

Memorials to the Merchant Navy

FAMILIES remembered loved ones who served in the Merchant Navy as memorial plaques were unveiled in the city.

The youngest person to be commemorated was Brian Brown, who went overboard in 1974 at the age of 17, and the eldest was Bill Williamson, who served in both the Merchant Navy and Royal Navy and lived to the age of 95.

Around 200 people turned out at the Merchant Navy Association memorial in Welsh Back yesterday, to see the names of their relatives unveiled on plaques attached to a bench. A total of 38 plaques were dedicated at a special ceremony conducted by the Reverend Philip Auden, while generations of families watched.

The latest memorials were in addition to 38 that were unveiled in November for Remembrance Day for all members of the Merchant Navy who have "crossed the bar", whether during service or after retiring from the seas.

For Brian Brown, whose son of the same name died at sea, the plaque is the closest he has come to a headstone.

Mr Brown junior was a deck buddy on the tanker British Commerce in the Indian Ocean when he was lost overboard.

His father, sisters and their own children attended the ceremony and laid wreaths in his honour.

Families welcome city's official recognition



Unveiling: Brian Brown, Philip Auden, Hamish Grant and Ted Williams unveiling the plaques at the Merchant Navy Memorial in Welsh Back.

by Vicki Mathias

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Mr Brown senior, of Warmley, said: "He was lost at sea so he's got no headstone - that's why we wanted a plaque here to commemorate him. This is our chance now to give him a headstone."

Chris Synnuck, also of Warmley, was at the ceremony with her children and grandchildren, remembering her father, Bill Williamson, and laid flowers in the dedication.

Her father first went to sea in the Merchant Navy when he was 15, and later joined the Royal Navy before returning to the Merchant seas after World War II.

Mrs Synnuck, of Whitchurch, said: "I think this is wonderful and dad would have thought that it was absolutely wonderful."

Jean Hobbs, of Kingswood, and her family attended in memory of her father Sydney Hennessy, a quarter master on board ss Cato, which was blown up in 1940.

The ship was carrying Guinness

from Ireland to England when it was blown up.

Mrs Hobbs said: "Dad was found in Milford Haven Dock and he's the only member of the Merchant Navy to have a grave in Arnos Vale.

"I feel this should be in a more prominent place rather than here, but I think it is good to know there is somewhere to come like this."

Brothers Bill, Roy and Maurice Damsell attended the unveiling to remember their brother Thomas, who was on board the Empire Mica which was blown up near Florida.

Roy said: "We heard different stories and only found out recently that he died off the coast of Florida.

"It's great to see the Merchant Navy recognised like this."

Standard bearers for the Bristol and District Merchant Navy Association, "Wings" Barry and Dave Caple, carried the flags for the group as part of the service and a minute's silence was observed after flags had been removed from the bench to unveil the plaques.

Anyone whose relative was in the Merchant Navy and feels they should be recognised with a plaque should send details to Ted Williams at 136 Hungerford Road, Brislington, BS4 4HF.

To see more pictures of the commemoration visit www.thisisbristol.co.uk/picshow