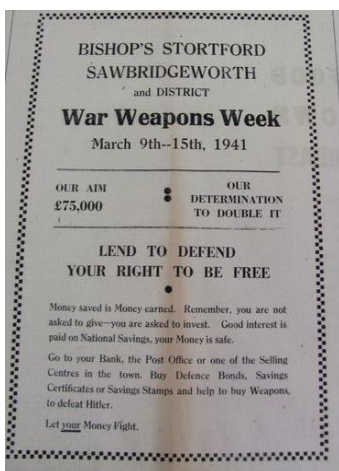


A Fairmile 'B' Type motor launch

Within the Royal Navy there is a long tradition which still exists of warships or their crew (or both) being 'adopted' by cities, towns and villages. It is this tradition which gives Sawbridgeworth its connection to HMML 146.

In order to raise funds for the war effort, the government introduced activities such as 'War Weapons Week' or 'Warship Week'. Towns and villages were encouraged to compete with each other to see who could raise the most money. For instance, in the 1941 'War Weapons Week',

Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth were pitted against Saffron Walden. Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth raised £184,135 9s 6d, just beating Saffron Walden by less than £5!



An advertisement from the 'Herts and Essex Observer' for 'War Weapons Week' 1941

**Fine Result of
War Weapons Week**

**Stortford Just Beats
Walden's Total**

Over £184,000 Raised

Bishop's Stortford, Sawbridgeworth and district have every reason to be satisfied with the result of their War Weapons Week, which met with a most gratifying response. The sum aimed at was £75,000, the determination to double it, and this was more than achieved, the grand total being the surprisingly large one of £184,135 9s. 6d., made up as follows:

Savings Certificates	29,407	0	0
3 per cent. Defence Bonds	54,730	0	0
2½ per cent. National War Bonds (1946-1948)	64,905	0	0
3 per cent. Savings Bonds (1935-1965)	22,775	0	0
Post Office Savings Bank Deposits	11,166	14	9
National Savings Stamps	334	4	0
Gift Tokens	67	10	9
Gifts	250	0	0
Grand Total	£184,135	9	6

Again, from the 'Herts and Essex Observer', the final tally from the 1941 'War Weapons Week'

From 14 March until the 21 March 1942, Sawbridgeworth held a 'Warship Week'. The monies raised from this were used (supposedly) in the equipping out of HMML 146, the town 'adopting' HMML 146 and even presented the commander and crew with a plaque to honour the event. The plaque read 'To commemorate the adoption of HMML 146 by the citizens of Sawbridgeworth. Warship Week March 14th to 21st 1942'.



Commander and crew of HMML 146 with their Sawbridgeworth plaque



Another more relaxed pose

The precise operational history of HMML 146 is somewhat obscure. The National Archive contains very little information, possibly because it was bombed in World War 2 and much information was destroyed. However, there is still sufficient information available elsewhere to give some idea of the exploits of this boat.

After completion in 1941, HMML 146 was assigned to the 20th Motor Launch Flotilla. This flotilla operated from Portsmouth and Weymouth and was normally involved in convoy protection duties in the English Channel. Because of the ever-present threat from German aircraft and Schnellbooten (often incorrectly referred to as 'E Boats'), These 'convoys' could actually consist of just the one ship.

In late 1943, the Commander of HMML 146 was noted as T/S Lt K D Gerard RNZNVR from New Zealand. The First Officer was T/S Lt G D Rouse RNVR.

In June 1944 HMML 146 was definitely involved in 'Operation Neptune'. This was the naval operation supporting the D Day landings of 6 June. Her role in this operation is not known, but she was one of 6,939 vessels taking part to ensure the freedom of Europe from Nazi domination.



Normandy beachhead June 1944 showing volume of shipping involved

On 1 November 1944, HMML 146 was once again in action. This time she was part of the naval force used for the British and Canadian landings on the island of Walcheren in the Scheldt estuary in the Netherlands. This was a successful attempt to open the port of Antwerp for Allied use. As part of 'Operation Infatuate II', HMML 146 was anchored on a dangerous shoal off the town of Westkapelle in order to mark the shoal and allow landing craft to pass safely without grounding. Furthermore, there is an unsubstantiated report that she may also have been performing ad hoc fall of shot spotting of shellfire for the 15inch gunned monitor HMS Roberts. Although this was not normal practice, other examples of this type of action have been reported from elsewhere, so it is far from impossible. It was during this action that HMML 146 was hit by a German shell. This destroyed the bridge, killing the captain, Lieutenant Commander C Cookson and three others, forcing the boat to retire from battle. To illustrate the ferocity of the German resistance to the landings at Westkapelle it is interesting to note that of the 27 small craft used in the Support Squadron, 9 were sunk and 11 damaged.



The landings at Westkapelle, 1 November 1944



Commemorative plaque from Westkapelle

Following the Westkapelle landings, nothing more is known of the active service of HMML 146. However, presumably she was repaired because she remained on the active list.

After over four years of useful service, and with the end of the war in Europe, the life of HMML 146 finally came to an end when in October 1945 she was sold for scrap. She had done her duty.

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With thanks to Donald Diskin for supplying family owned photographs.

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