

Dennis Barrington. 1924 - 2005



Dennis Barrington was a smallpox survivor. Thought to be fatally inflicted with the disease in July 1942, he was brought ashore when his ship, the *Clan MacDonald*, reached Fremantle and placed in isolation at the Woodman Point Quarantine Station where he defied all odds, miraculously recovered and returned to his life in the British Merchant Navy. This story, recording Dennis' life and experience at Woodman Point, has been written especially for this website by his daughter Anne Downes, who lives in St Briavels in England.

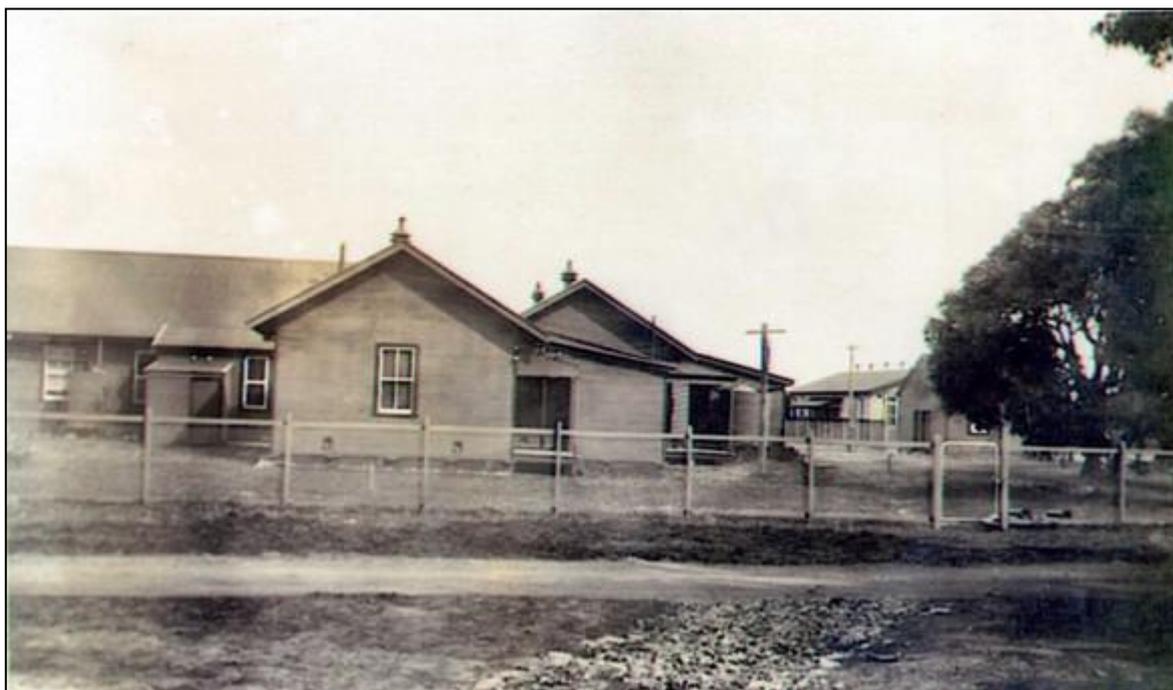


Dennis Barrington was born just outside Bristol, England on 25 September 1924 to Dorothy and Robert Barrington, and had a younger brother, Brian. He went to grammar school and achieved his 'first level school certificate', but, in 1940, he decided to leave school and train as a radio operator for the Merchant Navy rather than waiting to be called up for war service. On 30 August 1940, the family went with him by coach to London where he took lodgings in Kensington and started a year's training at the London Telegraph Training School. Still only fifteen at the start of the year, he enjoyed finding his way around London in his spare time and he became an air raid warden



On 26 August 1941, Dennis left London, spent a month which included his 17th birthday at home in Bristol, and left there the following day to travel to Liverpool. There he joined his first ship, an oil tanker named ***British Integrity***, as 3rd Radio Officer. From September 1941 to February 1942, the ***British Integrity*** crossed the Atlantic to and fro in convoy, with Dennis only managing to get home to Bristol for one day in December 1941.

In March 1942, Dennis joined the ship ***Clan MacDonald***, again as 3rd Radio Officer, and set off for Africa, India and Australia. It was on this voyage that he contracted smallpox after leaving Bombay. Dennis became very ill and, as the doctor on board had not been vaccinated, he was more or less left in the care of a young Indian boy. As the ship approached Western Australia, he fell into a coma and was thought to be dead. The usual arrangement of burial at sea was impossible because of a nearby Japanese aircraft carrier so the ship continued until on 28 July 1942, it was safe to put Dennis ashore at Fremantle in a small boat. It was on this short trip that he came out of the coma and it was found that he was still alive. He was taken to the Quarantine Station at Woodman Point still seriously ill with smallpox and not expected to survive.



Woodman Point Isolation Hospital during WWII



Dennis talked all his life about the care and friendship he received during his stay there and always hoped to return. He particularly remembered times when he was well enough to enjoy the area and the company of Roy and Pearl McIntosh, their daughter Mollie and their son Keith. Pearl treated Dennis like one of her own family and began what would become a lifelong correspondence with Dennis' mother in England, sending food parcels in the late 1940s and early 1950s while rationing was still in force in England. Dennis also became friends with a fellow patient from New Zealand, Jim Fox, and that too began a correspondence that was to last all their lives and be continued by their families.



Roy and Pearl McIntosh



Jim Fox - Ex NZHS Maunganui

In October 1942, Dennis was deemed sufficiently recovered to leave and he crossed Australia by train to join the ***Australia Star*** as 2nd Radio Officer and sailed from Melbourne back to England, arriving at the family home 2.30am on Christmas morning 1942



Blue Star Line's "***Australia Star***" and shown on the right in 1939

Dennis continued to serve in the Merchant Navy until 1946. He spent almost the whole of 1943 (January-November) at sea, again on the ***Australia Star***, with trips between Aden and Australia and New Zealand. He recorded his trips in a number of notebooks, and they include an entry for 5 August 1943 when the ship was anchored off Fremantle, and he could see the jetty at Woodman Point, but was not allowed to go ashore because they were only calling for orders. In January 1944 Dennis joined the ***Highland Chieftain***, a large troop ship on which he was to remain for the rest of his service, first in the Mediterranean, then crossing the Atlantic, then out to Karachi and Port Said, then to Iceland. He started his tenth voyage in May 1945, and this trip took him back to Africa, India, Singapore and Australia. On this trip, Dennis celebrated his 21st birthday in September by crossing the Equator for the eleventh time. He was to be away for 43 weeks before finally receiving his discharge and returning to Bristol in March 1946.



Dennis then joined many young men in search of a new career, and visited a Resettlement Office where the rather haphazard system led to him meeting an accountant who was there at the time (the alternative adviser being a vicar!). He decided that he could get professional qualifications in this field and have a good career, and that is the path his life took. He met Audrey Higman in Bristol and they married in 1950, and had two daughters, Anne in 1952 and Jill in 1954. Dennis was working and studying through the fifties until he achieved his professional qualifications, then he worked for some time at Bristol Siddeley. In 1962, he decided that better opportunities were available in London, and in 1963 the family moved to West Byfleet in Surrey. A number of different jobs in and around London followed, during the years of happy family life from 1963 into the 1970s. He began to play golf in his spare time, and took some flying lessons. During the 1970s and 1980s, Dennis and Audrey were able to meet Mollie McIntosh's sons, Neil and Steve, as they began to travel and came to England, as well as Jim Fox's sons, Brian and Gerry, and they really enjoyed these visits.



Dennis Barrington during his visit to the former Woodman Point Quarantine Station in 1985

Dennis' health remained good until he was into his 50s, but at 52, he had a mild stroke. During the recovery from this stroke, and probably because of the medication he had received, he developed asthma which was to become a real problem for some years and eventually lead to him give up work in 1982 at age 58 years. However he recovered quite well, and, in 1985, he and Audrey were able to make the trip of their lifetime around the world, taking six weeks, and spending some time with Neil and his family in Fremantle. Dennis was delighted to be able to again visit the Woodman Point Quarantine Station and recognise many of the old landmarks there from his youth.



In 1994, Dennis and Audrey moved from Surrey to Wiltshire, to be nearer Jill and her family, and enjoyed finding their way around a new area, though, after a fall and several more minor strokes, Dennis' health deteriorated and he was mostly housebound from about 2000 until his death in June 2005. He was amazed to reach the age of 80 in 2004, since he had always believed that he would not live to a great age, and indeed had told Audrey that before they married over 50 years earlier. Audrey remained well and active for a further three years, but died very unexpectedly in October 2008.



*Information kindly supplied by Neil Wilson  
Compiled by Earle Seibert*