Wetherby - Then and Now.

A Journey by Lieutenant Commander & Mrs P Danks RN.

My wife and I visited Wetherby on 12th July one of the drier days of the summer of 2012. Whilst there I thought that an article on the history of Wetherby and some key dates in the development of the Writer Branch would be of interest to all Writers in general, especially those who did not carry out their training in Yorkshire and in particular the Royal Naval Writers Association in this our 125th Anniversary year.

As in the First World War, Wetherby experienced the billeting of members of the Armed Forces within its environs. In 1940 a holding Battalion of four regiments occupied the larger buildings including the Racecourse, Town Hall and Masonic Hall. When these troops left the racecourse was taken over in turn by the Pioneer Corps, the RAMC and later the Royal Engineers. In 1943 Wetherby Grange the former home of the Gunter family was converted to a Civil Defence Training School; later hutted military camps, each for the accommodation of 750 men, were built in Wetherby Grange Park and at Scarcroft.

The town was patriotic in both wars, during the first the town supported the crew of the Racecourse Class Minesweeper HMS WETHERBY, during the second “dug for victory” in the allotments, donated money to buy a Spitfire and adopted the old First World War Hunt Class Minesweeper HMS SELKIRK.(see below).

This started through a crew member contacting a member of the St John’s Nursing Division. The people of the town provided 2 of the crew’s main needs - pullovers knitted from raw wool which was smelly but waterproof and string gloves that were worn under stout leather gloves used to protect the hands when hauling in hawser.

Equally significant in the long term was the decision to erect two hostels one in Hallfield Lane and the other in York Road. The hostel in Hallfield Lane, the site of the present High School, later became HMS CERES (Moorland) better known as the “Wrennery”.
The other hostel on the York Road, now HM Young Offenders Institution, was commandeered by the Admiralty and converted into a shore training establishment under the name HMS CABOT. When sailors arrived at the railway station from Bristol they marched ceremoniously through the town to their new ship but found that nobody had expected them. This was made worse when, as the camp was not fenced, they could not have their daily tot of rum. Lord Haw Haw, the wartime traitor who broadcast from Germany, thinking a ship based in Bristol had disappeared, claimed HMS CABOT had been sunk to the amusement of the Wetherby locals. To add to the confusion “the ship” later became HMS DEMETRIUS. HMS DEMETRIUS had its former wartime home in Highgate School, London N8, where it had been established as HMS PRESIDENT V since being requisitioned and commissioned on 1 November 1941 as the training school for Accountant Branch ratings. HMS DEMETRIUS later became HMS CERES (York Road) on 15 July 1944.

There are still many retired personnel who remember doing their initial training in Wetherby. The navy was popular, especially with the publicans, the young ladies of Wetherby and the Trustees of the Town Hall, which was financed by the ever popular Saturday night dances. In the main the sailors were well behaved but a “naval picket” boat had to be sent up Cemetery Lane early on Sunday mornings to collect discarded contraceptives.

Bibliography:
Wetherby through the ages by Dr J S H Lodge
Archives Photographic Series – Wetherby
Wetherby – History of a Yorkshire Market Town by Robert Unwin
The Main Gate at HMS CERES circa 1950 and

2012

Another 2 views of HMS CERES.

Three ships and two shore establishments have been named HMS CERES after the goddess Ceres of Roman mythology:

Ships:
1. HMS CERES was an 18 gun sloop launched in 1777 and captured by the French frigate IPHIGENIE off Saint Lucia in December 1778. The British recaptured her in April 1782 and renamed her HMS RAVEN. The French again captured her in December 1782 and renamed her Ceres. They sold her at Brest in 1791.
2. HMS CERES was a 32 gun Fifth Rate launched in 1781 and broken up in 1830
3. HMS CERES was a C Class light cruiser launched in 1917 and sold and broken up in 1946.

Shore Establishments:
1. HMS CERES was the Supply and Secretariat training at Wetherby, Yorkshire between 1944 and 1958.
2. HMS CERES was an RNR Communications Training Centre in Leeds between 1984 and 1995.

Ceres Division is the Leeds based satellite unit of HMS CALLIOPE, Newcastle’s RNR Unit.
Some key dates in the development of the Writer Branch.

1867. Introduction of the Writer rating. Writers wore a gold star on their arm.

- Three classes of Writer who messed with the Master at Arms.
- After satisfactory passes in examinations in arithmetic, writing and reading set by the Paymaster HMS PRESIDENT and an Assistant Paymaster from another ship, they could be rated Writer 3rd Class at age 18, and after 5 years' service to 2nd Class, which was the equivalent to a 2nd class Petty Officer.

1909. Warrant rank for Writers.

1915. Commissioned rank for Writers introduced.

1923. New Titles for Writer Ratings

1944 Title of Accountant Branch changed to Supply and Secretariat Branch.

1944. Move of Accountants School from Highgate to Wetherby

1946 WRNS left HMS HEADINGLY, in Leeds, to continue their training at their camp at Moorlands.

1950. Introduction of Naval Pay Regulations – to be known as BR 1950

Introduction of two sets of Ledgers Form S41a – rough and fair. (*Happy days of pre-treatment and totalling and abstracting at the end of the period before one set was sent off to the Abstracting Centre at Victory Barracks now HMS NELSON*)

1951 Tobacco coupons introduced.

1954 Form S.50 Ledger sheet/transfer list came into service.

1956 Central Drafting Authority for General Service personnel formed at Haslemere. (*Does anyone remember the good times at Lythe Hill House, the local runs ashore and the many and varied ‘Approved Lodgings’ in the area. Drafting offices for Submariners and Fleet Air Arm personnel remained at HMS DOLPHIN and HMS DAEDALUS respectively.*)

1958 Closure of HMS CERES and move of the Supply School to HMS PEMBROKE Chatham in March.

1961 By 1st January all S & S ratings who had been issued with fore and aft rig had to change into square rig. (*All S & S ratings could now form part of ceremonial guards*)

1970 31st July Rum Ration abolished. (*Many ceremonial funerals held*)

1971 March computerisation of pay accounts with take on of shore establishments commenced with HMS SULTAN

1972 General Service Drafting Office moved from Lythe Hill House to offices in Grange Road Rowner and co-located with Submarine and Fleet Air Arm Drafting and Director General Defence Accounts.
1981 Last general payment and introduction of Centralised Determination of Pay. All pay calculated and sent to individual's bank accounts by central authority viz Naval Pay and Pensions Division HMS CENTURION

1983 Closure of HMS PEMBROKE and transfer of Supply School to HMS RALEIGH at Torpoint Cornwall.

1999 Personnel Administration System (PAS) introduced in RN. Electronic pay, leave and warrant record and direct electronic transmission and input of computer documents.

RORRS Ratings and Other Ranks Reporting System introduced. Electronic Promotion reports for Naval Ratings and RM Other Ranks.

2006 Joint Personnel Administration System (JPA) introduced progressively across the 3 Services, RAF first in April 2006 followed by the RN in October 2006 and finally the Army in 2007.

2007 OJARS and SJARS, Officers Joint Appraisal Reporting System and Ratings equivalent introduced.

Some more pictures which might bring back memories for those of us that were trained at HMS CERES at Wetherby

Two Views of the Cinema at Wetherby on the left 1964 and on the right 2012.

And of course the famous Swan and Talbot
Views of Wetherby 2012

Inspection of Raleigh Division HMS CERES 1948
By Admiral Sir Harold Burrough GCB KBE DSO,
Commader-in-Chief The Nore

The Last March Past March 1958, Tate's Garage
next to the Royal Oak North Street Wetherby.
AND FINALLY GUESS WHO

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