

Tower Hill Memorial, Greater London, England



Lest We Forget

World War 1



SEAMAN

E. ROBERTS

AUSTRALIAN MERCANTILE SERVICE

S.S. "SOUTHBOROUGH"

16TH JULY, 1918

Evan (Sunny) ROBERTS

Evan Roberts was born on 19th October, 1897 at 19 Clyde Street, Millers Point, New South Wales to parents Evan & Mary Grace Roberts (nee Steer). His birth was registered in Sydney, New South Wales.

Evan Roberts joined Merchant Navy - Australian Mercantile Service.

Merchant Navy

The term "Merchant Navy" refers to a nation's commercial shipping and crews. During the First World War, merchant ships were requisitioned to act as transports, hospital ships and cargo carriers. (AWM)

Seaman Evan Roberts was killed in action on 16th July, 1918 when S.S. *Southborough* was torpedoed & sank in North Sea – off Ravenscar, United Kingdom. He was supposed drowned as his body was not recovered as a result of enemy action.

S.S. *Southborough*

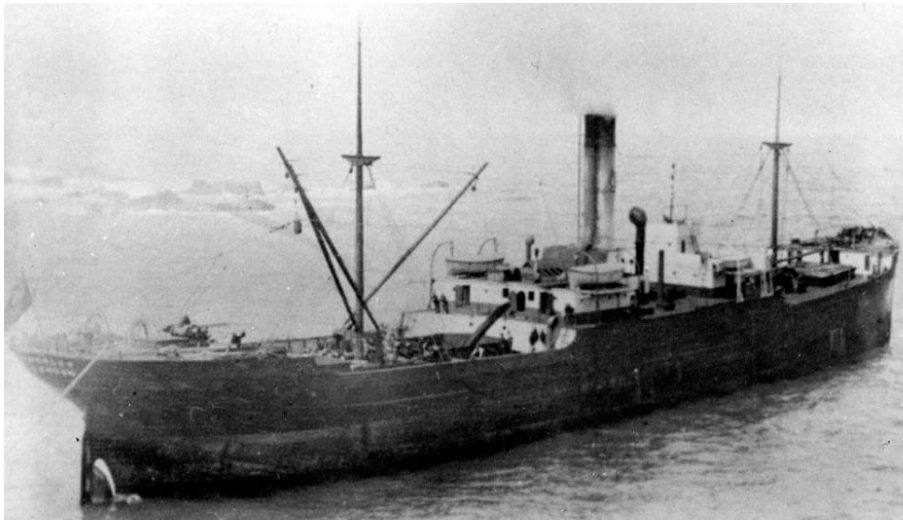
S.S. *Southborough* was built in 1910 by the Sunderland Shipbuilding Co. under the name of *Anerley*. In 1914 she was sold to Hazelwood Shipping Co. Ltd, Sydney, New South Wales. In 1915 *Southborough* was chartered to B.H.P. Shipping through agents W. Scott Fell & Co., Sydney & registered in Sydney. She was one of three British ships chartered by B.H.P. Shipping. *Southborough* traded around the Australian coast until she was recalled to Britain in May, 1918.

S.S. *Southborough* was on passage from La Goulette to the Tees with a cargo of iron ore. She was torpedoed by UB-110 at 1.43 p.m., 4-5 miles from Ravenscar, North Yorkshire. The vessel was hit on the starboard side of the forward bunker. S.S. *Southborough* was in convoy at the time and sank almost at once losing 30 of the crew. The eight survivors were picked up by an escort vessel and landed at Middlesbrough.

Newspaper article – *Bendigo Advertiser*, Victoria, Australia - 23 July, 1918:

S.S. SOUTHBOROUGH TORPEDOED

The Acting Minister for Navy (Mr A. Poynton) has been notified that the s.s. Southborough has been torpedoed and sank in European waters. There were only eight survivors – two gunners and six of the crew. The names of those who were on the torpedoed ship have not yet been made available, The Southborough was a steel screw steamer of 3709 tons and traded between Australian and Europe. She was built in 1910 by the Sunderland Shipbuilding Co. Ltd. and was owned by the Hazelwood Shipping Co. Ltd.



S.S. *Southborough*

Newspaper item – *The Age*, Melbourne, Victoria – 25 October, 1918:

HOW S. S. SOUTHBOROUGH WAS SUNK.

The survivors of four torpedoed Australian steamers— Warilda, Barunga, Southborough and another vessel — disembarked yesterday at Victoria Dock. Of 32 repatriated sailors five were from the steamer Southborough, in connection with the loss of which a brief announcement was made on 22nd July. The only survivors from the sinking of the Southborough were six Australians, five of whom returned yesterday. Their names are: — F. Johnson, seaman, N.S.W.; W. Robinson, assistant steward; W. Regan, fireman, of 59 beach-street, Port Melbourne; D. Davenport, trimmer, Fremantle; and J. Franklin, sailor, Sydney. J. W. Walton, a Sydney trimmer, signed off in London. Twenty-eight men, including Captain W. Eade and two Australians named E. Roberts (New South Wales) and C. Heazelwood, of Melbourne, were drowned.

According to the men, the Southborough was in sight of land en route from a French port when she was torpedoed. She was heavily laden with iron ore, and sank in less than a minute, precipitating all onboard into the water. The weather was fine, and the Southborough was one of a convoy of 47 vessels. The man in the crow's nest sighted the track of the torpedo about 12.30 p.m., and the next moment the vessel was a complete wreck forward. The lookout man, who immediately slid down one of the foremast stays, had barely reached the deck before the vessel went down at the bow. J. Franklin, an able seaman, who was dragged under by the suction, had an extremely narrow escape of being cut down by the vessel's propeller as the stern came down after the vessel's dive at the bow. 'The captain was in charge,' said a seaman yesterday, "and we could see the buildings on shore. Then in one minute 28 of our number were dead. I saw poor Captain, Eade haul himself on to some wreckage only to be immediately washed off again. The end came so suddenly that the destroyers and trawlers had no chance to effect a rescue.'

Three other shipwrecked mariners who debarked here yesterday were on a steamer bound for Melbourne with the war tank. The vessel was torpedoed, and was beached in a damaged condition.

E. Roberts is remembered on the Tower Hill Memorial (Mercantile Marine Memorial Part VII), Greater London, England as he has no known grave.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Seaman Evan Roberts of Australian Mercantile Service – S.S. "Southborough" (Sydney, NSW). He was the son of Evan & Mary Grace Roberts, of 31 Dalgety Rd., Miller's Point, Sydney, New South Wales.

Seaman Evan Roberts, of Merchant Navy, is remembered on the Commemorative Roll Book, located in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. The Commemorative Roll records the names of those Australians who died during or as a result of wars in which Australians served, but who were not serving in the Australian Armed Forces and therefore not eligible for inclusion on the Roll of Honour.

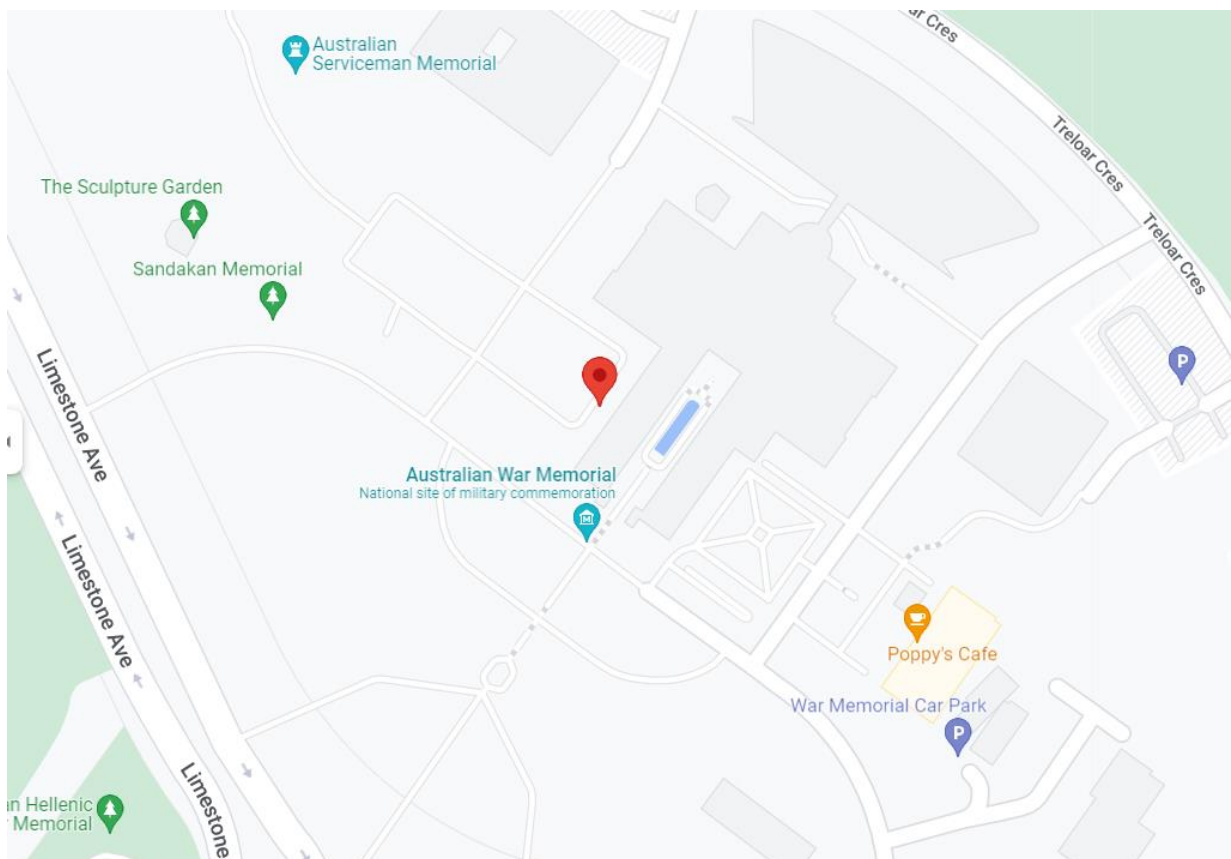


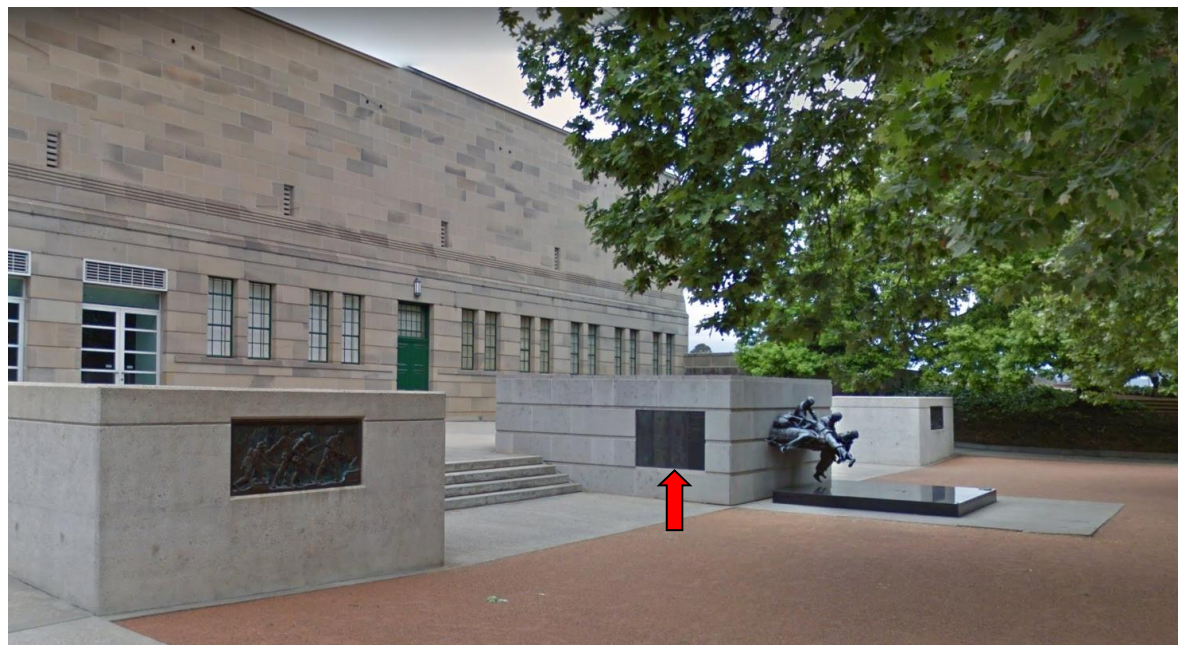
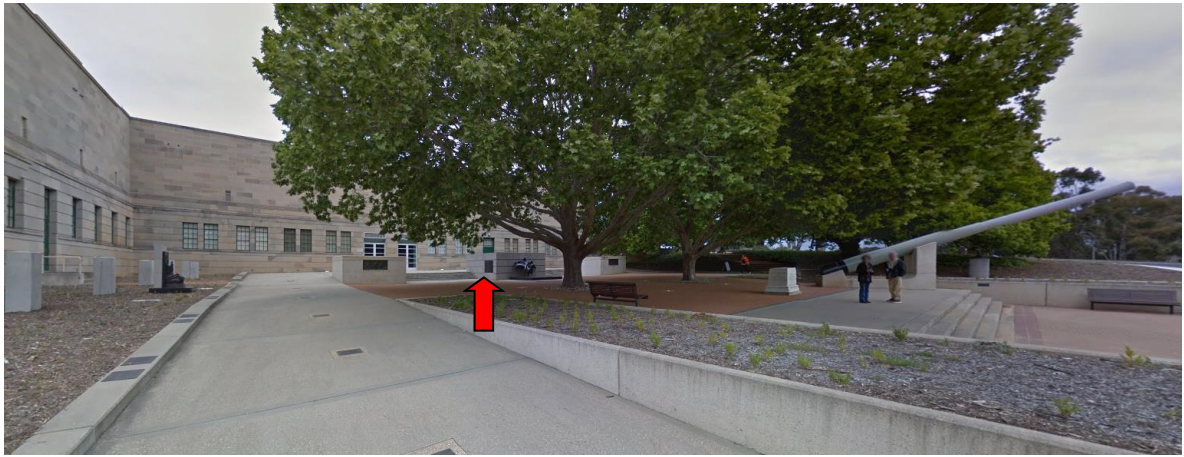
Commemorative Roll (Photo from AWM)



Commemorative Area of the Australian War Memorial (*Capital Photographer*)

E. Roberts is remembered on the Merchant Seaman Memorial Commemorative Plaque, located at the Australian War Memorial – Western forecourt, Treloar Crescent, Campbell, Australian Capital Territory.



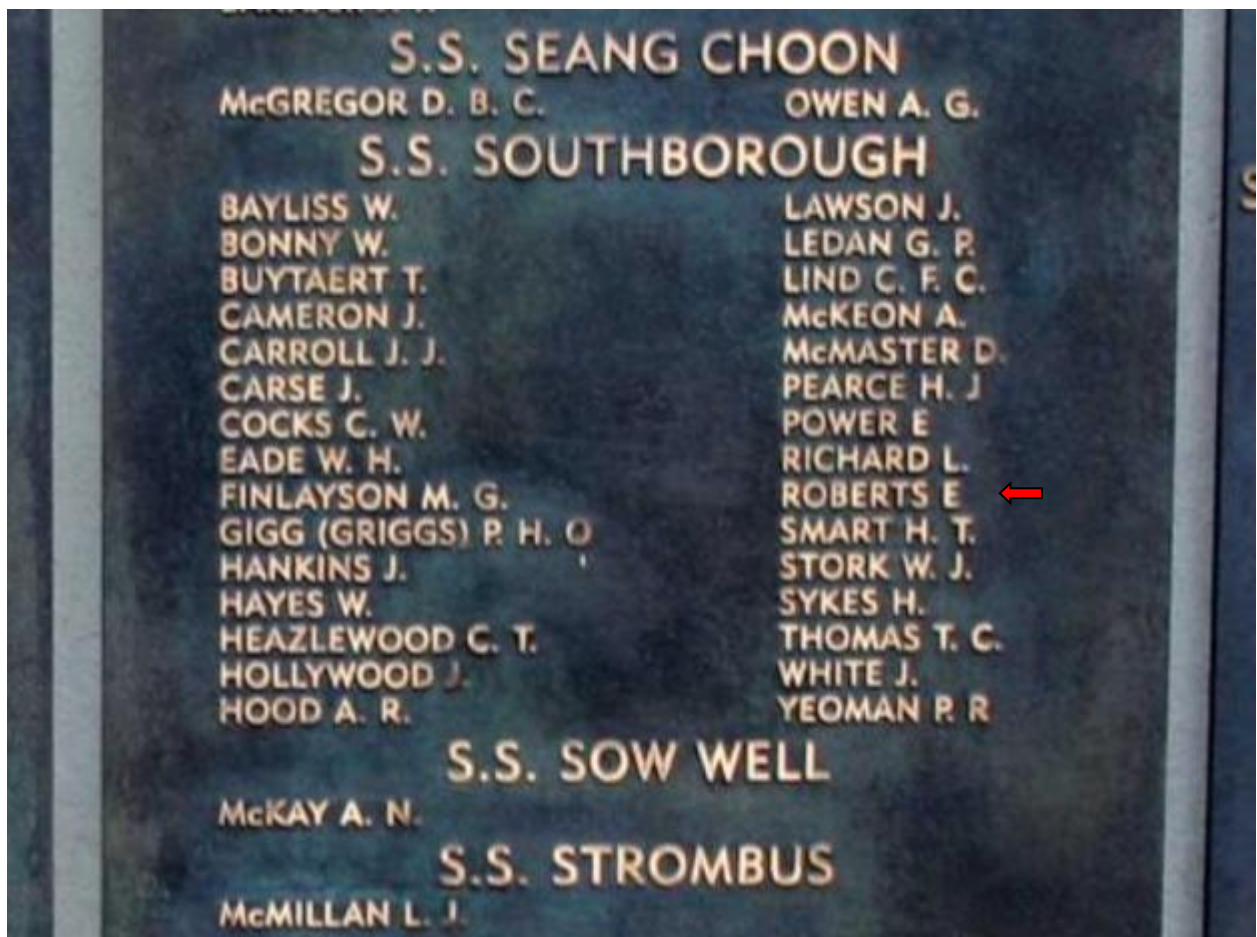


Sculpture at Merchant Seamans Memorial
depicting survivors in a life raft recovering other survivors from the water.

(Photo from AWM Places of Pride – Brian Rowe)



Merchant Seaman Memorial – WW1 Roll of Honour (Photos from AWM Places of Pride – Brian Rowe)



Information from The Australian War Memorial:

Service records

The National Archives of Australia holds microfilmed employment records for Australian seamen who served on Australian merchant vessels between January 1922 and December 1990. The records are arranged by family name and give some personal information, the name of ships and dates of service.



Evan (Sunny) Roberts



Newspaper Notices

SOUTHBOROUGH SURVIVORS

MELBOURNE, October 25.

The survivors of four torpedoed Australian Steamers – Warilda, Barunga, Southborough and another vessel – disembarked yesterday at Victoria Dock. Of 32 men and repatriated sailors, five were from the steamer Southborough, in connection with the loss of which a brief announcement was made on 22nd July. The only survivors from the sinking Southborough were six Australians, five of whom returned yesterday, Their names are: F. Johnson, seaman, New South Wales; H. Robinson, assistant steward; W. Regan, fireman, Port Melbourne; D. Davenport, trimmer, Fremantle; and J. Franklin, sailor, Sydney, J. W. Walton, a Sydney trimmer, signed off in London. Twenty-eight men, including Captain Eade and two Australians named E. Roberts, New South Wales, and C. Hazelwood, Melbourne, were drowned.

(*The Week*, Brisbane, Queensland – 1 November, 1918)

WE MUST KEEP FAITH WITH THEM

Our Promise to 300,000 Men

TO BREAK IT WOULD BE TREACHERY

What Neglect May Bring To Us

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A CASE IN POINT

John David Roberts, of 27a Dal gety's Terrace, Miller's Point, enlisted in the A.I.F., and left Sydney on September 20, 1915, as a private in the 2nd Battalion (Infantry). He lost his left leg at Pozieres, and arrived back in Australia in August, 1917. The following is his statement: —

"I was discharged from hospital in December, 1918, and except for an artificial leg am now quite physically fit to resume my former occupation as a winch-driver.

"Before enlisting I was for ten years a member of the Sydney Coal Lumpers' Union, and for the last three years of that period was a winch-driver.

"I am a married man, with one child aged five. In addition to these responsibilities, my father is unable to work, and has to look to me for some assistance. **My only brother was drowned on the torpedoed 'Southborough'.**

"In April last I applied to the Repatriation Department for work. At the same time I also applied to the Sydney Labour Bureau (Coal Staff) for employment as a winch-driver in the coaling industry on the waterfront. I produced to the officer in charge a reference which showed that I had the necessary qualifications for the work. I was duly given a disc, No. 1234, which cost 1s., and which should entitle me to a place on the roster by means of which the work is allocated.

"So far so good.

"Armed with this disc, I applied at the Model Lodging House, Kent Street, where the roster is prepared.

"The clerk in charge told me that there were no jobs for winchmen.

"Later that day, or the next day, I called again, and an officer from the Sydney Labour Bureau was there. He told me that my case would have to be considered by the Board. This in spite of the fact that the disc should have given me a place on the roster automatically, and without any questions being raised.

"I replied that I was willing to take my turn on the roster, but, obviously, owing to my artificial leg, I could only do winch work, in which, however, my disability would be no disadvantage. As a matter of fact before the war, there was a man minus his left leg working continuously as a winchman on the waterfront.

"I then went again to the Repatriation Department and stated my case. They handed me a sealed letter to take to the officer in charge of the Sydney Labour Bureau. It was opened in the presence of myself and the Secretary of my late Union, and the officer on reading it said:

'Who are they to demand work off me?' or words to that effect.

"A few days later the Sydney Labour Bureau Board sent a letter to the Secretary of my late Union aforesaid stating that there were no vacancies for winch-drivers.

"This practically means that I am deprived of the chance of a job in the Coaling Industry as a winchman. It means, also, that I am even debarred from being included in the roster.

"The officer in charge of the roster has the appointing of the winchman for each gang, and it would be a very simple matter for such work to be given by him to any man who, like myself, is thoroughly competent for it, yet incapable of doing the other classes of work.

"This would be real preference returned men. Instead, however, of this promised preference, I am absolutely prevented from doing the one job which I am most competent to do and which chances to be the one most suited to my disability."

(*Smith's Weekly*, Sydney, NSW – 10 May, 1919)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

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.

Tower Hill Memorial, Greater London, England

The Tower Hill Memorial commemorates men and women of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets who died in both World Wars and who have no known grave. It stands on the south side of the garden of Trinity Square, London, close to The Tower of London. The Memorial Register may be consulted at Trinity House Corporation, Trinity Square (Cooper's Row entrance), Tower Hill, London EC3N 4DH, which will be found behind the Memorial.

In the First World War, the civilian navy's duty was to be the supply service of the Royal Navy, to transport troops and supplies to the armies, to transport raw materials to overseas munitions factories and munitions from those factories, to maintain, on a reduced scale, the ordinary import and export trade, to supply food to the home country and - in spite of greatly enlarged risks and responsibilities - to provide both personnel and ships to supplement the existing resources of the Royal Navy.

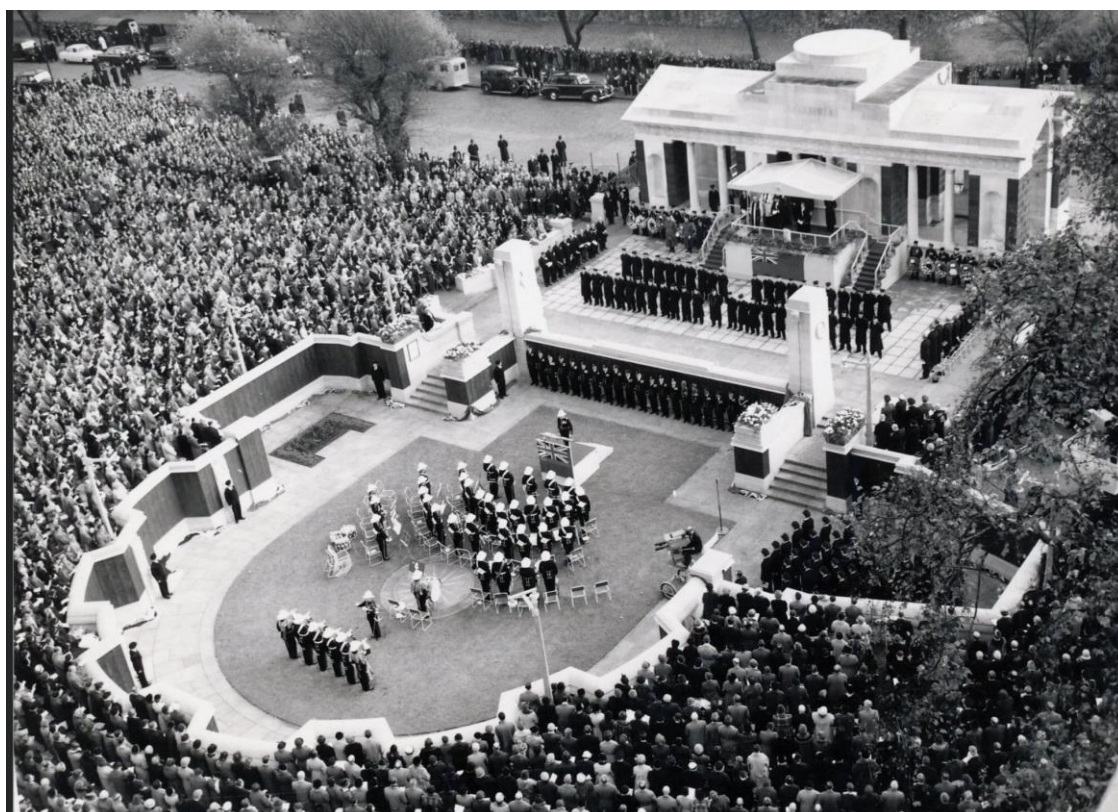
Losses of vessels were high from the outset, but had peaked in 1917 when in January the German government announced the adoption of "unrestricted submarine warfare". The subsequent preventative measures introduced by the Ministry of Shipping - including the setting up of the convoy system where warships were used to escort merchant vessels - led to a decrease in losses but by the end of the war, 3,305 merchant ships had been lost with a total of 17,000 lives.

In the Second World War, losses were again considerable in the early years, reaching a peak in 1942. The heaviest losses were suffered in the Atlantic, but convoys making their way to Russia around the North Cape, and those supplying Malta in the Mediterranean were also particularly vulnerable to attack. In all, 4,786 merchant ships were lost during the war with a total of 32,000 lives. More than one quarter of this total were lost in home waters.

The First World War section of the Tower Hill Memorial commemorates almost 12,000 Mercantile Marine casualties who have no grave but the sea. The memorial was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens with sculpture by Sir William Reid-Dick. It was unveiled by Queen Mary on 12 December 1928.

The Second World War extension, which commemorates almost 24,000 casualties, was designed by Sir Edward Maufe, with sculpture by Charles Wheeler. It was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II on 5 November 1955.

(Information from CWGC)



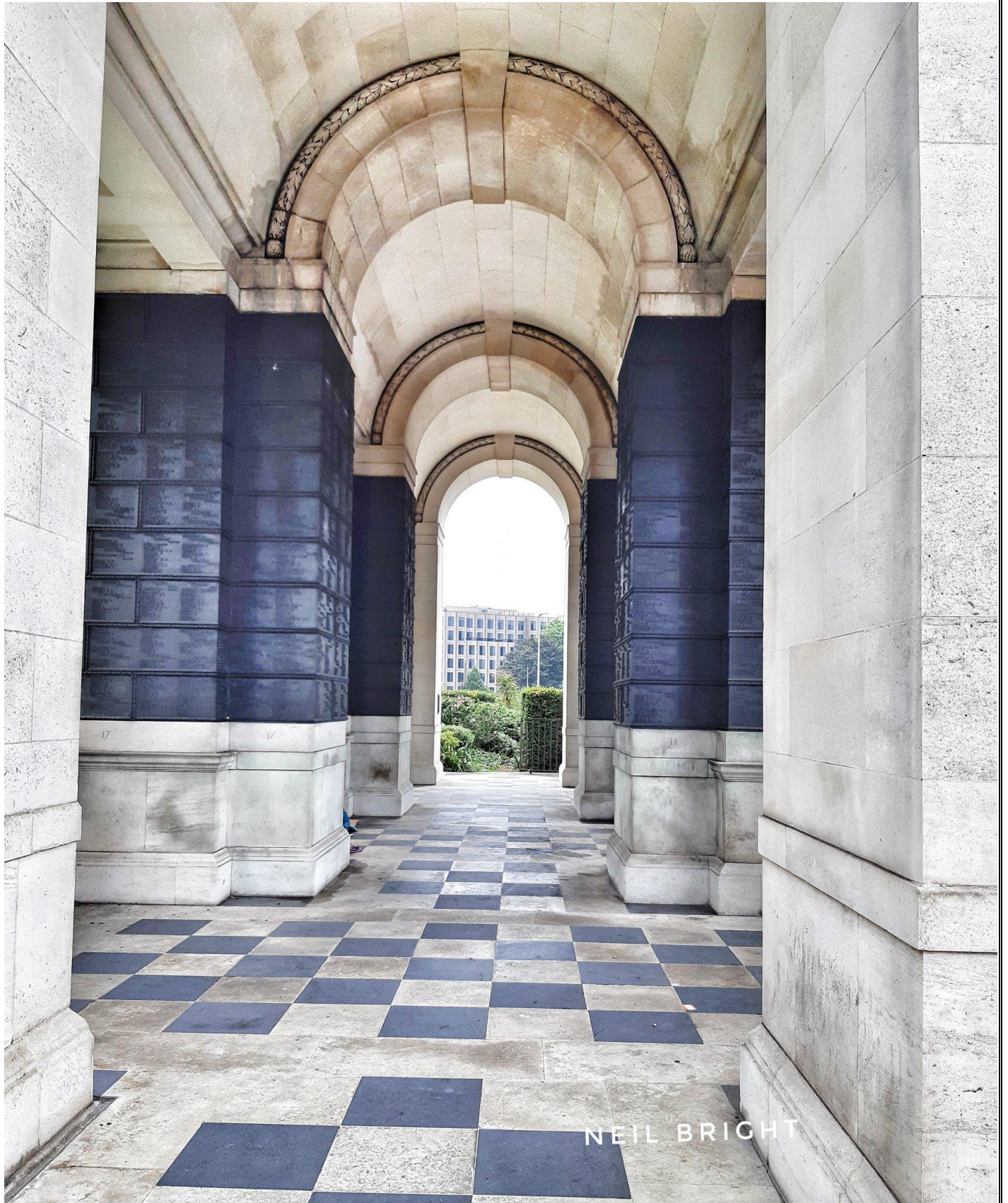
Opening of WW2 Extension of Tower Hill Memorial - 1955



(Photo by Chris Anderson)



(Photos courtesy of Neil Bright)



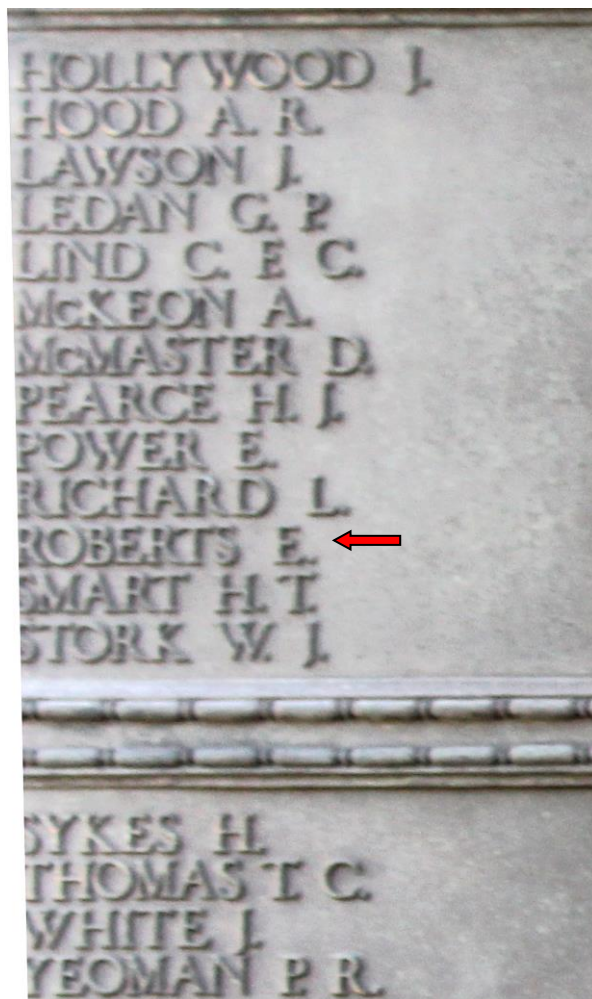
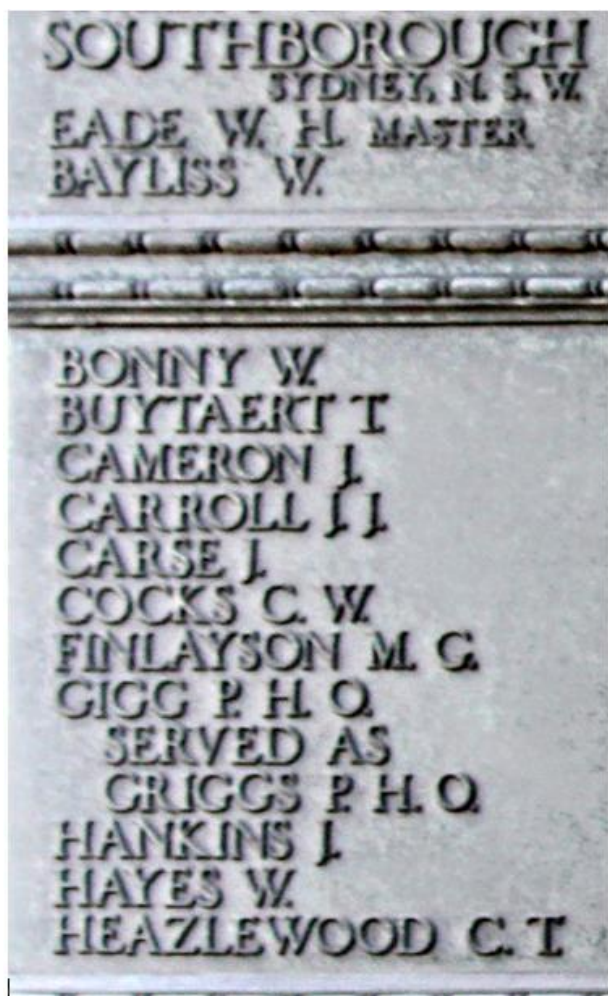
NEIL BRIGHT



(Photo from CWGC)



Photo of Seaman E. Roberts' name on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Tower Hill Memorial, Greater London, England.



Tower Hill Memorial – *Southborough* (Photo from Benjido)

