



WRNS Officers' Steward Patricia Potton (née Gervaise)

Patricia was born in 1923 in Barry, South Glamorgan to Patrick and Lily Gervaise, and was the sixth of nine children. Only 16 when war broke out, Patricia had to wait until she was 18 before she could volunteer for the WRNS. Her family were opposed to the idea, but although her aunt burnt her call up papers she arrived for training at *H.M.S. Eaglet* in Liverpool.

Before the completion of her training Patricia requested to be given the category of Officers' Steward because she enjoyed meeting people and was interested in catering. Her request was granted and she was told to report to *H.M.S. Osprey* in Dunoon. Her duties there included cleaning cabins and serving meals.

Patricia was one of eight Wrens who made up the entertainment committee called "The Glenmorag Follies". One of the "Follies" was a trained dancer and she choreographed and taught the others. Not having any tap shoes they had to "make do and mend" by using their uniform shoes which had metal pieces in the heel and toe. It was through the follies that she met her future husband, Frank. He saw her perform and asked to be introduced to her, after telling a friend that he was going to marry "that Wren with the nice legs in "The Glenmorag Follies"!"

Patricia was demobbed in May 1946 and married Frank in June at Wortley Parish Church, Leeds. When her son started school she put the catering experience gained in the Wrens to good use. She became the manageress of a hotel grillroom and eventually the owner of her own 10-bedroom hotel.

The Centre is proud to preserve a scrapbook of Patricia's time in the Wrens, her memoir and photographs of Nagasaki taken by her late husband Frank.



Patricia Potton



Patricia Potton's Scrap Book:

Left - top to bottom, left to right:
- Postcard from Dunoon with pull-out pictures of Dunoon
- "What about another for the road, Mater?"
- "Dinner to-night will consist of salt pork, hard tack and slightly brackish water"
- 6 photographs OS (Officer's Steward)
- badge

Right - top to bottom, left to right:
- 2 x 1944 Christmas cards
- Three dance invitation cards
- 1944 Christmas air letter (card stuck on: invitation to musical revue in Dunoon) - opened in image below



From Patricia Potton's Memoirs:

I was reprimanded on one occasion in the wardroom because my hair was touching my collar, which was not allowed in uniform. A suggestion put to me was to mix sugar and water together, and comb it through your hair. I used this method, and as hairstyles were upward with curls around your forehead, the next evening in the wardroom, wearing starched white coat, navy blue mandarin collar and navy blue deck cuffs on the sleeves, I felt the epitome of smartness.

The Wren officer who chastised me, looked at me, eyes boggling, a smile on her face, a slight nod in my direction. I thought good, she is pleased. Trying to comb my hair that evening, I realised why the Wren officer smiled, my hair was like a board and needed to be washed several times.



1944 Christmas air letter from scrap book

From Patricia Potton's Memoirs:

By 1946, women had experienced life in the armed forces, factory work, ambulance, bus and train drivers, with even a minority of pilots. Life took on a different meaning, it was now accepted that women, although married could take up employment. There were those of course, who did not approve, "its disgusting, married women working". Women in their thousands did, despite the fact that at the end of the working day, it was still the women who cleaned the house, and cooked the meals. The husbands, arrived home from their employment, and expected their evening meal placed before them, prior to them going out in the evening, to wherever they would go.



W.R.N.S Victory Ball Programme -
Cover and Programme inside





Inventory of the Donation

- Photographs of atomic bomb damage in Nagasaki (taken by her husband, Frank Potton)
- Book, *The ABC of Cookery*, 1945
- Scrap book containing photographs and memos of Dunoon and *H.M.S. Osprey*, also her OS (Officers' Steward) badge
- Typescript memoir with scanned photographs

The photographs below are of atomic bomb damage in Nagasaki and were taken by Patricia Potton's husband, Frank Potton.



"Showing the strange effect on trees"



"Part of the Mitsubishi Aircraft Factory which was put entirely out of action. Note shelter entrance."



Detail showing "The corner of the Mitsubishi Aircraft Factory."