

# 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

of the Defence of Cowes & East Cowes

by the Polish Destroyer

## ORP Błyskawica

4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> May 2017

### Programme of Events

*Organised by*

Cowes Events in association with the  
Friends of the ORP Błyskawica Society and  
Island Concerts Limited Registered Charity No: 1019518

[www.blyskawica-cowes.org.uk](http://www.blyskawica-cowes.org.uk)



G.J.BANKS (I.W) Ltd

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# General Events

Talk on the East Cowes Blitz : Friday 21 April

7.30 pm at St James's Church, East Cowes

Talk on the ORP Błyskawica: Friday 28 April

7.30 pm at St Mary's Church, West Cowes

Arrival of Polish Warship ORP Gniezo and

Royal Navy Type 45 destroyer (subject to sea trials)

Arriving Thursday 4 May. Departing Monday 8 May

## ORP Błyskawica Exhibitions

Błyskawica Photographic Exhibition

Regatta House, Bath Road, West Cowes.

Thursday 4 to Sunday 7 May 10am to 4pm

East Cowes Blitz Exhibition

East Cowes Heritage Centre (free entry)

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> April to end of June

Monday - Saturday 10am to 1pm and

Wednesday 10am to 4pm

Cowes Heritage Exhibition

Maritime Library, Beckford Road, Cowes,

Friday 5 May onwards

East Cowes Town Hall (free entry)

Friday 5, Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 May: 10am to 4pm Blitz

Exhibition and Blitz Paintings by local youth groups and

schools. Refreshments available

Polish Dining Experiences

At various restaurants and yacht clubs during the weekend.

# Thursday 4 May 2017

For exhibitions see General Events

## Royal Yacht Squadron

7.30 pm: Gala Piano Recital by Eva Maria Doroszkowska, granddaughter of Capt Francki, Commander of the ORP Błyskawica on the night of the dedicated air raid on Cowes on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1942.

From the elegance of Rameau and Ravel and some of Chopin's most celebrated salon pieces, Eva Maria will be performing a programme of piano music to commemorate the defence of Cowes and East Cowes.

Advance tickets:

£25 Recital only (Under 25s - £10)

£45 Recital and post-concert supper

£30 U-25s recital and post-concert supper

£10 U-25s recital only

*Book On-Line at*

[www.ticketsource.co.uk/islandconcerts](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/islandconcerts)

*or text 07774 851911 or book using the attached form.*

# Friday 5 May 2017

## Cowes Yacht Haven

7.30pm: Gala Concert featuring the Polish Naval Band providing a programme of Polish and international music

Advance Tickets: £15 (uniformed attendees free)

Advance tickets: £10 U-25s (uniformed attendees free)

*Book On-Line at:*

[www.ticketsource.co.uk/islandconcerts](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/islandconcerts)

*or text 07774 851911 or book using the attached form.*

# Saturday 6 May 2017

For exhibitions see General Events

## Yacht Club of Poland

08:20 Start of a race from the Royal London YC start line around the Island for the Ambassador's Trophy. Finishing circa 18:00.

## The Cut, High Street, West Cowes

10am onwards. Mile of Pennies by TS Osborne Sea Cadets. Come and bring your coins for this wartime re-enactment which supported the ship's crew of the time. Proceeds to the Cowes Sea Cadets.

Francki Place, West Cowes 10am: Dedication ceremony

## Polish Food Market, King's Square, East Cowes

10am to 4pm

## Blitz Walk & Service East Cowes

10.30am: Walk starts East Cowes Heritage Centre and returns to East Cowes Town Hall approximately 1pm after taking part in the 12 noon: Remembrance Service at Kingston Cemetery.

## Blitz Walk, West Cowes

2.30pm: Walk from war memorial, Northwood Park

## Town Square (Outside Waitrose), East Cowes

1.30pm, 2pm and 2.30pm: Performance by Karpaty Polish Dancers.

## 1940's Dance, East Cowes

7pm to 11pm. East Cowes Town Hall. Tickets £5 on the door.

## St. Mary's Church, West Cowes

7.30pm: **Concert** by the **Ave Verum Choir**

featuring a variety of Polish and international music.

Advance tickets: £7.50. £10 on the night at the door. U-18s Free

*Book On-Line at: [www.ticketsource.co.uk/islandconcerts](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/islandconcerts)*

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# Sunday 7 May 2017

For exhibitions see General Events

## The Parade , West Cowes

10am to 4pm: Radio link to the ORP Blyskawica from mobile shore station, The Parade, West Cowes.

## Wreath Laying and Dedications

10am: Northwood Cemetery, West Cowes.

## Laying of Wreaths and Service

**11.30am: Cowes War Memorial, Northwood Park followed by a short church service in adjacent St. Mary's Church from where the Polish Naval Band and Cowes Royal British Legion Band will march to The Parade, West Cowes.**

## Cowes Parade Assembly

**1.30pm approx: Speeches with Polish Naval Band and Cowes Royal British Legion Band playing.**

*The organisers reserve the right to change the content and timings of this programme without liability, as dictated by circumstances which may arise out of their control.*

# The ORP Błyskawica and Cowes



In 1935 J S Whites' of Cowes yard won, against stiff international competition, an order from the Polish Navy for a new class of destroyer, the 'Grom' Class. The ORP Grom and the ORP Błyskawica were built (in English they would be HMS Thunder and HMS Lightning). At an astonishing 41.5 knots, they were the fastest destroyers afloat. When war came in 1939, the ORP Błyskawica sank the first U-Boat, and later escorted the Queen Mary when she was a troop ship bringing US forces to Britain. In 1940, the ORP Grom was sunk during an attack off Norway. During the war, the ORP Błyskawica returned to Cowes for refit and in the spring of 1942 she was back, anchored with a gangway to the shore at West Cowes, just upstream from the chain ferry, facing north. Hitler had declared he would re-write the tourist maps of Britain and began attacks on so called 'soft targets', where homes as well as factories could be destroyed – Norwich and Exeter were already two victims of these 'Baedeker' raids. On 28<sup>th</sup> April 1942, six bombers made a hit-and-run sortie on Cowes and nearly sank the ORP Błyskawica - one bomb fell to seaward, and another bomb exploded in the mud between the ship and the shore, destroying the jetty, throwing the gangway over the ship which carried away her mast. Photo reconnaissance planes were seen. Certain that this was the precursor to a full attack, Capt Francki, the ship's commanding officer, against Admiralty orders whilst the ship was in a decommissioned state and in port, ordered munitions from Portsmouth to repel a possible attack. The town's defences were not strong. Capt Francki was determined to mount as much defence as she could. True to expectation on the night of the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1942 160 bombers (according to the Island's history book) arrived off Cowes at 11pm. After lighting the sea and land with parachute flares, the enemy came in near sea level. Smoke screens tried to hide the towns. Ack-ack guns were few and struggled to aim low. Six Free French 'Chasseurs' (MTB sized convoy protectors) up river tried to help and fired their small calibre guns. The brunt of the defence lay with the Polish sailors. The planes came from the Solent and the ORP Błyskawica's main armament drove the attackers up higher so reducing the accuracy of the raids. The ORP Błyskawica's anti-aircraft guns fired without pause. Hands were scalded and gun barrels grew so hot that seawater was gathered in buckets to be thrown on the barrels to cool them down. A second wave of planes arrived at 3.45am the next morning, the guns still fired throughout the raids. By daylight damage to the town could be assessed. Over 70 people had died and all of Cowes and East Cowes firmly believe that except for the fierce resistance of the Polish sailors, the damage to lives, property and factories would have been far greater. The towns had been saved by these and other men from near destruction.

Anthony Churchill

# Booking Form for Musical Events

*Try secure On-Line booking available at:*

[www.ticketsource.co.uk/islandconcerts](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/islandconcerts)

OR *please detach this page and mail to:*

Island Concerts Ltd, 7E Queens Road, Cowes,  
Isle of Wight PO31 8BQ. Tel: 07774 851911

Please mail tickets to the following events,

I enclose a **STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE:**

## Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30 pm

### **Piano Recital at Royal Yacht Squadron**

Please send \_\_\_ tickets at £25 - recital only. Total: £ \_\_\_\_\_

Please send \_\_\_ tickets at £45 - with buffet. Total: £ \_\_\_\_\_

Please send \_\_\_ U-25 tickets at £30 - with buffet. Total: £ \_\_\_\_\_

Please send \_\_\_ U-25 tickets at £10 - recital only. Total: £ \_\_\_\_\_

## Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30 pm

### **Polish Naval Band at Cowes Yacht Haven**

Please send \_\_\_\_\_ tickets at £15: Total: £ \_\_\_\_\_

Please send \_\_\_\_\_ U-25 tickets at £10: Total: £ \_\_\_\_\_

## Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30 pm

### **Ave Verum Choir at St Mary's Church, Cowes**

Please send \_\_\_ tickets at £7.50: Total: £ \_\_\_\_\_

**Grand total enclosed: £ \_\_\_\_\_**

Cheques to: *'Island Concerts Ltd'*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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