

In Memory of
Able Seaman

Robert James Cannon

P/SSX 19985, H.M.S. Royal Oak., Royal Navy who died on 14 October 1939 Age 24

Son of James and Janet Cannon, of Kirkbean, Dumfries-shire.

Remembered with Honour
Portsmouth Naval Memorial



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Able Seaman Robert James Cannon

HMS Royal Oak, Royal Navy

Number: P/SSX 19985

Died: 14 October 1939

Age: 24

How Died: Killed at sea

Country of burial: At sea, Scapa Flow, Orkney

Cemetery or Memorial: Naval Memorial, Portsmouth

Town Memorial: Kirkbean, Scotland

Extra Information

Robert James Cannon was born on 20 October 1914 in the village of Carsethorn on the Solway Coast in South West Scotland. He was the third of five children and his father, James Cannon, was both a fisherman and a pilot on the Solway Firth.

He was a pupil at Kirkbean School, and on leaving school, was engaged in farm work in the district. He joined the Royal Navy in 1937 and, prior to joining the Royal Oak, he served on the destroyer Express and also on the Winchester.

Shortly after midnight on 13 October 1939, a German U-boat, U-47, was located off the east coast of Orkney and was successful in navigating past blockships in the narrow channels between islands to get into Scapa Flow itself. The attack on Scapa Flow had been commissioned by Admiral Dönitz and the commander of the U-Boat was Kapitänleutnant Günther Prien.

Around 1.00 am on 14 October, an initial salvo of torpedoes was fired and a single torpedo hit the bow of Royal Oak. Many believed that it was a small explosion that could be dealt with and went back to their hammocks believing that nothing was amiss. Around 1.16 am, a further salvo was fired which scored direct hits on the ship. The impact on the ship was so great that, in thirteen minutes, it had turned over and sank. From a total crew of over 1,200, 834 lost their lives.

The wreck of HMS Royal Oak is a designated war grave and there is a marker buoy in Scapa Flow near where the wreck lies. The wreck is in 30 metres of water, almost upside down, and the upturned hull of the ship is around five metres below the surface. Each year there is a memorial service in Portsmouth (in recent years it has been held at HMS Excellent) and there is also a memorial service held in Orkney over the site of the wreck in Scapa Flow. Additionally, each year Royal Navy divers replace the White Ensign on the wreck.

St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney, has a memorial for HMS Royal Oak and a book of remembrance containing the names of all those who lost their lives in the sinking. Each day a page of the book of remembrance is turned but staff in the cathedral will open the cabinet and turn the pages to show a particular name on request. There is also a memorial to HMS Royal Oak and her crew at Scapa Beach.

Robert Cannon's posthumous war medal, his naval prize book awarded in 1937, a birthday present never received and the Order of Ceremony for the Unveiling of the Extension to the Portsmouth Naval Memorial in April 1953 have been given to Orkney Museum to be preserved with other items relating to HMS Royal Oak.

HMS Royal Oak was a Revenge-class battleship, launched in 1914 and commissioned in 1916. It first saw combat in the Battle of Jutland. Günther Prien and his U-boat crew were lost off Iceland in March 1941.

(Information provided by Robert Cannon's niece, Maureen Austin (nee Rush))

Memorials found on:

31

SINKING OF ROYAL OAK

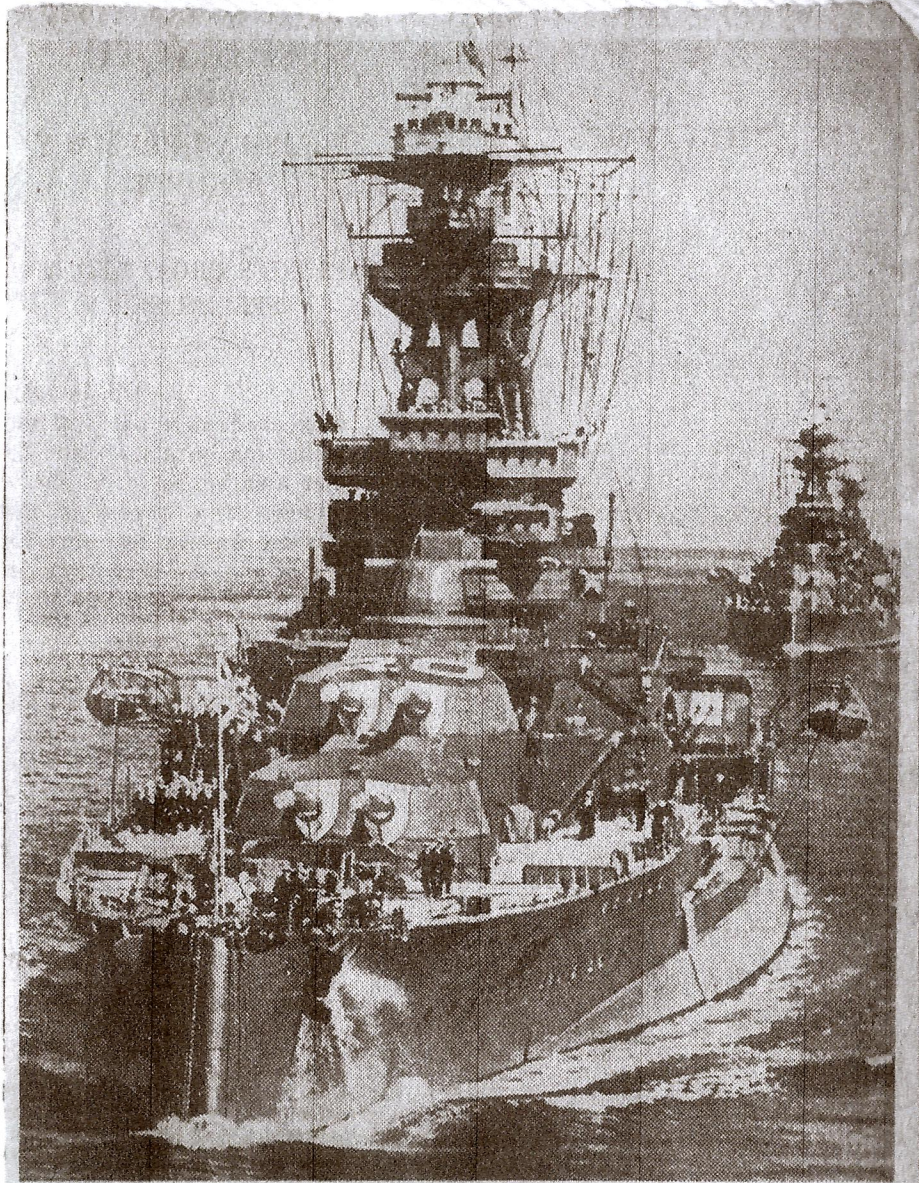
CARSETHORN MAN LOST



A.B. GUNNER ROBERT J. CANNON

Official intimation was received on Monday by Mr and Mrs James Cannon, Carsethorn, that their son, A.B. Gunner Robert James Cannon, was a victim of the sinking at the week-end of the battleship, H.M.S. Royal Oak. Much sympathy is expressed for the parents and their family of two sons and two daughters in their loss. Mr Cannon is well known in the district as a river Nith pilot, a duty he carries on in conjunction with his brother-in-law, Mr Robert Stitt.

Gunner Cannon, who would have celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday on Friday first, was a pupil of Kirkbean School. On leaving school, he was engaged in farm work in the district, and later removed to the employment of Mr Hunter, Banks, Kirkcudbright. It was from there that he joined the Navy in February, 1937. Previous to joining the Royal Oak he served on the destroyer Express, and also on the Winchester. His last visit home was in February this year.



A RECENT PICTURE OF H.M. BATTLESHIP ROYAL OAK.





ABLE SEAMAN

ACKERMAN A. C.
AMOS E. J.
BAILEY C. W.
BEANCE J.
BEDDALL H.
BELL R. W.
BESWICK H. W. J.
BETTS W. T.
BINNS F. B.
BINSLEY G. F.
BIRTCHELL C. E.
BLYTH H. B.
BOLD P. W.
BOWDEN R. C. B.
BRISCOE E. J.
BRITTON T. F.
BROWN H.
BROWN J.
BUCKNALL A. G.
BURNS A.
BURTENSCHAW C. H.
CAMPSIE C.
CANNON R. J.
CANNONS E. G.
CARTER G. W.
CARTER R. W. H.