



**Centre for Port and Maritime History: The War at Sea.**

**The Quaker Meeting House**

**22 School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BT**

**Saturday 17 May 2025.**

**0930 Refreshments.**

**1000 Welcome: Dr David Clampin, Centre for Port and Maritime History.**

**1015 Dr Frances Houghton, The Open University.**

Hospital Ships at War, 1939-45.

**1055 Derek Nudd, Independent scholar.**

The Sturdy Incident, 1944: Collateral damage or forgotten war crime?

**1135 Refreshments.**

**1200 Dr Andrew Davies, University of Liverpool.**

Mutinies in the Indian Navy at war's end.

**1240 Lunch.**

**1345 Dr Bjørn Tore Rosendahl, Centre for the History of Seafarers at War, ARKIVET Peace and Human Rights Centre, Norway.**

Semi-militarized in war and lack of recognition in peace: Norwegian and other Allied seafarers in the Second World War.

**1425 Dr John Greenacre, University of Suffolk.**

Competing Interests: The British Fishing Industry at the Close of the Second World War

**1505 Refreshments.**

**1535 Dean Paton, Chief Executive, Big Heritage CIC.**

Presenting the 'most important campaign of the Second World War': the new Battle of the Atlantic Museum, Birkenhead.

**1635 Close: Prof. Nicholas J. White, Co-director, Centre for Port and Maritime History.**



## Abstracts.

### **Dr Andrew Davies, University of Liverpool.**

The Royal Indian Navy underwent significant expansion in response to World War Two, moving from a coastal defence force towards an ocean-going fleet which would eventually become the naval forces of independent India. However, in early 1946, a large scale 'mutiny' or 'strike' occurred, spurred on by poor working conditions alongside nascent Indian nationalism amongst the sailors. In this paper, I explore the administrative and political background to the 'mutiny' to discuss its importance as a moment in the wider decolonisation of the British Empire.

### **Dr John Greenacre, University of Suffolk.**

The Second World War was a period of significant turmoil for the British fishing industry. The requisition of fishing vessels, the conscription of fishermen and restrictions imposed on traditional fishing grounds reduced fish landings in the UK to approximately 40% of the immediate pre-war yield. As the war in Europe drew to a close a number of complex and often competing interests threatened the recovery of the post-war fishing industry.

A scientific committee was established by the government in an attempt to avoid a repeat of the near catastrophic boom and bust period that followed the end of the First World War, and which led to the near economic collapse of the British fishing industry. The committee's conclusions, which included artificially restricting the size of the fishing fleet, met with opposition from the Ministry of Food and the Admiralty on the grounds that any reduction in fishing power would hamper their own departments' post-war recovery efforts.

Attempts to rebuild the British fishing industry were further complicated by the residual threat from mines laid throughout European waters. The threat from mines continued to impose restrictions on fishing grounds and sunk fishing vessels and killed fishermen who ignored them. Mine clearance in European waters was a slow process that required international collaboration to be fully effective. Fishing vessels were retained by the Admiralty as one of the principal means of conducting mine clearance post 1945.

These competing interests in the wake of the Second World War hampered the recovery of Britain's fishing industry and efforts to reform it on a long-term economically sustainable basis. The results of that post-war turbulence still reverberate in the industry today.



**Dr Frances Houghton, The Open University.**

In 1940 the British state formally protested to the German government about a recent string of attacks violating the neutrality of hospital ships. Oddly, despite extensive research into attacks on hospital ships during the First World War, infringements of hospital ship neutrality in the Second World War have been more or less ignored by historians. Bringing to light little known methods by which Britain conducted its hospital ship war between 1939-45, this paper considers the literal and figurative ways in which wartime medical humanitarianism came under fire throughout the global Second World War at sea. In so doing, it establishes the maritime environment as a critical, yet neglected, humanitarian space in wider scholarship of this conflict.

**Derek Nudd, Independent scholar.**

On 25 November 1944 a boarding party from HM Submarine *Sturdy* sank a small coaster by demolition charge off the coast of South Borneo. Passengers including women and children were still aboard, and perished with the vessel. Were they unfortunate bystanders in a total war, caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, or victims of a war crime? The immediate repercussions came to the attention of the Prime Minister, and the debate resurfaced over forty years later to threaten a diplomatic incident.

Derek Nudd uses declassified material and a recently discovered document to try and separate truth from speculation, and explore how personal stance affects our perception of an event.

**Dean Paton, Chief Executive, Big Heritage CIC.**

**Dr Bjørn Tore Rosendahl, Centre for the History of Seafarers at War, ARKIVET Peace and Human Rights Centre, Norway.**

Ship transport was a decisive factor for the outcome of the Second World War and resulted in many casualties among merchant seafarers. A lesser-known consequence of the war was the challenges to the seafarers' position as civilians, not least through the militarization of merchant ships. This paper explores how this took place and its consequences during and after the war. Both the seafarers' questionable legal status in relation to the rules of war and the character of their situation are examined. This is done by studying how the wartime seafarers were treated by their governments, the enemies' perspective and the seafarers' own identity, using empirical examples from the Norwegian, British and other Allied nations' merchant fleets. I will argue that an unclear and changing position between being a military and a civilian person, probably contributed to the lack of recognition of the seafarers' long and dangerous wartime effort in the post-war era.



## **Biographies.**

### **Dr Andrew Davies, University of Liverpool.**

Andy Davies is a human geographer whose work examines the legacies of colonialism in the past and the present. His work has explored how South Indian anticolonial activists imagined what the world after colonialism would look like - explored in detail in his book *Geographies of Anticolonialism* (Wiley, 2019) which was published in the Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers) Book Series.

He also conducts participatory research in Liverpool with communities and volunteers, encouraging public education about the legacies of colonialism which are still visible in the 21st Century. Working alongside Writing on the Wall, a creative charity based in the city, this has led to videos, mapping exercises, and walking tours, as well as the publication of *Ten Years on the Parish* (LUP, 2017), the autobiography of the Liverpool-based radical playwright and activist George Garrett, which featured on the BBC's One Show in 2019.

### **Dr John Greenacre, University of Suffolk.**

John Greenacre spent 24 years in the British Army, principally as a reconnaissance and surveillance helicopter pilot. During his service he deployed on operations in the Gulf, the Balkans and Northern Ireland. He also served in the Falkland Islands, Canada, Kenya and Germany. While in the Army John completed an MA in Military Studies with Cranfield University and was awarded his PhD by Leeds University in 2009. His first book, based on his thesis, *Churchill's Spearhead: The Development of British Airborne Forces during the Second World War* was published the following year. On leaving the Army in 2011 John worked extensively as a tour guide, mainly on battlefields, across Europe and in Myanmar and Tunisia. In 2017 he began working as lecturer in history at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich. His latest book, *Ops Normal: The Authorised Operational History of the Army Air Corps, 1957-2017, Volume 1* was published by Helion in 2024.

### **Dr Frances Houghton, The Open University.**

Dr Frances Houghton is a Lecturer in Modern British History at The Open University. Her research interests span the social, cultural and medical histories of Britain's armed forces during the Second World War, and she has published widely in these areas. Her latest research examines the history of medical care in the Royal Navy between 1939 and 1945.



**Derek Nudd, Independent scholar.**

Derek graduated with a BA in History and English from Keele University, and a MSc in Operational Research and Systems Analysis from Aston. Following a career spent mainly in the naval engineering industry he has returned to his first love, history. He has published three books and a number of articles, mainly (but not always) about naval intelligence. He is a volunteer at the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth, a member of the Society for Nautical Research, the Society for Nautical Research (South) and the Navy Records Society.

**Dean Paton, Chief Executive, Big Heritage CIC.**

Dean Paton is the founder and current CEO of Big Heritage and a visiting research associate at the University of Chester. He graduated from the University of Chester with a degree in archaeology before completing an MSc at The University of Oxford. He has an interest in the social impact of archaeology and the breaking down the physical and social barriers that prevent people from accessing heritage.

**Dr Bjørn Tore Rosendahl, Centre for the History of Seafarers at War, ARKIVET Peace and Human Rights Centre, Norway.**

Bjørn Tore Rosendahl leads the Centre for the History of Seafarers at War in the ARKIVET Peace and Human Rights Centre in Kristiansand, Norway. He completed his PhD in 2018 with a thesis entitled 'Seafarers or War Sailors? The Ambiguities of Ensuring Seafarers' Services in Times of War in the Case of the Norwegian Merchant Fleet during the Second World War'. Rosendahl edited the books *Seafarers Remembered* (2015) and *Allied Seafarers in the Second World War* (2018). And he led the establishment of the online database [Krigsseilerregisteret.no](http://Krigsseilerregisteret.no), which aims to record the individual histories of all the seafarers on Norwegian merchant and naval ships during the Second World War.