

Press Release

St Cybi's Church, Holyhead

Special Service to Commemorate the Friendship and Bond between The Royal Netherlands Navy and the People of Holyhead During World War Two.

Following the unveiling of a memorial commemorating the bond between the Royal Netherlands Navy and the people of Holyhead on Friday 17th October a special service of thanksgiving was held at St Cybi's Church, Holyhead on the afternoon of Sunday 19th October.

The service was conducted by The Reverend Dr Kevin Ellis, Vicar of Bro Cybi Ministry Area in the presence of Captain Harrie Welmer, the Military Attaché to the Royal Netherlands Navy, and several local dignitaries.

The Holyhead Maritime Museum, which has been the driving force behind the project, has some details of the presence of the Netherlands Navy in Holyhead on its website where it records:

“After the fall of France and the occupation of Holland by German troops in 1940 several vessels of the Dutch Navy managed to avoid capture and made their way to the UK. A number of these were directed to serve in the Irish Sea and the first vessel to arrive at Holyhead on 31 July 1940 was the liner *"Stuyvesant"*. This was to become an accommodation vessel and initially served as a temporary headquarters for the Netherlands Navy until a shore base could be set up.

“On the 2 August 1940 the minelayer *"Medusa"* arrived at the port to become a guard vessel for the liner. She remained at Holyhead until January 1946 and was one of the last Dutch vessels to leave. In August 1941 the depot ship *"Oranje Nassau"* arrived to relieve the *"Stuyvesant"*.

“There were a number of smaller vessels attached to Holyhead to help protect shipping in the Irish Sea. These included a number of fishing trawlers, motor torpedo boats, auxiliary patrol boats, guard vessels and also the famous lifeboat *"Zeemanshop"*, which had escaped from Holland carrying 46 Netherlanders, many of them Jews, to safety in the UK.

“In addition to the Dutch sailors there was also a large number of Marines attached to the port. In all these numbered more than 100 men and they began to use the Cafe at the now Maritime Museum as an unofficial "NAFFI". They would use the adjacent Air Raid Shelter for their protection during air raids. This shelter now houses a permanent exhibition on *"Holyhead at War"* and includes many unique photographs, artifacts and memorabilia relating to the Royal Netherlands Navy at Holyhead”.

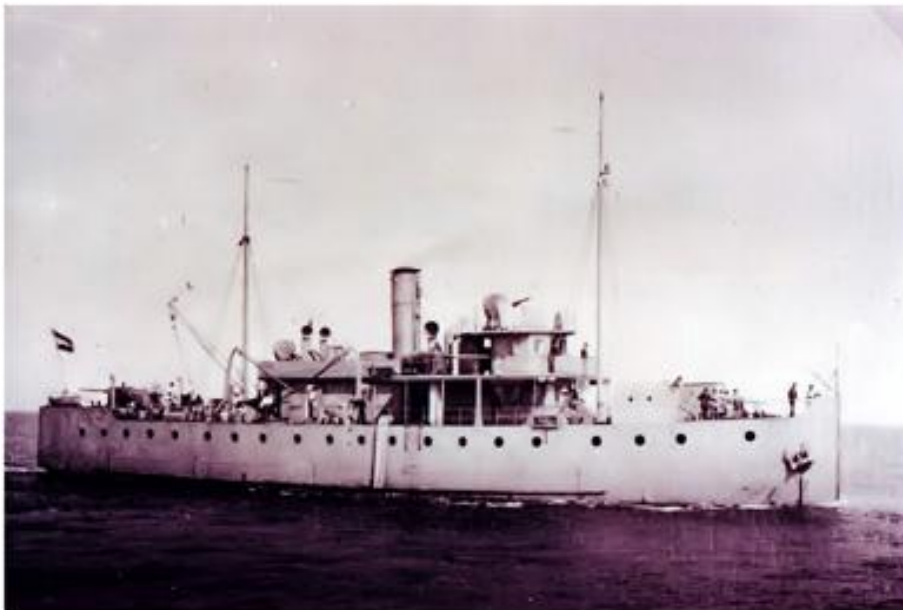
Many of the sailors in the Netherlands Navy married local girls and settled in the town after the war. Several of their descendants attended the service.

The service included readings by Albert Owen MP and Rhys Ap Iorwerth AM; addresses by the Vicar and Councillor J V Owen, Mayor of Holyhead, and recollections of life in a Welsh / Dutch family living in Holyhead.

The new memorial, erected with funding assistance from Heritage Lottery Fund, the naval charity the Karel Doorman Fund, Anglesey County Council's Three Towns Programme and a number of other organisations and individuals, contains, in Dutch, Welsh and English, the inscription "To remember the goodwill and bond between the people of Holyhead and the Mariners of the Royal Netherlands Navy". This reflects the sentiments expressed by Dutch servicemen on a Delft Plaque given some years ago to the people of Holyhead and erected in St Cybi's Church which reads "To The Glory of God and in grateful remembrance of generous hospitality bestowed on the Netherlands Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen during their stay in the United Kingdom Annis Domini 1940 – 1947. This tablet was presented by the Protestant Churches of the Netherlands. I was a stranger and ye took me in".

The erection of the memorial and the service of thanksgiving demonstrate the considerable contribution made by Britain's allies during World War II and how all parts of the United Kingdom played a part in the conflict.

The weekend of events, which included a visit to the town by the Dutch Navy minehunter HNLMS Makkum and a Dutch Embassy delegation, testifies how the links formed during the war endure into the present



Royal Netherlands Navy Minelayer Medusa at Holyhead during the war.



Standing on the path outside St Cybi's Church, Holyhead (Left to Right) Graham Van Weert of the Holyhead Maritime Museum, Councillor J V Owen, Mayor of Holyhead, Albert Owen MP and Rhys Ap Iorwerth AM with his son surrounded by members of the Dutch families.



The Memorial unveiled in Holyhead.

Note to Editors:

Further historical photographs, including some wedding photographs of Dutch servicemen getting married in Holyhead, are obtainable via Holyhead Maritime Museum, see contact details below.

St Cybi's Church is a Grade I listed building situated within the walls of the Roman Fort at Holyhead. A religious community was founded on the site by St Cybi in the 6th Century. The present church building dates back to the 13th Century. Today it is one of four churches within the Bro Cybi Ministry Area of the Church in Wales.

The walls of the Roman Fort remain largely intact and are an Ancient Monument in the care of Cadw.

Holyhead Maritime Museum is located on Newry Beach, Holyhead in the oldest lifeboat station in Wales (circa. 1858), which houses a wonderful collection of exhibits telling the enthralling maritime history of Holyhead.

Situated alongside the Maritime Museum, in a Second World War Air Raid Shelter, is the very informative permanent exhibition "*Holyhead at War*".

There is wheelchair access, a well stocked gift and bookshop, very knowledgeable museum guides and a highly recommended cafe/licensed restaurant, the "Harbour Front Bistro".

The Museum is an Accredited Museum to Arts Council of England (ACE) national standards. This is administrated in Wales by the Welsh Government under CYMal: Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales.

For further information contact:

The Vicar

Rev'd Dr Kevin Ellis
Y Ficerdy
Trearddur House Mews
Lôn St Ffraid
Trearddur Bay
Anglesey
LL65 2UD
Tel: 01407 861845

Holyhead Maritime Museum

Graham Van Weert
Newry Beach
Holyhead
Anglesey
LL65 1YD.
Tel: 01407 769745