

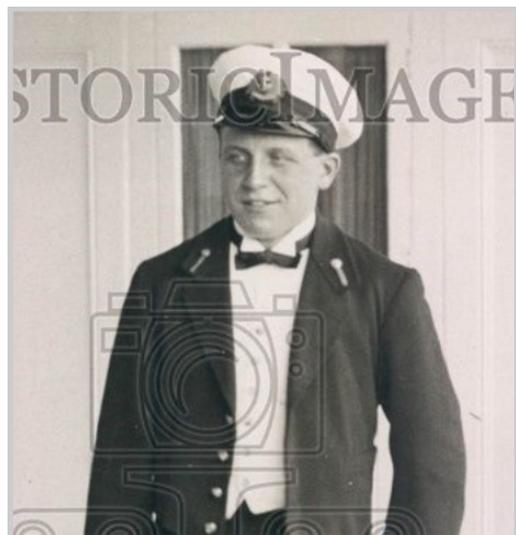


Thanks Cunard

An ambitious four year project such as Thame Remembers will always include a few surprises but a particularly surreal moment was when Wendy Townsend, a Thame resident, contacted Dave Bretherton earlier this year with an extraordinary proposal. Wendy was planning a trip to New York, returning by sea, and asked whether there were any Thame men in ocean graves along the route where she could place a Thame Remembers wreath on the surface above the wreck. The logistical difficulties, not least in persuading a big ship to plot a route to meet our needs, initially seemed daunting but we did have a wreck in approximately the right area so we took up the challenge. Our jaws dropped when we asked what ship she would be sailing on and she replied with "Queen Mary 2".

We enlisted the help of the National Hydrographic Office to determine the precise marks for our target and Wendy secured the co-operation of Cunard in making it possible, with the result that on 17 October, at 7.00 in the evening, a Thame Remembers wreath was launched from the stern deck of Cunard's flagship in commemoration of Lieutenant Commander Hugh McRae who perished in December 1940 with his vessel Branlebas.

Hugh, born in 1909 and educated at Lord Williams's Grammar School in Thame, joined the Navy as an officer cadet in 1926, and served on a number of ships before being posted to the destroyer HMS Grafton as second in command in 1938. In June 1940, during the evacuation from Dunkirk and after successfully rescuing 1600 troops, the Grafton was struck by a torpedo from U-62 and her captain and fourteen others were killed. Lt McRae was rescued, was subsequently Mentioned in Despatches, and was



promoted to Lieut-Commander, taking over command of the captured French torpedo boat Branlebas.

Branlebas was one of the units of the French Navy which adhered to General de Gaulle's Free French force after the capitulation in June 1940. The vessel was manned by a mixed French and British crew and came

under the orders of the British Navy. On 13 December 1940 she left Dartmouth at around 18:00 hours and was charged with escorting a west bound convoy, but her poor sea going qualities meant she could not keep pace in rough weather and she lost contact. At 09:00 on the 14th a heavy sea caused her to break her back at the aft end of the engine room, separating the stern section; she turned over and sank immediately. There were only three survivors, picked up from a life raft four days later, from a

complement of 92. Hugh McRae was not among them. Branlebas was unpopular with her crew. There were rats on board and she made a lot of smoke. She was not built for the type of conditions encountered that night and many of the crew had a bad feeling about the trip. Her wreck now lies at a depth of 68 metres approximately three miles due south of Lizard Point, and is a protected ocean grave.

Crosses Recently Delivered

26 September 2016

Corporal

William James Lewis
Household Battalion

Michael Rains & family
Mindel Trench Cemetery,
St. Laurent-Blang, France

Sergeant

William Henry Wentworth
Grenadier Guards

Michael Rains & family
Rocquigny-Equancourt Road British
Cemetery, Manancourt, France

17 October 2016

Lieutenant Commander
Hugh Charles James McRea
Royal Navy
Torpedo boat Branlebas

Wendy Townsend
At sea in English Channel,
from the stern of Queen Mary 2



Letter from Wendy

This is just to confirm the successful wreath laying ceremony for Lieutenant Commander Hugh Charles James McRae on board Queen Mary 2 on October 17th. QM2 Captain Kevin Oprey was very helpful and delegated all details to the entertainment Officer Paul O'Loughlin and his deputy Tommi Baxter-Hill, who took care of all the arrangements. I had met the two lovely on-board Filipino florists just before the ship arrived in New York so they could order the red flowers for the wreath, and we decided on carnations. I think you will agree that the wreath was beautiful. They do all the floral arrangements on the ship and I thought they were real artists.



Captain Oprey, Wendy and Paul O'Loughlin

I enclose photos of the Captain in the lobby of the ship in front of a painting of Queen Mary 2 and also of the two young florists. For the ceremony we were joined by friends we had made on board including a Lieutenant Commander Ball, now retired, and his wife; the deputy Captain, from Witney, Karl Shepherd; and a priest who was travelling on board. At 7pm, when it was already dark outside, we were

taken to a deserted deck at the stern of the ship and Tommi read the Thame Remembers record of Lieutenant Commander McRae, and followed with the Exhortation.

The priest then led us in the Lords Prayer and it was really very moving in the dark of the night with the waves rushing by. The wreath had been put in a non-biodegradable container so in theory as we tipped the wreath over the side we would have kept hold of the container, but what we hadn't realised was that the wreath was anchored by twine. Tommi struggled to release it and, in doing so, upset the container filled with water all over his very smart pale blue trousers. He was due to go on stage almost immediately so presumably had to rush off and do a quick change.

However he conducted it all beautifully and the Deputy Captain and I tipped the wreath over into the sea. It all happened so quickly in the end that there was no chance of the actual wreath laying to be photographed, only our backs as we looked over



to follow its progress, but it disappeared very rapidly in the waves. We all felt that it was a very emotional and moving experience and I was honoured to be able to take a small part.

Thank you so much for all the information that you provided and I think that everyone agreed that what Thame Remembers is doing is a wonderful and memorable thing.

With many thanks and all good wishes

Wendy

Queen Mary 2

RMS *Queen Mary 2* is the only major ocean liner built for Cunard since Queen Elizabeth 2 in 1969, the vessel she succeeded as flagship of the Cunard Line, and is the only transatlantic ocean liner in service between Southampton and New York. Her maiden voyage was in January 2004. At the time of her construction, *Queen Mary 2* was the longest passenger ship ever built and with her gross tonnage of 148,528, she was also the largest. *Queen Mary 2* has a maximum speed of just over 30 knots (56 km/h; 35 mph) and a cruising speed of 26 knots (48 km/h; 30 mph), much faster than a contemporary cruise ship. Instead of the diesel-electric configuration found on many ships, *Queen Mary 2* uses integrated electric propulsion to achieve her top speed. This uses gas turbines to augment the power generated from the ship's diesels. Having undergone a re-fit in 2016 *Queen Mary 2*'s facilities include fifteen restaurants and bars, five swimming pools, a casino, a ballroom, a theatre, and the first planetarium at sea. There are also kennels and a nursery on board.



This newsletter is printed and published by Thame Museum Trust and distributed free to all

This paper is intended as a digest of news items about the Thame Remembers project to keep the people of Thame up to date with what is happening.

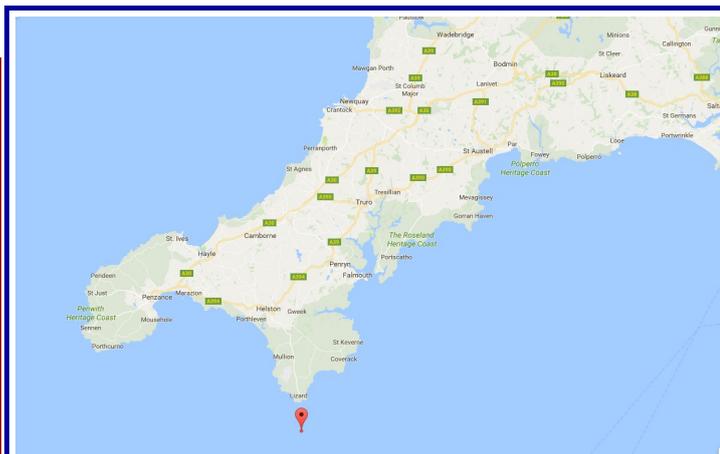
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Rains Family Visit



Stephen, Sylvia and Michael Rains
Somme, France 28 Sept 2016
Thame Remembers
Sgt W Wentworth - Manancourt
Cpl W Lewis - Mindel Trench



Left: The red marker shows the location of the wreck of the Branlebas 3 miles south of the Lizard Point and approx 40 miles SSW of Eddystone.

Below: The wreath ceremony at the stern of Queen Mary 2 prior to wreath being thrown into the sea as she passed over the Branlebas at 7 pm on 17 October 2016.



Thame Remembers is a project of Thame, Oxfordshire to commemorate the centenary of World War One by researching those from Thame who fell in all conflicts worldwide, and remembering them by placing a Thame Cross on their grave or memorial wherever in the world that may be. If you feel that you can help please contact Dave on 01844 21 5178.