

SPECIAL COUNCIL

21 JULY 2022

CONFERMENT OF HONORARY FREEDOM TO CHATHAM HISTORIC DOCKYARD TRUST AND THE CHATHAM BRANCH OF THE ROYAL NAVAL ASSOCIATION

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive

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Summary

This report has been prepared at the request of the Leader of the Council and invites the Council to consider a proposal to confer the honorary freedom of the borough on the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust and the Chatham Branch of the Royal Naval Association in recognition of the contribution of their members to the Falklands War of which it is the 40th anniversary this year.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1 This is a matter for Council.

1.2 The Annual Council meeting, held on 18 May 2022, agreed to convene a Special meeting of the Council on 21 July 2022 to consider a proposal to grant the freedom of Medway to such organisations as determined by the Council in recognition of their contribution to the Falklands War (minute no. 6/2022 refers).

2. Background

2.1 The honorary freedom of the borough is the highest civic distinction that can be conferred upon individuals or collective bodies in recognition of outstanding service or particular civic association, ensuring that their memory is maintained within the community.

2.2 Entry to the roll of freedom is usually accompanied by the presentation to the recipient of a scroll embodying details of the formal Council resolution.

2.3 The power to award honorary freedom of the borough is contained in the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009). Section 249 of that Act requires

that an appropriate resolution is passed by not less than two thirds of the members voting thereon at a meeting of the Council specially convened for the purpose. Those awarded honorary freedom are required to be persons of distinction or persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the borough.

3. History of workforce of Chatham Dockyard and contribution to the life of Medway
 - 3.1 Our armed forces act in the highest traditions of our country in the conduct of their Operations.
 - 3.2 The Royal Navy has an important place in the heart and memories of everyone in Medway. The historic links date back to the first recorded use by the Navy of the River Medway in 1547 and reached their peak with establishment of the Dockyard in Chatham.
 - 3.3 Members will no doubt be aware that the 1981 Defence White Paper included cuts to the Royal Navy including the withdrawal of the ice patrol ship HMS Endurance from the South Atlantic as well as the closure of Chatham Dockyard.
 - 3.4 HMS Endurance nicknamed “The red plum” due to her red hull to aid visibility for polar vessels, had a close relationship with Chatham Dockyard, having had annual refits there since 1976. Having completed the latest refit at the Dockyard ahead of schedule, the ship sailed for sea trials on 7 September 1981 and was due to return in May 1982. As most people will be aware, the ship was involved in combat action on 25 April 1982 when her two helicopters took part in attacks on an Argentinian submarine which was later abandoned by her crew. When Argentine forces surrendered the next day, the ship remained near the island to show the UK flag, maintain a naval presence, and guard the waters. Whilst there are differing reports, it is believed that the Argentinian surrender of the Falkland Islands was signed in the wardroom of Endurance. She eventually made a triumphal return to Medway in August 1982 and was the only HM ship to return from the conflict to the Medway where she was accorded a hero’s welcome.
 - 3.5 Other Royal Navy ships involved in the Falklands conflict that had undergone refits at Chatham, included the Leander class frigate HMS Minerva, the Rothesay class frigate HMS Plymouth, the Valiant class nuclear submarines HMS Valiant, HMS Warspite, HMS Conqueror and HMS Courageous and HMS Rhyl.
 - 3.6 During the Falklands conflict, HMS Minerva performed a number of duties including escort for other vessels and detected an Argentinian transport aircraft which led to it being successfully intercepted and shot down. HMS Plymouth was one of the first Royal Navy ships to arrive in the South Atlantic following the Argentinian invasion and took part in the recapture of South Georgia during Operation Paraquet, providing naval gunfire support for Royal Navy forces and escorting amphibious assault forces. The ship came under

fire from the Argentinian Air Force and suffered extensive damage. After repairs, the ship returned to shore bombardment duties when Argentine forces surrendered. HMS Plymouth was the first warship to enter Port Stanley after hostilities ended and assisted in establishing naval control of the harbour.

- 3.7 HMS Valiant was the second of Britain's nuclear-powered submarines and transmitted more than 300 early air-warning alerts and spent more than 101 days on patrol off Argentina's Patagonian coast. It suffered minor damage while submerged after an Argentine aircraft jettisoned its bombs near the submarine coming back from a mission. Interestingly, a predecessor ship named HMS Valiant was launched at Chatham in 1759. HMS Warspite, the sister submarine to HMS Valiant, went straight to the Falklands from her refit and refuelling, after a serious fire in the diesel generator room. Although HMS Rhyl was expected to take part in Operation Corporate to recover the Falkland Islands, due to mechanical failures she acted as the guardship for Ascension Islands. HMS Conqueror most famously sank the Argentinian cruiser General Belgrano and later joined other submarines in early warning alerts for enemy aircraft. HMS Courageous carried out four patrols in the area
- 3.8 Although Chatham Dockyard had in some respects begun running down the workshops when the Falklands war started, it did join the prefabrication programme, sending metalwork to both Portsmouth and Devonport. In addition there were also many ships collecting stores (the dockyard was still a major stores and equipment provider) during the period including Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Black Rover, the landing ships RFA Sir Percivale and RFA Sir Lancelot, and the landing craft Her Majesty's Army Vessel Ardennes.
- 3.9 Chatham Dockyard was home to the Stand-by Squadron, mainly Rothesay and Tribal class frigates on the list of proposed "disposals" arising from the 1981 Defence White Paper, some of which had been laid up since 1979/80. Some of these were needed to replace the ships that had been allocated to the Falklands Task Force. HMS Falmouth was one of the first to be made ready for sea (using spares taken from HMS Berwick) and she was recommissioned in June 1982 to serve in home waters and NATO areas. HMS Berwick was in a poorer condition with serious corrosion problems because of lack of maintenance, but after a superb effort was able to be recommissioned in August and joined the 5th frigate squadron.
- 3.10 HMS Zulu was able to be recommissioned in August, and HMS Tartar was sent to Devonport and HMS Gurkha to Rosyth for eventual recommissioning. The remaining Tribal class were stripped for spares to allow the other three to return to sea. HMS Zulu had parts taken from her sister ship HMS Nubian.
- 3.11 On behalf of the people of Medway, the Council now wishes to cement and foster the close and longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual respect between Chatham Dockyard as well as express admiration at the contribution to the Falklands conflict made by the Dockyard workforce. The Council is therefore minded to formally decide to grant the Freedom of Medway to the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust on behalf of the workforce in recognition of the eminent services the Dockyard workforce have made.

4. History of the Chatham Branch of the Royal Naval Association and contribution to the life of Medway

- 4.1 The Royal Naval Association (RNA) exists to provide social activities and welfare services to serving and ex members of the royal navy, royal marines and reserves and their dependants. It is the biggest collective group of the Royal Naval veterans and serving personnel and provides access to a life-long community of companionship, resilience, comradeship and unity to anyone and everyone with a Naval story, supporting them through life's highs and lows. There are 270 Branches across the country.
- 4.2 The Chatham Branch currently has 75 members with 2 currently serving in the Royal Navy. Other members of the Branch have served since 1943 and include 2 members who served in the Falklands War. The core values of the Branch are Unity, Loyalty, Patriotism and Comradeship and it is entirely within that framework that the Branch arranged for a memorial to be erected in front of the Drill Shed library on the Universities at Medway campus to honour the sailors who were killed whilst sleeping in the Drill Shed when it was bombed during the First World War. Whether catching up with friends, fundraising, advising on welfare or providing support, the Branch members' natural willingness to help others stems from the tradition and camaraderie that life in the Royal Navy instils, and the social functions, days out or short group holidays they arrange, all help to keep the naval spirit alive in Medway.
- 4.3 On behalf of the people of Medway, the Council now wishes to cement and foster the close and longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual respect with the Chatham Branch of the RNA as well as express admiration at their members' contribution to the Falklands conflict in particular. The Council is therefore minded to formally decide to grant the Freedom of Medway to the members of the Chatham Branch of the RNA in recognition of their eminent services.

5. Formal presentation of Freedom

- 5.1 If approved, it is the intention to hold a ceremony in conjunction with both organisations for the formal presentation of the Freedom scrolls later in the year.

6. Risk management

- 6.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Costs of in the region of £16,000 are likely to be incurred relating to the proposed event for the formal presentation and the preparation of a scroll setting out the resolution of the Council. These costs will fall in the financial year 2022-23.
- 7.2 The cost of the Trust and/or RNA Chatham Branch exercising their right to march through the Borough annually is £11,500. However, the likelihood of this happening is rare, and any costs incurred would come from the existing base budget allocation of £23,000 in Community & Culture to cover the cost of any freedom marches.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 The power to confer the honorary freedom of the borough of Medway on persons of distinction or persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the borough, is contained within section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009). Section 249 of the Act also empowers the Council to spend a reasonable sum for the purpose of presenting an address or casket to a person upon whom the honorary freedom of the borough has been conferred.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 That, in pursuance of the power vested in it by virtue of section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Council agrees to confer the honorary freedom of the borough on
- (a) the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust from time to time, and indefinitely, in the interests of cementing and fostering the close and longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual respect existing between the Dockyard and its workforce, Medway Council and the people of Medway as well as express admiration at the Dockyard workforce's contribution to the Falklands conflict; and:
 - (b) the members of the Chatham Branch of the Royal Naval Association from time to time, and indefinitely, in the interests of the cementing and fostering the close and longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual respect existing between the Branch, Medway Council and the people of Medway as well as express admiration at their members' contribution to the Falklands conflict.

Note: this resolution must be passed by not less than two-thirds of the members voting thereon to take effect, in accordance with section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None