

WOMEN'S MARITIME HERITAGE STORIES



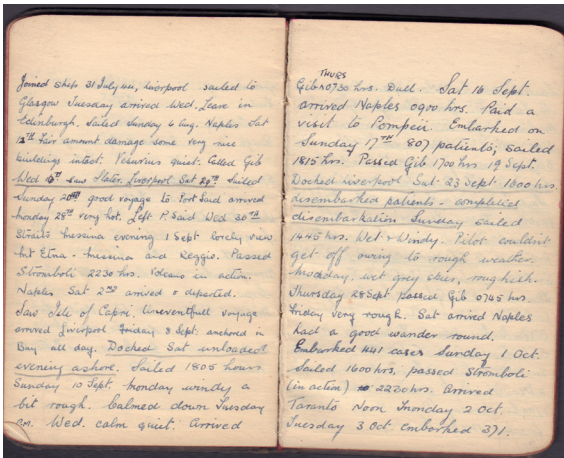
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Left: Pocket book of Harold Fox. Right: Medals from James Biggam. Cover Image: Enid with fellow Wrens.



'Poppies'. - Painted by
Mike Greaves.

Introduction

This booklet was inspired by our Women's Day on the Isle of Wight, held in September 2022 at the Shipwreck Centre & Maritime Museum. The day was instigated as part of our *Fathoming the Future* project, encouraging women to share what heritage meant to them and discuss any stories that particularly resonated with them.

One volunteer - Maggie - was so inspired by the day that over the following months she posted a request on social media asking women local to Southampton to get in touch and share their stories of maritime heritage. Several women responded, telling either their own personal accounts or tales of close family members. They shared letters, diary entries, photographs, and had interviews with Maggie, describing incredible experiences.

The following stories are from these women.

(Unless stated otherwise, all images are kindly provided by the families)



James Biggam's Story

Told by his granddaughter, Val Fox

James Iredale Biggam, was born in the Northwest of England, and was one of eight children. His mother, Eliza Iredale, came from a strong maritime background as her family had owned many merchant ships.

Just before war broke out across Europe in 1914, James joined the Royal Navy and was an Engine Room Artificer on HMS *Arun*. The *Arun* was based in Chatham and was part of the 9th Destroyer Flotilla, tasked with anti-submarine and counter mining patrols. In September 1914 the *Arun* was deployed to Scapa Flow in defence of the Main Fleet at anchor, before being re-deployed in 1915 as part of the Mediterranean Fleet based at Alexandria. For the rest of the war the *Arun*, based in the Mediterranean, carried out its usual defence duties whilst also escorting merchant ships in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In 1917 James was married to Florence Hermann, who was actually of German descent, before moving to Woolston in Southampton and extending their family.



*Top: James Iredale Biggam.
Bottom: James' medal for his service during the First World War.*

Wren Peggy Mead's Story

A story of several mysteries

Peggy started her time in the Wren's when she was 17 years old, after a family member had suggested she do so: "my cousin who was in the Navy told me to apply to go in the Wrens" Peggy begins, "so I did!". Initially Peggy was sent to Chatham Dockyard for training, before being assigned to Fleet Mail and heading off to her posting, which was at a Motor Torpedo Boat Base.

"If we had important or urgent messages, we would have to deliver them on to the vessel!" Peggy continues "once when crossing the dock, we were fired on by machine guns on a German ship out at sea". After being positioned at Harwich for eight months, Peggy was then transferred to Portsmouth and then to Exbury. Here, Peggy was part of the first group of Wrens to be sent to HMS *Mastodon*, a house requisitioned by the War Office in early 1942.

During the build up to D-Day, the whole of the Beaulieu River was filled with Landing Craft and because HMS *Mastodon* was a Combined Operations Base there was a lot of mail, meaning the Mail Room was a big busy office. "We worked hard" Peggy remembered fondly "but we had a lot of fun".

It was here that Peggy met the author - Nevil Shute - who would later go on to write *Requiem For A Wren* based on his experience at Exbury. He was an aeronautical engineer and took part in several exercises with the Landing Craft crews at Slapton Sands. One memorable part of Shute's novel is when the character Janet shoots down a plane, echoing Shute's own experience when a plane was shot down at Exbury in April 1944. "It was a Junkers 188E", Peggy confirms, "it was actually shot down by an Anti-aircraft placement on the Isle of Wight and crashed into the field in front of Exbury House".

There appears to be a lot of mystery and speculation about this plane. Volunteer Maggie Fogg researched further and believes it took off from North-West France and was due to fly to London through Holland: "they were way off course", Maggie laments. Further research indicates that there were four crew aboard plus three unexplained ground crew, and that the plane had been sending out red distress flares. Many years later, one Wren whose name has been lost to history, said it was a top-secret plane, which was intended to be given safe passage, but that the anti-aircraft position on the Isle of Wight were not informed. To this day, the reason for the plane's flight is still unconfirmed.

Shortly before D-Day, Peggy amongst other Wrens, were informed that King George would be visiting their station. Although Peggy herself had little interaction with the King, she later met another important figure. Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey – acting Commander in Chief of Allied Naval Forces for the Invasion of Europe – arrived and gave a rousing open-air address. It is a moment that Peggy remembers well: “[he told] us we were about to be involved in the biggest enterprise of the war”.

After Exbury, Peggy was transferred to Camp Bedhampton, and had been allowed to take a stray dog she had adopted. During her time at Bedhampton,



Peggy Mead at Bedhampton (second Wren from the right).

Peggy learnt of some German occupants who were being kept nearby. One of whom was a scientist stationed in Peggy's office block. "It was all very hush hush", Peggy recalls "but we heard he was something to do with the atom bomb". Peggy never saw the scientist so could only speculate herself, however she later heard the

man was taken to America. On hearing this story, volunteer Maggie tried avidly to identify who exactly this person could have been. "I was hoping the German scientist could be Robert Oppenheimer", Maggie wrote "but in July 1945 he was in Los Alamos New Mexico watching a bomb explode. So maybe not". There are several contenders that Maggie has investigated including Hans Bethe, Niels Bohr – even Albert Einstein. However, the true identify of this individual has never been confirmed.

After the war, Peggy moved to Southampton with her husband, who had recently left the Navy, and settled into married life. Reflecting on her time at HMS *Mastodon*, Peggy seems to have found it quite natural as mariners have always been part of her family. "My mother-in-law had relatives who sailed on the *Victory* and the *Cutty Sark*" she concludes "my father-in-law was a Captain in the Royal Navy so there were a lot of connections to the sea". Clearly Peggy is a Wren with an aptitude for adventure.

Wren Enid's Story

A first hand account of Arromanche

"As one of the few women who took part in Operation Overlord in Normandy, I set sail with a group of fellow Wrens, all Writers or SDO (Signal Distribution Officer) Watchkeepers, on 28th August 1944 on the *Ulster Monarch*. We were taken to the beach by landing craft. By the time we arrived, nearly three months after D-Day, the beaches had been partially cleared of sea defences, but the sight of clothing and equipment, forage caps, bits of tunics, and berets lying on the sand was a stark reminder of the heroism and sacrifice which had been displayed there not long before. We were transferred to landing craft seven miles out, although a safer passage to shore than the troops had on D-Day. On shore there were still mines not yet defused and snipers laying about in small outlying pockets of German resistance.

In Arromanche, home for Naval Party 1500 was L'Oasis Hotel, now the Arrotel. This French villa was the Wrens' Quarters, three to a room, bare floors, just green canvas camping equipment. No hot water for washing ourselves or our clothes but the NAAFI rations were transformed by our French cooks! (Even if they did use all the butter ration for cooking). The fields opposite our quarters were full of Army tents and we were woken each morning by Reveille (a sound to awaken the troops), I can hear it now.

Caen had been badly bombed and they had not yet managed to remove the horses from under the rubble, the smell was atrocious. Two big ships were moored at the end of the Mulberry harbours and they said we could take a bath there. This involved us going in pairs, climbing a ladder from the pontoon which was going up and down, carrying a suitcase and towel: if there was any time I was scared it was then – we had to cross an expanse of open water and I could not swim!

I worked in the Sea Transport Office in La Rue de la Mairie some distance from L'Oasis. German prisoners of war had been put to work mending the roads and we had to run the gauntlet of grey-capped prisoners on our way to and from work. My typewriter and all the office equipment such as filing cabinets etc, were just as the Germans had left them. I can still remember the orange paper we continued to use for minutes and notices. We had the feeling that the German soldiers were thankful in a way that D-Day had happened and they would be going home again.

Our stay had lighter moments; one evening three of us were urged onto an improvised stage to sing to a sea of khaki – 'Mexicali Rose' and 'Melancholy Baby'

are two tunes I remember, also the thrill when everyone joined in. I also remember our dismay the day we found our sheets, which had been washed in cold water, had been pulled off our makeshift clothesline in the garden and trampled in the mud by a herd of cows!

My final recollection is when I was to return to England, my colleagues were going on to Minden in Germany, I was going home to serve at Greenwich. They asked me what I would most like to do as a last farewell to Calais where we had been since December 1944, I said I'd like to do a circuit of the town on a fire engine. With a group of Wren friends that's just what I did, with all bells ringing! The date was 8th May 1945.

All these memories came flooding back to me in June 1994 as I sailed back to Normandy on the *Canberra* with my husband (who had been serving with the Royal Navy in the Far East in 1944) and members of the NVA (Normandy Veterans' Association). The Service on board and the return to Arromanche the next day were the highlights of that memorable occasion.

As I marched with my husband and several thousand Normandy Veterans, proudly sporting my medals and exercising a balancing act between observing the command 'Eyes Left' and trying to keep in step on the wet, slippery sand, I was aware of the warm and wonderful welcome we were given by the people of Arromanche, particularly the children. We saw the bunting which proclaimed that welcome in the small villages as we approached Arromanche. I remember Princess Margaret's surprised question 'Were you here too?'

The memorial service on board the *Canberra* was particularly moving. Poppy petals representing the wartime Services' casualties were dropped with unerring accuracy by a Lancaster bomber. They seemed like a faint breath, carrying a silent message".



Lancaster Bomber
preparing to drop Poppies
Image Credit: Wikimedia
Commons.

Ernest Greenwood's Story

Told by his granddaughter, Laura Mouratsing

Ernest Greenwood was born in March 1914 in Heywood, Lancashire and after leaving school he took an apprenticeship at an electrical company. On finishing his apprenticeship and marrying in 1934, he enlisted in the Royal Navy as an Electrical Artificer; this meant being responsible for the maintenance of the ship's engines, generators, and machinery. Eventually Ernest was posted to Chatham for basic training and earned the rank of Chief Petty Officer, before being posted to the cruiser HMS *Kent*. The *Kent* was in Chatham Dockyard for a major refit and, following the refurbishment, went on a two-year tour at a station in China, being positioned there when war was declared in September 1939.



Certificate from Crown Prince Olaf of Norway thanking them on behalf of the people of Norway.

As the war progressed, HMS *Kent* sailed around the East Indies, assigned to Troop Convoy Escort, and was also involved in the pursuit of the German battleship *Graf Spee*. Following this, HMS *Kent* conducted patrol duties in the Indian Ocean and was then ordered to the Mediterranean to take up convoy duties from Alexandria to Malta. During these duties, the *Kent* was torpedoed by an Italian vessel in September 1940 and had to be towed back to Alexandria for repair, before being sent back to Devonport for further maintenance.

A new era dawned for HMS *Kent* in December 1941, when the ship was entrusted with the crucial task of taking Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden and the Soviet Ambassador in the UK to Murmansk to meet Joseph Stalin for talks. For six months in 1942, HMS *Kent* provided escort to the Russian convoys taking supplies up to the Russian ports of Murmansk and Archangel.

The time spent in these convoys started to take a toll on Ernest: "for the rest of his life Grandad suffered nightmares" Laura confirms.

The seas on these journeys proved perilous and created laborious work for the crew.

“The crew had to take turns on deck breaking the ice from the ships superstructure”, Laura recalls from her grandfather’s account “as it hit [the ship] the cold metal would freeze immediately [and] the weight of the ice, if not removed, would sink the ship”.

After his time on HMS *Kent*, Ernest was posted to HMS *Bellona*, which in 1944, commenced duty on Channel Patrols based out of Plymouth Dockyard. This patrol force comprised the cruiser *Bellona* and seven destroyers – so was playfully given the codename Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. It was here the ship appeared to serve two purposes leading what could be thought of as somewhat of a double life.

“By day they provided air defence of Plymouth Dockyard” Laura clarifies “but as soon as dusk fell... they sailed at full speed to Brest in France”. It was there that they kept the German Fleet of destroyers hemmed in the port, before returning to Plymouth at dawn. The RAF did the same in day patrols.



Large icy waves about to hit HMS Kent where Ernest was stationed.

One of the most pivotal moments for HMS *Bellona*, was the ship’s participation in D-Day on Omaha Beach. Alongside U.S battleships, USS *Texas* and USS *Arkansas*, the *Bellona* assisted by firing its guns inshore at targets spotted by aircraft. After that monumental amphibious attack, HMS *Bellona* then spent July conducting patrols along the coast of Brittany and around the Bay of Biscay. When the war was drawing to a close in 1945, HMS *Bellona* was in Copenhagen and in June 1945 was part of the escort for the return of King Haakon VII and his family to Oslo.

By the end of 1946 Ernest was on stand-by for HMS *Crossbow*, which at the time was being built by John Thornycroft in Woolston. When the ship entered service it's believed that Ernest did one sailing aboard to Key West, bringing back a doll for his daughter, Laura's auntie. Ernest then spent fifteen years in the Royal Navy Reserve and took part in the Fleet Review at Spithead in honour of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation in 1953. "Like many other service men from the Second World War [he] didn't want to talk at great length about [his] experiences" Laura shares, "but we have lots of his photos, and his medals".

It seems evident that Ernest, and his time in service, has left a lasting impression on Laura.

Henry Price's Story

Told by his granddaughter, Vicky Wilson

Henry was in the RAF Coastal Command during the Second World War and was subsequently employed by Trinity House on a Light Ship in the English Channel. This is Vicky's account of her grandfather's story.

"Like so many men who had served in the war, Grandad was quite reticent about talking about his experiences, but one Sunday lunch time we were all sat around the dining table; mum, dad, my husband and me and our baby daughter and of course Grandad, and he started to talk.

We had noticed a slight change in him, he seemed more keen to talk about the past and this particular lunchtime he regaled us with this story.

They were at sea and there was particularly heavy air fire all around them. They were waiting for further instructions on where



Henry Price during his time in service.

they could dock for shelter, but there was an issue of jurisdiction. The air fire was so heavy they decided to see if they could tie up against a much larger Allied ship a few miles away. They hunkered down for the night next to the ship as the sound of air fire continued through the night.

Happy to have survived the night, one of Grandad's crew mates who would trade whatever he could get his hands on, spoke to the crew of the larger Allied ship to see what cargo they were carrying. Much to their horror he replied "Nothing to trade mate, we're just carrying ammunition".

I remember him saying we couldn't have chosen a worse ship to tie up with but we were lucky enough to survive the night".

After this anecdote, Vicky and her family felt it was easier to encourage Henry to talk about his war time experiences. Because of this, she decided to share her granfather's full story.

"Grandad was born in Neath, West Glamorgan on 24th September 1921. We are not sure what work he did on leaving school, but he signed up to join the RAF on 31st December 1940 and was posted to Coastal Command, Marine Craft. This formation was founded in 1936, and acted as the Maritime Arm after the Fleet Air Arm became part of the Navy in 1937. Its primary task was to protect convoys from the German Fleet and U-boats and protect Allied shipping from the Luftwaffe.

The Marine Craft Command were the small armadas of craft that supported the seaplanes used by Coastal Command. These craft include pinnaces,

lighters, launches, motor boats, and depot ships that ferried crew, stores, supplies, and ammunition out to the seaplanes and they maintained and kept clear the runways and taxiways at sea.



Henry during his time with the RAF.

The section of Marine Craft Command that Grandad went into was Air Sea Rescue (ASR). This was established at Ramsey on the Isle of Man in 1939, in the Training Flying Control Centre.

RAF bases all round the Irish Sea were training navigators,

gunners, bomb aimers, and wireless operators in interpreting meteorological reports and changing weather conditions, and following instructions by wireless. The Base controlled ten separate stations and at any one time was handling two-hundred men in aircraft of five man crews. The Air Sea Rescue crews placed targets at sea for them to bomb and in the event of accidents or ditching were there to rescue the crews, either themselves in high speed launches or by involving the coast guard”.

Vicky believes her grandfather's first posting was to the ASR unit at RAF Culmore Londonderry in Northern Ireland. Then Henry was posted to Wales before he was re-stationed to Dover, patrolling the English Channel. After D-Day, he joined Mobile Unit 32ASR at Calshot and patrolled Mid Channel and the Beach heads in France. Then, after the war had ended, Henry acquired a job with Peter Thornycroft, sailing high speed launches which Thornycroft was developing. It was shortly after that Henry then met his wife, Norma, and married her in 1946.

“She was a sheet metal worker at Saunders Roe”, Vicky elaborates “they made aircraft, helicopters, lifeboats for RNLI, powerboats, HSL, flying boats, canoes, and assault craft. I'm sure she told me too sometimes she had also made parachutes at a place near Osbourne”.

Vicky's grandmother continued her connection with the RNLI, raising large sums of money for them and the British Legion. Henry became a Junior Light Signal Driver on the Shambles Light Ship, before being promoted in 1948.

“I am so proud of both Grandad and Nan”, Vicky concludes “who in different ways saved so many lives at sea”.



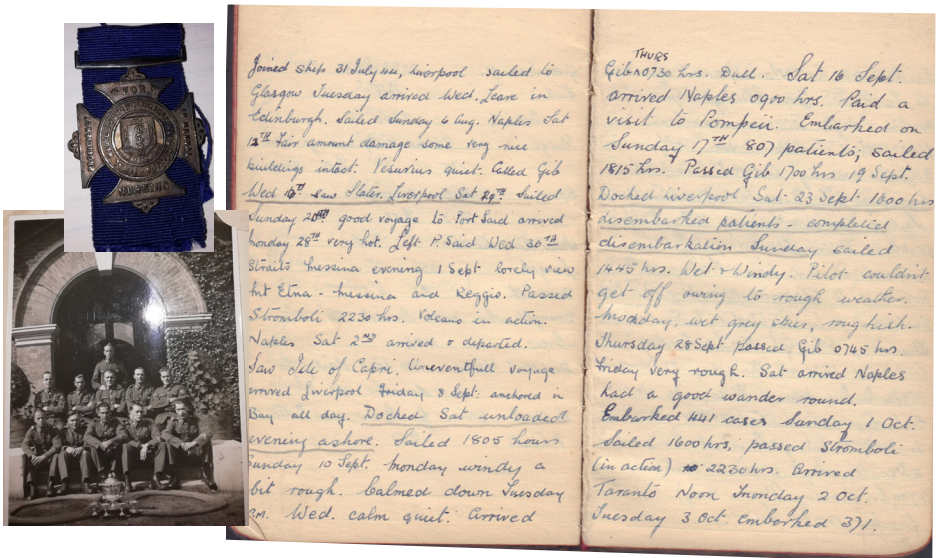
Henry during his time in service.

Harold Arthur Fox's Story

Told by his daughter-in-law, Val Fox

Harold was born on 14th March 1910 in Redditch, one of a very large family. On leaving school, Val believes Harold was enlisted into the Royal Army Medical Corps, and completed basic nursing training before specialising as a psychiatric nurse. By 1933 he was nursing at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Netley. From its earliest days as a Hospital, the wing in Royal Victoria known as "D" block had been built to nurse patients with severe psychiatric problems. Unsurprisingly, the number of patients had increased exponentially since the First World War, with many suffering what is commonly known now as PTSD.

After marrying Violet Lillywhite in Southampton the previous year, Harold was then posted to serve on hospital ships on the outbreak of war, many of which brought wounded soldiers from the site of any battle back to England. On his voyages, Harold made excellent notes in his diary, including descriptions of several ports they docked in, and even an occasion where he visited Pompeii. Unfortunately, the exact vessel that he served on remains a mystery as his notes merely state "joined ship". One fact that does appear at the end of his notes was that Harold was posted to Carstairs, a high security psychiatric hospital in South Lanarkshire in Scotland, before returning to Southampton and working as a Welfare Officer for the Council.



Right: Harold Fox's pocket book.
Top left: Harold's medal. Bottom left: Harold during service.

Harry Rogers' Story

Told by his daughter, Linda Leigh

Linda's father – Harry – volunteered for the Royal Navy and entered service in 1941, as soon as he was eighteen years old. A while later, Harry's brother George also joined when he was eighteen; they both trained as Gunners at Whale Island in Portsmouth. In fact, Harry was one of five brothers, all of them decided to volunteer when war broke out in 1939; and miraculously, all of whom came home.

Thankfully Harry remained near his brother on active service. "He and George were posted to the Mediterranean Fleet", Linda shared, "and strange though it is – they were posted to the same ship". George and Harry were involved in the convoys running from Alexandria during the Siege of Malta.

The Siege began on 11th June 1940, a battle between the Allied Front of the RAF and Royal Navy, against Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The outcome would determine who gained control of the strategic base in Malta, which was crucial to the Allies as they opened up a new front in North Africa. As the siege raged on, the Royal Navy convoys ran from Alexandria to Malta, carrying food and other supplies, whilst under protection from their own warships, destroyers, and the watchful eyes of the RAF above. Even though the siege lasted just over two years and five months, ending in November 1942, the Mediterranean Fleet maintained patrol duties until the end of the war. Harry and George were part of this Fleet, with Harry celebrating his 21st birthday in Alexandria: "I think that was a very good night!", Linda confirmed enthusiastically.

Luckily, the ship that Harry and George were aboard only suffered one attack, with Harry sustaining a slight injury. When the war was over, they sailed up the coast of Italy, and later returned to Liverpool, after being demobilised in 1946. Following this, Harry moved to Southampton and married Linda's mother at Peartree Church in Woolston. He then got a job as a builder repairing all the bomb damage that Woolston had sustained during the war. Harry didn't often reflect on his time during the war, but on occasion would take his family to Malta. Linda remembers these holidays fondly "he reminisced a lot then: kicking over the traces".



Harry Rogers and his brother George.

It is clear Harry's legacy maintains a strong presence with Linda.

Wren Molly Kenny's Story

Told by her daughter, Ruth White

Molly was born in Upper Clapton, London in September 1919. Her father Albert Edward Kenny was employed by the Asiatic Petroleum Company, the parent company of Shell, and Molly also gained employment there after leaving school. After excelling in both maths and physics, and passing at university level with flying colours, Molly was called up to serve in the Wrens as a trainee Radio Mechanic. On completing four months of initial training at HMS *Pembroke III*, followed by three months further training at HMS *Gosling* in Warrington, Molly became specialised and was promoted to Leading Wren.

At the end of January, Molly was transferred to HMS *Victory III* in Portsmouth, later to be HMS *Nelson*, and then within a month to HMS *Excellent* on Whale Island in Portsmouth. This appears to be the same location that the aforementioned Harry Rogers had attended when he was training, a fact that caused our research volunteer Maggie a great deal of excitement. "Did Harry Rogers meet Wren Molly Kenny?", Maggie writes enthusiastically.

After a short time at Whale Island, Molly was promoted to Petty Officer Wren, working there for the rest of her service with a brief secondment to Fraser Battery at Eastney. Like HMS *Excellent*, Fraser Battery was a gunnery school and radar testing site and Molly's job was to maintain all the guns and radar equipment used for training. This role seems to have had its light-hearted days as one aspect of Molly's job was to simulate unfavourable weather when the naval ratings, otherwise known as junior sailors, were manning the guns. For this, Molly would set the simulator in action, which mimicked the aggressive rolling of a ship out at sea, whilst she would spray them with water!

As Ruth reflects on her mother's time on Whale Island, she believes there was a



Molly Kenny during her time in service.

great deal of camaraderie amongst the Wrens. Many were from all walks of life, from debutants to shop workers, and according to Molly, were often encouraged to keep up with the sailors drink for drink!



Top: The wrens sat in the place of the junior sailors on the simulator.

Bottom: Molly Kenny's grade card during her time of service.

NATIONAL SERVICE ACTS, 1939 TO 1941 WOMEN GRADE CARD	
N.R. Identity No.	XIAY 150/11
Miss/Mrs.	KENNY Molly
whose address on her registration card is	29 Holmsdale Road Teddington Middlesex
was medically examined at	WIMBORNE-ON-TREASURER
on	15 MAR 1943
and placed in	Grade* I one
Chairman of Board	Ott Praue
Medical Board stamp	
Woman's Signature	Molly Kenny
*The roman numeral denoting the woman's Grade (with number also spelt out) will be entered in RED ink, by the Chairman himself, e.g., Grade I (one), Grade II (two) (a) (Wimborne)	

NATIONAL SERVICE ACTS, 1939 TO 1941 WOMEN GRADE CARD	
CHRISTIAN NAME (First and last)	Molly KENNY
CLASS CODE	A
FULL POSTAL ADDRESS	29 Holmsdale Road Teddington Middlesex
HOLDER'S SIGNATURE	Molly Kenny
CHANGES OF ADDRESS (The only change of address to be notified to the Registrar is one of residence)	
REMOVED TO (Full Postal Address)	
REMOVED TO (Full Postal Address)	
REMOVED TO (Full Postal Address)	
REMOVED TO (Full Postal Address)	
REMOVED TO (Full Postal Address)	

3. 1517 (REVISED MARCH, 1941).
WOMEN'S ROYAL NAVAL SERVICE.
 Certificate of Service of

NAME Kenny Nobby Official No. 57356

Date of Birth 22 September 1914
 Religious Denomination Ch of England.
 Home Address 29 Holmesdale Road
Teddington.
Middx.
NO UNEMPLOYMENT BOOK.

National Registration Identity No. A194 150111

DESCRIPTION ON ENTRY

Height	Colour of	Scars,	Date of Enrolment	Date of Commencing Duty	Period of Engagement
Feet	Hair	Marks, etc.			
5	Dark Brown	None	15 June 43	2 June 43	HO.

Nearest known Relative or Friend (to be noted in pencil).
 Relationship Sister
 Name Albert E. Kelly
 Address 29 Holmesdale Road
Teddington
Middx.

Establishment	Rating	Specialised or Un-specialised	Category (A.F.O. 1587/41)	Mobile or Im-mobile	From	To	Cause of Discharge
H.M.S. Pembroke III	Probem	Unspec	Trance	Mobile	2 June 43	15 June 43	
H.M.S. Pembroke III	Wren	Spec	Radio Mech	Mobile	15 June 43	27 June 43	Leave after 14 days
HMS Aniel	Wren	S	Radio Technic	M.	27 June 43	20 July 43	Rated Spec. F
HMS Aniel	Wren	S	Radio Mech.	M.	20 July 43	30 July 43	Rated Wren
HMS Aniel	Wren	S	Radio Mech.	M.	30 July 43	17 Feb 44	Transfer
H.M.S. Victory III	Wren Spec.	Spec.	Radio Mech.	M.	17 Feb 44	19 June 44	Transfer
H.M.S. Excellent	Wren	Spec.	Radio Mech.	M.	19 June 44	22 Feb 45	Transfer
H.M.S. Excellent	Wren	Spec.	Radio Mech.	M.	22 Feb 45	22 Feb 45	Released in Clo

Papers from Molly Kenny's time in service.



Molly Kenny with fellow Wrens in uniform.



Medal from Wren Molly Kenny's time in service.

Maurice Hurlstone's Story

Told by his daughter, Rose Askham

Maurice Hurlstone was born in 1924 in Weymouth and left school around the start of Second World War. He was a telegram boy for a short while before he went to work in a Post Office balancing the books. It was around this time that Maurice met Dorothy whom he would later marry, and they would go dancing together, with Maurice being a talented dancer and pianist.

In 1942, Maurice volunteered to go into the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and was assigned to the Post and Communications section; Rose believes this was because of his past experience in the Post Office. After some time, Maurice then entered service in March 1943, seemingly doing his basic training at HMS *Excalibur*. This round of training would have been two weeks and included several physical aspects such as route marches and what was known as "square bashing", a military drill performed on a barrack square. Training also included lectures and medical tests before being posted elsewhere for further training in a particular field. Here no note taking was permitted; everything had to be memorised, including the Kings Regulations and Admiralty Procedures.

When Maurice finished his training at HMS *Pembroke* in October 1945 he was a Log Writer Postal and, over the Christmas period, he was posted to HMS *Mayina* in Columbo, Ceylon which is now Sri Lanka. Maurice also spent some time on HMS *Sultan* and HMS *Berwick* in April 1946. After being released from the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, Maurice transferred to the Royal Navy Reserve. This meant that he could be recalled to duty immediately if hostilities broke out again, and meant he had to do two weeks training every year to keep up to date with procedures.

Rose still has letters that Maurice wrote to her mother, including a poem which Maggie specifically pulled out.

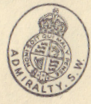
*'Think of me at night when sleep is near
And I, who love you am so far away,
Think of me then,
And I will come to you,
Nor leave you till the night turns into day'.*

Maurice and Dorothy spent their remaining days together living in Weymouth. Something which Rose thinks of fondly - "it was a long and happy life".



Maurice Hurlstone whilst in service.

and then only do you
 others love means the
 rushes through my
 like this. Think of
 is near. And I, who
 Think of me then, and
 leave you till the
 forth your hand,
 dark Another hand
 And as of old my
 And press



C.W.558/R.A.

ADMIRALTY,

S.W.1.

13th June, 1947.

Sir,

On the occasion of your release from Naval Service, I am commanded by My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to convey to you an expression of their recognition of your services in the Royal Navy during the war.

The good wishes of Their Lordships go with you on your return to civil life.

I am, Sir,

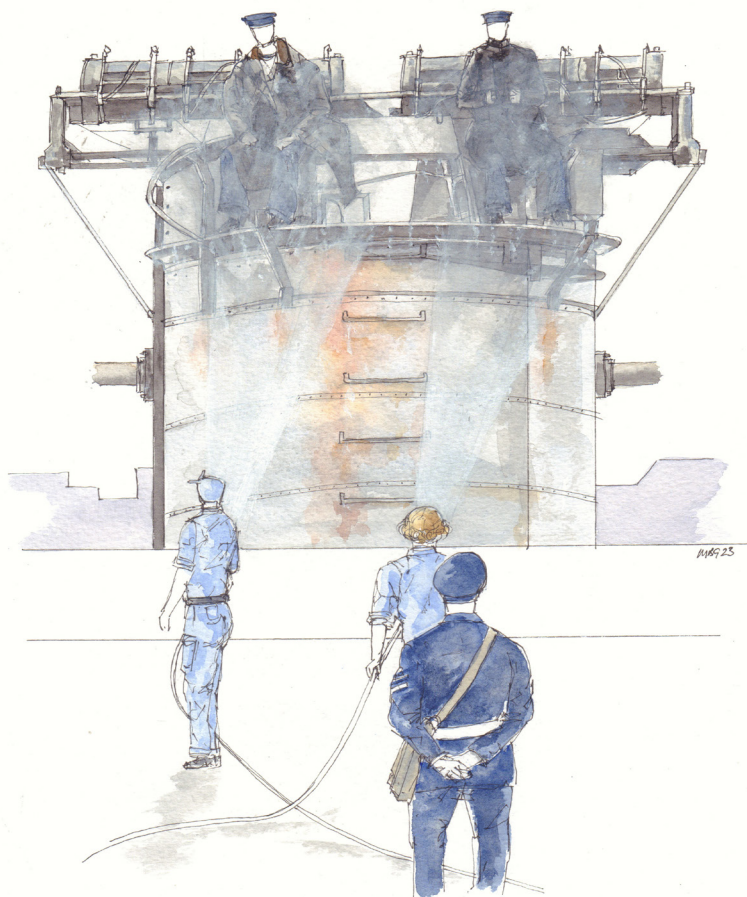
Your obedient Servant,

W.A. Meadow

(Sp.) M.F.J. Hurlstone, R.N.V.R.,
 Craft Avenue,
 South,
 West.



Some of Maurice's documents and notes from his time in service.



*'The Wrens spraying junior sailors' -
painted by Mike Greaves.*

George White's Story

Told by his daughter, Frances Lake

George White was one of six children, and to support the family, both George and his brother Alf went into the Navy. Again, like many men, George didn't speak too much about his time in service and kept it to himself. "He was a very quiet, reserved man", Frances comments. George's modest nature led Frances to speculate whether his time in the Navy proved to be a strenuous period in his life "maybe he had bad or scary experiences" she elaborates. In fact, not much is known about how George spent his time in service. Since he worked in the Merchant Navy as a butcher, Frances wonders if George followed the same pursuit in the Royal Navy before. When in the Merchant Navy he worked on many transatlantic vessels such as the *Franconia*, the *Caronia* and the *Mauretania*. Whilst on the *Mauretania*, George encountered renowned singer Tommy Steele. Although after several months, George hadn't become a lifelong fan of Steele's guitar playing "he never put it down!", Frances recalls her father saying.

After the *Mauretania*, George sailed on the *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth*, staying aboard them for years. Like many sailors, George brought home lots of trinkets and ornaments, including a large American fridge which particularly stands out in Frances' memory: "it filled our kitchen and lasted years!"

Stories of Sailing and Adventure!

Roger Lake's Story

Told by his wife, Frances Lake

Frances grew up next door to her husband and knew him long before he joined the Merchant Navy when he was sixteen. He later became a waiter on a Union-Castle line boat, a large shipping line that ran ships to South Africa carrying passengers and cargo. One night, Roger found himself in hot water when he went ashore and missed the sailing after having a good night! The tardy arrival time meant he had to race to the next port, much to his employer's annoyance: "he got a disciplinary for that!" Frances confesses.

Afterwards, Roger next sailed on the *Northern Star*. This was more of a tourist class passenger ship, often including many Brits who were encouraged by the Government to emigrate to Australia to boost the population. The *Northern Star* sailed South, around the Cape of South Africa, across to Fremantle in Australia, then on to Auckland New Zealand, eventually returning to England via the Panama Canal. In the following years Roger worked as a cook on the *Holsworthy Beacon*, a tramp steamer and regularly sailed to Japan.

Norma Hamilton's Story

A globe trotter who never stops learning

"Many years ago my husband and I shared ownership of a motor boat at Bursledon. We spent a lot of time working on it, painting and refitting with the occasional trip up and down the River Hamble emitting huge clouds of smoke. The engine never seemed to run particularly smoothly...

Then my daughters in law bought a boat and I sailed with them up and down Southampton Water and over to the Isle of Wight. They decided they needed to get it out of the water to paint the hull. At the time I had a big powerful car with a towbar so I said I would tow it out. I reversed down to the waters edge and they hitched the boat trailer to the towbar. When my car was about to hit the water we realised the boat was too heavy and was actually pulling me in instead of me pulling the boat out!



Noma (left) sailed the Boyjan (right) to the Mediterranean.

Soon after this my sister Maureen and her husband Alan bought a motor boat that they named "*Salome*" and moored it at Shamrock Quay. They had the bright idea they would sail it to Australia even though the furthest they had been was Southampton Water. I suggested I would go with them as far as Cyprus and, because I felt at least one of us should know what we were doing, I took a Competent Crew and Navigation Course. I got my Certificate and was duly proud of it. At the age of 63 years I was the oldest on the course. We set off and I sailed with them as far as Barcelona. It had been an uneventful trip, good weather, the Bay of Biscay had been calm.

When *Salome* was moored at Shamrock Quay we became very friendly with the couple in the boat moored next to her. Glynis and Bob owned a Cornish clinker built fishing boat called *Boyjan*. It had been converted to living accommodation. Glynis was a hairdresser and Bob was a businessman; neither had any sailing experience and neither could swim. Somehow they met a Canadian guy who offered to teach them to sail in return for a lift to France.

Glynis and Bob had a plan to sail to America so I said I would go with them as far as Cadiz. So all four of us sailed to Cherbourg where we dropped off the Canadian and then we carried on to Cadiz. Again we were extremely lucky with the weather!

When I left them in Cadiz they loaded up with barrels of fuel, sailed a bit further south and then headed due west across the Atlantic. I'm not sure where they landed in the U.S. but they loaded up again and sailed on down to the Caribbean. They spent a few years working around the Caribbean transporting people and small loads around the Islands; just living the life, but then *Boyjan* got totally wrecked in a hurricane. Fortunately Glynis and Bob were sheltering on land but they lost everything.

They returned to the UK and got jobs as trouble shooting landlords for a pub chain. They are now retired and living in the Midlands; far from the sea!

Were we reckless? Stupid? Adventurous? Probably all of those but we didn't think about the risks or really appreciate the power of the sea if things had gone bad, like being hit by a huge storm. We did it and all lived to tell the tale".

Larry Mark's Story

Told by his niece, Carol Pulman

"Larry was born in Woolston, Southampton in 1935, and became interested in boats when he was about 14 or 15 years old. He used to hang around Weston Sailing Club, talking to the yachtsmen about their boats, listening to their chat about races, new boats, and other people in the yachting world. A school teacher who was also a yachtsman taught him to sail and probably recognised his abilities and skill.

Coming from a family of builders and builders merchants, Larry had access to timber and had space to build his own 12 foot dinghy when he was still in his early teens. He has now lost count of the number of boats he has built! His love of sailing soon became more than a hobby; it was a passion and a whole way of life. He built and raced his own 505 class yachts and in 1969 became World Champion in the race in Buenos Aires, following this with another World Champion win in Plymouth in 1970.

He competed in races worldwide, but the most memorable one was the Fastnet Race of 1979. This was the most disastrous race ever, and culminated in the biggest peace time rescue mission ever. At the time Larry was crewing for Ted Heath (Prime Minister 1970 - 1974) on the yacht *Morning Cloud*, and Ted entered his yacht in the race.

This race is out from Cowes, Isle of Wight, to Fastnet, around the Rock, and back to Plymouth. The first indication of bad weather was at 3pm on Monday 13th August when the Met Office issued a gale warning, Gale Force 8 imminent in Sole, Fastnet and Shannon, three sea areas off the coast of southern Ireland. This was followed by another warning this was increasing to Storm Force 9. The isobars on the map in the Met Office indicated this would increase again to a 10 with winds of 60 knots and waves of 60 to 70 feet (18 - 21m) in height.

The weather was bad when they left Cowes, but by the time they passed around the Scilly Isles they were feeling the full force of the storm, and waves were about 40 ft in height. The squall moved through a tight corridor in the Sole /Fastnet area and in the trough behind it the wind changed direction too fast for the sailors to cope with.

Of the six crew members on *Morning Cloud* Ted was wedged in his bunk, another was trying to prepare some food, Larry was helmsman and had lashed himself

to the ropes and the other three were doing whatever they could to keep the boat upright. But the worst happened and the boat capsized. Larry's rope broke, but he got caught in webbing at the stern and the yacht did a full 360 degree roll.

They managed to finish the race as did many others but of the 303 yachts that set off from Cowes 75 capsized, 24 were abandoned, five were lost completely, and 19 sailors lost their lives. Around 4,000 people were involved in the rescue and salvage operation.

Morning Cloud was sailed back to Hamble and Larry said he went down to have a look at the yacht a few days later. Everything was still damp but all their food had got washed around the galley and all their eggs got broken, so it was stinking.

This experience didn't stop Larry from sailing; in fact he only finally retired about 10 years ago, although he is half way through building another yacht.



Larry with many of his trophies.

Walter Scott's Story

Told by his wife Sheila Scott

Sheila was born in Bootle in 1938, and after the passing of her mother, was raised by her dad and his new wife, Dorothy. Growing up in Liverpool, Sheila had many fond memories including her dad's incredible ability to blag his way onto a ferry during a family holiday to Ireland: "don't ask me how he did it, but he always knew somebody in the crew and just kept walking and talking", Sheila recalls fondly.

When Sheila was only 15 years old, she left school and went to work in the switchboard room at Diamond Laundry in Liverpool. It was here that she met Walter Scott, a Linen Keeper on the MV *Georgic*. His dad – George – was also a Linen Keeper and got him the job. Born in South Africa, George was a talented linguist and could speak five languages, "I adored him", Sheila comments.

The MV *Georgic* was a White Star Liner, the same class of ship as the *Britannic*. They both did the Transatlantic route to New York out of Liverpool, so Walter was away for twelve days and home for two. Sheila's dad was less than pleased with this scenario, "sad to say my dad didn't approve of me having a seafarer for a boyfriend", Sheila reflects, "but Walter was a very funny man, when he proposed to me, he said 'If you can prove to me two people can live as cheaply as one, I'll marry you', fortunately he was joking and we got married in 1959".

White Star sold both the *Georgic* and *Britannic* to Cunard and when they took *Georgic* out of service in 1956, Walter, who was now employed by Cunard did a few trips on the *Mauritania* out of Southampton. It was on this ship that Walter met



Walter Scott in Panama in 1957.

trouble for singing and dancing instead of working! In 1960, Shelia and Walter moved to Southampton so that Walter could get a job on the *Queen Mary*, this meant he was still doing transatlantic crossings and was away for twelve days at a time: "I was quite lonely having left all my friends and family in Liverpool".

Towards the end of 1966, Sheila was expecting her first child, and in 1967 their first daughter was born. This was also the same year that the *Queen Mary* was taken out of service, meaning Walter worked on the *Queen Elizabeth* for a couple of years until 1969 when the *QE2* was launched. By which time Walter had been promoted to Head Linen Keeper and shared two daughters with Sheila. By the early 70's Walter decided he had had enough of Transatlantic routes and cruising and got a job with P&O on *MV Dragon* which was a cross channel ferry on the Southampton to Le Havre route, he retired from the sea in 1995.



Walter in Barbados.



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'Wrens in the postal room' - painted
by Mike Greaves.

About Us

The **Maritime Archaeology Trust** is a registered charity with more than 30 years' experience in research, investigations and pioneering techniques for the study and promotion of maritime cultural heritage. The MAT has grown from regional roots to an internationally renowned authority on maritime archaeology.

This booklet was created for the *Fathoming The Future* project and made possible thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We are very grateful to all those who decided to share stories and to our *Fathoming* volunteer Maggie Fogg for connecting with these women and conducting interviews with them.

You can learn more about our Fathoming The Future project and women's stories below by heading to our project page and YouTube channel.

Fathoming The Future page: <https://maritimearchaeologytrust.org/fathoming/>

YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@hwtma>



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About the Author, Maggie Fogg

Maggie has a varied employment history including catering management, immigration at Gatwick Airport, victualling for the Ministry of Defence during the Gulf War, area manager for a national home care company, and part time work with the Office for National Statistics. Since retiring, Maggie has volunteered for several years with the Maritime Archaeology Trust.

Maggie worked on the *D-Day: Stories From The Walls* project, researching the lives American soldiers who carved their names on the wall. She then wrote and recorded five articles for the *Fathoming the Future* project and now with this booklet has given a voice to women with a maritime story to tell.



*Fathoming the Future
volunteer, Maggie Fogg.*

