

WRNS Meteorology Observers in World War II

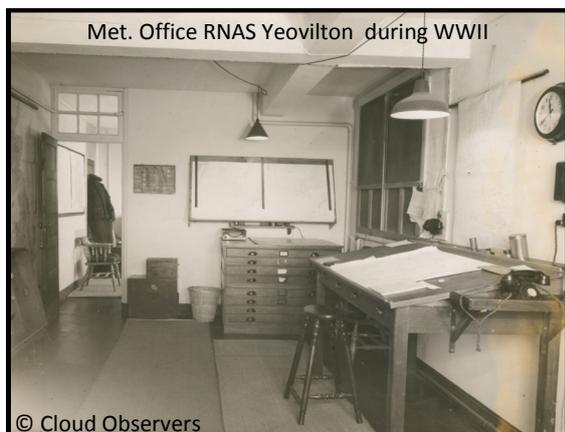
Elizabeth Dear - Jean Atkins - José Brysdon - Dorothy Rickards - Geraldine Skull

The first three weeks of WRNS basic training took place at HMS Pembroke III, Mill Hill, London.

On completion Dorothy went to HMS Merlin (RNAS Donibristle) in Fife for Meteorological training, as did Jean, Elizabeth went Berkeley Square in London, at that time the Met. HQ, for her training, José went to HMS Jackdaw (RNAS Crail) in Fife and Geraldine to HMS Kestrel (RNAS Worthy Down) in Hampshire.

All training was 'on the job' carried out by the Meteorological Officer, there were no formal courses at this time.

Elizabeth Dear (nee Baldwin) 1942 – 1948



Elizabeth's career took her first to HMS Heron (RNAS Yeovilton) in Somerset, then in 1944 to HMS Nightjar (RNAS Inskip) in Lancashire and then on to HMS Jackdaw, where the WRNS were accommodated at the Balcomie Hotel in the village, where she celebrated VE and VJ days in 1945.

At this time shore stations were so desperate for weather reports from the Western Atlantic that three ships, the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth and RMS Andes were allowed to send reports, although once used they had to be burnt! After returning to HMS Heron to sign on for a second term, in 1946 Elizabeth was drafted to HMS Goldcrest II (RNAS Dale) in Pembrokeshire and then to the new School of Meteorology at HMS Harrier (RNAD Kete) again in Pembrokeshire, where officers and ratings were trained at the same establishment for the first time. Elizabeth was asked to help set up the new school by Cdr. A R Edwards. The two opened it together in October 1946 and were joined later by L/s (Met) Pearce. Elizabeth was by this time a Petty Officer instructing ratings courses, she met her future husband Lt. Arthur Dear when he was training as a Met. Officer. Elizabeth left the WRNS in 1948.

Jean Atkins (nee Aitchison) 1942 – 1946

After training Jean remained at HMS Merlin as part of the bank of Met. WRNS that were used to cover staffing shortages at other stations due to leave etc. Jean went to HMS Jackdaw, HMS Condor (RNAS Arbroath) and HMS Sparrowhawk (RNAS Hatston) in the Orkneys. Promoted to Leading Wren in 1943 her next draft was to HMS Lynx, based at Dover in Kent, where they worked in the tunnels underneath the castle. D Day preparations were underway and travel was very restricted, shelling was fairly frequent and also the odd air raid. Weather for D Day was unpredictable but Jean was not on duty at that time.



Later that year Jean went to Stoke Poges for three weeks training to become a WRNS Officer and then to the Royal Naval College Greenwich for Met. Training, during which time the first V1 rockets fell. Upon qualifying she was sent to HMS Landrail (RNAS Macrihanish) in Argyllshire as the first female Met. Officer, something that didn't go down too well with some of the old hands. After a year there prior to demob Jean took a physics refresher course at HMS Cabbala as she intended going to college, albeit four years later than originally planned.

José Brysdon (nee Littlejohns) 1942 – 1946

José completed training at HMS Jackdaw where she too was accommodated in the Balcomie Hotel, and after short spells at HMS Lynx in Dover and HMS Pembroke in London was drafted to HMS Landrail at Machrihanish. This was a happy station, fresh milk from a farm, fishing in the loch and 8 miles of beach where washed up tins of cigarettes, fruit and meat from convoys torpedoed in the Atlantic were still fit to use. When Jean arrived at Machrihanish as WRNS



Third Officer, José was drafted back to London as they had been at school together and were friends and the policy was not for them to serve together.

José also applied to be a Met. Officer but failed selection, was offered another branch but declined and subsequently went to HMS Blackcap (RNAS Stretton) in Lancashire as a Petty Officer until she was demobbed in the spring of 1946.

Dorothy Rickards (nee Davies) 1943 – 1947

Dorothy was conscripted in 1943, originally intending to join the ATS as WRNS recruiting was temporarily closed but was allowed to join as she had a sister already in the WRNS, anyway she said that khaki would have clashed with her red hair. She also remained at HMS Merlin, going on loan for short periods to HMS Landrail, HMS Sparrowhawk, HMS Condor and HMS Osprey in Belfast, before ending up at HMS Nuthatch (RNAS Anthorn) in Cumbria where she was demobbed in 1947.



Geraldine Skull (nee Billingshurst) 1944 - 1946



When she finished her training Geraldine was drafted to HMS Vulture (RNAS St. Merryn) in Cornwall to the mainly wooden control tower where one kept the night watch alone in solitude. On the morning watch the office was all activity, officers and Met. WRNS rarely seen at other times. Late in 1944 a draft to RNAS Machrihanish, a very different station, much busier with night flying, incredible gales and storms as well as breathtaking sunsets. The Met. Officer (a former observer) at whom in a moment of exasperation she lobbed the full weight of the Admiralty Weather Manual elicited not a charge of mutiny' but a life sentence of matrimony. Then came VE day and leave.

In 1945 it was back to a much changed St. Merryn, a new modern control tower, more people and the war ended. Cornwall in the summer, beaches, picnics and endless demob parties until Geraldine herself left in August 1946.

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During this time all Met. Wrens were encouraged to take shorts flights as much as possible, ostensibly to view cloud formations, some being luckier than others.

Due to a lot of aircraft not being kept in hangars it appears that the main concern for those on the lonely night watch was always the wind, was it getting gustier, had it changed direction, should they ring the Duty Met. Officer to alert the Duty Station Officer to call out the duty watch in the middle of the night to turn the parked aircraft into wind and check that they were securely lashed down?

There was a similar bank of WRNS to those at RNAS Donibristle stationed at RNAS Lee-on-the-Solent in Hampshire to cover staffing shortages in southern England due to leave etc.



World War II recruiting poster encouraging young women to join the WRNS to free a man to join the fleet. Meteorological WRNS were recruited from 1942

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