

HMS MERCURY BLUE PLAQUE SCHEME

HMS Mercury occupied the 120 acre Leydene Estate from 1941 to 1993. Over half a million personnel served or trained at Mercury during the 52 years of its existence and amongst its distinguished visitors were The Queen, Prince Phillip, Lord Mountbatten, Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer.

A small group of ex-Mercurians gathered in the early part of 2014 to discuss the fact that the existence of HMS Mercury and the impact it had on the local community was little known in the area particularly amongst the younger generation. We felt that this had to be rectified and the best way of doing so was by installing nationally recognized English Heritage Blue Plaques on selected buildings which had a special association with Mercury and which are fondly remembered by those who served at Leydene.

The scheme was launched on Sunday 26th October 2014 by the unveiling of the first blue plaque at the Rising Sun, Clanfield. The plaque was unveiled by Commander Keith Evans, who served at Mercury during World War II and had previously served as a midshipman on HMS Hood.

The occasion was a great success, attended by about 120 ex-Mercurians, some of whom had travelled great distances to witness the unveiling.



RISING SUN UNVEILING - 26 OCT 2014



CDR KEITH EVANS (CENTRE)

The second Blue Plaque was unveiled on Saturday 13th December 2014 at the Bat & Ball in Hambledon. The unveiling was conducted by Captain David Hart-Dyke, a resident of Hambledon and Captain of HMS Coventry during the Falklands War.



The third unveiling on the 14th March 2015 was at the Mercury site itself. The Sustainability Centre is one of only four buildings still standing from the days when the site was a naval establishment. The unveiling was conducted by Commodore Anthony Morrow who was Captain of Mercury from 1988-1991.



With the great co-operation of the Sustainability Centre staff, the day was a resounding success with c 130 in attendance, travelling from as far afield as Cyprus to witness the occasion. A message was also read out from Kenneth Tipper, an ex-telegraphist who now lives in Florida and who sent his best wishes for a successful day and fond memories of his time at Mercury.

The fourth unveiling was on 2nd May 2015 at the White Lion in Soberton, affectionately known by all matelots as the "Pinky".

The guest of honour and "duty unveiler" was 1/O Polly Booth WRNS who was the most senior Wren officer to serve at Soberton Towers.

A turnout of about 120 and favourable weather made a great success of the day and many old friends remembered the wonderful times we all had at the Pinky.

Not surprisingly there was a large contingent of ex-Wrens present with some making their first visit to the Pinky since living in Soberton Towers in 1949-50.

The Blue Plaque Scheme had purchased a ships plaque of HMS Soberton which was presented to the landlord, Allan Marks, for display in the pub and as a reminder of the great affection in which his pub was, and still is, held by the Royal Navy.



The fifth Blue Plaque was unveiled at the Izaak Walton in East Meon on 11th July 2015, by Vice Admiral the Hon Sir Nicholas Hill-Norton KCB. The landlord of the Izaak Walton, Dave McGeorge, was presented with a plaque of HMS Mercury as a memento of the day.



Plaque number six was unveiled on 13th September 2015 on the cricket pavilion at Broadhalfpenny Down, now the home of Broadhalfpenny Down Brigands CC. The plaque was unveiled by ex-WO(CY) David Morris, the founding father of the scheme. This famous ground, dating from the early 18th century, was leased and maintained by HMS Mercury from 1952 to 1992 and used regularly by Mercury teams. The ground was used by Mercury as far back as World War II and the Brigands CC was formed at Mercury in 1959.



The seventh Blue Plaque was unveiled at the Hurdles at Droxford. Situated along the back route from Mercury through what was known colloquially as the 'cabbage patch', this road was the normal route to and from Mercury for personnel living in the Fareham area. It was particularly popular in the 1970s when there was a skittle alley at the rear of the pub which was well used by Mercury personnel. Our guest of honour and duty unveiler was Vice Admiral Sir Philip Jones, the most senior serving signals officer in the Royal Navy. He has since become the First Sea Lord.

Sadly the Hurdles has now closed and the plaque resides in the HMS Mercury museum in HMS Collingwood.



Plaque number eight was unveiled at the Bird in Hand, Lovedean on Saturday 14th May 2016 by the late ex-WORS Dave Tavener. The Bird in Hand, was a very popular pub in the days when Mercury Married Quarters were situated a short distance away. A good turnout enjoyed the bar and lunch menu on a beautiful sunny day.



The ninth Blue Plaque was unveiled at the Heroes, Waterlooville on June 18th. The duty unveiler was WOCY Paul Saynor. This date was chosen as it commemorated the 201st anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo.



The 10th Blue Plaque was unveiled on 3 September 2016 at the Red Lion Chalton. Duty unveiler was ex-WOCY Hugh Axton. Around 70 ex-Mercurians enjoyed a glorious day and good beer.



Plaque number 11 was unveiled at the Hampshire Hog (formerly the Hogs Lodge) at Clanfield on 18 March 2017. A very well attended event saw ex-CRS Ned Davies and ex-Chief Wren RS Ollie Butler unveil the plaque.



Number 12 followed soon afterwards, on 6 May, on the building which used to be the Green Dragon, and now a Tesco store. The Green Dragon, affectionately known to those at Mercury, as the Fleetwork Trainer South, was the "local" of the residents of the adjacent married quarters. Our guest of honour and unveiler that day was ex-Commander Mike Cheshire, who was at the time leader of Havant Borough Council.



Our final Blue Plaque unveiling was on 8 July 2017 at the Mercury building at HMS Collingwood. Our guest of honour was Commodore Peter Swan who brought down our ensign for the final time.



The final unveiling at the Mercury Building in HMS Collingwood