Fresh bid to tackle wartime shipwreck

Petition to deal with explosives

Report by Jim Palmer
jim.palmer@KRNmedia.co.uk

A PETITION has been launched urging the Government to remove the wreck of the SS Richard Montgomery or make it safe.

The American Liberty ship was sunk off the coast of Sheerness on August 20, 1944 with 1,400 tonnes of explosives on board, and many still believe it poses a threat to people living on the island.

Optimistic

Semi-retired electrical engineer Ron Angel created an e-petition which he hopes people will sign.

While he is not optimistic his campaign will attract the 100,000 signatures necessary to force a debate in the House of Commons, he hopes to move the debate about the ship forward.

“Ha ha ha ha… “If we get 20,000 signatures then it will show something needs to be done about it.”

He added: “I want to get something done about the thing before it is too late. No one is doing anything about it and everybody is just hoping it will go away, but it is not.

“This has been going on 67 years. It has been sitting there and it could go off at any time.”

Mr Angel has been researching the ship for 20 years and runs a website – www.ssrichardmontgomery.com – dedicated to it.

He said that in order to move the wreck or to make it safe, an

Unsafe? The SS Richard Montgomery sank with 1,400 tonnes of explosives on board in 1944.

And they’re off in the donkey derby

You would have hit the jackpot if you bet on a great day out on Sunday, as more than 1,800 people trotted along to the Donkey Derby.

Eight races were fiercely fought with crowds spurring the young jockeys on, and £2,500 was raised for charity.

Full coverage on page 4

Full story page 7

Lost at sea

ACTOR Timothy Spall was all at sea when he had to be rescued after getting lost on The River Medway, not far from Iwade.

The RNLI came to his aid after his night-time navigation skills let him down.

Full story page 5

Turbine views

WIND turbine manufacturer Vestas wants people’s opinions on its plans to build a factory in Sheerness.

Up to 2,000 jobs could be created if the firm comes to the island and it is holding a series of roadshow events.

Full story page 7

Maths genius

A 10-YEAR-OLD was among the youngest in the country to pass his maths GCSE.

Daniel Dawson from Eastchurch sat the exam six years early after teachers at the village school noticed his amazing mathematical potential.

Find out more on page 3

Vet vouchers

STAFFORDSHIRE bull terriers are being put down because homes cannot be found for them.

To halt the increase in the number being abandoned, the RSPCA is offering owners a cut-price neutering voucher.

Full story page 5
Maths genius passes GCSE six years early

10-year-old Daniel is delighted with his B grade

A MATHS whizz is one of the youngest in Kent to have gained a top grade in the GCSE exam, aged just 10.

While most boys his age prefer their Pi with mash, Chelsea fan Daniel Dawson sat his maths exam six years early.

On Thursday Daniel, of Anne Boleyn Close in Eastchurch, joined more than 300 teenagers at Sheppey Academy to pick up his results and got a B – better than a lot of 16-year-olds.

The result was a welcome present for his mum, Anne, whose birthday was on results day.

She said: "I am really proud of him. He has always shown ability from a very early age. He has something explained to him and he can just do it. There is no grey area."

Neither Anne nor Daniel's father, Steven, who manages Cains Amusements in Leysdown, lay claim to the maths genes. Anne said: "When he is not at school, his parents said Daniel is just like any boy his age."

Normal

Anne said: "He loves football and plays for Range Rovers under-11s. He does maths when he is at school and apart from that he is a normal 10-year-old boy, which is important for us as a family."

Last November, Eastchurch Primary School head teacher Pauline Shipley arranged for him to take maths lessons at the academy.

Anne, herself a qualified teacher, manages the nursery at the Warden Road school, said the staff had been "fantastic" with her son, after identifying him as a gifted pupil which was still in reception class aged just 5.

She said: "They had everything in place for him. It was really helpful. It meant I could relax. I didn't have to fight to get what was right for my son, which was nice."

"You hear about families that have had to do it all by themselves but we have been really lucky. Mrs Shipley and the staff have always looked to do the best for Daniel."

Next term Daniel, who aspires to be an accountant, will leave his old class-mates behind and become a fully-fledged Sheppey Academy pupil a year early, in Shurland school.

Anne said: "He is above average in all subjects and hopefully he can thrive with the right support."

For more GCSE results coverage turn to pages 10 and 11

Petition over explosives on war wreck

A spokesman for the Department for Transport, which is responsible for the wreck, said: "Our current management regime is one of monitoring and non-intervention, together with frequent surveys of the wreck and the surrounding seabed.

Zone

"Consequently protection of the wreck is maintained by a no-entry exclusion zone and by marking the location of the wreck as a hazard to shipping."

It also continues to be monitored 24 hours a day by radar, and is regularly surveyed to establish the current state of the wreck and the surrounding area.

"In addition, the need for future limited intervention measures is kept under review."

You can put your name on the petition by going to http://petition.direct.gov.uk/petitions/13021. A talk about the SS Richard Montgomery, called The Wreck, will take place from 7.30pm on Friday, September 9 at Blue Town Heritage Centre, as part of the Sheerness Promenade festival. For more information or to book tickets call 01795 662981.
A disgraceful policy of fear
I WAS appalled to read the latest attack by the Conservative section of our current government on our hardworking public servants. The latest policy development is to instil fear of job losses into teachers, doctors, nurses, policemen and other public sector employees.

Ministers feel that someone in fear of losing their job is more productive than someone who isn’t. Never mind that all studies show that employees who are happy, secure and well rewarded are more productive than any other. This is another crude and callous attempt by this government to blame the public sector for the recession caused by their friends in the banking world.

The minister in charge of this policy, Oliver Letwin, makes under £2 million per year as a banker. I would be interested to hear our MPs’ views on this disgraceful policy.

Martin McCusker, Lloyd Drive, Sittingbourne

Landfill in our precious pit
This chatty pit quarry on Woodstock Road was the environmental jewel in the crown of the consortium behind the plans to expand the Kent Science Park. They were to offer this already valuable environmental asset as some kind of public country park. Yes, it was always questionable that the quarry could somehow offer compensation for the extensive loss of surrounding countryside, but at least they were not going to destroy what is now, in the minds of many, a very precious and sensitive nature reserve.

Now, however, the light is dimming on any prospect of the Kent Science Park expanding. The owners of the quarry – the Swale Council – have decided to put forward this site for landfill. As any large landowner should be aware, there is a definite difference between running a day-to-day business and being guardians of the countryside. Given that the area concerned is relatively small and has always been entirely unsuitable for farming and that the very same landowners as part of the Kent Science Park Consortium once extolled the environmental virtues of this site, isn’t this just a tad hypocritical?

Andy Hudson, Bapchild

Mr Morgan’s excellent idea
PETER Morgan is to be congratulated on his ambitious plan to acquire the former magistrates’ court in Park Road, Sittingbourne, for transformation into a centrally-located heritage museum (East Kent Gazette, August 17).

This is not the first time Mr Morgan has striven for this. Sadly, previous plans came to nothing. This is exactly the sort of thing Sittingbourne needs – a beating heart at its centre. It has been run down by the Town Council, the museum in East Street and the development of the old market – the latter is an interesting and, more importantly, support for a heritage museum. Museum members are asking the public – why not Sittingbourne?

We all know that museums in this crazy town, I expect the site will be flattened and flats built thereon. Will the council then go on to cover the area with our high street is going to happen. Does that mean that we can’t all coexist – housing and flats? They only bring more people to live in our town, a town that cannot sustain or accommodate them.

Mark Moran says: ‘Mr Morgan has the best in trying to acquire the funding to buy this building. He has my full support and, I hope, also that of the corporate bodies he approaches. Just for once I hope he will get all the support he deserves.’

Finally, while many will remember that the magistrates’ court was formerly the police station, how many know it was also once the fire station as well? When the town’s fire brigade was first formed, it should be remembered, it was formed by the sittingbourne council.

At the side of the building you can still see the pump once hung to dry. So you see what a historic building it is.

John Clancy, Woodside Gardens, Sittingbourne

We should all back this plan
PETER Morgan’s suggestion of converting the disused magistrates’ court into a museum is a wonderful idea and should be supported by everyone in Sittingbourne, including local politicians.

With the large number of people who are without work, I wonder how many will offer their services to help to construct and run the museum. Which is a better answer in a job interview to the question, ‘Why are you still jobseeking after your last job?’ – unemployed, or working, albeit upland, at the museum?

At present, Faversham has one of the finest museums in the whole of Kent. Sittingbourne has about six museums around the island. So, Sittingbourne has only two very small ones, open only a couple of hours each week.

The council should help with money, either through direct contributions, or with grants. Mr Morgan has spent most of his life trying to live the “H” out of the town’s name. I am not so sure about the supermarkets, with their expensive mad plans to develop the centre of Sittingbourne.

Sheikh Mihand (aka Jackie Davidson), Sittingbourne Loonies.

Warm welcome for Vesta’s plan
I WAS pleased to read in the national press that Vesta proposes to create a wind turbine factory in Sheerness. As the Green MEP for the south-east region, I welcome Vesta’s plans to develop the site further toward the environment in the south-east, as it is also good news for our local economy.Upon opening it will produce up to 2,000 much-needed jobs.

I am delighted to learn that Vesta are planning to save the Vesta factory in the Isle of Wight, which was forced to close back in the nineties due to government subsidies. Now, just two years later, this company’s progress is remarkable and the proposed new factory could be built within a year. Renewable energy contributes to our short-term reduction targets to prevent climate change, is safe, unlike nuclear power, and provides long-term energy security.

Keith Taylor (Green MEP for south-east England)

In praise of our A-level pupils
I HEAD with great interest the proposal from Sittingbourne and Sheppey MP Mike Whiting to use the potential of this system in Sittingbourne better and I welcome the idea he has put forward.

However, at a time when families are struggling, high fuel prices are pricing people of the road, and commuters’ wages are being frozen or cut, the environment is growing concern and unemployment is an increasing problem in Sittingbourne and Sheerness. This Government – which Mr Whiting’s party is leading – has decided to raise a fare freeze, that will bring in an eight per cent increase in prices this year (up to 13 per cent on London fares) potentially reaching a total of 28 per cent by 2015.

Commuters travelling to work every day have no realistic alternative to rail travel and will have to lower their standard of living to remain in employment. The unemployed will have restricted access to job opportunities.

Given that this Government has flirted for nine months with the idea of this Government’s austerity measures (this MP has voted for) and given the importance of the railways to the economy, I think it is clear that pushing train fares up by such ridiculous sums is totally the wrong approach.

Other Kent and south-east MPs have been extremely vocal about their constituents’ concerns over the impact of the rising costs of travel. Why hasn’t Mr Henderson done the same?

Aashley Wise, Shortlands Road, Sittingbourne.

Give our young people a chance
OVER the years we have watched helplessly as Sheerness and the island continually declines – due, in my opinion, to the apathy and negative attitude of some people. They seem always to oppose any developments and changes, particularly if it is they who consider best for Sheppey and their people. We must stop always thinking of it as the wrong approach.

Other Kent and south-east MPs have been extremely vocal about their constituents’ concerns over the impact of the rising costs of travel. Why hasn’t Mr Henderson done the same?

Tim Bell, Scrapsgate Road, Minster

Still searching for a lost cat
IT IS now a year since I lost my beloved tabby cat and I have had no word or trace of her. She was lost early on August 25, 2010, a very windy morning, and although we searched and searched, we have not found her. This is not a letter to preach to anyone but to urge them to remember their animal chipped. In my case, she was to be done on her next booster in September. How I wish I had got to see her.

In any case – and many more – whether a body is never found, it doesn’t hurt to run the word if one is found over a year of two later, they can be brought back to their owner, saving the heartache.

Was she killed by a dog, or by a bird? Someone else chipped into her or something else was wrong? But was her body picked up? I know she didn’t go far from her own home so she isn’t to our side.

In any case – and many more – if a body is never found, it doesn’t hurt to run the word if one is found over a year of two later, they can be brought back to their owner, saving the heartache.

C Snody, Marine Parade, Sheerness.