

## Elsie Edwards 1925 – present

### WREN - Women's Royal Naval Service



Elsie aged 18



Elsie aged 95



Elsie (top row centre) at HMS Fieldfare in Scotland

When Elsie left school, she went into an office job in Income Tax (and was *'bored out of my mind'*) so 13 months later when she was aged 17 (in September 1943) she volunteered to join the WRENs. She was given a choice of office duties or training to be a cook, and because of her desire to have *'a change of pace'* she chose to train as a cook. When her mother found out she declared her displeasure saying: *'A common cook, after I've educated you!'*

Following her training at the WREN Headquarters at Mill Hill, North London, Elsie was posted to HMS Eaglet which was the flagship of Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches. Here she had a tough introduction to her role as a cook, getting up at 4.30 in the morning to heat the fat for sauté potatoes that were served at breakfast. When fully trained, Elsie was able to make huge quantities of substantial meals (such as vegetable soup and suet pudding) in great metal pans.

It was at this time that the human cost of war was brought home to all those WRENs stationed at HMS Eaglet. Elsie and other WREN cooks would exercise and drill on the beach each day. Here they would see the ships in the dockyards and on one morning were turned away and told that there would be no drills that day. Elsie recounts: *'We found out later that the previous night a ship had been mined and overnight bits of bodies had swept on to the beach.'*