

# Gone Aloft

## William Wilson McCrea MNM

The Reverend Bill McCrea was called aloft on the 31<sup>st</sup> October after suffering with heart problems for a prolonged period.

Born in Belfast on 10th May 1941 he was the eldest of nine children and had an early interest in ships and the sea, wishing that one day he would be Captain of a ship. His faith, however, took him into the Church and in 1969 he started working with the Sailors' Society, a relationship that would last over 50 years. He served as full-time Chaplain in London, Kent, Belfast, Jamaica, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Houston and finally Southampton before retiring, officially, in 2006. But he continued as a volunteer and ship visitor until 2021.

Perhaps best known for his work related to the 'Herald of Free Enterprise' disaster in March 1987, when he was based in Kent as chaplain to the Merchant Navy and sea training colleges at Greenhithe. Bill took the funerals of four crew members and cared for their families in the aftermath of the disaster.

In June 2009 Bill was made an Honorary Life Member of the Club and he and his wife Rosaleen were entertained at a Club Supper in his honour. After receiving his certificate from then Captain of the Club John Mileusnic, he then, of course, entertained us in return with several jaunty renditions on the harmonica that he invariably carried with him.

In 2010 he was awarded the Merchant Navy Medal *in honoris causa* for 'Services to the welfare of retired seafarers, especially alumni of the National Sea Training School/College/Centre, Gravesend'. It was presented to him at Trinity House by another member of the Club, Stowaway Admiral Lord West of Spithead. We don't know if he similarly entertained them, but it wouldn't surprise us.

In January 2020 the Sailors' Society honoured Bill's 50 years of service at a special event in Southampton.

A very likeable man and a true friend to the Club, who lit up the Clubroom every time he visited. He will be sadly missed and well remembered not only in Southampton but in other ports as well.

His funeral Service was held on 20th November at Farnham Baptist Church followed by his committal at Whitehill Cemetery in Borden. Over 100 attended the service and many more followed it online.

Our thoughts go to his wife, Rosaleen, their daughter Elisabeth, son Jonathan and their families.

Donations in Bill's memory can be made to the **Sailors' Society** via  
[williammccrea.muchloved.com](http://williammccrea.muchloved.com)

