

Southampton's Maritime Memorials

History reveals that when the Roman army left Britain in 407AD they abandoned the town they had built, some 300 years before, on a bend in the River Itchen adjoining today's Bitterne. It was called Clausentum and it was to be some 300 years before the Saxons established a new town in the area, albeit not quite on the same site. The new town was called Hamtun and it was centred in today's St.Mary's area –close to the waterfront. Understandably, given its geographical position it developed as an important sea port and despite the close if unwelcome attention of marauding Danes it flourished for three centuries.

Hamtun declined in 1000AD and the population dispersed throughout the surrounding countryside. Many reasons have been given for this downturn but the most persistent one is – the river Itchen silted up and seaborne trade ceased.

Unfortunately, my historical references do not reveal how the silt was dissipated but, dissipated it was (probably by the natural processes of tidal flow) and by the 12th century Hamtun was once again a thriving port to be supplemented a century later by the establishment of a shipbuilding industry. The fortunes of the port fluctuated and by the 16th. century most of the continental trade had gone to be replaced by a less rewarding coastal trade. The 18th. century saw a revival of the continental trade and an increase in coastal trade and the town thrived.

As seaborne trade increased it was evident that the port had to expand and new docks and shipyards soon lined the Itchen. In 1842 a rail link with London was established. In 1907 the White Star Line moved its ships and its operations to Southampton and, as they say –“The rest is History”.

Depending how one looks at it, it is, perhaps, a “happy” fact that Southampton, still the premier deep sea passenger port in the United Kingdom and a seaport with such a long and distinguished history, has so few maritime memorials. Given the number of ships that have traded to and from the city – many of them employing local men and women – it came as a surprise to discover that only seven “lost” ships are honoured and remembered on publicly displayed memorials throughout the city.

St.Michael's Church in St.Michael's Square –adjoining the one-time home of the Club – displays a wall tablet in the South aisle in memory of the Royal Mail Steam Packet “AMAZON” destroyed by fire in January 1852 on her maiden voyage from Southampton to the West Indies. Some 105 passengers and crew perished and 56 survived.

Southampton Old Cemetery in Hill Lane is the site of a dual memorial, in the form of an obelisk, to record the loss of the Royal Mail Steam Packets “RHONE” and “WYE”. Both vessels were lost October 1867 during a West Indies hurricane with a combined loss of 166 passengers and crew and 50 survivors.

The same cemetery displays a memorial in the form of a pink granite column on a square base to honour the loss of the Royal Mail Steam Packet “DOURO”.

In April 1882 this vessel was in collision with the Spanish “YRURAC BAT” off Cape Finisterre with the loss of 21 passengers and crew. Happily, 114 survived.



The Douro Memorial

The Western Esplanade is the site of one of the most impressive memorials – a canopied Portland stone drinking fountain in memory of those who lost their lives when the London & South Western Railway packet “STELLA” grounded off Alderney on March 30th. (Good Friday) 1899.

This memorial is even more interesting when one reads that it was erected by public subscription to recognise the bravery and sacrifice of Mrs. Mary Ann Rogers, Stewardess on the “STELLA” who, realising that a lifeboat was full to capacity and in danger of being swamped declined to board and remained on the sinking vessel.

Understandably, the White Star Liner “TITANIC” features prominently in any record of Southampton maritime memorials. Her loss, on April 15th.1912, following collision with an iceberg in the North Atlantic is very much a part of the city’s heritage and many of Southampton’s sons and daughters perished on that dreadful night.

To this day the casualty figures are disputed. The US Enquiry said 1,517, the UK Board of Trade enquiry ruled 1,503 and the UK Enquiry calculated 1,490 but the most widely accepted number is 1,502 following the revelation that Fireman John Coffey deserted in Queenstown (Ireland) following a premonition of disaster. Survivors totalled 704.

The Seaman’s’ Chapel in St.Mary’s Church displays a tablet in memory of the 8 musicians who continued to play (reputedly “Nearer my God to Thee”, although this is also queried) as the ship sank. Another memorial to the musicians, in London Road, was destroyed during the blitz in 1940.

The old High Street Head Post Office once displayed a tablet in honour of the 2 British and 3 American Sea Post Officers who were lost with the ship. Its whereabouts now is uncertain (as the Post Office has moved) but reputedly it is in the Below Bar Post Office but possibly not on display. This will be confirmed, or otherwise, in the near future.

St.Joseph’s Roman Catholic Church in Bugle Street has a brass plate affixed to the leg of an oak table (low down, I believe) inscribed “In memory of the Restaurant Staff –subscribed by colleagues and friends”. *(The tablet has now been moved to the top of the table so that it can be seen more easily. The Ritz Restaurant was a very fine restaurant for the exclusive use of 1st Class passengers, at an extra, very high, cost. It was managed by Luigi Gatti and of the 68 employees, who were neither crew nor passengers, 65 perished in the disaster.*

www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/item/4770 ..Ed)

In East Park, Above Bar there is a bronze and granite memorial to the Engineer Officers of “Titanic” subscribed by “their fellow Engineers and friends throughout the world”

The blitzed Holyrood Church, Below Bar is the present site of another Portland stone memorial to the crew (stewards, sailors and firemen) subscribed for by “the widows, mothers and friends of the crew”. Originally, this stood on Southampton Common but it was vandalised in 1972 and moved to its present location that same year.

Finally, in the Chapel in The Southampton Seafarers’ Centre, Queen’s Terrace (in the building currently housing the Club) there are two memorial plaques dedicated to the memory of the seafarers – 7 Merchant Navy, 2 Royal Fleet Auxiliary and 3 Royal Navy – who lost their lives on May 25th. 1982, when the Cunard Ro-Ro “ATLANTIC CONVEYOR” was struck by an Exocet missile fired by an Argentinean aircraft during the Falklands War, and subsequently sank.

Most readers will know that there is a memorial on Tower Hill, London bearing the name of each and every Merchant Seaman –without exception – lost during WW2.

These names are also recorded in 3 leather bound volumes and it would appear that there are, at least, three sets of these volumes. One set is held in St.Paul’s Cathedral, London, another set is held in Winchester Cathedral (and it is traditional for a representative of the Southampton Master Mariners’ Club to place a small wreath on the opened book on Armistice Day) and the third, by amazing good fortune and the keen eyesight of a Club member, is now in possession of the Club. It is hoped that these three volumes will be afforded a suitable “resting place” in the near future and that they will, under supervision, be available for inspection by the public.

CRK 16/2/07

Readers might be interested in a sequel to CRK’s informative article in “The Cachalot” (Above). A further three memorials, each outside the ordinary field of vision of the citizens of Southampton, are noteworthy.

The extensive Hollybrook Cemetery lies close-by Southampton General Hospital. Just inside the main gates, to the right, lies a small, immaculately maintained Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery where, behind the few lines of standard design headstones and the traditional Cross of Sacrifice, stands a long white wall bearing several bronze plaques on which are engraved nearly 2000 names. The inscription above the names reads:-

1914 – 1918

*“To the Glory of God and in memory of 1852 officers and men of the British Empire who fell in the Great War
and have no known grave but the sea
or to whom the fortunes of war denied the known and honoured burial given to their comrades in death”*

The names of the soldiers lost at sea were inscribed in cemeteries nearest to their last point of embarkation and perhaps the most notable of these was the Hollybrook Memorial at Southampton. Not only soldiers, but sailors and nursing sisters and others are commemorated, the most senior being Lord Kichener who perished in HMS "Hampshire".

The ships mentioned, for instance:- Llandoverly Castle, Asturias, Apapa, Connemara, Leinster, Maine, Abasas, Armadale, Warilda, Anglia, Clenarty Castle, Lanfranc, Citta di Palermo, - will be familiar. Some are described as HM Ships, others as HM Transports or Hired Transports.

Holyrood Church, in the High Street, has stood on its present site since 1320, although it has been rebuilt or restored on several occasions. The "Picture of Southampton and Stranger's Handbook to every object of interest in the town and neighbourhood", published in 1850, tells us that "this church has suffered most extensively from the wretched vandalism of the last two centuries". The old Town Hall stood in front of it and, until 1849, a wooden Doric colonnade, called the "Proclamation", whence Government declarations of war, etc. were read. There were a great number of tablets and monuments, including one to sufferers by the great fire of 1837. On 7 November of that year, a fire having broken out in a store in the lower part of High Street, a number of respectable inhabitants pressed into the burning edifice with the laudable intention of saving such portions of the property as might admit of removal, but the fire unfortunately reached some carboys of turpentine, which exploded in resistless sheets of flame, thus cutting off the retreat of a part of the crowd, 22 of whom perished miserably, and many others were severely injured. The fire was supposed to have arisen from some fireworks set off by boys in the neighbourhood, in the earlier part of the evening.

By 1850 the restoration of the church tower had been deferred due to the insufficiency of funds but it was hoped that the wealthy of the parish, and the munificent among the public generally would not allow it to remain in its present state. Whether or not funds were raised, 90 years later on 30 November 1940 the Church was virtually destroyed by enemy action. Known for centuries as the Church of the Sailors the ruins have been preserved by the people of Southampton as a memorial and garden of rest dedicated to those who served in the Merchant Navy and lost their lives at sea.

A small plaque records "The Watch Ashore has dedicated this corner garden to the everlasting memory of relations and friends who lost their lives at sea".

A larger wall plaque erected by the City Council on behalf of the citizens of the City reads:-

The Falkland Islands

May – July 1982

This tablet marks the invaluable and heroic service of the

Merchant Navy

Operating out of the

Port of Southampton

For the Campaign to recover

The Falkland Islands

From occupation by Argentine forces

A memorial fountain, removed from the original site in Cemetery Road, The Common, was erected in memory of the Crew, Stewards, Sailors and Firemen, who lost their lives in the S.S. "Titanic" disaster, April 15, 1912. It was subscribed for by the widows, mothers and friends of the crew.

Resting in the Sailors' Church, having removed from St. John's church yard in 1958, is Richard Taunton 1684 – 1752, Merchant Venturer and benefactor, twice mayor of Southampton, and founder of Taunton's School, Southampton, where incidentally Lord Maybray-King, one of our late respected Stowaways, taught.

There are several other memorials, somewhat difficult to read as a result of crumbling stonework or want of a drop of Brasso and regrettably the wretched vandalism suffered for centuries continues, although of late considerable effort seems to have been made to keep the Sailors' Church shipshape.

If you go up the River Itchen you will find on the Eastern bank Peartree Green, with its ancient pear tree, Jesus Chapel and school-house. It is an area once much favoured by the families that traditionally provided the Masters, officers and sailors who manned the many large privately owned yachts, sail and steam, in the late 19th, early 20th centuries, and in the graveyard of the little church you will find a tombstone bearing the inscription, "Sacred to the memory of Richard Parker, aged 17 years, who died at sea after 19 days dreadful suffering in an open boat in the tropics, having been wrecked in the yacht "Mignorette".

Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him - Job X111, 15

Lord, lay not this sin to their charge - Acts VII, 60

This memorial to an illiterate orphan boy is located over the unmarked graves of his father and mother, having been set up

again after being damaged by a falling tree some thirty years ago. Apparently the memorial was given to a Captain Mathews, Parker's foster father, by a Mr John F. Hoskins, a mechanical engineer with an office in the City of London, but what connection with the Parker family seems to be unknown.

The yacht "Mignorette" sailed in 1884 on a delivery voyage to Australia with a total crew of four: Tom Dudley, Master, Edwin Stephens, Mate, Ned Brooks, AB and Parker the ship's boy. The vessel foundered in the Southern seas and the crew took to the small boat with practically no food or water. After some 20 days, in order to survive, they killed and started to eat the cabin boy. Four days later they were picked up and, when they got back to Falmouth, the Master and Mate were held in custody before both of these most respectable seafarers were committed for trial at Exeter for murder, for having killed their young shipmate in order to eat him, which they did. They were sentenced to death, but the sentences were commuted to 6 months imprisonment, only part of which was served. Able seaman Brooks turned prosecution evidence at their trial.

The case of Regina versus Dudley and Stephens (1884 QBD) is practically the only decision dealing with cases in which the accused commits what would otherwise be a crime against an innocent person in order to prevent harm to himself. Apart from self defence and prevention of violence there is no clear authority on the extent to which necessity is a defence to a criminal charge. R v Dudley & Stephens lives on as a leading case in English criminal law, but this would be little compensation to poor Parker.

Returning once more to the memorial, the second text was added at the request of Parker's brother and sister, surely an act of forgiveness and magnanimity.

Apparently the memorial stone was maintained in pristine condition for many years, although no one knew who cleaned the stone and tended the grave at dead of night, but local tradition maintains that before leaving England again for Australia, Captain Dudley had arranged for someone to do so. Also, although in poor financial straits at the time, he retained none of the surplus money from the defence fund, donating it as he had pledged to pay for the education of Richard Parker's sister, Edith. Tom Dudley became a reasonably successful ships' chandler in Australia, where he died as the first victim of an epidemic of bubonic plague in Sydney NSW. Stephens and Brooks resumed their careers at sea.

Cachalots developing a taste for this sort of thing can further whet their appetites by devouring "Cannibalism and the Criminal Law" by Prof. A.W. Brian Simpson of the University of Kent at Canterbury, or Neil Hanson's "Custom of the Sea".

Neither the humble ship's boy commemorated in an obscure Southampton church yard, nor his shipmates, could in the awful agony of the moment have had any idea of what was to be their continuing importance in relation to the intricate subject of sanctity of life and the criminal law. R v Dudley and Stephens was the first and still possibly the only modern case concerning seafarers in which necessity was thoroughly discussed as a possible defence to a criminal charge. At their appeal the tenor of Lord Coleridge's judgement suggests that necessity can never be a defence to a charge of murder, but the case is not conclusive on the point, because the Jury merely found that the seamen would probably not have survived if they had not behaved as they did. It seems that allowance is no doubt made for certain species of necessity as a defence. not only for murder but for numerous other crimes and that since Dudley and Stephens the defence of necessity has been very much a matter of speculation.

No doubt many such incidents took place, recorded or otherwise, in times of war and, quite recently, at the inquest into the sinking of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* at Zeebrugge in 1987, the Coroner, during his summing-up, referred to the evidence of an army corporal who had been trapped with dozens of other passengers. Their only way of escape from the rising water was by means of a rope ladder, but it was blocked by a man who had frozen in panic while climbing it. After repeatedly shouting at him to move, the corporal ordered those below to pull the man off the ladder. They did so and he fell into the water and drowned, while the others made their escape. No criminal proceedings were ever contemplated against the corporal or any of the other people involved and, although the Coroner conceded "I think we need to at least glance in the direction of murder" he went on to describe certain killings as "a reasonable act of what is known as self-preservation.....that includes in my judgement the preservation of other lives; such killing is not necessarily murder at all". Necessity – "the great law of self-preservation and nature" reflected by the most senior judge in England a century before, might be a defence, after all, against a charge of murder, (Hanson).

One conclusion may be drawn from these short articles on Southampton's Maritime Memorials – just as there was plenty of variety in life at sea, so was there equal measure of variety in death.

The Memorials mentioned are all inanimate objects beaten out of brass, bronze or copper; hewn from granite or stone, sculptured from marble or shored-up as ruins, waiting to be stumbled upon by the curious or given a fleeting glance by passers-by, to most of whom, nowadays, a ship means only "your cruise liner" or "the ferry". There is however a vibrant, living memorial to be found almost directly below our club room.

This is St Andrew's Chapel, familiar to many present day seafarers and the dockland community but, although ecumenical in worship and open to all, less familiar to a wider cross section of the community. Adjacent to the Seafarers' Centre the small, plain white walled chapel is approached through a small cloister lined with nautical standards. Open to the side to a small walled Garden of Remembrance, the walls bear an interesting variety of memorial plaques. Many of those commemorated once were stalwart Cachalots.

Inside the chapel are more flags and plaques, the most distinctive being those commemorating the tragic losses of the m.v. "Derbyshire" and, during the Falklands Campaign, the "Atlantic Conveyor".

Many seafarers from all parts of the world use the chapel for prayer and meditation during their necessarily short periods of shore leave in Southampton, and greatly appreciate the ministry of the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Free Church Chaplains.

This living memorial to all seafarers is commended to the citizens of Southampton.

Hamish Roberts 24/4/07