

The Kitchener Memorial



The site of the Kitchener Memorial in Orkney is very evocative. It is impossible to go up the cliffs and look out over the sea off Marwick Head on a stormy day and not be awed at the power of the Atlantic. But of course the Memorial marks another aspect of the sea here. The uncaring ability it has to snatch away life.

The Memorial marks the closest point on land to where, on the 5th of June 1916, Lord Kitchener and his staff of 11 perished along with over 700 members of the crew of HMS Hampshire in the teeth of a gale just 2 miles out to sea of the tower. The stories of the survivors and of the ineffective official rescue efforts make pitiful reading and to an extent these have obscured the bigger tragedy.



The Memorial itself is a simple tower 48 feet high with little adornment except on the shoreward face where the plaque that records how the tower was erected by the people of Orkney to commemorate the loss of Lord Kitchener and the crew of the Hampshire.

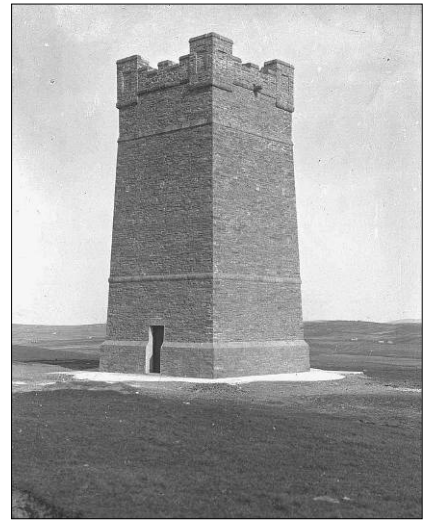
The plaque is now damaged and the tower is beginning to show the effects of its exposed position high on the cliffs.



A project has been underway for 4 years, led by Orkney Heritage Society, to both restore the memorial in time for the centenary of the sinking and also to better remember the 736 others now believed to have died when HMS Hampshire sank. The tower is to be restored to its original condition and a low wall erected on the seaward side to bear the names of all those lost that night.

A grant has been secured for restoration work from a trust for £30,000 and the local council have just granted £50,000 for the restoration.

Donations to the project have been received from relatives of those lost and more recently the Royal Engineers have indicated they would be willing to support the work logistically. The VAT can be claimed back due to a government initiative and the scheme is eligible for Gift Aid donations.



All in all we are practically 2/3rd the way to having the money.

But regrettably the project has just been turned down for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. They were over subscribed and whilst supportive have asked to re-submit at the next round. This may well be too late to get the work done in time for the centenary just 13 months away at the time of writing.

There has been a raft of publicity arranged by the locals in Orkney and an unveiling of the restored memorial is in planning for the 5th of June 2016.

However this is all at risk if the money to restore the tower cannot be raised in time to do the work in the short summer season in Orkney. The summer is now upon us and we have a £78,000 hole in the budget due to the lottery's present decision.

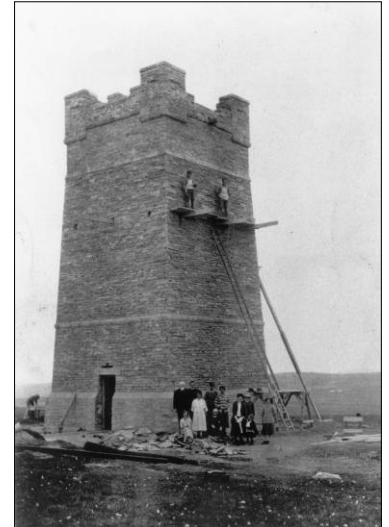
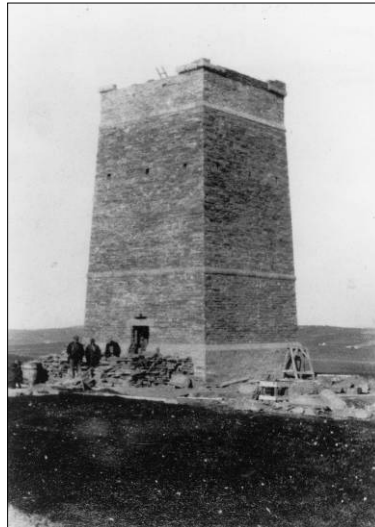
The temptation to use the 'Your Country Needs You' strapline is practically overwhelming, but it perfectly encapsulates the position at the moment. The Kitchener Memorial really does need your help and if you can contribute to the project it would be marvellous. Small donations from relatives up to £500 have already been received and whilst more along these lines will be welcome we also really need a shot in the arm to get the project initiated.

Please help by donating or sponsoring if you can.

In 1926 around 4000 people attended the opening. On the centenary of the sinking we will have worldwide media attention and are anticipating the highest level of attendance at the unveiling.



The original memorial cost £734 to build, paid for by public subscription from Orcadians and built by a local contractor. Health and safety regulations were somewhat more relaxed in the 1920s!

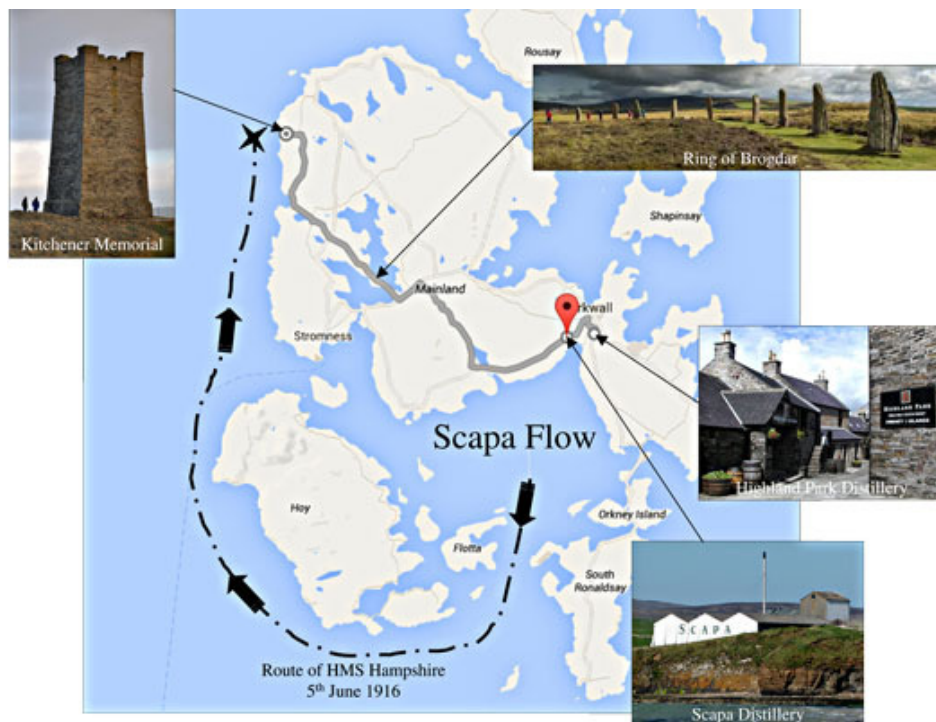


HMS Hampshire and the sinking

HMS Hampshire was a Devonshire-class armoured cruiser and took part in the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916. Days after returning from Jutland, on 5 June, she left the Royal Navy's anchorage at Scapa Flow, Orkney bound for Russia. Lord Kitchener was on board, heading for secret talks with Britain's war-time ally.

But at about a quarter to eight in the evening, in stormy conditions less than two miles from shore, she struck a mine laid by a German u-boat. Only 12 crewmen survived.

It was long thought that Lord Kitchener was one of 650 men lost from HMS Hampshire. But recent research by local historian Brian Budge suggests the final death toll was as high as 737.



5 June 1916: The last journey taken by HMS Hampshire

Orkney Heritage Society

Orkney Heritage Society is undertaking the project as its contribution to the centenary of World War 1, to preserve the existing tower and to enhance knowledge about the events surrounding the sinking.

Founded in 1968, the society is a charitable body whose objectives are: to stimulate public interest in, and care for, the beauty, history and character of Orkney; to encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity or historic interest; to encourage high standards of architecture and planning in Orkney.

The society funds and runs the following awards and prizes: the Marjorie Linklater Award for a piece of original writing by school and college students; the Fereday Prize for a local history investigation (this is open to second year school pupils); the Laura Grimond Awards for architectural projects.

Web resources

<https://www.facebook.com/Kitchener.Memorial>
<https://twitter.com/kitchenerorkney>
<https://kitchenerhampshire.wordpress.com/>
<https://www.justgiving.com/orkneyheritagesociety/>
<http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/ohs/>

Contact us

If you would like to know more about this then please get in touch. The centenary presents an unique opportunity to reflect on the tragic events and to leave a lasting legacy to signpost our successors to keep that reflection refreshed.

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