

# Submariners Association



## History of the Embankment Memorial

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There can't be many of you who have not seen the National Submarine War Memorial in London and I'm sure you will agree it is a worthy and splendid tribute to all Submariners past and present.

You may be interested to know that the Monument has very recently been reassessed by the National Heritage List for England and the Submariners Association have received the following message:

***“We have taken into account all the representations made and completed our assessment of the memorial. I am pleased to inform you that having considered our recommendation, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has decided to amend the entry for The National Submariners' War Memorial, attached to the Embankment Wall on the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The memorial is listed at Grade II\*”***

The following notes may give you a better idea of the history of our National Monument.

### Location

Victoria Embankment, City of London, EC4Y 0HJ

## History

The aftermath of the First World War saw the biggest single wave of public commemoration ever with tens of thousands of memorials erected across England. This was the result of both the huge impact on communities of the loss of three quarters of a million British lives, and also the official policy of not repatriating the dead: therefore, the memorials provided the main focus of the grief felt at this great loss.

The inability to perform burials following losses at sea was a common part of the Naval Experience and had led over previous years to the erection of a number of memorials to sailors of the Royal Navy, Merchant Marine, and other services such as the RNLI. The First World War, however, was the first arena in which submarines would play a significant military role.

Britain had 57 operational submarines at the beginning of the war, with 15 under construction. Their most important function was the defence of Atlantic merchant shipping convoys against German U-boat attacks, which intensified after Germany announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare from 1 February 1917. At the war's end Britain had a fleet of 137 serving boats, with a further 78 under construction. Fifty-four boats were lost during the war and with them the lives of 138 officers and 1,225 men, approximately one-third of the Submarine Service's total personnel.

The memorial commemorating the British submariners who died in the First World War was paid for by private subscription and unveiled on 15 December 1922 by Rear Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair, Chief of the Submarine Service, and dedicated by the Chaplain of the Fleet, Archdeacon Charles Ingles. The City of London Corporation and London County Council were represented, and the Submarine Service provided a guard of honour at the well-attended ceremony. The memorial's sculptural elements are by Frederick Brook Hitch whilst the architect was AH Ryan Tenison FRIBA. The memorial was subsequently adapted to commemorate losses in the Second World War.

The granite pier to which the memorial is affixed and the matching structure to the west, flanking a tall rusticated arch, constitute the entrance to the now-defunct Temple Pier, one of a series of steamboat landing stages which formed part of Sir Joseph Bazalgette's Victoria Embankment scheme of 1864-70. The granite piers were intended to be embellished with sculptures; the corresponding pier to the west of the submarine memorial carries a bronze plaque (Grade II-listed) by Sir George Frampton commemorating the journalist WT Stead who died on the Titanic. There are records of British naval submarines moored near Temple Pier in 1907, and in August 1916 a German U-boat UC5 captured off the Suffolk coast was moored there as a visitor attraction. These associations may have influenced the choice of this site for the war memorial.

The sculptor Frederick Brook Hitch (1877-1957) studied at the Royal Academy Schools and exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1906 to 1947, specializing in portrait sculpture and statuary. He collaborated with the London-based architect Arthur Heron Ryan Tenison FRIBA (1861-1930) on another submariners' memorial at St Mary's Church, Shotley, Suffolk, commemorating the 8th and 9th Submarine Flotillas.

## Details

The memorial is located at Temple Pier, in close proximity to a number of listed structures and opposite the Grade II-registered grounds of Middle Temple and Inner Temple. The memorial consists of a monumental stepped granite pier carrying a large bronze plaque comprising a bas-relief underwater scene set within an architectural frame. The centrepiece of the bas-relief depicts the cross section of a submarine control room with the Captain to the fore beneath the periscope. Around the vessel is a host of mythical sea spirits or mermen tugging at the nets which are ensnaring it. The cornice is crowned by an escutcheon resembling the Submarine Service 'Dolphin' badge; at each end are ships' prows clasped by putti. The base has a relief of a submarine cruising on the surface of the sea and the dates 1914 and 1918.

The pilasters contain the lists of 50 submarines lost in the First World War (left) and 82 in the Second World War (right); the capitals are embellished with the Royal Navy insignia and the bases with laurel wreaths. The frieze has relief lettering reading:

**ERECTED TO THE MEMORY OF THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE BRITISH NAVY WHO LOST THEIR LIVES SERVING IN SUBMARINES 1914-1918 AND 1939-1945** (the last part of the inscription originally read AUGUST 1914 – NOVEMBER 1918).

Attached to the sides of the plaque are the allegorical female figures of Truth and Justice supported on miniature pedestals with dolphin consoles.

Below, a second plaque, surmounted by a precise rendition of the Submarine Service badge, reads:

**NATIONAL SUBMARINE WAR MEMORIAL (1922) THIS PLAQUE COMMEMORATES THE MEMORIAL'S SEVENTIETH ANNIVERSARY AND THE CONTRIBUTION BY THE MEMBERS OF THE SUBMARINERS OLD COMRADES, LONDON, IN THEIR DEVOTION TO THE UPKEEP OF THIS MEMORIAL, UNVEILED BY /PETER P RIGBY C.B.E. J.P.**

Fixed to the wall to either side are 40 bronze wreath-hooks in the form of anchors, which are a distinctive feature of the memorial.