

The President's Cup 2017

The challenge for the annual President's Cup took place during the Birmingham Medal Society's Annual General Meeting at The Holiday Inn, Bromsgrove on Thursday 6th April 2017.

There were four entries:

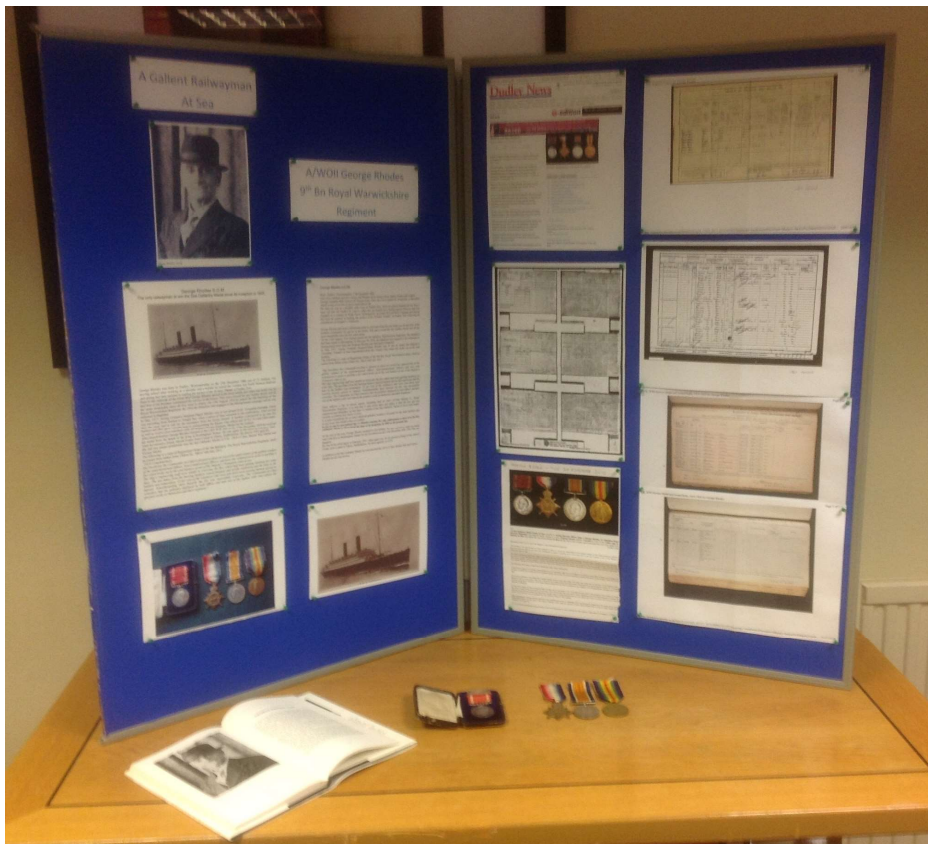
1. A Gallant Railwayman at Sea – Dave Seeney.
2. Only A Side Show – John Scott
3. London Calling – The Yangtze Incident – Martin Harrison
4. The Africa General Service Medal to the Royal Navy – Ken Weston

The three judges, Paul Handford, Roger Bragger & Mark Platt announced the following:

Joint Third - Only a Side Show and A Gallant Railwayman at Sea.

Second - The Africa General Service Medal to the RN

Winner - London Calling – The Yangtze Incident, second place



A Gallant Railwayman at Sea – Dave Seeney



Only A Side Show – John Scott



The Africa General Service Medal to the Royal Navy – Ken Weston



London Calling – The Yangtze Incident – Martin Harrison

William James Beard Herbert was born on 9th October 1903 in Reading, Berkshire, son of William, a Tailor and Eliza Martha nee Cheer, and had one younger brother, Donald born in 1909. By 1911 the family were living together with Eliza's father William James Cheer at 17 Francis Street in Reading.

Little is known about his early life except that he was a keen sportsman being part of the local YMCA Gym Squad, and a keen footballer playing for the Reading Temperance League and Redlands Factory Team during the 1920s.

His civilian trade was a Fitter and Turner and his National Insurance Number BH599282C.

William volunteered for the Royal Navy on 8th October 1930, a day before his 27th birthday starting his service on 20th for a period of four years with number MX 48453. He won the General Efficiency Medal for new entries whilst at Royal Naval Barracks Chatham. He was described as being 5'8" tall, with a 39¾" chest, brown hair and blue eyes with a fresh complexion with a scar over his left eye and an appendix scar. His home address was given as 57 Plains Avenue, Maidstone, Kent.

William served aboard a number of ships and shore establishments during the next 30 years including, HMS Victory, HMS Pembroke - the name given to a number of shore barracks at Chatham, Harwich and on the Forth. It was commissioned in 1878, moved ashore in 1903 and paid off in 1983 - , also HMS Curlew, Achilles, Scarborough, Titania and York.

During the second quarter of 1934 William married Florence Guise O'Reilly in Tonbridge Wells, Kent.

Between July 1939 and August 1941 William served in HMS Sheffield; and was involved with the search and sinking of the Bismark. During this episode Sheffield was nearly torpedoed and sunk by Royal Navy Fairey Swordfish from the Aircraft Carrier HMS Ark Royal, a case of mistaken identity, an aircrew member mistaking Sheffield for a German Battleship. Luckily for William and the crew faulty detonators had been fitted to all 11 torpedoes dropped, this, plus the expert seamanship of the Captain and crew saved her being sunk.

From September 1942 William served in Combined Operation Ships (HMS Copra), these covered many shore establishments throughout the United Kingdom and his attachments included HMS Dinosaur - the Flotilla

Headquarters for Tank Landing Craft Training at Troon, Scotland, where he was assigned to the Landing Craft (Infantry) section.

He also worked at HMS Northney - formerly a Warners Holiday camp but taken over by the Royal Navy during WWII. Hopetoun - a Copra training centre established at Port Edgar on the Firth of Forth during 1943, where British and Allied navies carried out training for the D-Day landings. HMS Lizard – a landing craft base established in summer 1942 as Butt's Baltic Wharf, Portslade Basin, Shoreham, East Sussex, here he worked on the preparation of the top secret Landing Craft in preparation for the D-Day landings at Normandy. HMS Plinlimmon, Naval Party 4263, Roeseneath - a Naval Base located in the area of the Rosneath Peninsula, Argyll and Bute. Buchan Ness, and various postings back at Pembroke

For his War time service he was awarded the 1939-45, Atlantic and Africa Stars, Defence and War Medal 1939-45, followed by the Royal Naval Long Service and Good Conduct Medal on 9th October 1945 for 15 years service

On 1st July 1948 William was drafted to the Cruiser HMS London, and as the senior Chief Petty Officer in the engine room saw action on the Yangtze River during the Chinese attack on HMS Amethyst; when he was in the damage control section. He later recounted to a reporter *"We spent the time dealing with fires, checking damage, and filling up shell holes. It was certainly the worst 'do' that I have ever been in. It was really pretty hot at times. The outstanding feature was the morale of the young chaps who had never been in action before. It was fine"*. He also spoke of his disappointment that his staff had felt when they learnt that the Amethyst had not escaped with the London. *"We all thought she was with us when we returned, and did not know otherwise until the padre told us half an hour afterwards"*. William served in London until 1st October 1949 and for the action on the Yangtze was awarded the Naval General Service Medal with clasp 'Yangtze 1949' on 26th April 1951.

Following this he served once again in HMS Pembroke until he was released from the Royal Navy on 27th August 1952 aged 49.

In later life William lived at 11 Brishing Lane, Maidstone with his wife and died in West Kent General Hospital on 22nd November 1979 aged 76 of carcinoma of the large bowel widespread metastases.



President Philip Wilson presenting The President's Cup to Martin Harrison