

VISIT OF MRS BRIDGET DICKINSON (NEE TOMKINSON) AND MR FRANCIS DICKINSON TO FORT BLOCKHOUSE AND THE RN SUBMARINE MUSEUM ON 25TH MARCH 2019

Charlie Hayward (an ALLIANCE Guide and a Fort Blockhouse Historical Guide) and Michael Bates (representing the Committee of the Friends of the RN Submarine Museum) welcomed Mrs Bridget Dickinson, daughter of Lieutenant Commander E P “Tommo” Tomkinson DSO**, and her son, Mr Francis Dickinson, to Fort Blockhouse to view the historical artefacts connected with her late father, Commanding Officer of HMS URGE which was reported missing with all hands on 6th May 1942. TOMKINSON had an accommodation block named after him in the then HMS DOLPHIN. This was opened in 1975 by Rear Admiral Miers, which was when Bridget had last been to Fort Blockhouse.

After viewing the block and the adjacent Wanklyn Block (the two COs had been friends in Malta), the party visited the Submarine Escape Training Tank where Warrant Officer Steve Thorpe gave a full brief of the work of the SETT and showed the party around, although we were not allowed to get under pressure! Photos were taken from both the bottom and the top of the tank, allowing the full scope of Blockhouse and its surroundings to be seen in wide perspective. Steve Thorpe had been the driving force behind the clean-up and repainting of the Submarine Memorial Chapel in Fort Blockhouse, to which the party then moved on.

The memorial windows in the Chapel contain references to HMS URGE and her crew, and as luck would have it the Memorial Book was found to be open at the pages for HMS URGE. Charlie explained how Commanding Officers of submarines leaving DOLPHIN for patrol would meet up with Flag Officer Submarines (FOSM) and Captain SM in the Chapel, then move on into what is now the Vestry but still contains a very large chart press, to receive their final orders for their forthcoming patrol.

The party then moved on to the old HMS DOLPHIN Wardroom Bar, where we saw the joint photographs of Lieutenant Commanders Wanklyn and Tomkinson, with replicas of both UPHOLDER's and URGE's Jolly Rogers, still in place. We then looked round the outer part of the Fort, with Charlie explaining how the submarines were moored on the trots, sometimes six deep.

After a very pleasant lunch at The Anglesey Hotel, which in Tommo's day was almost a Wardroom Annex, we looked at the Signal Station (as it was, now an NCI Lookout Station) and the seaward ramparts with all their history being explained by Charlie, before moving round to the Submarine Museum. We viewed the Memorial Wall in the newly enhanced and much improved Memorial Garden, and noted HMS URGE's entries. As it was no longer open Claire Bavistock gave a brief explanation of the Museum itself, to which Francis Dickinson had already present URGE related memorabilia from his family and other URGE family descendents.

Bridget Dickinson thoroughly enjoyed her day in the Submarine Heritage world, and her son, who has already written up papers on Lieutenant Commander EP Tomkinson's connections with HMS DOLPHIN and Fort Blockhouse, was fulsome in his praise of the arrangements made for the

visit and how much it all meant to his mother. He hopes to be able to attend the AGM of the Friends on 13th September this year, and intends to continue to support the Heritage story, particularly with regard to HMS URGE and her Ship's Company.