

# **“Aye Ma’am”**

## **Women at War when Stepping Forward into Significant New Roles with BOAC !**



Principally focussed upon: ~

**Marinecraft Unit Seawomen**  
(BOAC's MCU based at Poole)

and . . .

**1<sup>st</sup> Stewardesses with BOAC**  
(Flying Boats based at Poole  
+ Landplanes at Hurn-B'mth)

**Poole Flying Boats Celebration** (Charity 1123274)



PFBC Archive: *Our Charity is committed to developing and maintaining its Public-Access Archive...*

*For the purpose of this website a brief selection of items together with information have been provided where references in blue indicate further material is available. Á*

Our Project: **‘Women at War when Stepping forward into Significant New Roles with BOAC etc...’**  
(BOAC's Women Seamen & Stewardesses at Poole in WW2, through to the postwar era)

Part Gamma: **“ Tour de Force ~ Women with the Military when based at Poole ! ”** **Y**

The **AYE MA'AM Project** was conceived, devised and then undertaken by **PFBC** (with Heritage Lottery Funding)

Both the Marinecraft's Women Seamen and first Flying Boat Stewardesses of British Overseas Airways Corporation at Poole, operating from **BOAC's Airways House** by Poole Quay, along with its **Marine Terminal at Salterns** - Lilliput, did so alongside a strong and growing military presence of the RN and RAF in & around Poole Harbour during 1943: For the Royal Navy's role was gradually shifting from one of patrol + defensive work variously protecting the harbour and approaches *via* the Swash Channel, to one which included the local build-up of men, materials and armaments.

Therefore, not only was there an expansion of its HQs & base in old Poole, with a range of vessels along the quays, but also a Combined Ops Training Establishment set up as **HMS Turtle** at Lake, Hamworthy together with Round Is., commissioned on 7th. Oct. 1942 (*with Assault Gunnery Training*) and a School at the Shaftesbury Homes, Parkstone. So there would be another influx of **Wrens** in the area, with their hostels, following on from those serving with the Fleet Air Arm at the **RNAS Sandbanks**, as **HMS Daedalus II**... Also, towards the Autumn of 1942 there more women signed-up by the RAF for its new base at Hamworthy & offices around Poole, as **WAAFs** serving at **RAF Hamworthy**.

WOMEN'S ROYAL NAVAL SERVICE

## Wrens in Poole when serving at RNAS Sandbanks, 1940-43

JOIN THE

# Wrens

The [Royal Motor Yacht Club](#) (aka [RMYCS Enchantress](#)), was requisitioned by May 1940 to provide the facility at Sandbanks, Poole for a [Royal Naval Air Station](#) to be used by the [Fleet Air Arm](#) for [Seaplane Training](#) as part of the *pilot course* which had been developed at [HMS Daedalus](#) at [Lee-on-the-Solent](#), with its School dating from 1917.

This new Station was commissioned as [HMS Daedalus II](#) on the 15th. May, and was ready to receive [765 Squadron](#) by the [26th. August](#) following preparative work under the supervision of [Surgeon Lieut. Ronald Pitts Crick](#), who was i/c of the Wardroom, also [Lieut. Commander Humphreys](#) and [Lieut. Cdr. Wilson](#) i/c *Flying LoS* with a working party.

The Clubhouse housed the Wardroom & Officers' Cabins, the Boatshed became the Hangar for a dozen Seaplanes: mainly [Walrus](#)- but also [Seafox](#), [Swordfish](#) + a [Sea Otter](#), and in 1943 US-built [Kingfishers](#) (together with '[Petrel](#)' a Marcel-Besson, from Free-French Submarine [Surcouf](#)).

There were offices, kitchens, a parade ground & slipway, an air raid shelter + garaging for the station fire engine. Fairly adjacent was the Guardroom at [10 Old Coastguard Cottages](#) and Sick Bay at [Fowey Cottage](#) in Panorama Rd.

Another yard nearby included boats loaned to the RNAS for *pleasure* which made service *a reasonable experience* [confirmed by Chief of Staff of FAA Cdr Martin Westwood at the PFBC Celebration for the RNAS 70th. Anniversary].

However by the nature of fortnightly intakes of Trainees for a relative *crash course* there were plenty of mishaps: Also, the sad loss of two pilots shot-down whilst on [ASR](#) (another function of the RNAS) on the 7th. October 1940.

RNAS Sandbanks was also attacked from strafing and by bombing raids ... one of which destroyed a Hostel (there were 2) used by the men ratings: Luckily everyone was away from [Byfleet](#) on duty.

\* For further detail see [www.pooleflyingboats.com](http://www.pooleflyingboats.com) and consult the Archive Section's PDF: Number 3.

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OR THE NEAREST EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE



[www.pooleflyingboats.com](http://www.pooleflyingboats.com)

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The photograph opposite - was taken on the *Parade Ground* in front of the Hangar Offices etc. ~ where the Complement of *HMS Daedalus II* at the *RNAS Sandbanks* is arranged, with the front entrance and an end wall of the Hangar directly behind. The upper windows belong to the timber mezzanine comprising of Hangar Offices with the strategic view over maintenance + servicing conducted inside the Hangar. Other than Senior Wren *Esme Cameron*, the grouping of those 16 Wrens on duty seated cross-legged, forms the front row. The *Women's Royal Naval Service* (WRNS) with members popularly known as *Wrens* had been originally formed during 1917, and revived in 1939 at the start of WW2.

Besides the 8 pilots at-a-time training on the Basic Seaplane Course, who were billeted at the *Moorings* 118 Panorama Rd., there was a full complement of 120 Officers and Ratings: Most of the Wrens had been recruited locally and lived at home. These (rather ironically) were classified as 'immobiles' - as being non-transferrable Wrens, and were issued with bicycles ! The more senior Wrens and those transferred-in to HMS Daedalus II, were billeted at the *Red House in Brownsea Road*...

Today, this prominent house is arranged as apartments, yet in WW2 (other than for *Esme Cameron*) the large bedrooms accommodated up to 6 ratings; and as *Grace Goodfellow* recalled (in 2004) even with *the luxury of an en suite bathroom*. 'The ceiling of the bedroom was decorated with a moon and stars, and we would shine our torches on it after lights out looking for imaginary aeroplanes,' she added in an account provided for pupils from Wildern School (BBC People's War) about Christmas there in 1942 when on duty, which included a trip by motor boat to Brownsea Is. for an ENSA Concert:~ 'It was a most beautiful day and we donned our best blues and did not need our greatcoats.'



Petty Officer Wren  
Molly Puleston in  
her WW2 uniform

*Molly Scammell* (serving at HMS Daedalus II as *Petty Officer Wren Puleston*) recollected that as a matter of interest the Roman Catholics who had been based at RNAS Sandbanks had to be 'ferried across' to Brownsea Island for worship in the Church (dedicated as St. Mary's) ~ whilst those belonging to the Church of England and various other denominations held their services at the *Haven Hotel*. She was also billeted at the *Red House* and noted that the Mess for Petty Officers was at *Belle Holme* (owned by the Davis family), which had previously been the home of *Mrs Louie Dingwall* (see *\*Zeta Part 2*). The Wrens were also deployed at a Signals Station at the top of Dune Crest. [In the 1970s a block of beachfront apartments, as 105 Banks Rd., was built there.]

Like *Lt. Ronald Pitts Crick* (+ various others) who served at Sandbanks, *Molly* returned to the area and became a member of the *Royal Motor Yacht Club*.

## WAAFs in Poole when serving at RAF Hamworthy, 1942-43

At a time when the Fleet Air Arm Conversion Course for Seaplane Training of Pilots through HMS Daedalus II (at the Royal Naval Air Station, Sandbanks) was entering its third year of operation, and BOAC was centred about Airways House in the old town of Poole, the RAF completed construction of the slipway and hardstanding by the foreshore at Lake - a district within Hamworthy which had formed around a former Admiralty Shipyard from the Great War.

Accordingly, RAAF 461 Squadron arrived and operated from here for the next 7+ months in close association with the RAF Bases at Mount Batten (where it was raised on *Anzac Day*, 25th. April 1942) & Pembroke Dock which would be the next homebase by May '43.

At first these 2 RAF Coastal Command Stations were the forward-staging bases for surveillance of s.w Approaches, + Biscay Patrols, and/or receive aircraft after their missions before return to Poole. However, in due course 461 frequently operated in-&-out of Poole, as did the replacement Squadron RAF 210 with their Catalina FBs... Poole was more suited to the long-distance capability of Catalinas but adverse weather conditions often intervened with the choice of base to which an aircraft could be re-directed during a mission.

Both Mount Batten and Pembroke Dock had better purpose-built facilities, which made them popular with Aircrews & Groundstaff: Whereas RAF Hamworthy, as the Poole base was officially named, had to initially contend with *ad hoc* arrangements for offices etc., Also there was neither a hangar nor workshops on site other than a marquee so that maintenance had to be carried out in the open. Bungalows in the local Lake Estate served 'a variety of purposes' !

*Also along Parkstone Road (opp. Poole Park), Station HQs were at No.43, the Ops Room was at 51, and the Accounts Section at 45...*

Yet even at this stage of preparation in the beginning of July 1942, the eventual mainstay of RAF Hamworthy was earmarked as the Harbour Yacht Club at Salterns (Lilliput), with its longstanding pier, which had been already requisitioned but required major updating.

With 461 Squadron's move from Mount Batten on 14th. August, there were 4 WAAF Officers (posted), with 51 other WAAF ranks. In this instance other than being deployed in secretarial roles, the main number of WAAFs here (most local recruits) were in catering, so that when the main contingent of men arrived by special train on 1st. Sept., they were catered for by temporary Field Kitchens !

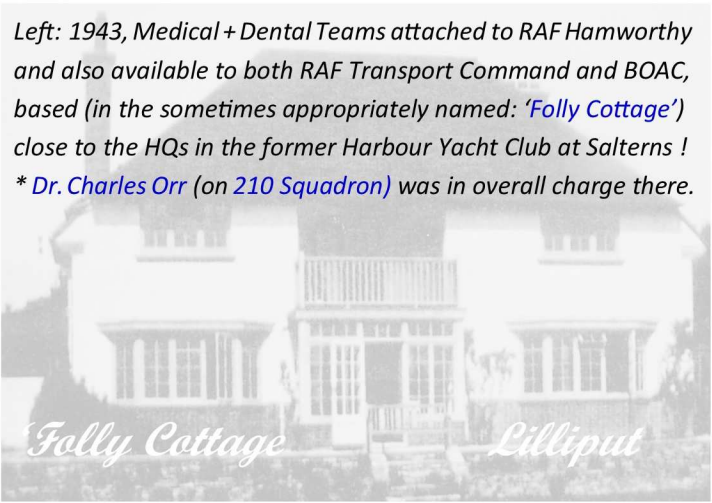
\* For further detail see [www.pooleflyingboats.com](http://www.pooleflyingboats.com) and consult the Archive Section's PDF: Number 4.

The Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAFs) had been established in 1939, where numbers peaked in 1943. The pay was 2/3rds of that of RAF male counterparts. Nurses belonged to the Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service, whilst those with medical or dental services as Officers held RAF Commissions/Ranks accordingly.

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Whilst the Officers' Mess was at the Harbour Heights Hotel (nr Sandbanks) *ad hoc* facilities at Lake were unacceptable: As Winter 1942 approached, the Field Kitchen + outside Mess clearly could not continue, so dining was moved indoors at the Dinghy Boatshed of Dorset Lake Shipyard, immediately adjacent to the yard & offices of RAF Hamworthy at Lake. Also Coastal Command looked forward to the new HQs and pier being completed at Salterns in time for January 1943, so with the relocation of various depts. & offices to Lilliput, the growing number of WAAFs enjoyed better conditions!



Left: 1943, Medical + Dental Teams attached to RAF Hamworthy and also available to both RAF Transport Command and BOAC, based (in the sometimes appropriately named: 'Folly Cottage') close to the HQs in the former Harbour Yacht Club at Salterns!  
\* Dr. Charles Orr (on 210 Squadron) was in overall charge there.

Right: "The Telephones' Team" with 3 WAAF members included is seated outside Poole's Longfleet Hotel, where it was based... Besides the switchboard and telephones' workshops, the Hotel also served as the Sergeants' Mess, which was a popular venue being situated near Poole's Railway Station + the town's shops. The Mess was later moved to Crichel House & Knoll Lodge, Lilliput



This included Hostels for WAAFs (centred on Ashley Cross) in place of various billets, that were opened In Nov. 1942, at Merrion, Varenne & Stretton Court (around Castle Hill). The latter also served as the Central Mess for the WAAFs. Another Hostel at Tangleby was replaced by Lablagh... and increased WAAF Cooking Staff nos. were based at Rowena. Among the WAAFs there were now 7 on the Ground Staff, classified in rank as Airwomen ~ later trebling in number! By Sept. 1943, with 210 (having replaced RAAF 461 in May) there were 6 WAAF Officers with 228 WAAFs of other ranks stationed at RAF Hamworthy, and 21 on 210 Squadron etc. Most of these were at Salterns with Ops, Signals, Cyphers, Intelligence and Metrology, also with Cooking Staff there, as well as at RAF Hamworthy Base at Lake and the Hostels. From this point totals then dwindled until closure in 1944.

Photograph Below... 'Courtesy of the Balderson Family Archive': Two WAAFs at the Blue Lagoon Lido, Lilliput are entertained by 210 Squadron crew members and friends in the Summer of 1943  
The Blue Lagoon Lido Building was used as the Airmen's Mess...



(Aimée - with acknowledgement to Air Cdre Norman Ashworth RAAF rtd., Douglas Cook OBE, Colin Pomeroy & Jeremy Waters.)