

**Artefact of the month November 2010: Escape hatch from HMS Hampshire (Cat No: 1478)**



At 1730 on 5 June 1916, HMS Hampshire, under the command of Captain Herbert Savill RN weighed anchor and sailed out of Scapa Flow through the Hoxa Boom. The weather was particularly bad that night with a full northeasterly gale having blown up during the afternoon. By the time HMS Hampshire was heading north up the west coast of Mainland Orkney to gain some shelter, the gale had backed to the northwest, exposing the cruiser and her destroyer escort to the full force of the weather. Despite the conditions, there was no possibility of aborting this voyage as HMS Hampshire was carrying the British Minister of War Lord Kitchener and his staff to a meeting with the Russian Czar's government, with the purpose of strengthening the precarious Russian position along the Eastern Front, so the mission could not suffer any delays. The 11,000-ton cruiser pushed on, the 50 mph gale reducing her speed from 21 to 13½ knots. At 2130 Captain Savill ordered the escort destroyers HMS Unity and HMS Victor back to Scapa Flow when it became clear they were unable to keep up in the severe swell and so HMS Hampshire passed alone through waters that had not been swept for mines in over a week. Half an hour later, in the shadow of Marwick Head, she struck one of the 34 mines laid by the German submarine U-75 and sank in 15 minutes. The crew of 655 aboard HMS Hampshire, who had tasted victory at the Battle of Jutland less than a week before, abandoned ship, many through escape hatches such as the one you see here, heading for the icy waters. All but 12 of those gallant men lost their lives in the waters beneath Marwick Head.