

Town of Ajax History - Recognizing the Past; HMS Ajax

The Town of Ajax and the HMS Ajax

When you look at a street sign in Ajax, you are looking at history: most of our streets have been named after the officers and men that served on HMS Ajax during WWII. The street names include Exeter Road named after HMS Exeter and Achilles Road named after HMS Achilles. Harwood Avenue is named for Admiral Henry Harwood, commander of the Ajax.

The Town of Ajax has been assigning street names in honour of those who served on HMS Ajax during the Battle of the River Plate and throughout WWII since 1958. This was later expanded to include the names of those who served on HMS Exeter and HMS Achilles during the Battle of the River Plate

Occasionally members of the crew of HMS Ajax or their families visit our Town to see the streets named after them. On such occasions a plaque is placed on the street. The visitor is presented with a street sign bearing his name. We have had several significant events to mark our link with the HMS Ajax and World War II.

Ship's Visit

A tradition dating from 1963 has each incoming Mayor extend an invitation for the HMS Ajax to visit. The tradition started when then-mayor William Parish visited Birkenhead, England to attend the commissioning of the eighth Royal Navy vessel to carry the name Ajax. (The seventh vessel was the one involved in the Battle of River Plate). The invitation could not be accepted until a few years later when it was extended by Mayor Clark Mason. The HMS Ajax docked at Oshawa on August 25, 1976. The crew was given "Freedom of the Town," the highest honour that can be bestowed on a visiting military unit. The crew paraded down Harwood Ave with swords raised, bayonets fixed, and colours flying.

The street naming policy was changed in 2014 to include the officers and men who served on the 8th HMS Ajax in 1976.

Ship's Bell in Council Chambers

When the eighth HMS Ajax retired in 1985, the Town was presented with the ship's bell, which now hangs in the Council chamber and is used to call meetings to order.

Ship's anchor memorial

The anchor from the retired ship was brought to Canada on the HMS Fife in 1987, and was presented to then-Mayor Bill McLean. It rests in front of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 322 on Hunt Street. It is a memorial to Canadians who died serving overseas, and to those who served on ships named HMS Ajax. Several hundred veterans and residents attended the dedication ceremony, which was broadcast to England by special trans-Atlantic hook-up.

[D.I.L. 50th Anniversary](#)

The Town celebrated the 50th anniversary of D.I.L. in June 1991 with a reception for those who worked at the plant and those who attended the University of Toronto engineering school in Ajax from 1948-49. A plaque was erected to honour the munitions workers of Ajax.

[Veteran reunion](#)

In October 1999 the 60th Anniversary of the Battle of the River Plate was marked in Ajax with the veterans' association's annual reunion. Many activities were held during the week, including dedication of the Harwood Point Historical Garden, a fly-past of a Canadian Forces plane, tree planting ceremonies, and a parade. The town had a total of 65 visitors, including 12 veterans who served on HMS Ajax at the Battle in December 1939. There were also crew members from the Achilles and Exeter, along with family members and other representatives. The 70th Anniversary of the Battle of the River Plate was celebrated in October 2009. Notable events included dedication of a memorial Obelisk at Veteran's Point, gala dinner & dance, Toronto Harbour boat cruise and historical town bus tour.

[Visits to England](#)

There have been several visits by Ajax mayors and Town representatives to England for the annual reunion of the HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association, including in 1997, 2001 and 2002 and 2009.

[Juno Beach Memorial](#)

In 2002, Council approved purchase of a brick to become part of the Juno Beach Centre in Normandy, France, which is the beach where Canadian forces landed on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

[40th Anniversary Reunion of the 1976 Visit](#)

The anniversary of the visit of the 8th HMS Ajax in 1976 was celebrated in August 2016. Activities included the dedication of the Memorial Wall at Veteran's Point Gardens, a fly-past of a Canadian Forces plane and street dedications. The parade down Harwood Avenue marked 40 years, to the day, that the crew had been granted the "Freedom of the Town". The town had 19 visitors, including 7 veterans who served on HMS Ajax in 1976.