



HMS NAILSEA - A SHIP TOO LATE FOR WAR

PENNANT REPRINTS N^o 2

NAILSEA

BY DAVE SOWDON

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A SHIP TOO LATE FOR WAR

The First World War saw an unprecedented growth in the number of British warships, with hundreds of vessels of all types being built, and a consequent pressure on the Admiralty Ships' Names Committee of the time. Even though ships were built in common-named classes by this time there were cases where the policy had to be altered and the intended name was changed before a ship's completion. An example of this can be seen in the Aberdare, or later Hunt, class of minesweepers of 1917-1919 which were originally given the names of seaside towns. However it was realised that the names of coastal or harbour towns could result in confusion in signals and several names were changed to those of inland towns and villages. One such was NEWQUAY, under construction by A & J Inglis of Glasgow, which was renamed HMS NAILSEA on 25th June 1918, Nailsea being a small village in North Somerset, some 9 miles SW of Bristol.

The ship was ordered as NEWQUAY on 17 July 1917 and the keel laid down on 29 September 1917 as Inglis's yard number 322. Erection of hull framing was commenced on 1 October and completed on 21 December; plating of the hull started on 10 December and was completed on 13 May 1918. This was well before hull plates were welded and riveting was the only method of fixing plates to the frames. HMS NAILSEA was launched on 8th August 1918 and the boilers installed on 14 August with the engines being shipped eight days later. With the machinery in place fitting out of the rest of the ship could take place. This was completed at the beginning of November 1918 with the engines being steamed for the first time on 4 November. Sea trials started on 14 November in the Clyde, during which a measured mile would have been run to assess the ship's performance and to ensure that the speed specified in the building contract was achieved. The Admiralty number assigned to HMS NAILSEA at this time was 4356, but by early 1919 T.A7 was allocated, finally changed to T.18 by the end of that year. Trials were satisfactorily completed on 21 November 1918 and the ship commissioned - ten days too late for war! Many other ships then under construction had completion delayed or were cancelled as a result of the cessation of hostilities on 11 November 1918, but minesweepers such as HMS NAILSEA were badly needed to help clear both Allied and enemy minefields to make the seas safe for shipping of every nation. During WW1 British ships lost to mines alone included 44 warships, 225 auxiliaries, 259 merchant ships (1493 men lost), 578 fishing vessels (98 men lost) while 84 ships were damaged by mines with the loss of 64 men.

HMS NAILSEA is first found in the Navy List of January 1919, nominally based at Devonport under the command of one Lt Cdr J P Gibson RNR, with two sub-Lieutenants and a Chief Mechanical Officer; the intended complement was some 74 officers and men. It would appear that the ship was engaged on minesweeping duties in the North Sea between her

completion and October 1919, at a time when many ships were being laid up immediately on completion. In September 1919 NAILSEA visited Lervik and Stavanger in Norway before returning to Rosyth on 1 October where she remained until paying off from Mine Clearance on 17 October. She left Rosyth the same day for Harwich where she arrived on 19 October. NAILSEA then remained at Harwich laid-up under care and maintenance until 27 October 1921 when she was towed to the Medway for a refit at Sheerness. This commenced on 29 October and was completed on 25 November, NAILSEA being towed back to Harwich on 6 December to continue lay-up for a further year.

On 28 October 1922 NAILSEA returned to Sheerness where she was to stay until 4 February 1924 when refitted at Chatham, completing in early March. These short docking periods would have included boiler cleaning and any essential repairs as well as other small defect rectification. This was followed by repairs and alterations between 16 and 23 May 1924, also at Chatham, prior to re-commissioning with a Portsmouth crew at 0800 on 10 July 1924. The commissioning, probably for the summer Home Fleet exercises was short-lived for, following visits to Portsmouth, Margate Roads, Sheerness and Deal, NAILSEA was again reduced to reserve at Chatham under the control of Commander-in-Chief Nore on 21 August. During this lay-up the ship underwent annual refits, but was listed in the July 1925 and January 1926 Navy Lists as tender to the depot ship BLENHEIM; the following year BLENHEIM having gone for disposal, NAILSEA was listed as tender to ARK ROYAL, a former seaplane carrier then acting as a depot ship. NAILSEA'S role was shortlived as during 1927 she was listed for disposal and taken in hand at Sheerness on 22 June in preparation for her sale, completing on 2 July. A Dockyard Acquaint of 29 September states that the ship was ready for sale, while Captain of the Port's Acquaint no 775 of 6 December shows that the ship was sold on 25

November 1927 to Hughes Bolckow Shipbreaking Co Ltd, Battleship Wharf, Blyth, Northumberland, for breaking, after a short and relatively uneventful career.

The Aberdare, or later Hunt class, was a modified version of the Hunt class twin screw minesweeper, altered to permit mass production using mercantile type construction. Originally 56 were ordered, but by November 1918 the number had been increased to 131. Of this number 35 were cancelled on 17 December 1918 and completion delayed on others, with many sold early on to civilian owners for conversion to coasters, replacing merchant ship war losses.

The class had a displacement of 800 tons, a length of 231 feet overall (220 feet at the waterline), a beam of 28.5 feet and a draught of 7.5 feet. Power was provided by two-shaft triple expansion steam engines, with two coal-fired Yarrow boilers developing 2200 ihp and giving a maximum speed of 16 knots; bunkers of 185 tons of coal were carried. The intended armament was a single 4-inch gun on the foredeck and a 12 pdr anti-aircraft gun aft although, as many ships were completed after the war it is probable that few were so fitted. The class were flush-decked compared to the earlier Hunt class which had a break at the quarterdeck. Sweep gear was deployed over the stern using "Quixo" patent davits, though activities were not restricted to minesweeping as the class could also be used as escorts to larger ships if required.

Nailsea's one and only warship had a very quiet career being in commission for only some twelve months of the eight years she was in naval service. At the time of her disposal the prospect of further hostilities was deemed remote and the state of the domestic economy meant that scarce defence resources had to be channelled into the building of battleships, the standard against which the naval strength of a nation was measured. As a consequence many smaller ships, such as HMS NAILSEA, had to be scrapped, a move

that meant that only twelve years later, with war again looming, the Royal Navy would be desperately short of minesweepers to combat the new German threat. Although during the 1939-1945 naval construction programmes the names of other class members were re-used, NAILSEA was not amongst them and this short-lived minesweeper remains the sole warship to have borne the name of our home village.

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