

The Wandering Worcesters

The period between 1947 and 2010

By

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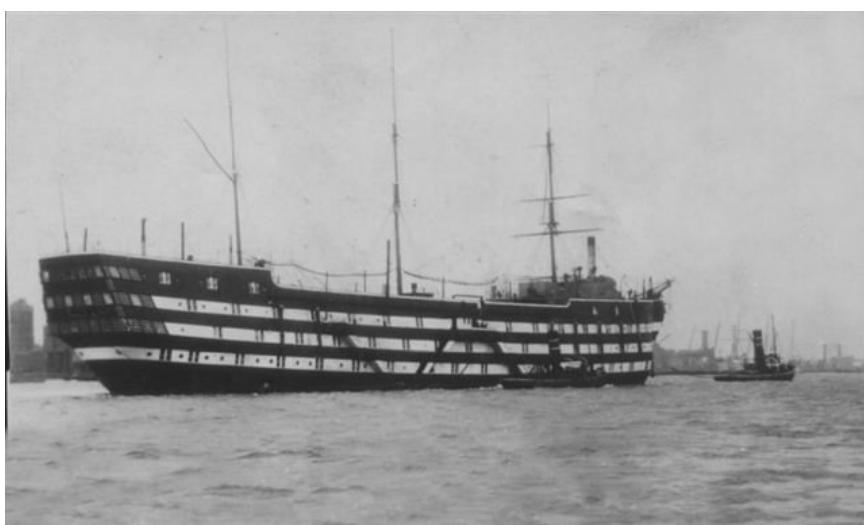
In the 22 years between the end of World War II and when HMS *Worcester* ceased to operate; some 1917 cadets left to find their way in the world, there were still honours and awards being granted to OW's right up to 2010. The Wandering part of the title refers to a large number of ex-cadets who now live all over the world, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, America, South Africa, Spain, Corsica, France, Malaya, Italy, Greece and many other counties. The South African training ship the SATS *General Botha* ex HMS *Thames* a River class Cruiser was scuttled in False bay on 13th May 1947, the training establishment then went ashore, like the HMS *Conway* a few years later, leaving HMS Worcester the only "Floating" training ship for the Merchant Navy.

The pace of life, generally, increased which can be attributed to mass communication; of Radio, Television and latterly the Internet.

With peace in Europe and then the world, came a problem, the poor old wooden wall Worcester II, was well past her use by date, and was not fit to have cadets under training ever again. Fortunately it was learnt that TS *Exmouth*, a custom built training ship, built in Barrow in Furness in 1905 for the London County Council and which had spent the war years, painted a dismal grey, at Scapa Flow being used as a minesweeper depot ship. She had constructed with an iron hull but the upper works were of mild steel, the idea being that the ship could go 10 years without a dry-docking. Negotiations were entered into to bring her down to the Thames and to rename her HMS *Worcester III*.

She was handed over to the Worcester Committee in July 1945 and by the time she was dry-docked and some

minor modifications made it was the 31st January 1946, when the first group of cadets came from Footscray Place to "Sling their Hammocks" on the Lower Deck of HMS *Worcester III*.



HMS Worcester being brought to her Greenhithe site in 1946 (note the Starboard ladders and gangways and the tall funnel)

Routines were put in place, like "Slewing" clockwise or anti-clockwise depending upon whether Port or Starboard cutters crew had won the annual Houlders rowing race on the Thames.

The greatest number of cadets leaving the ship on an annual basis was, 112 left in 1950, 109 left in 1959; 104 in 1954; and 100 in 1948; the lowest was 50 in 1967, followed by 60 in 1968; and of course only 38 left in the July of 1968.

The winter of 1947 was the severest one in the twentieth century, and they may have even shut the Lower deck and Orlop deck ports that winter!, I certainly don't remember them closed in subsequent years! WNGCMDR Edward Hutchings Roberts (1923) MBE, RAF; granted this award for being 25 years in the Marine Branch of the RAF and later on, an OBE for 30+ years. While Captain Colin James Williams (1919) in the Australian Army received a Mention in Despatches, 7 months after the war in the Pacific had ended. That was on land and in the air (?) whilst at sea properly, CMDR Will Cecil Riley (1922) was awarded an OBE and the Order of Leopold (Belgium).

India became independent in August 1947 which was the end of the Empire, and Princess Elizabeth married LEUT Philip Mountbatten RN.

Until the establishment was closed down in 1968, of the 1917 cadets who left, quite a few migrated into the Armed Services, the greater proportion going, as you would expect into the Naval Reserve, 6% or 125 of them. There were a number of OW's who for one reason or another; eyesight problems; seafaring not to their liking; and a genuine liking for the 3 Armed Services rather than the "Fourth Service". 9 of these cadets went into the RN; 42 into the RAF and 42 into the Army; these include those who did their National Service; including Pilot Officer Richard Hudson (1939) DFC, RAF who changed from the Army to the RAF and back again to the Army.

The Berlin airlift took place in the period from July 1948 to April 1949 and the individual British Railways companies, like the GWR – Great Western Railway, or LNER London and North Eastern Railway - were nationalised 3 years after the end of the war. Chaplain Harold Mayo Harris (1910) RNZN, who had been a POW in World War I and was now the Venerable Archdeacon to the Royal New Zealand Navy and mentioned in the New Years Honours of 1949 with an OBE. Clothes and Bread became de-rated in February 1949, but other items were still rationed until 1951. In 1950 the Korean War started, with rumours flashing around the Worcester's decks –"That all cadets would be arbitrarily called up"! as Midshipmen RNR. It didn't happen! Although, as we shall see later ex-cadets were involved.



Painting of HMS Worcester, Cutty Sark and Katrine by Roger Morris (1952) in late 1950's

On a more local level the London docks went on strike, which lasted from June until the end of July 1950. VADM Sir Eric George Anderson Clifford(1916)KCB, CB, CBE, MiD** as the Senior Naval Officer (RN) in Korean waters; sadly LCDR Donald Arthur Dick (1936) DSC MiD RN died when his aircraft was shot down, and LCDR Thomas Dennis Handley (1940) received a Mention in Despatches when HMS Triumph was sunk.

On March 7th 1951 the Iranian Prime Minister Mossadeq nationalised the oil activity in Persia (Iran), from which British Petroleum came, out of the loss of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company, the British Tanker Company became BP Shipping and Great Britain put on the Festival of Great Britain, in which the **Cutty Sark** took place.

In January 1952 a fierce hurricane force storm swept in from the Atlantic across the Bay of Biscay, catching the ship the **Flying Enterprise**, code letters KWFZ which after some heroic efforts of a Falmouth base tug the **Turmoil** and crew, to save the ship she capsized and Captain Carlsen and the Tugs Mate, Kenneth Dancy were saved.

In February 1952 King George VI died of lung cancer and the Shaw Savill liner the *Gothic*, which was hovering off Mombasa to act as a surrogate Royal Yacht, taking Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh to Australia was stood down as the Royals flew back to Great Britain.

At the end of 1952, on the north coast of Devon, a freak storm deluged the valley on which a village/town called Lynmouth was situated, devastating the area, where an OW, James Hudson Earle (1929) was with the Devon constabulary, and for saving life was awarded both a BEM and their Royal Humane Society Bronze Medal, he retired as an Inspector.

VADM James Wilfred Jefford (1918) RIN who was the Flag Officer Commanding the Pakistan Navy and the only Vice Admiral of OW's not to have been knighted.

1st March 1953, Stalin dies, setting the scene for many changes of Soviet leadership over the next half century; Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay conquer Mount Everest in May 1953. The French lost the battle of Dien Bien Phu, which later led to a controversial conflict; the Viet Nam war, "H" bombs were exploded at the Bikini Atoll amongst a fleet of warships and merchant ships considered surplus to requirements and to ascertain the damage that would be inflicted on the ships. Not the same though as fully manned and operational ships!.

CAPT Roy Carlton Harry (1917) RN who was the Director of the PT School in Portsmouth was awarded the CBE and in the RAF; GPCAPT Patrick Abercrombie Lombard (1929) DFC, CBE, had commanded 24 Squadron and the Flying boat base at Pembroke Dock.

An event occurred in July 1956, which affected many OW's. Nasser the Egyptian President nationalised the Suez Canal, and banned any Israeli ships from transiting the waterway. This brought a military response by the British and French in October 1956, when they attacked Egypt, but were stopped when they had reached Ismailia on the canal, by the United Nations from taking over the Canal Zone. An international force started clearing wrecks from the canal in December, but in the meantime ships had to go round the Cape of Good Hope to access the Gulf or Far East, Australia and New Zealand.

In 1956 the Andrea Doria and the Stockholm were in collision, in fog, off the entrance to New York, with the former sinking and loss of life.

The Southern Oceans and the Antarctic continued to hold a fascination over ex-Worcester cadets, with LEUT Patrick Arnold Toynbee (1936) RNR receiving a Polar Medal, nearly five years after the event. (You have to have spent at least one winter in the region to qualify, and there are two OW's who qualify but have never received a Polar Medal) John Stuart Bunt (1911) was a Biologist with Mawsons Australian Antarctic Expedition of 1956 who did receive his Polar Medal.



Our very own OW General!, AVM James Laurence Fuller-Good (1919) CB, CVO, RAF was the Commandant General of the RAF Regiment, tasked with the security of all British Military airfields and establishments. CAPT Ernest Clifford Rhodes (1909) OBE, MVO, RAN was awarded his MVO for

his position as private secretary of the Governor of Queensland for many years.

In 1959 there were a couple of emergencies that most likely affected the brotherhood, in both Aden and Sri Lanka (or Ceylon as it was then). Where as the CND march on Aldermaston AWRE would not have caused much concern to OW's but the Munich Air Crash with the death of 8 of "Matt Busby's Babies" from the Manchester United Football Club would have registered.

One Captain, Hugh Topley (1915) who struck fear into aspiring Mates and Masters, he was the Senior Examiner at Dock Street London, and he was awarded an OBE in 1959.

In 1961 CAPT William Edward Bertram Griffiths (1923) was awarded a CBE on top of his OBE, being a Test Captain for BOAC and then Director of Aviation Safety. Whilst on 'terra firma' Major Patrick Brian Thomas Ross of the Kings Own Royal Border Regiment was awarded an MBE (Military) and the East Germans built a wall across Berlin to stop its citizens escaping to the west.

The Profumo affair was all the talk in the media, but that was overtaken by the “Great Train Robbery” when £2.5 Million was grabbed a not insignificant sum in those days. On 22 November 1963, a date that anyone born before 1955 will probably remember for the rest of their lives, it was the day that President Kennedy was assassinated. In 1965 the Viet Nam war escalated, there was an OW involved Vincent Francis Waller (1966) who won an American award when working in the Mekong Delta, but I am unable to confirm this.

In April 1966 the first Hovercraft service across the English Channel commenced, with ex-cadets being in command at some stage. Also this year between June and July the Seaman’s Strike which bottled up most British Ports as no British flagged ship sailed from the United Kingdom.

In March 1967 the **Torrey Canyon** comes to grief on Seven Stones Reef off SW England and in June of the same year was the Six Days War between Israel and the United Arab Republic (Egypt, Jordan and Syria); which closes the Suez Canal for 8 years until 1975. One of the more ‘left field’ awards was made to CAPT Edward Thompson Graham (1928) RN, when he was awarded an OBE for services to horse racing in the Birthday Honours for June 1967! In the August of that year Sir Francis Chichester starts his solo around the world voyage in **Gypsy Moth IV**.

The **Worcester** ceased to operate in July 1968 and 38 cadets had to finish their training under the concrete roof of the Merchant Navy College at Ingress Abbey, Greenhithe. Ex Cadets though were still active in the world and making their presence felt.

The first human, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon in 1969, and in the same year the “Internet” is borne, with at that time a network of only 4 American Universities linked together for research purposes, the ampersand “@” is used in 1972 to indicate an e-mail address.

A January 1970 saw a “Bloody Sunday” when the British Army opened fire on a mob estimated to have been 20,000 strong in Belfast. Here again in Northern Ireland were OW’s; Major Kenneth Hurrell Hedges (1951), a doctor with the RAMC added a Mention in Despatches to his Polar Medal, when he walked to the Pole, he now lives in Canada. Also was Capt Christopher Field (1952) a George Medal in 1973; as well as Staff Sergeant Kenneth John Stanton (1952) with a BEM while serving with the Bomb Disposal Unit of the RAOC; and Private Brian Patrick Kelly (1960) was doing his National Service with the Prince of Wales Regiment being Mentioned in Despatches. CAPT Peter John Williams (1940) OBE RN while in command of the RNAS at Yeovilton.

IN 1972 at the Munich Olympic Games, 11 Israeli Athletes were killed by terrorists, who in turn were also killed by the German security forces.

1973 saw the last American troops leaving Viet Nam, while Great Britain instituted VAT (Value Added Tax), followed in the October by oil prices rising up to 70% of previous costs, right after the Yom Kippur war in the SE corner of the Mediterranean.

1974 is remembered by the world for ‘Watergate’ and the eventual standing down of an American President –“Tricky Dicky” Nixon. But the OW’s celebrated a ’hat trick’ VADM Sir John Anthony Rose Troup (1936); RADM James William Dunbar Cook (1940); and RADM Alan George Watson (1940) were all honoured in the

same New Years Honours with in the case of the Vice Admiral when he was Flag Officer Northern Ireland a knighthood and the two Rear Admirals, Cook in the RN and Watson in the RCN with being made Companions of the Order of Bath (CB)

The Suez Canal reopens in 1975, and the Chief Test Pilot for Short Brothers Mr. Donald Bur Wright (1948) made an OBE in the Birthday Honours.

1979, CMDRE John Frank Wacher (1942) – already mention in the World War II was granted a CBE, being a Commodore twice over, both in the Naval Reserve and with his company P&O.



Nearly gone – in Bruges

Margaret Thatcher in 1982 committed Great Britain to war over the Argentinean's blatant Invasion of Georgia Island and the Falklands. There was great activity in the maritime world, both Royal Naval and British Merchant Navy. "STUFT"ed (Ships Taken Up From Trade) ships were called in to act as troopships, hospital ships, tankers and RoRO ships and Ferries, all to support the Navy and Army to regain these far away territories. Again OW's were there. CMDRE Michael Verney Nigel Bradford (1948) CNE RNR as Master of the *Canberra*; also CMDRE Peter John Melson (1961) CBE, CVO, RN the CVO being as recent as the Birthday Honours of June 2010, when he retired from being the Director of Operations for Trinity House.

1986 Britain and France signed an agreement to build the "CHUNNEL" across or under the Straits of Dover. It was finally opened on the 6th May 1994, taking six years to construct, a year over the expected time frame and 80% over budget, but has since, in 16 years transported 250,000,000 people.

The Polar story continued in 1987 with C/O Nicholas Anthony Beer (1966) gaining a Polar Medal, while CAPT Maurice John Cole (1952) MBE added to his Polar Medal with the MBE for taking part in the Antarctic Surveys between 1960 and 1972. Sir John Michael Parsons (1955) was granted a KBE for services to British commercial interests in India in 1970.

Possibly the last ex-cadet to be knighted took place in 1988, when Sir Christopher John Benson (1949) KBE, who served his time in Union Castle and then as a 2nd Leut in the REME for his national service. He had become the Chairman for Boots the Chemist and Chairman for the House of Fraser. In the same year Mr John David Rendle (1947) was awarded a CBE as the Managing Director of Shell Tankers.

CMDR Anthony John Bull (1952) RNR who now lives in France, received a Sovereigns MVO for his services as the Port of London Harbour Master, and CAPT David Charles Cole (1958) MVO RN as the Captain of the Royal Yacht *Britannia*.

The ex-cadets mention above and their Honours and Awards is NOT the full list over that period of time from 1947 to 2010, but taken at random from the known data.

Of those wide eyed cadets, nearly 2000 of them, they have ended up in an astonishing variety of occupations, quite a few having nothing to do with the sea. For example in a blanket coverage of the law; we have a District Court Judge, 10 Police officers. A Governor, of two different prisons, and a probation officer as well as lawyers. In the period covering the cadets of 1947 to 2010, there have been four Examiners of Masters and Mates in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. At least 12 Harbour Masters around the world that I know of. A Member of Parliament (for Glasgow for 14 years); two Professional Marine Artists, 1 (at least) Historian, 3 Professors at various Universities around the world. The originator of the Glastonbury Festival.

Back in matters maritime and aeronautical, two Civil Air Traffic Controllers and 3 OW's involved at a high level in the Cruise industry; four Radio Officers and six Marine engineers, 15 Purser, 2 Hovercraft captains, a number of civil airline pilots. A couple of Journalists, a BBC TV Cameraman. A director of Funeral Services with a special dispensation for Burials at Sea!. Two men of the cloth and two wine makers in Australia, one in Tasmania the other in the Hunter region of New South Wales. The editor of Reeds Nautical Almanac, and several Authors; but the strangest one is a Worm Farmer!

Sadly the ship shut up shop on July 19th 1968, but she stayed off Greenhithe until a tug came to collect her in 1978 and take her on her last voyage to Bruges for breaking up. Her memorabilia did not go ashore to the Merchant Navy College, (because I am led to believe of a directive from the new head of the MN College) but went to the Naval Museum at Chatham, some have ended up in Greenwich at the National Maritime Museum, but the oddest report is of the quite large builder's model of one of the "Grange" ships of Houlders Line in a large glass case which used to be at the head of the gangway between the main deck and the lower deck on Worcester III, has surfaced in Kenya in Mombasa, I await confirmation of this however.

Ackowlegments : London Gazette 1949 – 2010
Dog Watches and Newsletters 1947 to 2010
Roger Morris for painting of HMS Worcester.
Blue Funnel (Ocean Steamships) at Liverpool.

Tony Maskell
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