

MN Memorial at Weymouth the end of a Long Voyage

The Merchant Navy Association Weymouth and Portland and District Branch was founded in 2010. The branch meets every second Thursday of the month at the Royal Dorset Yacht Club in Weymouth. Captain Paul Compton, a fellow Cachalot, is the Branch Chairman.

In 2014, the Branch started discussing the possibility of placing a permanent memorial on Weymouth Esplanade to all merchant seaman and fishermen who have lost their lives not only in war but peace as well. The design of the memorial, depicting the bow of a ship just before it disappears beneath the waves, was suggested by David Kennet, a former Chief Engineer. He was also instrumental in drawing up an excellent set of plans which were submitted to the local council for approval and planning permission. Due to the quality of the application and in recognition of the need for such a memorial, the Council very quickly gave permission for the proposed memorial to go ahead. Fund raising began in earnest in early 2016 and the needed sum of over £20,000 was raised in quick time, enabling the project to be advanced rapidly. The MNA was the chosen charity of Mayoress Caroline Churchill and she also assisted in making collections around the town. The Cachalots also made a contribution to the fund and the Club was invited to be present at the unveiling, and I subsequently volunteered to represent our Club at this event.



The memorial is made from Portland stone and the bronze fittings were moulded in Bridport with the railings being made locally in Weymouth. It was good to see that everything was made in Dorset. Viewed from the side, you can clearly see the profile of the bow with the anchors in place.

On the 9th of November 2016, a good crowd of ex and serving seafarers and fishermen as well as the general public assembled on Weymouth seafront close East of the existing War Memorial. Captain Paul Compton started by reading a message from HM the Queen expressing her warmest wishes for the day. The Lord Lieutenant of Dorset, Angus Campbell Esq, unveiled the memorial stating "If ever a town, borough or port deserved to have a memorial like this, it has got to be Weymouth and Portland. I take my hat off to all those involved". The first wreath was laid by retired Bosun Tony Cash assisted by Bethany, the daughter of a fisherman who lost his life at sea. Tony Cash started his career at sea in 1939, he said it was a very proud moment: "It is so important that we remember the sacrifice of all those men and women who lost their lives at sea in the First World War, Second World War and the other conflicts around the world. I have waited a long time for this day. It is very moving to see the memorial on the Esplanade, a permanent reminder of their sacrifice"

I was invited back to the Royal Dorset Yacht Club after the unveiling for a light buffet lunch. This gave me the opportunity to meet a lot of the members of the MNA and to congratulate them on their splendid achievement. An excellent cake had been made to mark the occasion. It included a perfect replica of the Memorial and Bosun Tony Cash was invited to cut the cake.

This unveiling led me to wonder how many of our seaports around the UK still lack a dedicated memorial to Merchant Seaman.

Ian Odd