

**The Town Council is asked to request Prudhoe Community Partnership, as owners of the Spetchells Centre, to reconsider their refusal to sanction the permanent display of the historic war bond plaque in the Spetchells Centre. The request has been made on the basis that the Centre is the civic ‘hub’ of the town, and therefore the best location for this item of considerable historical significance and interest to be brought to the attention of the public at large.**

The plaque is mounted on a shield, and states as follows: “Presented by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to Prudhoe Urban District Council to Commemorate the Adoption of HMML 142 during Warship Week, March 1942.” The shield itself is made of wood, with an embossed metal crest, and is suitable for indoor display only. For many years, it was prominently displayed in the offices of Prudhoe Urban District Council on South Road. Following the dissolution of the UDC in 1974, the plaque / shield was kept in a storeroom at the Prudhoe Parish Hall, before being recently recovered by local volunteers and restored by one of their number.

The plaque acknowledges and commemorates the town’s financial support, in the form of savings, for the war effort in the Second World War. The modest size of Prudhoe at the time, with a population of around 4 – 5,000 people, would have meant that the type of vessel adopted would be relatively insignificant by comparison with the corvettes and destroyers, etc adopted by larger towns. The ship adopted by Prudhoe was His Majesty’s Motor Launch (HMML) No. 142. This was a motor launch of the Fairmile ‘B’ class, whose specification is given below.

The vessel was adopted during “Warship Week” in 1942. Warship Weeks were the culmination of a campaign organised by the National War Savings Committee with the support of the Admiralty. Each settlement in the country was set a savings target in the form of the purchase of government bonds and national savings certificates. Each level of savings had a class of vessel allocated to it: once the target was reached, the community would adopt the vessel. It is reported – though not confirmed – that the amount raised by the settlement of Prudhoe was in the region of £10,000.

The Fairmile ‘B’ class vessels were supplied in pre-fabricated sections, produced by Fairmile Marine, of Surrey, for assembly by shipyards around the country. The vessel that became HMML No. 142 was ordered early in 1940, assembled by Brooke Marine at Oulton Broad, Suffolk, and commissioned into the Royal Navy late the same year. Records suggest she was based initially at Dover, as part of the 5<sup>th</sup> ML Flotilla, and that in 1944 she took part in Operation Neptune, the naval part of Overlord – the invasion of Normandy. At some point it appears, though, that HMML 142 was converted from being a weaponised motor launch to an ambulance launch, in which case her armament would have been removed. She was sold off in 1946.

The Fairmile ‘B’ class was of the following dimensions / specification:

Displacement: 85 tons    Length: 112 feet    Beam: approx 18 feet    Draught: just under 5 feet  
Crew: 16    Max. speed: 20 knots    Range: 1500 miles    Construction: wood (hull and superstructure)  
Armament: (probable – varies between boats) 1 x 3 pounder gun plus 2 x .303 Anti-Aircraft guns

