

Devonport Dockyard Museums (Wills, M., July 2009, *Dockyards* 14(1), pp. 6-7)

Devonport Dockyard had a museum in the first half of the 1800s, and deposited there was the flag under which Admiral Lord Nelson fell at the Battle of Trafalgar. Other relics, including many wooden walled ships' figureheads and numerous other ornate carvings were also housed in the museum. Unfortunately a fire occurred in 1840 - known as 'The Great Fire of 1840' (booklet available) and destroyed the lot. This first museum was known as the 'Adelaide Gallery'/Adelaide Row.

Records in the Admiral Superintendent's Office in 1968 revealed a letter dated 1914 from a former Admiral Superintendent calling for the setting up of a museum, but the Great War of 1914-1918 intervened and nothing came of the idea.

After the Second World War 1939-1945 and when life in Plymouth was starting to get back to normal, Stanley Greenwood, a longtime employee of the Naval Stores Department at Devonport Dockyard observed that many visitors to the dockyard - some with young children in pushchairs - who despite, in Stanley's words, "shouldering the burden of taxation" were trudging around the dockyard with nowhere to take a comfort break or refreshment; in those days toilet facilities for females within the dockyard grounds were nonexistent, incidentally it was usually a Police Officer guiding visitors around back then, as appears to have been the case since the evolution of the dockyard in the late 1690s.

Being a keen amateur historian Stanley thought a museum would be the ideal solution to the problem he perceived. So began a fairly long *quiet* effort to get the authorities to listen to his suggestion. It wasn't until 1969 with the arrival of Vice Admiral Dick Wildish and his Assistant Sec. Mr Norman Chaff, with, it is believed, a little help from the Dockyard Welfare Officer, Councillor Fred Stott, that authority was given and plans set in motion to set up a museum. The Old Admiralty Fire Station, then just inside the dockyard gate but previously just *outside* the gate, became surplus to requirements, and being so near to the gate was an ideal place for visitors to gather. Mr Reg Blackett and 'Tom' Sawyer' were employed to set up displays etc., and Norman Chaff made an appeal for the donation/loan of memorabilia in the local press. Reg Blackett became the Curator and Tom Sawyer the Tour Guide, both wore uniforms which were provided. The Museum was opened on 28 April 1969 by the late Dr Basil Greenhill, Director of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, who stated 'There were few places with a greater maritime history than Plymouth'. To coincide with the opening, George Dicker, also a Naval Stores employee, wrote a booklet entitled 'A Short History of Devonport Dockyard'.

Visitors to the North Yard used to form long queues outside Albert Gate AM and PM - I can remember well the queues outside Albert Gate when I came back from my lunch break at 1.30pm. In December 1969 it was reported in the press that 1,500 people a week were being given a conducted tour around the dockyard and visiting the duty ship; there were also prebooked visits from organised groups and schools. Visits to South Yard were also arranged in the same manner - prior to the 1960s no travel was possible from South Yard to North Yard and vice versa. The yards were 'joined up' during the 1960s by flyovers.

The Museum moved in the early 1970s, due to redevelopment within its area, and ended up in the dockyard Church of St Lo, this Church was previously known as St Chad's and outside the dockyard wall in Devonport, however after the war the Admiralty claimed land which had been bombed and the church became within the dockyard walls. The museum moved again in the late 1970s and was housed in its present location, the former Cashier's Offices - on the ground floor were the offices of the Assistant Chief Constable (Western Area) Admiralty Constabulary. Today's museum is manned by many voluntary staff and was enthusiastically managed up to July 2007 by Commander Charles Crichton OBE.

It is ironic that old records and mementos of the dockyard, including a model of the ill-fated HMS *Hood* were destroyed when South Yard's No. 1 Store was blitzed in 1941. Likewise records held at North Yard, near to the then Main Central Office Block, were also destroyed in the Second World War, along with the wall alongside the Burma Road, a plaque at this spot makes interesting reading and if you look carefully at the old Main Central Office Block on Burma Road you will note a First World War Memorial to Dockyard Workers.

Mary Wills

(Daughter of the late Stanley Greenwood)

(Since Dockyards received this article, the MoD has announced the disposal of much of South Yard to Princess Yachts for the construction of so-called 'super yachts'. This development casts some doubt on the future of the dockyard museum, and the NDS has written to the Second Sea Lord, English Heritage and other interested parties to state our strong support for the survival of the museum. See <http://www.thisisplymouth.co.uk/news/moddispose-yard-sites/article-1075394-detail/article.html> and related articles on the same website.)