

EIGHTY SIX TO ONE

An Open Competitive Examination for the entry of Apprentices in HM Dockyards, and Artificer and Air Apprentices in the Royal Navy, was held in or near Belfast, Cardiff, Chatham, Chester, Devonport, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Ipswich, Leeds, London, Pembroke, Portsmouth, Rosyth, Sheerness and Weymouth, on 17th and 18th April, 1940. The vacancies for Dockyard Apprentices in Portsmouth was 339 with 180 at Chatham, 281 at Devonport, 21 at Rosyth and 63 at Sheerness – a total of 884, plus vacancies for 54 Naval Shipwright Apprentices at the three main yards – 18 at Portsmouth.

Of the 339 successful candidates in Portsmouth, whose ages were between 15-17 years old, about 86 were indentured as Shipwright Apprentices and started in the yard on 19th August, 1940. Of the known number at least one enlisted in the RAF during his apprenticeship and never returned to complete his time. Apprentices could at 18 years old volunteer to join the Royal Air Force or Fleet Air Arm, but only as trainee Air Crew (Pilot, Navigator, Bomb Aimer or Air Gunner).

Assuming all the others completed their apprenticeship and passed their trade test in 1945, within a very few years nearly one half of the number had left the Service. It is known that eleven joined the Royal Navy as Shipwrights; six took Naval Constructorships; thirty two became Non-Industrial Officers (Drawing Office and Production); five went into Teaching, four were made Chargemen and four became Recorders; three emigrated, three took Clerical posts – 2 with the Civil Service and one to Local Government; one joined Lloyds Shipping; one enlisted in the Merchant Navy; one became a full-time Trade Union Official and one entered the Church. Where the other eleven of the total number of 86 went is not known. This left just one of the original numbers who remained in the Dockyard as a Shipwright for all his time with MOD (N). This state of affairs, where so few stayed at their tools, was not unusual immediately following the war years, because there were many opportunities for advancement within the service and also for entering the teaching profession, the Police, Ordnance Survey, Local Government and as Tax Officers. One wonders where the future tradesmen came from because the “trade drain” was the norm for those who served their apprenticeship time between say 1935-1950.

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