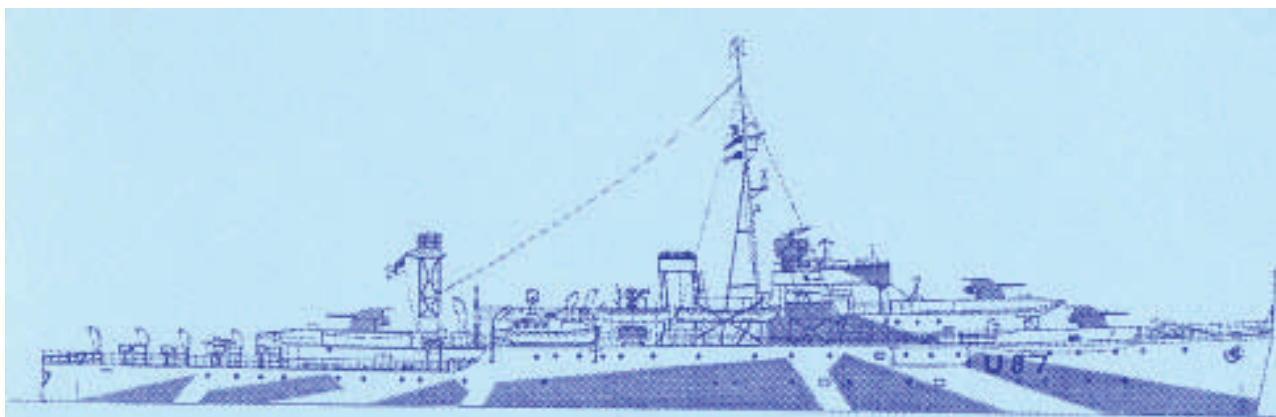


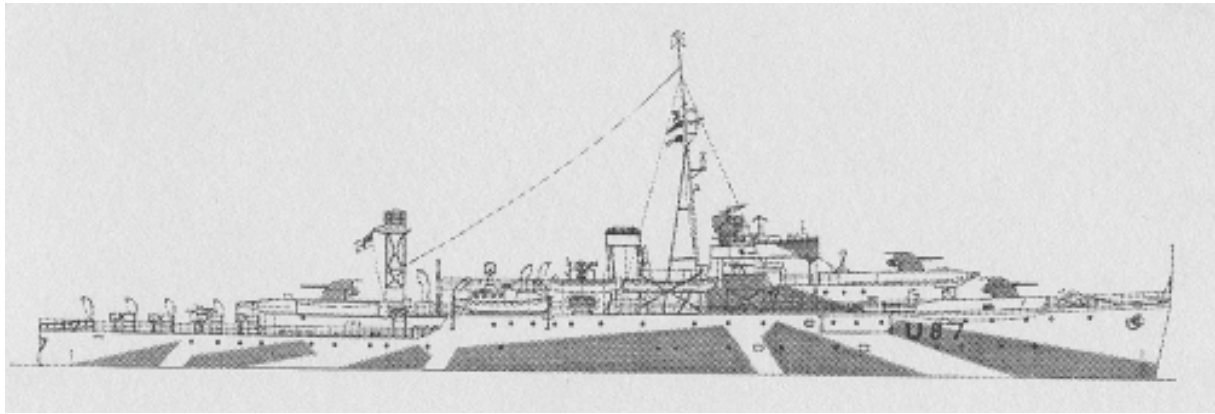


Braintree District Council

Information Sheet:

HMS Kite





On March 7th 1942, as part of the Admiralty's 'Warship Week' initiative, the people of Braintree officially 'adopted' HMS Kite, a Royal Navy sloop that entered active service almost exactly one year later, on 1st March 1943. The plaque to the left commemorates the adoption, and is on display in Braintree District Museum. Kite's short career was punctuated by several successes, but ended in tragedy in the icy waters of the Arctic.

HMS Kite arrived on the military scene at the height of World War Two naval tensions, and on 9th April 1943 she became a founder member of the 2nd Escort Group, tasked with protecting Allied convoys from the perpetual threat of enemy U-Boats and aircraft.

Biscay and the Atlantic

The first major operation in which Kite's Escort Group participated was a patrol of the Bay of Biscay to counter the 'Wolf Pack' U-Boat tactics of the Germans. Kite's 2nd Escort Group encountered the enemy on several occasions: in late April U-202 was forced to scuttle herself, and two more U-boats were sunk in June, one being rammed by HMS Starling, one of Kite's sister ships. On 30th July the group sunk both U-461 and U-504, the latter being a victim of Kite's depth-charges.

In October 1943 the 2nd Escort Group reverted to escort duties, and accompanied convoy CN.208 across the Atlantic. This mission resulted in the sinking of two U-boats, U-266 and U-842, off the Canadian coast near St. John's.

A period of relative inaction then followed until 8th - 9th February 1944, when the Group destroyed U-238, U-734 and U-762 off the west coast of Ireland; Kite played a major role in the sinking of U-734.

D-Day

The D-Day operation in June 1944 was a crucial phase of the war in which HMS Kite played a role, escorting convoys across the English Channel. This was a task very different to the long range Atlantic missions, and made somewhat less hazardous by Allied air superiority, but one that was crucial to the war in the west.

The Arctic Convoys

Despite being allies in the early stages of the war, it was only a matter of time before Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia turned on one another, and when this happened in June 1941, Churchill quickly made common cause with the Soviets by offering to supply them with war materials. The chosen method of delivering these supplies was by naval convoy to the Russian ports of Archangel and Murmansk; a route which involved navigating the icy waters surrounding Norway.

However, since the German occupation of Norway, the country's fjords provided ideal bases for Hitler's naval power, and the Luftwaffe also used Norwegian airfields to exert aerial dominance. The British convoys could minimise this threat in the summer months by taking a wide course around Iceland, but in winter the encroaching ice fields meant a more perilous route closer to the Norwegian coast had to be risked.

By the time HMS Kite entered the Arctic scene in 1944, the Luftwaffe no longer had air superiority and American industrial strength was making its presence felt. Although the danger of German surface vessels had receded, the U-boat threat was still present, and it was this danger which spelled doom for HMS Kite.

Convoy JW.59 was the first to brave the Arctic trip following the D-Day operations, and HMS Kite was one of the many British vessels tasked with its protection. On 21st August 1944, a German U-boat patrol encountered the convoy off the coast of Greenland, and U-344 unleashed a salvo of pattern-running torpedoes towards the British ships. Kite was struck by two of them, and in the space of some 90 seconds she sank beneath the freezing sea. For the 226 servicemen on board there was little hope; a handful of life-jacketed crewmen were picked from the sea by friendly vessels, but only some 10 individuals survived to return to Britain. This number was until recently put at 9, but correspondence in the *Navy News* magazine in November 2008 revealed that a 10th survivor, John Taylor, actually returned to Britain (after being reported missing) in a USAAF Liberator.



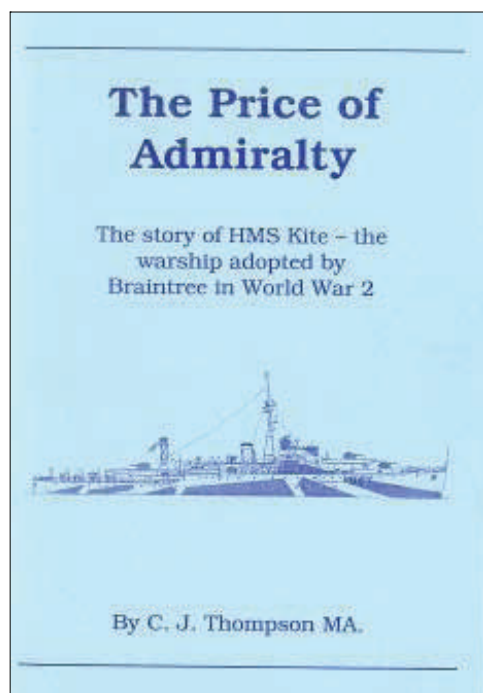
The small plaque on the left, on display in the Museum, features the following inscription:

***“Presented by Lionel Irish
Survivor of HMS Kite
In Memory of His Lost Shipmates”***

Mr Irish is one of very few remaining survivors, and has participated in many local acts of remembrance. On 21st August 2004 – the 60th anniversary of Kite's sinking – a memorial stone was unveiled in the Brin-tree and Bocking Public Gardens in remembrance of all those who perished aboard HMS Kite.

Specifications of HMS Kite

Class/Type:	'Black Swan' Class Sloop
Displacement:	1350 tons
Length:	299 ft. 6 in.
Beam:	38 ft. 6 in.
Armament:	3x twin 4-in. guns 2x 2-pdr. 4-barrel pom-poms 2x 20mm Oerlikon AA guns 2x 3-in. twin machine guns 2x stern rollers, 2 light and 2 heavy rail throwers for depth charges.
Machinery:	Geared turbines
Design Speed:	19.75 knots



The Price of Admiralty

This information sheet is heavily indebted to C. J. Thompson's study of HMS Kite's story, entitled *The Price of Admiralty* (Braintree District Museum, 2001).

This booklet contains Thompson's revealing research into the ship's career and demise, placed within the context of global conflict, and is illustrated with numerous photographs and charts.

The Price of Admiralty is available to purchase from the Braintree District Museum Shop.