

PRESS RELEASE

Rigger's Mate reunited with old aircraft carrier

When in 1967, Stephen Maynard was a 20year old Rigger's Mate working for Thorneycroft on the River Thames; little did he know that he was using a WWI aircraft carrier as his barge and general floating workshop.

44 years later he was taking a nostalgic trip from the Medway along the Thames towards the small island in the Thames near Hampton Court called Platt's Eyot where the old barge was kept.

He learnt that the vessel had been identified as a 1918 Thorneycroft Lighter - the world's first purpose built aircraft carrier and it had been taken to the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Yeovilton for careful restoration and preservation.

"I knew it was a bit special" he said "It had a fast sleek bow which made it look like a speed boat from the front and lots of sophisticated winching gear on the stern. It looked quite exotic but when I was working on it in the 60's, it had become little more than a wreck".

"Along with my duties at the time of pumping out hulks, laying up boats, fetching and carrying supplies, I was also responsible for the manoeuvring of large trucks to the island aboard the deck of the Lighter. A short tow of a quarter of a mile was required from the north river bank to the south bank of the island. All sorts of stuff was delivered on the Lighter including quite large fuel oil tankers. The small fore cabin holds particularly fond memories for me as it served my private tea break area and otherwise idling hiding hole!"

The Fleet Air Arm Museum invited Mr Maynard to visit the Museum on December 7th and to be reunited with the old vessel of his youth. Says David Hill Curator, "We were really pleased to meet Mr Maynard and were able to learn more about this vessel's fascinating history".

Caption:

Stephen Maynard enters the 'hiding hole' of his youth