

SERVICE ABROAD

For over a hundred years Portsmouth, along with other Royal Dockyards, needed to send Dockyardmen abroad to help service the Fleet. During a normal career of 45 years, two tours of three years could be demanded of anyone, industrial, non-industrial and senior staff alike. The 'old hands' advised the young men to volunteer as soon as possible. Firstly, when they had children under school age - as abroad there was ample scope to employ at least one servant; and secondly, it did give a man a chance to select where he would be sent. To volunteer for a post also helped on promotion boards to show one had wider experience than just a Home Dockyard. This early tour should avoid any compulsory drafting until the children had grown up and his career had progressed. Then a second tour abroad could be chosen carefully, to another location. With good accommodation and the usual servants, it could be a pleasant three years before retirement. Journeys to and from abroad posts were by sea up until the 1960s when air travel took over. Since some sea trips lasted four weeks, it was like a holiday on full pay without any costs! Of course, during the war this was not the case, and staff were deployed all over the world to help build or repair naval ships. Travel was fraught with danger and accommodation could be fairly basic at some locations.

The permanent bases were located at Gibraltar, Malta, Alexandria (Egypt), Mombassa, Simonstown (South Africa), Trincomalee (Ceylon), Singapore, Hong Kong and Bermuda, plus other places in earlier times. Peacetime and WWII deployments also included Canada, United States, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Africa, Middle East and Europe where, as the Allies liberated areas, Dockyard staff, sometimes in uniform, were sent to help restore services at naval bases for Allied use. They also did the same at Hong Kong and Singapore.

Bob Russell, Support Group