



THE ROYAL NAVAL ENGINEERS' BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

ITS ORIGIN, AIMS AND OBJECTS

Engine Room Artificers were first introduced into the Royal Navy in 1868 and at that time were the only kind of naval artificers. Although entered direct as C.P.Os., they found their living conditions primitive and inferior to that provided for other senior ratings. Most other ratings and officers were hostile towards them and resented them as being "oily-wads." There was no provision for widows of those who died in service nor any assistance for any who were invalided from the Service. There was no prospect of advancement beyond the rating of E.R.A.

By 1872 the Society had been formed and set itself the task of improving the conditions and prospects of its members and establishing amongst them a system of contributions and benefits which would aid those who became victims of misfortune.

It did not aim at attending to petty grievances and complaints. Instead it sought, by the interchange of experience and ideas amongst its members, to build up an *esprit de corps* which would make the E.R.As. as a body respected and valued as a loyal and highly important and integral part of the Navy. By proving their worth and encouraging all its members to maintain the highest possible standards of craftsmanship and technical knowledge, general intelligence and conduct, the Society sought to provide the conditions which would justify better treatment, accommodation and prospects.

Influential men in public life who were especially interested in the Navy, came to hear of the Society. They saw that it was a well-conducted and responsible organisation and that it reflected the reasoned opinion and aspirations of E.R.As. as a whole. Thus, by their own efforts and the ideas they inspired and influenced amongst others the Society's members were able to achieve first the opportunity of promotion to Chief E.R.A., with the Chief placed in sole charge of the machinery of small craft, then the opening of Warrant and Commis-

sioned rank and finally, shortly before the First World War, direct promotion to Commissioned rank under what was then known as the Mate (E) scheme. Each of these steps, which now seem so natural and are taken for granted, was only won after a long battle with Authority. That it is now possible for an ex-apprentice to reach the rank of Rear-Admiral (and several have already attained this rank) is due in large measure to the persistent effort of the Society. Very many have reached Captain and Commander rank because of that effort.

Not does the Society rest only on past achievement. The introduction in 1955 of a Certificate of Trade and Engineering Experience (s.437) to be issued to Artificers on leaving the Navy was the result of representations made on behalf of the Society. This has proved of great assistance to those seeking jobs. The reintroduction of brass buttons on the uniform of Artificer Apprentices was influenced by very strong representations by the Society (and that at the time when all other "black button" ratings were being transferred to "bell-bottoms.") We have carried on a consistent campaign in Parliament for very many years for the re-building of the accommodation at H.M.S. *Caledonia*, which has been of a "temporary" nature since before the beginning of World War II. That work is soon to start on a ten-year plan is largely due to our efforts. A watching brief is continually held on the training syllabuses and conditions of Artificer Apprentices and that of Junior Artificers at sea. Many of the innovations and improvements in training methods introduced in recent years were first suggested by the Society. Periodic visits are made by the Society's General Secretary to the training establishments with the co-operation of the Admiralty. Since 1950 the Society has made persistent efforts, both in Parliament and by direct representation to the Admiralty to gain increased status for Chief Artificers and, although not yet successful, much seed has been sown and many influential persons have been won over, so that the time will surely come when this battle will be won.

As other types of Artificer were introduced into the Navy they took over the same privileges and conditions which had been achieved for E.R.As., and have continued to share in every benefit which the Society has been able to win. Since its inception in 1872 the Society had restricted its membership to E.R.As., and those promoted therefrom. In July, 1960, it was decided to open the membership to all Artificers and those promoted therefrom, in the belief that as all Artificers share a similar training, now largely mess together and have the same problems, there was little which could be done on behalf of E.R.As. which did not also similarly affect all other Artificers. It was only fair, therefore, that other Artificers should have a voice in the Society's affairs. Furthermore, in representing only the Engine Room side the Society could no longer claim to represent the majority of Artificers as it had done in years past. It was considered better that all Artificers should rally under one common banner, that of this Society, with 90 years of experience behind it, than that the various small groups should each seek their own individual interests.

What is more, the Society has a sound financial backing, which is immediately available to new members of whatever Branch. Death and Invaliding benefits are paid on a basis which ensures that the higher the total membership of the Society, the higher the actual benefits received. It therefore behoves every member to ensure as high a membership as possible. Benefits paid to nominees of deceased members in the 1914-18 war exceeded £30,000 and those paid in a similar cause in the 1939-45 war exceeded £46,000. Death and invaliding benefits are, of course, paid in peace-time as well as in war. It has been found that the majority of our members maintain membership after retiring from the Navy, and their death benefits are paid to their widows or nominees on their eventual death, thus becoming a very useful "burial insurance."

Although it is less than two years since the decision was made to admit all Artificers, an O.A. is already Vice-President of the Devonport Branch and has a seat on the Executive Council, which meets in London half-yearly. It is hoped, as more "new" members join, to widen still further the representation on our Committees and Council and, as time goes by and numbers justify such a course, to consider creating a separate Branch or Branches of the Society where other Artificers congregate. At present the Branches exist only at Portsmouth and Devonport, the Chatham Branch having been absorbed by these two on the closure of the Nore Command in 1961. A further Branch exists for Artificer Apprentices and is controlled from Devonport.

The underlying theme of the Society's record is one of keeping together, as members of one body, all who share a common task, outlook and method of expression. Much of the Society's strength and influence derives from the fact that many of our members have retained their membership when promoted to a high service rank.

The Society, through its membership, Committees, and by the efforts of its General Secretary and Branch Secretaries, keeps in touch with events and trends which may have an influence on the well-being of Artificers and those promoted therefrom and, by representations in Parliament or to the Admiralty, seeks to foster that which will be to our advantage and to the advantage of the Service, and to redress any injustice or anomaly. Because of the responsible manner in which the Society has been conducted, it has for many years enjoyed the approbation of those in authority. Its interests have been represented in Parliament also for many years by an M.P. who is an ex-E.R.A. and ex-Artificer Apprentice, who is tireless in his efforts on our behalf.

The Society publishes its own Journal on technical matters of interest to all Artificers and a printed Report is also sent to each member three times a year. At present the Society is, in concert with kindred Associations, seeking to gain some improvement in pensions

for its older retired members and to obtain some redress from the many anomalies existing with regard to pensions and widows' pensions.

The foregoing must surely indicate the purpose which the Society serves, though it would take a book to tell of its 90 years of endeavour and achievement. Times and conditions change, but throughout all change there are certain underlying purposes which remain to be served. Each generation gives a fresh expression to the purpose and finds a slightly changed method of serving it within the old and well-tried scheme. For men of a common duty and interest, a common background of schooling and training, it is natural to form into some sort of Society or Association. It is a characteristic of the British way of life which finds expression amongst all sections of the community. For an Artificer the Society offers itself as the natural and ready provided body for him to join. By doing so he will be conscious that he has qualified himself to share in the benefits which he inherits from the Society's work in the past. More important still, he will be conscious that he is taking a proper and responsible part in determining the future for himself and others who will follow him and be grateful that he has carried on a very useful and successful work.

The Society sponsors the R.N.E.B.S. Club, 46 Clarence Parade, Southsea. Make it a place of call whenever you are in Portsmouth. You will receive a warm welcome. (Temporary membership available for short-term visitors on application to the Steward). Facilities include Bar, Restaurant, Cocktail Bar, Sleeping Accommodation, etc.

Any Artificer or Officer promoted therefrom who wishes to join the Society or obtain any further information on it should write to:—

Mr. W. G. Osgood, 97, Hayling Ave., Copnor, Portsmouth.
(For the Portsmouth Branch).

Mr. W. J. Robins, 2, Alton Terrace, Plymouth, Devon.
(For the Devonport Branch).

Mr. L. J. Morey, 2, Alton Terrace, Plymouth, Devon.
(For the Junior Branch—Artificer Apprentices).

R. H. CRICE, *General Secretary.*

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