Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, England

Lest We Forget

World War 1

LIEUTENANT

R. S. LAIDLAW

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

H.M.A.S. "MELBOURNE"

23RD APRIL, 1919   Age 24

Robert Steward LAIDLAW

Robert Stewart Laidlaw was born at Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland on 25th December, 1894 to parents David & Annie Orr Laidlaw (nee Stewart).

The 1901 Scotland Census recorded Robert S. Laidlaw as a 6 year old Scholar, living with his family at Ardeer Mansion, Stevenston, Ayrshire, Scotland. His parents were listed as David Laidlaw (Engineer & Ironfounder – Major 1st Lanarkshire Regiment (vol), aged 39, born Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland) & Annie O. Laidlaw (I P C C Chairman Parish Council, aged 32, born Langside, Renfrewshire, Scotland). Also listed were Robert's three younger siblings – Alexander B. S. Laidlaw (aged 4, born Glasgow, Lanarkshire), Frances S. Laidlaw (aged 2, born Stevenston, Ayrshire) & David K. Laidlaw (aged 1 month, born Stevenston, Ayrshire). Four servants were also listed – Mary J. Wilson (Nursery Governess, aged 33), Agnes Paton (Nurse domestic, aged 37), Agnes Reid (Cook domestic, aged 54) & Julia Mcleod (Laundress Domestic, aged 47). (Note: Census details are only from a transcription – original was not viewed).

Robert Stewart Laidlaw joined Royal Navy on 15th September, 1907

The 1911 England Census recorded a "*Robert Laidlaw*", aged 16, born Lanark, Glasgow, as a resident & Student – Naval Cadet at R.N. College, Hospital & Masters' Hostels at Dartmouth, Devon, England. Captain E. Thomas, R.N. was the Chief Resident Officer & there were 351 Cadets listed on this Census

The August, 1912 UK Navy List recorded Robert Stewart Laidlaw as Midshipman (15 May, 1912).

The October, 1913 UK Navy List recorded Robert Stewart Laidlaw as Midshipman (15 May, 1912).

The November, 1914 UK Navy List recorded Robert Stewart Laidlaw as Acting Sub-Lieutenant (15 Sept 1914).

Midshipman Robert Stewart Laidlaw was Acting Sub-Lieutenant from 15th September, 1914 while with H.M.S. *Agamemnon*. He was Sub-Lieutenant from 15th March, 1915.

The April, 1915 UK Navy List recorded Robert Stewart Laidlaw as Sub-Lieutenant (15 Mar, 1915).

Sub-Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was transferred to H.M.S. *Blenheim* from 2nd April, 1915.

Sub-Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was admitted to Bighi (?) Hospital on 29th December, 1915 for observation for Appendicitis.

Sub-Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was transferred to H.M.S. *Mastiff* on 8th April, 1916.

The October, 1916 UK Navy List recorded Robert Stewart Laidlaw as Sub-Lieutenant (15 Mar, 1915).

On 21st November, 1916 Sub-Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was recommended for rank of Acting Lieutenant & appointment as First Lieutenant of a Destroyer by Captain Goode.

Sub-Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was admitted to Haslar Hospital on 23rd December, 1916 with Appendicitis (4 weeks). His recovery was at South Queensferry & he was fit for active Service from 24th January, 1917.

On 10th February, 1917 Sub-Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was described as "*most courteous and reliable officer. Specially recommended for promotion"* by Captain Goode.

In June, 1917 a Court of Enquiry was held into the grounding of "Mastiff". Acting Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw "*Is much to blame for gross carelessness (To be relieved 2nd Sea Lord)."*

Sub-Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was transferred to H.M.S. *Cardiff* on 26th June, 1917.

The August, 1917 UK Navy List recorded Robert Stewart Laidlaw as Acting Lieutenant (15 Feb, 1917).

From Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw's file for 11th February, 1918: "*Application for Short (G) ___ for destroyer officers & to be appointed as 1st __ of a destroyer. Capt. Sincair reports I shall be extremely sorry to lose his*

services as I have formed a very high opinion of his abilities. It is not proposed to appoint this officer to a destroyer in the near future."

In November, 1918 Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was described as "*Very promising. Steady, quite & trustworthy. Good at games & takes an interest in the men. Should make a good executive officer.*" by Captain Sinclair.

The January, 1919 UK Navy List recorded Robert Stewart Laidlaw as Lieutenant (15 Sept 1916).

According to the records held by National Archives Australia - Robert Stewart Laidlaw "*was appointed Lieutenant P.N.F. (Permanent Naval Forces) for 2 years as from 5th February, 1919 with seniority in rank of 15/9/16.*" He was on loan from the Royal Navy for a period of 2 years from 5th February, 1919.

Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was posted to H.M.A.S. *Melbourne* from 5th February, 1919.
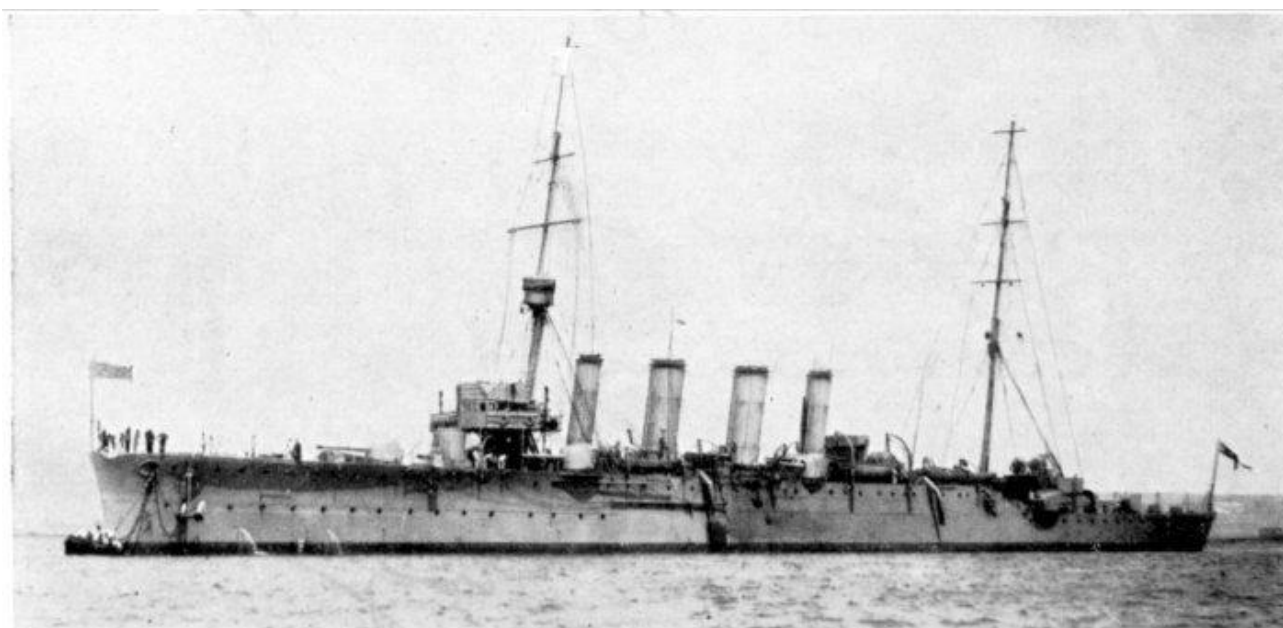
H.M.A.S. *Melbourne*

HMAS Melbourne was a Town class light cruiser operated by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). The ship was laid down by Cammell Laird at Birkenhead in England in 1911, launched in 1912 and commissioned in 1913. At the start of World War I, Melbourne was involved in attempts to locate the German East Asia Squadron, and participated in the capture of German colonies in the Pacific, before being assigned to the North America and West Indies Stations. In 1916, the cruiser joined the Grand Fleet in the North Sea, where she remained for the remainder of the war. Melbourne spent late 1919 and early 1920 in reserve, then was flagship of the Royal Australian Navy from 1920 until 1928, except for a second period in reserve during 1924 and 1925. HMAS Melbourne paid off in the United Kingdom on 23 April 1928, and was scrapped in 1929.
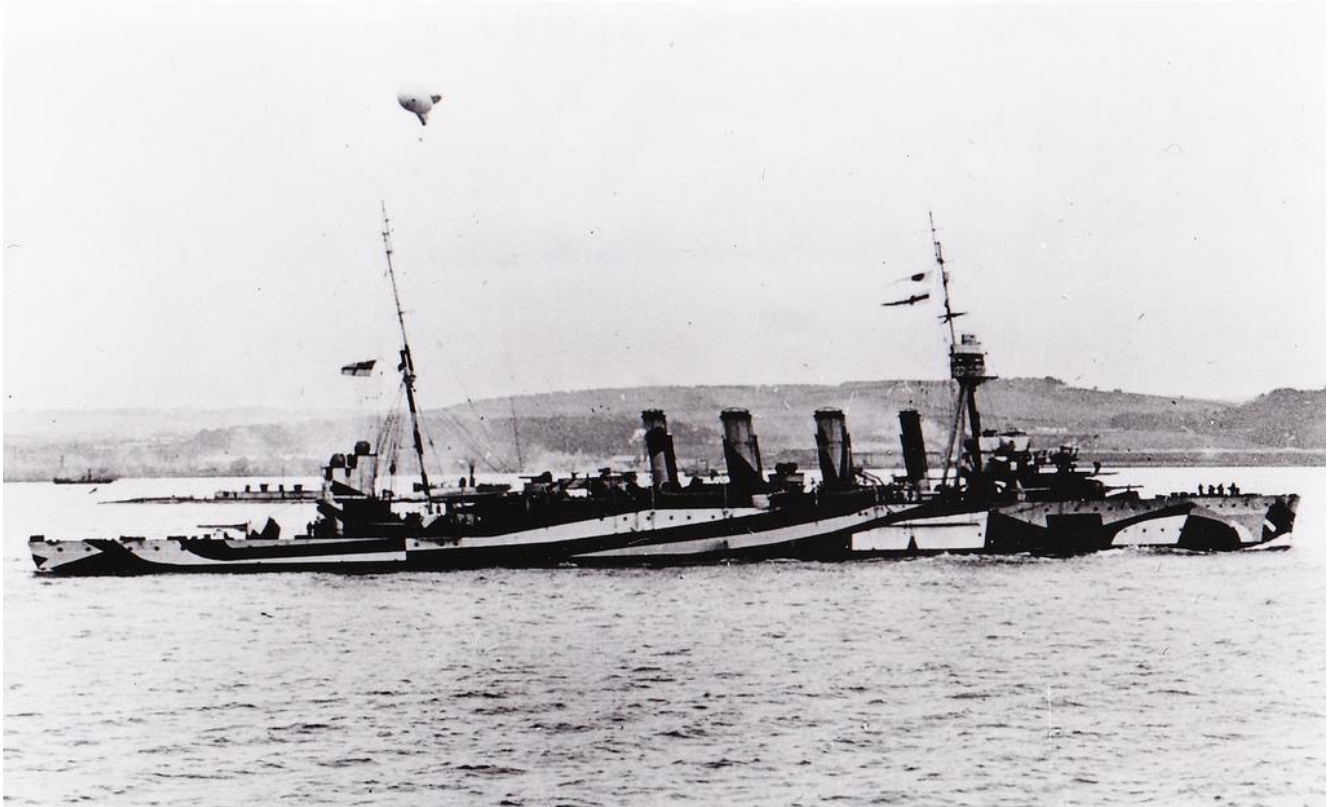
Operational History:

At the surrender of the German High Seas Fleet, Melbourne was assigned to escort SMS Nürnberg. The cruiser remained with the Grand Fleet until 30 November 1918: during the entire war, Melbourne was not involved in any sea battles. Initially, the cruiser was not awarded any battle honours, but a reorganisation of the RAN honours system published in 2010 retroactively awarded the honours "Rabaul 1914" and "North Sea 1916–18" to the ship.

HMAS Melbourne stayed in Portsmouth until 7 March 1919, then sailed for Sydney via Suez, Singapore, and Darwin. The ship was paid off into reserve on 5 August 1919 until 14 April 1920, when she was recommissioned.

(Extract of information from Wikipedia)

HMAS *Melbourne* - 1914

HMAS *Melbourne*

1918 - HMAS *Melbourne* was the only ship of R.A.N. to be painted in dazzle camouflage during World War 1.

Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw died on 23rd April, 1919 from Septicaemia on board H.M.A.S. *Melbourne* while at Sea on passage from Singapore to Port Darwin.

Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was buried at Sea from H.M.A.S. *Melbourne.* According to Longitude & latitude on the headstone in Glasgow Necropolis Cemetery, Scotland - Robert Stewart Laidlaw was buried at Sea here:

Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw is named on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, England – Panel 31. He has no grave, however his death is still acknowledged by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Scotland National Probate Index:

Laidlaw, Robert Stewart, Garnock House, Bridge of Allan, Lieut., R.N., died 23 April, 1919, at Sea, intestate. Conformation granted at Edinburgh, 3 June, to David Laidlaw, Garnock House aforesaid, Executor dative *qua* father. Value of Estate, £131. 17s. 2d.

England & Wales National Probate Calendar:

Laidlaw, Robert Stewart of Garnock House Bridge of Allan Stirlingshire North Britain lieutenant R.N. died 23 April 1919 at sea. Administration London 17 March to David Laidlaw colonel H.M. Army. Effects £143 19s. 10d.

Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw, aged 24, of Royal Australian Navy – H.M.A.S. "Melbourne". He was the son of Col. David Laidlaw and Annie Orr Stewart Laidlaw, of "Beechwood", Skelmorlie, Ayrshire.

Lieutenant R. S. Laidlaw is remembered on Royal Australian Navy WW1 Memorial, located at HMAS Cerberus Protestant Chapel of St Mark, Nelson Road, Crib Point, Victoria.

HMAS *Cerberus* Protestant Chapel of St Mark, Crib Point, Victoria *(Photos courtesy of Karen Standen)*

(3 pages of Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw's Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the CWGC & National Archives

A young Robert Stewart Laidlaw

———— ◆ ◆ ————

Newspaper Notices

NAVAL AND MILITARY NEWS

NAVAL APPOINTMENTS

Admiralty, February 6.

Lts….. R. S. Laidlaw to Melbourne…..

(*The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland – 8 February, 1919)

AUSTRALIAN WARSHIPS TO ARRIVE WEDNESDAY

H.M.A.S. Melbourne and Destroyer Flotilla Expected Off the Heads at 10 o'clock

It is expected that H.M.A.S. Melbourne and her consorts, the six destroyers Swan, Parramatta, Yarra, Torrens, Warrego and Huon, will arrive at about 10 o'clock on Wednesday morning off Sydney Heads, where they will be met by His Excellency the Governor General, who is making a special visit to Sydney for the purpose. Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson will be accompanied by Commodore Glossop, and will journey to the Heads in the naval cutter Franklin.

Official Calls.

As soon as the ships have come to their moorings, the officers will embark upon a round of official calls upon the Governor-General, the State Governor, and the Premier. At noon an official call will be made upon the Lord Mayor, who will avail himself of the opportunity of extending to them an official welcome to the city.

Races and Shows.

The rest of the day will probably be spent by the officers and men in visiting their friends, in attending the races (to which the Australian jockey Club has extended an open invitation to officers and men in uniform), or in visiting the

picture shows, courteously thrown open to them by the proprietors; while in the evening, doubtless large numbers will avail themselves of the generous invitation of the chief theatrical managers. All authorities are agreed that it would be preferable not to have any additional entertainment upon the first day of arrival.

Naval and Military Parade.

On Thursday the sailors will head the procession of sailors and soldiers in the Anzac Day parade, which had to be postponed from April 25 on account of the influenza restrictions. At 1 o'clock the State Government will entertain the officers at luncheon at Parliament House, at which His Excellency the Governor is expected to be present. The same evening the Y.M.C.A. committee has arranged to entertain about 500 officers and men at a dinner at the Town Hall, to be followed by a concert, the detailed arrangements of which arc in the hands of M. Verbrugghen, Director of the Conservatorium, and Mr. John Brown low. On Friday the officers of His Majesty's Naval Establishments will give an at home on Garden Island in honor of the officers of the flotilla.

Concession to Men.

At the present time it is not known what arrangements regarding shore leave for the men can be made, but the State Government will be able, on short notice, to arrange for special trams to La Perouse and other resorts, where refreshments will be provided. It has also arranged that officers and men in uniform shall travel on the trams free of cost, while rail passes will be granted to those who desire, and have been granted permission, to travel beyond the city's limits. The Y.M.C.A. committee has made very complete arrangements for the entertainment of the men, giving them a free run of their various hostels, with the use of the billard rooms, writing rooms, libraries, etc. Public buildings will be decorated with flags, in honor of the return of the sailors.

Leave Next Saturday.

Some doubt exists as to the length of the stay of the vessels in Sydney, but it appears likely that the Melbourne, accompanied by the destroyers Huon and Yarra, will leave for Melbourne on Saturday, while the remaining destroyers will, for the present, be allocated to Sydney.

The Officers.

The commander of the Melbourne is Capt. R. J. N.. Watson, D.S.O. Other officers are: Commander Malcolm R. J. Maxwell-Scott, Lieut.-Commander K. H. L. Mackenzie, Lieutenants L. C. Rowland, G. D. Moore, and **R. S. Laidlaw**, Lieut. J. G. Boyd, R.A.N.R., Sub-Lieut. C. B. Rosenthal, Engineer Commander E. A. Archard, and Engineer-Lieut. H. C. W. Mears.

Commander W. Burrows is in command, of the destroyer flotilla, his flag ship being the Swan. Commander Burrows was formerly in command of the Una (the German sloop Comet captured in New Guinea). He joined the flotilla last August, and took over command from Commander Bond. Other officers on the Swan are Lieut Gordon W. Knight, R.A.N.R., Sub-Lieut. J. D. Cunningham, and Engineer Lieut.Commander G. W. Bloomfield.

Lieut. Cyril J. P. Hill, who is in command of the Parramatta, has been attached to the vessel throughout the war. He succeeded in command on the death of Commander Warren at Brindisi.

The officers on the Torrens are: Lieut H. P. Keeley, D.S.C. (in command), Lieut. W. H. H. Stevenson, Sub-Lieut .G. W. Armitage, and Engineer-Lieut. J. W. Wishart.

Thanked by Admiralty.

Lieut.-Commander E. N. Mortimer has been in command of the Warrego since 1916. He was one of the officers thanked by the Admiralty for salvage work in the Adriatic in connection with the Italian troopship Orione. Other officers on the Warrego are Lieut. O. J. L. Symon, Sub-Lieut. E. S. Nurse, and Engineer Lieut. F. D. Stafford.

Lieut.-Commander Charles J. R. Webb, R.A.N.R., is in command of the Yarra. He was formerly First Lieutenant on the Huon, and was transferred to the Yarra in August, 1918. Other officers are Lieut Cyril B. C. Williams, R.A.N.R., and Engineer-Lieut.-Commander D. P. Herbert.

Lieut.-Commander Herbert V. Creer, R.A.N., is in command of the Huon. His twin brother is First Lieut, at Garden Island. Both saw service in the South African War. Other officers are Lieut. E. C. Rhodes, Sub-Lieut. R. B. Long, Engineer-Lieut. Commander Oscar A. Ireland (who belongs to the well-known Australian family and was a Sydney University man).

(*Sunday Times*, Sydney, NSW, Australia – 18 May, 1919)

The Melbourne's Captain

A HERO OF THE ZEEBRUGGE RAID

Captain R. J. N. Watson, D.S.O., who is in command of H.M.A.S. Melbourne, has a fine war record. In the early stages of operations he was attached to the tenth cruiser squadron, and later served with distinction in the East African campaign. He commanded H.M.S. Vengeance for eighteen months, and the D.S.O. was his reward for the good work which he performed while on service in East Africa. Afterwards Captain Watson was transferred to the Dover patrol, and was given command of the monitor Lord Clyde, which figured very prominently in the great naval exploit at Zeebrugge. For his share in the Zeebrugge raid Captain Watson was mentioned in despatches. He is a genial, ruddy faced officer, well liked by both officers and men of his ship. He only joined the Melbourne in February this year. In the course of a brief conversation yesterday he mentioned that he was no stranger to Melbourne, having visited this port ten years ago, when serving as first gunnery lieutenant on board H.M.S. Powerful. Captain Watson said he had been particularly impressed by the warmth of the welcome extended to him and the officers and men of his ship by the people of Melbourne and the residents of other Australian ports. **He described the voyage out from England as uneventful, although the Melbourne had the misfortune to lose, one of her officers, Lieutenant Laidlaw, who died shortly before the ship reached Java.** Captain Watson paid a tribute to the stokers of H.M.A.S. Melbourne, who, he said, seemed to revel in their work, without ever a growl or grumble. He stated that the ship had encountered rough weather after leaving Sydney, and all on board were very glad to get into port yesterday.

(*The Age*, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia – 27 May, 1919)

Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw is remembered on a headstone in Glasgow Necropolis Cemetery, 91 Wishart St, Glasgow, Scotland.

In Loving Memory Of

ROBERT STEWART LAIDLAW, LIEUT, R.N.

Eldest Son Of

David & Annie Orr Laidlaw

Born 25TH Dec, 1894. Died On Board

H.M.A.S. Melbourne 23RD April, 1919

Buried at Sea, Lat. 7^0 22 ½ ^{0} S, Long. 114^0 21^0 E.

He Died In The Service Of His Country

A Man Greatly Beloved

———————

War Service

1914-16, Channel Battle Squadron

& Dardanelles,

In Agamemnon, Ribble & Usk

1917-19, Dover Patrol In Mastiff,

North Sea No. 1 Light Cruiser Squadron

In Cardiff

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstones

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for cemeteries and memorials in 23,000 locations, in 153 countries. In all 1.7 million men and women from the Commonwealth forces from WWI and WWII have been honoured and commemorated in perpetuity.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as part of its mandate, is responsible for commemorating all Commonwealth war dead individually and equally. To this end, the war dead are commemorated by name on a headstone, at an identified site of a burial, or on a memorial. War dead are commemorated uniformly and equally, irrespective of military or civil rank, race or creed.

Not all service personnel have a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. In some instances the relative chose to have their own memorial/headstone placed on the deceased's grave. These private headstones are not maintained by the CWGC as they have no jurisdiction to maintain them.

Lieutenant Robert Stewart Laidlaw has no headstone but is instead named on the Plymouth Naval Memorial.

Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, England

The Memorial is situated centrally on The Hoe which looks directly towards Plymouth Sound.

After the First World War, an appropriate way had to be found of commemorating those members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave, the majority of deaths having occurred at sea where no permanent memorial could be provided.

An Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports in Great Britain - Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth - should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer, who had already carried out a considerable amount of work for the Commission, with sculpture by Henry Poole. The Plymouth Naval Memorial was unveiled by HRH Prince George on 29 July 1924.

After the Second World War it was decided that the naval memorials should be extended to provide space for commemorating the naval dead without graves of that war, but since the three sites were dissimilar, a different architectural treatment was required for each. The architect for the Second World War extension at Plymouth was Sir Edward Maufe (who also designed the Air Forces memorial at Runnymede) and the additional sculpture was by Charles Wheeler and William McMillan. The Extension was unveiled by HRH Princess Margaret on 20 May 1954. A further unveiling took place on 11 November 1956, when panels 101 to 103 honouring those who died on shore, but who had no known grave, were unveiled by Admiral Sir Mark Pizey.

In addition to commemorating seamen of the Royal Navy who sailed from Plymouth, the First World War panels also bears the names of sailors from Australia and South Africa. The governments of the other Commonwealth nations chose to commemorate their dead elsewhere, for the most part on memorials in their home ports. After the Second World War, Canada and New Zealand again chose commemoration at home, but the memorial at Plymouth commemorates sailors from all other parts of the Commonwealth.

Plymouth Naval Memorial commemorates 7,251 sailors of the First World War and 15,933 of the Second World War.

(Information from CWGC)

Plymouth Naval Memorial *(Photo from VWMA – Julianne T. Ryan 2017)*

(Photo from CWGC)

1914 – 1918   1939 – 1945

All These Were Honoured In Their Generations

And Were The Glory Of Their Times

Photo of Lieutenant R. S. Laidlaw's name on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, England.

Panel 31 – Plymouth Naval Memorial

(Photo from CWGC)

Poppies Wave at CWGC Plymouth Naval Memorial *(Photo by Robert Pittman)*

© Cathy Sedgwick 2021