

HMS Magpie

Why her Crest changed.

by Roland Symons



HMS Magpie, circa 1944.

HMS Magpie and her Badges by Roland Symons

It has become the fashion recently for Royal Naval badges to be redrawn or even completely changed. Some have been altered for aesthetic reasons, some to reflect in status and some because the original design is now considered 'politically incorrect'! This may be current fashion but one change of badge design came as a result of a schoolboy's initiative in 1952.

There have been seven Magpies in the Royal Navy. The first was a re-named prize – a four-gun schooner captured at Perros in 1807. The last was a sloop of the Black Swan Class, launched in 1943. She saw active service in the Atlantic, the Arctic and off Normandy whilst in 1944 she formed part of Captain F J Walker's Second Support Group and, along with HMS Starling, HMS Kite and HMS Wild Goose, helped in the sinking of U238 and U592 in that year. In January 1943 had been granted a badge consisting of a magpie volant proper.

In September 1952 a pupil from Monkton Combe Junior School, in Bath, saw HMS Magpie at Gibraltar. The badge of the School happened to be a magpie and this appeared on the cover of the School's magazine. And so, armed with a copy of the magazine, young Michael Swift boarded the Magpie! This contact led to links being forged between the School and the ship. The captain of the Magpie, Commander Graham Lumsden DSC, was rather taken by the design of the magpie used by the School and which had been designed by the art mistress, Miss Bulmer. He enlisted the support of a previous captain of HMS Magpie, HRH Prince Philip, in an effort to get the ship's badge changed and in January 1953 a letter arrived at Monkton Combe Junior School stating that His Royal Highness feels that your magpie is nicer than the present ship's badge and he has asked me to write to the Admiralty to suggest that it might be substituted for the one in existence. In May 1953 this was achieved and a new badge and a new badge was granted; this could be blazoned as white within an annulet black a magpie statant rousant proper.

Apart from the bird being turned around to face the right way, the badge was that of Monkton Combe Junior School. Sir Arthur Cochrane, however, surrounded the badge with a black annulet. An annulet is symbolic of unity and friendship, here officially linking school and ship, but it may also be derived from the 'magpie' found on a shooting target.

Sadly, in 1956, HMS Magpie went into reserve and then to the breakers' yard in 1959. One of Magpie's final appearances was to 'act' the part of HMS Amethyst in the film *The Yangtze Incident* – and when Amethyst moves in that film, it is in reality Magpie! As a token of her friendship with Monkton Combe Junior, the School was presented with the ship's bell and Division Trophies -the former is still used for the christening of children of staff members! In 1970 another chapter in the story was written when the Magpie's badge made an appearance in the South Atlantic, this time on a postage stamp – the ascension 2s.6d. issue, being one of a series featuring Royal Naval badges.

In 1988 Monkton Combe applied for a Grant of Arms and to accompany it, the Junior School asked for its badge to be registered on the same Grant. There was a moment of worry – could the School retrieve its magpie from the Royal Navy? Thanks to the efforts of Hubert Chesshyre a design was produced which satisfied all concerned. It is blazoned within an annulet embellished in chief with a fleur-de-lys Azure a magpie proper. Somewhere amid the cast-off clothing of the Prince of Wales and the Princess Royal there are two rather small sweaters featuring the new badge of their father's old command. .

Update by RN Communications Branch Museum

To date (March 2024) there have been 9 RN Warships that carried the name of HMS MAGPIE.

1 st	1806
2 nd	1826
3 rd	1830
4 th	1855
5 th	1868
6 th	1889
7 th	1943
8 th	1982
9 th	2018

See Wikipedia for further details.

HMS Cutlass and HMS Dagger are now the smallest Royal Navy Warships. They are fast patrol boats working out of Gibraltar.