

Some Historical Notes

Pertaining to The Society

Since the introduction of artificers into the Royal Navy in 1868, their numbers have steadily increased, replacing those existing traditionally trained engineers and it would seem likely that this trend will continue.

On 1st April 1872 there were 176 Chief Engine Room Artificers and Engine Room Artificers (E.R.A.) in the Navy, including those in Indian Troopships. At the same time there were 974 Engineers.

The first benevolent organisation to be set up for lower deck personnel in the Royal Navy was the Naval Warrant Officers' Friendly Society, set up in 1792 and reconstituted in 1877.

It was followed by the Artificer Engineer and Engine Room Artificers' Club and Benevolent Fund in 1872. One of the founders and its first chairman (president) was Chief E.R.A G. C. Chisham, who joined the navy in 1868. Another founding member was William John Barratt who joined the navy in 1871 as a direct entry as an Acting Engine Room Artificer.

Before any of the lower deck societies had formed it was common practice for groups of seamen, chief petty officers, warrant officers and officers to submit petitions stating their grievances to such bodies as the Royal Commission on Naval Manning and the Amicable Naval Society. However, in 1860 the Admiralty moved to stop this practice and issued a letter to the fleet which declared.

"All combinations of persons belonging to the fleet are prohibited. Individuals are not to combine, either by the appointment of committees or in any other manner, for the purpose of obtaining signatures to memorials, petitions, or applications, nor are they collectively to sign any such document".

The circular was subsequently incorporated as Article 10 into Queens Regulations. Henceforth it was illegal to meet to discuss or take any actions on any collective grievance, and the maximum penalty for breaking the regulation was death. It was under this shadow of regulation that these newly formed lower deck societies had to operate. For precisely this reason the societies, and more particularly the joint committees, operated in a clandestine fashion, their officers were often pensioned ratings or civilians beyond the reach of naval discipline and their petitions were issued anonymously.

The Society was set up in a similar manner to that of the Royal Naval Engineers Club which had been formed in 1851 by Engineer Officers. At the start the Society had two branches, one in Plymouth and the other in Portsmouth. When the Society formed, it 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.

Recent years had seen a lot of changes in the Navy. In 1853, the Continuous Service Act (CSA) replaced the practice of pressganging sailors at times of high demand and the unpopular hire and discharge system. It moved the responsibility for manning from ships captains to the Admiralty and meant that men would join up and could be assigned to any ship. In 1860, the Naval Discipline Act reformed naval regulations and removed the ferocious nature by which the navy was governed. Both of these acts made the navy seem a little more attractive as a profession.

The Society did not set out to attend to petty grievances and complaints. Instead, by the exchange of ideas and experience, it sought to build up an esprit de corps to make the E.R.A.s a body respected and valued as a loyal, important, and integral part of the Navy.

By proving their worth and encouraging all of 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.A.s as a whole. Thus, by their own efforts and the ideas they inspired and influenced amongst others, the Society 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.

Members of the Engine Room Artificers', Plumbers', Carpenters' and Shipwrights' Societies often still belonged to their respective trade unions and contact with Members of Parliament tended to be made by means of the union machinery. An objection to trade union influence among E.R.A.s was partially responsible for the Admiralty decision to train its own boy artificers from 1903 rather than rely on skilled men recruited from industry.

Following the example of the Society, many other sections of the lower deck established their own benefit organisations in the course of the next thirty years. Naval ratings were never a cohesive group, the lower deck was fragmented into a score of grades and classes, and consequently membership of the different societies was restricted to men serving in particular branches such as Ships' Stewards, Coopers, Armourers, Blacksmiths and so on. By 1910 there were fourteen societies in existence.

In March 1877, the Admiralty proposed the establishment of 100 Chief Engine-room Artificers.

In 1897, when warrant rank was opened to engine-room artificers, the title "Artificer Engineer" was adopted, which to most laymen sounded akin to but less grand than Chief Engine-Room Artificer who, in fact, as a Chief Petty Officer, was still a rating, and so junior to the Artificer Engineer. It was exactly sixty years before in 1837 when the original style engineers were granted Warrant Officer status.

In 1898, the First Lord of the Admiralty confirmed that 20 engine-room artificers had qualified for the Warrant rank and that a certain number of these would be selected for promotion. An Order in Council stated that a maximum of 50 men would be promoted.

In 1903 the Chief Petty Officers' Society, that included men from all sections of the service, no longer had a common aim and split up, the Devonport and Chatham branches going in one direction and Portsmouth choosing to remain independent. After this schism another four societies formed, The Armourers Society 1905, The Ship's Stewards Death Benefit Society 1907, a short-lived Society of Cooks 1907 and the Electricians' Burial and Invalid Relief Society 1910.

In 1904 the first "loyal appeal" purporting to deal with general lower-deck grievances was issued and from 1907 until the outbreak of War the three joint committees published an annual loyal appeal. (6) Naturally there was no direct contact between the lower-deck movement and the Admiralty. The authorities never officially received or acknowledged the loyal appeals.

In 1905 the Society started to publish "The Naval Engineering Review" as a quarterly magazine. Mr. W. Stoddart had suggested some five years earlier, when he retired on a pension, that the E.R.A. class should have a journal of their own. But eventually he saw the first edition in which he had contributed an article called "Congratulations".

In 1906 the aims of the ERA's Society were to give financial assistance to the nominees of deceased members, to promote the intellectual and moral condition of its members, and to disseminate scientific knowledge in connection with the engineering trade. Other societies had broadly similar aims.

Also, in 1906 an apprenticeship scheme was introduced, which in Admiral Fishers words, "puts handicraft in the Navy beyond the control on Trades Unionism". Meanwhile artificers exerted an important influence in the flourishing of the lower deck societies during the Fisher era.

In 1909 a joint committee of the lower deck benefit societies issued the following appeal: The lower deck representatives selected by the men, shall have an official opportunity of direct representation to the Admiralty, at stated periods, in a similar manner to the concession enjoyed by the men of H.M. Dockyards.

In 1910, Mr. W. Stoddart was asked to take over editorship of the Review, even though he had no training as a journalist, but just an inside knowledge of an E.R.A.s life.

In 1911 the E.R.A.s' society forwarded a memorandum to members of parliament which argued that with regards to the mechanician scheme, the partially trained mechanic, is set in authority over the fully trained and specialised mechanic. The E.R.As were strongly opposed to the mechanician scheme on the grounds that the Admiralty had usurped them and replaced them with semiskilled stokers. E.R.As also voiced concern over the fact that in time a warrant mechanician could find himself in charge of chief artificers, men who saw themselves as being superior by virtue of their formal apprenticeships and training.

E.R.As believed they were separate and distinct from the lower deck, a notion they harboured as part of their longstanding ambitions to join the officer class. Because they were granted special privileges E.R.As looked down on all other tradesmen and seamen and consistently refused to participate in lower-deck petitions or Magna Charters preferring instead to pursue their own individual claims.

This issue brought the internal class war between E.R.A.s and stokers out into the public domain. The E.R.As received support from the Member for Parliament George Barnes who, as a former mechanic, had completed a full apprenticeship followed by twenty-five years at his trade. However, supporters of the stokers claimed that the E.R.As were doing the jobs that by custom belonged to the stokers and that the E.R.A. is a very much overrated individual. The Admiralty had no intention of pitting the mechanician against the E.R.A. but was merely providing the means to relieve E.R.As from their watch-keeping duties in order to allow them to attend to their respective trades. Their qualified technical status as tradesmen was, after all, the reason why E.R.As demanded special status within the Navy.

At this time the E.R.As society was arguably the most powerful of the lower-deck societies and one which was very successful in publicising its issues and requests, which it did through its links to various engineering trade unions and sympathetic members of parliament.

Also in 1911, the Captain Marrack Essay Prize was instituted in memory of Engineer Captain Phillip Marrack (1861-1911), Assistant Engineer-in-Chief of the Navy (1901—1911). He was a champion of high engineering standards and was devoted to achieving the recognition for naval engineering he felt it deserved. His obituary was printed in the February edition of the journal, The Engineer.

On 22nd October 1912, a deputation was sent to the House of Commons to interview the Financial Secretary to the Admiralty. The deputation consisted of four members of the Executive Council and three Branch Secretaries; however, their names are not recorded in the report. The three topics of conversation were: Pay, Present Position and Promotion.

By the end of 1912, membership stood at 902, however 28 members were excluded for arrears.

At this time there was a shortage on Engineering Officers and members were being encouraged by the Executive Council to undertake the requisite examinations. Due in large part to the persistent efforts of the Society, Chief E.R.A.s were able to attain Warrant and Commissioned rank as well as direct promotion to Commissioned rank under what was

then known as the Mate (E) scheme. The shortage was due to the rapid increase in the number of new naval vessels being built. This was done to counter the increase in shipbuilding by the German Navy who had changed two amendments in their Naval Law so that they could add a third battle squadron to their fleet. It took some seven years to train up Lieutenants before they could take up their duties on a ship, hence the shortage.

Up until the end of 1913, the adjudicator for the Marrack Memorial Essay Prize was Engineer Rear-Admiral W. L. Wishart. Due to continuing ill-health, he was not able to continue with the task of choosing the best essay. The Society was grateful that Engineer-Rear Admiral A. E. L. Westaway took on this role.

It was noted in the Society's January 1914 report, by the General Secretary, Charles J. Ward, that the membership now stood at 1,124 with the total value of the Fund standing at £2,094 17s 8d. The increase in membership over the last 12 months was 212. Ten years before in 1904 the membership was only 500 with a Fund value of less than £1,000.

It was also noted in the report that many of the noble veterans who had the sagacity and wisdom to start the Society, were still members in 1914. They were indeed stalwart men, for in those early steam Navy days, it required much British pluck, in view of the very strict discipline and usage, to even allow such an idea to take root in their minds and germinate into life. At this time the Society was still known as The Royal Naval Artificer-Engineers' and Engine-Room Artificers' Benevolent Society.

Pay was still a big concern as it had been fixed at the same daily rate since 1882 (some 31 years before). A 4th Class E.R.A was paid 5s.6d., rising to 5s.9d. as a 3rd Class, to 6s.0d. as a 3rd Class and to 6s.6d. as a first Class. A 2nd Class Chief E.R.A was paid 7s.0d. And a 1st Class was paid 7s.6d. It was submitted that pay should start at 7s.0d. per day with appropriate increments for the other grades. Also, that pay increments should be granted every 2 years, instead of 5 years.

In 1914 the Marrack Memorial Prize was won by Chief Artificer Engineer W. G. Harding. His rank would have been that of a commissioned Warrant Officer. Except for full dress, warrant officers and commissioned warrant officers wore the same uniforms as commissioned officers but were distinguished by cuffs with three buttons and buttonholes of blue "twist."

In March 1917, membership had fallen to 996. The Devonport branch treasurer, Mr. F. Angle passed away and his role was taken over by Mr. F. E. James.

On February 1st, 1917, Rear-Admiral Sir Arthur J. Hennike-Hughan presented prizes to boy artificers on board HMS Indus.

In September 1917 a copy of a most secret memorandum from the Naval Intelligence Division was forwarded by the Board to the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, Admiral Sir David Beatty, for comment. He was instructed to forward the memorandum to all of his flag officers and use their responses to comment on the discontent alleged to exist. Reliable evidence had been received that indicated that meetings of lower deck societies were occasionally being held at the Union Jack Club in London and at Portsmouth, Devonport and Chatham. The Naval Intelligence Division had reason to believe that trade unions had approached these societies asking them to assist in securing better pay and improved conditions for the men. The memorandum also stated that agreement had already been reached between a number of trade unions and lower deck societies ensuring joint action and support of the unions in any measures taken by the societies to obtain better pay etc.

By the end of 1917, the Society had paid out over £12,500 to widows and nominees of members and to members invalided.

Towards the end of 1918, the Admiralty appointed a committee to inquire into the question of pay, allowances together with terms and conditions of all ratings serving in the Royal

Navy. This had been prompted after they had received a number of pointed warnings that were common knowledge to all who were interested in lower deck affairs. The committee's presiding officer was Admiral Sir Thomas H. M. Jerram. The Committee visited all of the principle naval ports and out-lying stations to examine witnesses drawn from the lower deck, and to hear from them the exact nature of the requests they wished to put forward. The inquiry collected a good response from the lower deck as the men appreciated the way the proceedings were undertaken.

During the war the Society paid out in death and invaliding benefits, a total of £31,000. No widow or other nominee of a deceased member received less than £68. This relief work went forward without a hitch, without delay, and without signatures of magistrates or professional gentlemen. No third person stepped between the nominee and the Society.

By early 1919, 302 members names had been placed on the Roll of Honour. There were also 116 members who had been invalided.

In 1919 a vigorous political campaign had been mounted by the lower deck through their death benefit societies, comprising of ratings and petty officers. The campaign had become significant in the agitation for pay increases that year.

The Society demanded additional payments for gaining the certificate of competency for taking a watch in the engine-room of a small ship and for taking charge of the engines. Both of these requests were granted and E.R.As received one shilling per day for taking charge of a watch and a further shilling for taking charge of an engine room.

It is interesting to note that during this period 100% of Engine Room Artificers belonged to branch societies.

The Artificer Engineers and Engine-Room Artificers' Benevolent Fund invested the sum of £95 for the purpose of intending competitors for the Marrack Memorial Prize. (Printed in the Naval Engineering Review dated Oct 1919). It was also mentioned that it was the centenary year of the death of James Watt on 25th August 1819.

113 North Hill, formally known as 2, Alton Terrace was bought by the Society, in 1919, from the Trustees of the South Devon and East Cornwall District No. 66 Independent Order of Rechabites as a Memorial to the E.R.A.s of the Devonport Division killed in the First World War. The building funding by members voluntary subscriptions and cost £665.00. The house was originally built around 1887.

At 3 p.m. on Saturday, 10th December 1921, the new R.N.E.B.S. Club House was opened and dedicated at 2 Alton Terrace, Mutley, Plymouth and it coincided with the unveiling of the Naval Engineers' War Memorial, by Engineer-Lieutenant E. Richards OBE RN. Opening remarks were made by Mr. E. Richards, President. Several speeches were made by the following persons: Mr. F. T. Luckham R.N., Chairman of House Committee, Engineer-Commander F. T. Norris R.N., President of the Executive Council, Mr. W. Stoddart R.N. Editor of the Review and Mr. W. G. White C.E.R.A. R.N.

The text at the top of the memorial board reads as.

This building is dedicated to the Immortal Memory of the Members of the Devonport Branch of the Royal Naval Engineers Benevolent Society who served in the Great War 1914 – 1918 and were killed in Action or died as a result thereof.

The names include those of Engineer Lieutenants, Mate. E., Commissioned Engineers, Warrant Officers, Chief Engine Room Artificers and Engine Room Artificers.

On the 17th of November 1920, there was a meeting between the Civil Lord of the Admiralty and Officials and the Executive Councils of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Boilermakers' Society and the Royal Naval Engineers' Benevolent Society. Representing the Society were the President Mr. W. J. French, General Secretary Mr. C.

J. Ward and Branch Secretaries W. Stoddart and J. H. French. The Admiralty was represented by Lord Onslow, Civil Lord of the Admiralty, Admiral E. Hyde-Parker, Engineer Rear-Admiral Troope, Mr. Loveridge, Superintendent of the Labour Branch, Mr. S. H. Plumber and Mr. C. Pearlman.

The Admiralty were asked why no reply had yet been officially made to the Deputation which interviewed the Board of Admiralty in September 1918 regarding pay which compares very unfavourably with outside commercial rates.

Also in 1920, The Naval Engineering Review changed its sub heading from The Organ of the Royal Naval Artificer Engineers and Engine Room Artificers (Issue 42) to The Organ of the Royal Naval Engineers Benevolent Society (Issue 43).

The financial position of the Society was good this year with a reserve of £3,340. The flat rate of contribution was 3s 4d per month for active service members and 2s per month for pensioners.

The first inter-port meeting was held at Devonport on Monday 12th July 1920.

In February 1922, it was discussed in committee that applicants for the position of Club House Caretaker be informed of the privileges: Free lodging, free electric light and 10% of the lettings. However, no salary would be paid.

At the committee meeting held on 16th March 1922, it was proposed by Mr. Oliver and seconded by Mr. Bucknall, "that as this is the Jubilee Year of the Society and in consideration of its unique origin, we have a dinner, at home, or some function to be decided upon to mark the event". The motion was carried.

At the general meeting held in Devonport on 23rd March 1922 it was proposed by Mr. Oliver and seconded by Mr. Hampton "that the social committee be asked to draw up and submit proposals for the social gathering and that they have the power to co-opt ladies on the committee".

It was later announced in April that a function had been arranged for Wednesday 3rd May at the Corn Exchange Plymouth. The programme would consist of Whist from 6:30 to 8 pm followed by a Light Supper and Concert until 10 pm and then a Programme of Light Dancing until 12 pm. Tickets were 3s for Gents, 2/6 for Ladies and 2/6 for ERA Apprentices.

It was reported that the dinner that had been organised by Mr. Male, was a great success and with the attendance of its oldest member, William Barratt.

The Portsmouth Branch also held a Jubilee Dinner on Friday 21st April at the Corner House Portsmouth. This event was reported in the Portsmouth Evening News.

The Royal Naval Benevolent Trust was founded by charter in 1922 exactly 50 years after the R.N.E.B.S. was founded. Society members took an active part in the work of the new organisation and provided continuous assistance as well as providing most able officials.

It was common practice for members to read out papers they had written at RNEBS meetings held at their club at 2, Alton Terrace, Plymouth. One such occasion was held in September 1923 when C.E.R.A. J. A. Kirby read his "A Naval Man on Diesel Engines". The paper was reproduced in January 1924 edition of The Naval Engineering Review.

In December 1922, the proposal for increasing the benefits of the Scheme for Death and Invaliding Benefits had been prepared and that a special committee meeting would be called to fully consider it. At this time the three Society branches paid in different amounts into the scheme (and presumably received different payouts). Devonport suggested that a Flat Rate Scheme be adopted. Different rates were planned, and Devonport decided upon Scheme B. However, if Portsmouth and Chatham came onboard then they would revert to Scheme A.

In early 1923, the Admiralty selected a number of men for discharge to reduce the numbers and ultimately to lower the wage bill. Engineer Lieutenant Soper asked during a general meeting "whether it was wise to allow those members to be reduced to remain members' of the Society seeing that further reductions may take place and the Society may get such a strong civilian element as to swamp the naval character of the Society". The president, Mr J. Campbell, replied that a rule has been passed allowing reduced members the same rights and privileges as retired members. This did not give grounds for Mr Soper's plea.

In the January 1924 edition of The Naval Engineering Review, it was noted that 56 5th Class E.R.A.s were taking passage to the Mediterranean on board HMS Princess Margaret. As the vessel was short-handed these men, the equivalent of Leading Hands, were turned to by the Commanding Officer to painting, cleaning and other menial tasks. It was reported from many sources that these men obeyed the orders which must have revolted them.

Also in 1924, the Society received a general invitation from Mr. Lionel Yexley, editor of "The Fleet" who was to give an address on matters affecting Lower Deck men. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Wireless Telegraphists' Benevolent Society and attended by a number of Society members.

In 1924 the Review received a record eight contributions for the 1923 Marrack Prize competition. The entries were judged by Engineer Rear Admiral Harry Lashmore CB DSO. In a letter to the editor, W. Stoddart, the Admiral declared that after careful consideration he determined the winner to be F. Stallion E.R.A. for the paper entitled "CO2 Machinery and It's Defects".

When the E.R.A's Club, Malta opened on 1st October 1922 in Queen's Square, Valetta, it was a rallying place for the practical engineers of His Majesty's Navy. However, after two years, business had not been so good as the Mediterranean Fleet was still laying up at Constantinople with only the occasional visit from ships. A loan from the Society to make improvements coincided with the return of the Fleet and all seemed well again. However, the Fleet would often go on protracted cruises, leaving the Club with little or no business.

On the 7th of November, the Society, and the Devonport officials of the Joint Committee of lower deck societies of the Navy, played host at their annual dinner to former Prime Minister, Lord Balfour, who gave a speech in which he commented that "The Houses of Parliament owe so much more to the Navy than the Navy owes to the Houses of Parliament." It was suspected that his invitation had been arranged by Lady Nancy Astor MP.

In 1925, the authorities suddenly became concerned about the activities of the ERA's society, The January issue of the Naval Engineering Review, had been bold enough to discuss the protocol of the League of Nations and the question of whether soldiers and sailors have the right to decide whether to fight or not. It also carried a commentary on a recent speech by the commander-in-chief at Portsmouth, and this was seen as a breach of King's Regulations. The Second Sea Lord's view was that the RNEBS's aims went beyond the legitimate scope of society activity and that the Naval Engineering Review displayed a socialist tendency. He was inclined to suppress the publication but for the fact that such a course might prove counter-productive in the long run. However, those responsible for such dangerous literature were not allowed to go unchecked, and the society's executive committee were summoned before the commander-in-chief at Portsmouth to have this breach of their character pointed out to them and to be warned against future misdemeanours.

On reaching their 80th birthday, founding members G. C. Chisolm and W. J. Barratt sent one guinea each to be added to the Marrack Memorial Prize Fund. Although Chisolm had retired many years before, Barratt was still actively employed in superintending his own engine and motor business at Rowlands Castle.

Later in 1925 W. Stoddart, the editor of the Naval Engineering Review, resigned his post after 15 years. The role was taken on by Engineer-Lieutenant F. T. Norris. M.I.Mar.E.

Also, in 1925 an Admiralty Fleet Order was issued stating that men who were recruited after October 1925 would only receive a daily pay of 3 shillings. This contrasted with the 1919 daily rate of 4 shillings for an Able Rate. With mess bills rising applications for relief from hardship to the Society increased, putting a great strain on its finances.

At this time there were many death benefit societies lobbying the Admiralty for improvements in pay and conditions. But, in the opinion of Sir Charles Madden, Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, they were becoming too radical and were trending towards trade unionism. The Director of Naval Intelligence wanted to discourage these societies as there was as a new welfare system had been implemented, the Welfare Committee System. However, the new system was just as slow and ineffective as many had expected and it was soon disbanded. The Admiralty saw an opportunity to get rid of these death benefit societies and membership went into sharp decline after Fleet Order No 3657 was issued. However, the Society remained above all of these political machinations as it sought to get higher pay and faster promotions for Artificers.

In 1927, the Marrack Memorial Essay Competition was adjudicated by Engineer Rear Admiral R. W. Skelton CB, CBE, DSO. Of the eight essays submitted he determined that "Boiler Examination" stood out.

In 1928, Engineer-Rear Admiral R. W. Skelton adjudicated five essays for the Review and chose "Oil Fuel" by L. Hanbridge C.E.R.A. This was the seventh article submitted and the third that took first prize, the others winning in 1921 and 1924.

The Society committee met with its first chairman and founder, eighty-two-year-old, G. Chisolm. He stated that "in the early days meetings had to be held in secret and there were many disabilities under which the members suffered. These indeed were the cause of its formation, and it would be well for the most recent members, and especially the E.R.A.s who are not members—to their shame be it said—to discover what those disabilities were, and how many have been removed."

On 4th June 1929, W. Stoddart R.N. M.I.M.A.R.E. passed away suddenly, aged 71. For nearly half a century he interested himself in the aspirations of the corps, of which he was an exceptionally distinguished member. Letters of sympathy were received from an ex-Cabinet Minister, a Privy Councilor, Members of Parliament, journalists, Officers of H.M. Navy, and Society Officials.

The Stoddart Memorial Essay competition, for junior members, was instituted by the Society's Executive Council in memory of the previous editor.

On the 15th of February 1930, the new E.R.A.s Club at Malta was opened by the C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Sir Frederick Field. The new Club premises, comprising three floors, overlooked Grand Harbour. It was noted that in early 1942, the E.R.A.s Club was still functioning, including the Maltese stewards, Tony and Manuel. At this time the Club was mainly attended by visiting submariners.

Also in 1930, the first Stoddart Memorial Prize Essay was published in the April issue of the NER, the winner being K.P. Harman E.R.A. App with his paper "The Principle and Advantages of the Oil Engine".

L. Hanbridge published a small book entitled "W. Stoddart. A Biographical Sketch", published by the Westminster Press and costing two shillings. He writes that W. Stoddart, who for more than fifty years worked unceasingly in the interests of artificers. When quite the junior artificer he began writing to the Press on the disabilities of his class and he continued writing up until his death in 1929. As well as being the editor of the Review, he was also the Secretary of the Society.

On 9th June 1931, the Royal Navy submarine Poseidon was involved in a collision with the Japanese ship SS Yuta in the Yellow Sea area, 20 miles north of Wei Hai Wei, China. The submarine sank but there were some 34 survivors. Among the 21 casualties was a member of the Society.

In early 1932, the Society arranged a dinner function in Plymouth for the E.R.A teams contesting the inter-port Rugby football match, refereed by Engineer Captain H. S. Brockman.

In 1933 members of the Society attended the end of term prize giving function at the Mechanical Training Establishment at Chatham

In 1934, the founding chairman of the Society, G. C. Chisholm, passed away aged 87. He joined the Royal Navy in 1858 as an Engine Room Artificer and first saw service on the ill-fated HMS Captain that sank in 1890 with only 27 survivors. Chisholm had an eventful career serving in HM Ships Mersey, Serapis, Egeria, Iris and Zephyr. On Egeria he was awarded the Perak medal and clasp. On his retirement from the Navy, he served for many years as the Engineer of one of the War Department vessels.

HMS Hood played host to a large number of lower-deck societies that followed the rise of naval trade unionism prior to the Great War. Only the Engine Room Artificers' Society is known to have been represented aboard in the late 1930's, though its activities had clearly been in abeyance for some time.

On the 24th of May 1946, RNEBS founding member, William John Barratt, passed away peacefully having lived a long and illustrious life, at the age of 100 years and 8 months.

After the end of World War II, the three branches of the Society decided to try and set up social clubs as memorials to those who had died in both World Wars. The RNEBS Memorial Club was the first to open when Holland House was purchased, thanks largely to a very generous donation from Mr. Zoppi, and ex Chief ERA from Malta, who was later the engineer of the Duke of Westminster's yacht. There were also donations from many members of the Portsmouth Branch. Holland House dates back to 1860 and was formally the Dutch Consulate. The conveyance for Holland House was carried out on 24th July 1946.

The Devonport Branch succeeded in renting premises on the Hoe, but the social club had a precarious existence and was eventually closed in 1963.

The Chatham Branch started collecting a Memorial Fund but never attained sufficient funds or support to justify procuring premises in Chatham.

In February 1951, whilst still serving, W. J. Robbins made representation through his Captain for the introduction of Warrant Officer rank, to be held by all Chief Artificers and Chief Mechanics and a selected number of CPOs of other branches.

In 1955, the introduction of a Certificate of Trade and Engineering Experience to be issued to Artificers on leaving the Navy was the result of representations made on behalf of the Society. The introduction of brass buttons on the uniforms of Artificer Apprentices was influenced by very strong representations by the Society. This was at the time when all other "black button" ratings were being transferred to "bell bottoms".

The Society carried out a constant campaign in Parliament for many years to improve the accommodation at HMS Caledonia which had been temporary in nature since the start of WW2. The result was a ten-year rebuilding plan, but as was discussed in parliament on 16th May 1962, work had slowed down because of other priorities. This referred to the modernisation or new building work at HMS Excellent, HMS St. Vincent, HMS Ganges and HMS Fisgard.

In 1958, Chief Engine Room Artificer Sidney William Gladwin (the Review Editor) was awarded the British Empire Medal.

Since its inception in 1872, the Society had restricted its membership to E.R.A.s and those promoted therefrom. In July 1960 it was decided to open the membership to all Artificers and those promoted therefrom. This was in the belief that all Artificers share a similar training, largely mess together, and suffer the same issues and problems. There was not much that that could be done on behalf on the E.R.A.s that did not similarly affect all other Artificers. It was deemed only fair that all Artificers should have a voice in the affairs of the Society. Also, in representing only the Engine Room side, the Society could no longer claim to represent the majority of Artificers as it has done so in previous years.

In 1961, a prize was instituted each term at HMS Fisgard by giving berets to each member of the winning patrol in the expedition training events, together with a silver cup for the winning division - the Chatham Trophy.

In 1965, Memorial Fund that was at the time used a prize fund in memory of the fallen, was officially registered as a charity as the RNEBS Chatham Memorial Fund.

In March 1968, the question of Artificers pay was again raised in parliament as it coincided with the centenary of their introduction. The question of the master or warrant rate was also mentioned where it was noted that the Admiralty were very much opposed to it.

In 1968, the Society marked the Centenary of the introduction of Artificers into the Royal Navy with a dinner aboard HMS President, London.

In August 1970, Defence Council Instructions stated that the rate of Fleet Chief Petty Officer was to be introduced into the Royal Navy. Although the formal description of the new rank will be that of Warrant Officer, the proposal did not amount to the re-introduction of the old Naval Warrant Officer that ceased to exist in the Navy in 1949, in that its members would continue to be ratings and not officers.

In 1971, a silver cup was presented for a sailing competition between apprentices at HMS Daedalus and HMS Collingwood.

In June 1972, a former Society member, Rear-Admiral Sir Sydney Frew KBE, CB crossed the bar. Joining as a Boy Artificer in 1905 he to sea as an E.R.A. in 1909. In 1939, he was the first artificer to reach the rank of Engineer Captain and in 1941 he was also the first to reach to the rank of Rear-Admiral.

At the Executive Council meeting the notion of accepting Mechanics and officers promoted therefrom into the Society was formally discussed but it was decided to take no action at that time. The Executive Council could find no good purpose would be served and there had never been any approach to the Society by any body from persons claiming to represent all or any part of the Mechanician class asking for membership to be extended to them. Mechanician Apprentices had been introduced for some branches and the maximum joining age for Artificer Apprentices was being extended to 21.

Also in 1972, the Society celebrated its centenary. An anniversary dinner had been planned for June at the Victory Club in London, but this was cancelled (for reasons unknown at this time). However, the Portsmouth branch organised one of their own which was held at the Royal Marines Barracks on 6th October. It was attended by over 80 members whose most senior member was Rear-Admiral C. W. H. Shepherd CB CBE. Guests included Captain McClune from HMS Collingwood and Captain Titford from HMS Daedalus.

In 1974, an annual prize was instituted for the best result in the ONC examinations for Air Apprentices at HMS Daedalus. This was later changed to the BTec Diploma examinations.

In 1975, the Society received the sum of £2,014 under the will of Mrs. Annie Alston, the mother of Lt J. H. Alston RN, who died when HM Submarine Affray was lost in 1951. It was decided by the Executive Council not to place this in the Society's funds but to use it for charitable purposes. In consequence the Marrack Memorial Fund and the Chatham

Memorial Fund each received £500, and the remaining money started the Alston Memorial Fund, which was registered as a charity by a trust deed.

In 1980, Bob Crick completed 25 years as Honorary General Secretary of the Society and had arrived at his 70th year of age.

In March 1981 Les Morley the Apprentices Section Secretary became seriously ill and had to retire from his post. Managing Secretary W. J. Robbins took over the books of the Junior Section. Also, this year a prize was instituted in HMS Sultan for the best Direct Entry MEA each term. This was later changed to the best results in the common Marine Engineering Technology examinations each term with a total value of £180.

In 1982, Syd Humphreys passed away at the age of 94 and was at the time the oldest member of the Society. He had always been an active member of the Society and had served on the Executive Council up until 1970. He was a member of the second Entry of Boy Artificers to HMS Tenedos at Chatham in 1903.

In April 1983, the separate title of Mechanician was abolished, and all technicians of the Engineering sub-branches were to be known as Artificers, whatever their source.

In December 1983, HMS Fisgard closed its doors after 43 years. To mark its passing, it held a ceremonial divisions and open day on 13th August. Titled the Fisgard Finale it was well attended by over 700 ex-Fisgard trained apprentices.

On the 14th of July 1984 at a Special Executive Council meeting, it was unanimously decided to renew the lease on the Memorial Building for a further five years. However, it was recognized that future relations between the Society and the Memorial Club should move away from heavy sponsorship and towards a more businesslike arrangement.

The 26th of July 1984 saw the sudden death of Me N. H. A. Brown, a stalwart supporter of the Portsmouth Section for over 25 years. He was the son of a widow as his father had been lost at sea shortly before his birth in 1917. He entered the navy as an artificer apprentice in 1933. He sustained a very serious accident in 1939 when he fell through three decks on a captured German ship. On retirement he worked at the Experimental Department on Whale Island for two years and then moved to become a lecturer in mechanical engineering at Highbury Technical College.

In 1985, when HMS Sultan was being enlarged, it was decided to start a museum and the trustees of the Alston Memorial Fund agreed that this would be a suitable object on which to expend this fund. HMS Sultan therefore set up the RNEBS Alston Memorial Historical Society, Marine Engineering Museum in HMS Sultan. It was registered as a charity and the stock and cash to the value of £3,952 was transferred to the Historical Society by the fund trustees. They also transferred another £500 each to the Marrack Memorial Fund and the Chatham Memorial Fund.

Also in 1985, it was decided to award an annual prize to be taken in the form of books of their choice, to the Special Duties Officers Course at RNEC Manadon. It was to be known as the RNEBS Chatham Memorial Prize.

In 1996, the Executive Council had the pleasure of voting Vic Blackman into the position of Life Vice President. A long-standing member of the Society, he joined the Navy in 1933 and joined the Society four years later.

It was announced this year that the planned dinner to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Society was cancelled due to lack of support. 1997 also saw the last passing out parade in HMS Daedalus. Air Artificers were moved to a new training site in HMS Sultan.

In April 1990, Sidney William Gladwin BEM passed away aged 73. He had been the editor of the Naval Engineering Review from October 1959 to March 1990.

In July 1990, Ronald Francis Perry passed away aged 63. He had been a Society Trustee and Treasurer since 1972. He joined the navy in 1943 becoming an E.R.A. and retired in 1967. After a variety of jobs his final post was as a civilian instructor at RNEC Manadon.

The luncheon at the 1995 Executive Council meeting was attended by the curator of The Alston Memorial Historical Society Museum.

In July 1997, Mr. W. J. Robbins announced his retirement as Managing Secretary after 38 years of service to the Society. His initial work with the Society was in 1949 when the Junior Branch was re-started in HMS Fisgard. After a 3-year posting he returned as an instructor to HMS Fisgard, where he continued to promote the Society and gain new members. In 1957 he became the assistant to the then Devonport Branch Secretary, Teddy Smith, and when in 1959 he left the Royal Navy, he took over this role permanently. In 1974 he became Managing Secretary. He passed away in 1998.

In 2000, Life Vice President, Vic Blackman proposed at the Executive Council meeting that a trophy of sorts should be created to commemorate the centenary of the Submarine Service. At this meeting the way forward for the RNEBS Memorial Club was also discussed as their debt had risen to over £32,000, made up from unpaid rent, unpaid insurance premiums and repairs. By the following year this debt had risen to approximately £40,000.

At the 2001 Executive Council meeting it was agreed by all attendees that Holland House should be sold as soon as possible, as the property was unable to maintain itself financially. Building repairs were increasing year on year and the rental income from the RNEBS Memorial Club had not been forthcoming.

Later that year, in November, the Society presented a hand engraved glass bowl to the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Gosport to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Submarine Service. The glass was engraved by engraver and artist, ex-navy Rear Admiral, Frank Grenier. He created the design which includes all 612 names of the submarines that were in service between 1901 and 2001. These names form the wave design on the body of the bowl while dolphins swirl around the bottom. On the base is a reference to the Society and around the lip are the words "ROYAL NAVY SUBMARINE SERVICE CENTENARY 1901 - 2001".

In 2002, the Society Trustees took on the executive management of the Society. Up until this time there had been no recognized foundation whereby the Trustees would hold responsibility for the assets of the Society including property and investments. The four Trustees at this time were Vic Blackman, Rod Lampen, Mark Stevens, and Tony Worsfold. The objective going forward was to move all Society assets and accounts to bear the signatures of the Society Trustees, with the exception of bank and investment accounts where the Managing Secretary would also be a signatory.

The Society had for many years requested that the Admiralty create a Warrant Officer 2 rank for the Charge Chief Petty Officer (which was known in the past as the Chief Artificer). The Army, Royal Air Force and even the Marines had Warrant Officers but for some reason, not the Royal Navy.

The rank of WO2, created on 1st April 2004, was given to the Charge Chief with the understanding that other branches would accept the same requirements and educational levels in the near future. When this was finally achieved by the then Second Sea Lord Admiral Spencer, the Society had a special certificate created for him and Mr. Vic Blackman a Life Vice President of the Society made the presentation on the steps of the Haslar Hospital.

In February 2009, Executive Council members visited HMS Collingwood to witness the final passing out parade of Weapons Engineering Artificers. Society members also visited HMS Sultan in February 2010 for the final passing out parade of the Marine Engineering Artificers.

Victor Blackman passed away on Friday, December 4, 2009, at home aged 92.

The Naval Engineer Review was retired in 2010 and was replaced by a more informal magazine called the Society Members' Bulletin.

In 2012 the Society commissioned and paid for the Engineers Memorial to be created and installed at the National Memorial Arboretum. The dedication ceremony was held on the 1st of October the same year and proceedings opened by RNEBS member Commander John Arthur and the service conducted by RNEBS member, the Reverend Canon Paul Bentley.

Also in 2012, the Memorial Board at 113 North Hill was moved to a new home in the WOs and Senior Rates Mess at HMS Drake. The board, carved in oak, commemorated all those members of the Society from Devonport who lost their lives in the 1914–18 War or who died from their wounds. It had been in the Society's headquarters virtually hidden from view since the building's dedication in the 1920s.

In June 2014, it was agreed at the Executive Council meeting that the Society would take over responsibility for the provision of prizes formally sponsored by the registered charities, the Chatham Memorial Fund and Captain Marrack Prize. All of the charity accounts were closed down and the monies transferred to the RNEBS general account. The Society had been a major contributor of funds in support of these charities for a number of the years.

In August 2015, the Society purchased 111 North Hill, a five-story building somewhat larger than 113. The project was directed by Managing Secretary, Derek Fletcher and was a significant investment for the society and representing the reallocation of a large proportion of the funds from savings back into property. In early 2016, Derek Fletcher passed away.

On the 2nd of October 2016, a re-dedication of the NMA Engineers Memorial was held where the proceedings were opened by RNEBS President, David Woollard. Captain J.J. Price gave a poignant address, and the service was again conducted by the Reverend Canon Paul Bentley.

In November 2016 a new Society website was launched as the existing one was proving difficult to manage and was looking somewhat out of date.

In May 2018, the Society organised the Artificer150 Gala Dinner held at Guildhall London for 670 serving and retired Artificers. The event was organised by David Woollard (President), Cliff Fiander (General Secretary) and Mark Stevens (Vice-President). The guest of honour was Chief Naval Engineer Officer, Chief of Materiel (Fleet) and Chief of Fleet Support - Vice Admiral Simon R Lister CB OBE CEng, FIMarEST. The mess President for the evening was Captain P J Towell OBE MA MBA CEng CMarEng FIMarEST Royal Navy. He was an ex-artificer and was at the time Captain of HMS Sultan. Also in attendance was John Harrison (aged 104), an ex-Ordnance Artificer who joined up as a Direct Entry in 1938 and served on HMS Belfast during WW2.

Later that year it was announced, on 1st December that General Secretary, Commander Cliff Fiander, passed away at home. He had developed mesothelioma and had been battling the cancer for a number of months.

In June 2022, the Society celebrated the 150th anniversary of the founding of the RNEBS with a gala dinner at Home Park, Plymouth, hosted by the Society President, Mark Stevens. In view of the fact that the Society did not celebrate either the 100th or the 125th anniversaries the management committee was determined to hold an event however small the number of attendees. In this, they were successful. And a great time was had by all.

End Note

What the future of the Society will be, no one knows, but its history will continue to be recorded, updated, and published until such time that the Society closes its doors for the final time.

Members of the RNEBS, are of course measured in tens of thousands over the last one hundred and fifty years.

Fairness, equality, and recognition drove the Society. First of all, in the new steam navy, then in the post Dreadnought navy following WW1. Equal rights and privileges, pay and pensions, recognition within the old navy's rank and career structure.

Sounds like a Trade Union? Yes, in effect it was. But what set the Society apart was the increasing though gradual recognition of the essentiality of Artificers to a modernising Fleet. A recognition argued most forcibly by Captains of Industry rather than Naval Captains and by local MPs. And the Society succeeded because the Artificers' causes were just and reasonable.

Reading the handwritten correspondence and minutes from the late 1890s and up to the second World War reminds us of the constant efforts by our Societal forefathers to lobby parliamentary support in particular. We had many friends in successive Governments and Lords of the realm who regularly spoke for Artificers in parliament. (Google Royal Naval Artificers in Hansard)

Absent they may be, but their shadow lies long, and their achievements are writ large in the history of naval engineers.

But that was yesterday and today the place for the RNEBS in the Royal Navy has long since disappeared. Apart from providing prizes in support of technical training, we are an irrelevance. And realistically have no substantial future. However, the Society still manages its members subscriptions to good effect to ensure payment of the agreed death benefit and that significant management task is carried out by our three Trustees and the General Secretary.