

From the Dart to D-Day

Adversity, Innovation and Victory

Building gunboats on the River Dart



Speaker: Jonathan Turner, Vice Chair of Dartmouth Museum

Before the war, SB Hall at Galmpton, built trawlers for Brixham's fishing fleet—yet by 1940 it was producing vital Motor Gun Boats for the Royal Navy at extraordinary speed. Selected by Fairmile, the yard became part of a nationwide effort to rapidly expand Britain's coastal forces. This talk reveals how Dartmouth workers achieved build times of just 8–10 weeks, and presents new research quantifying wartime production for the first time. A remarkable local story of innovation, skill, and contribution to victory.

The 15th Flotilla: the Navy's most decorated unit



Speaker: Tim Spicer, author of: A very secret enterprise

Formed in 1942 to support MI6 and SOE, the secretive 15th MGB Flotilla carried out dangerous covert missions to occupied France under cover of routine naval activity. Delivering agents, weapons and intelligence to Brittany, and extracting operatives and escaped airmen, the flotilla completed 45 operations under constant threat. This talk explores their daring work, including the innovative navigation of David Birkin, and shows how their efforts helped prepare the ground for D-Day. By war's end, they were among the Royal Navy's most decorated units.

HMS Medusa – Leading the Way to Omaha Beach



Speaker: Lt Cdr (CCF) Alan Watson OBE RNR, HMS Medusa

As Allied forces prepared for D-Day, success depended on safely guiding landing craft through narrow, mined channels. HMS Medusa was tasked with marking the approach to Omaha Beach, holding position with extraordinary precision under enemy fire and difficult weather. For 48 hours, her crew maintained station within 50 metres, enabling thousands of troops—many trained in Dartmouth—to reach the shore. This talk explores the ship's equipment, the skill of her crew, and her vital role in one of history's defining operations.

Exercise Tiger and the Deadly German S-Boats



Speaker: Dr Harry Bennett, author The war for England's Shores

German S-boats—fast, seaworthy and heavily armed—posed a serious threat to British coastal convoys, exploiting superior design and tactics. This talk examines why the Royal Navy initially struggled to counter them, and how that challenge played out dramatically during Exercise Tiger, when over 750 US servicemen were killed. Dr Harry Bennett analyses how Britain adapted, developing new technologies and strategies to regain control of coastal waters and force the S-boat threat onto the defensive before D-Day.