

**Notes for editors:**

The Vernon Monument is a new campaign to design, construct and install a statue in Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth, Hampshire. It will be dedicated primarily to those who trained and worked in the Royal Navy's diving and minewarfare community, an elite component of combat operations in the Senior Service.

Members of both sub-branches have particularly strong bonds with this site from the years that the shore base HMS *Vernon* was their alma mater - before the land was sold and converted into a major commercial retail & residential development a decade ago; hence the name of the project.

The monument is being funded entirely by voluntary donations, raised from both serving and retired service personnel, plus members of the public and participating organisations. The campaign, entitled Project Vernon Monument, is due to be registered soon as a Charitable Fund.

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**Appendix:**

*Rough concept drawing for the **Vernon Monument** of "Clearance Diver engaged in dealing with a moored mine" (by J. Terry)*

## Monument to Diving and Minewarfare, Portsmouth, Hants

### Nationwide search started for suitable sculptor

Date: Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2008

A select team of artists have responded to a call to arms. Today is the deadline for those would wish to be selected to design and build a monument to commemorate a particular number of Royal Navy personnel: the clearance divers and specialists in minewarfare.

It's a challenge to be selected to join the world of mines, underwater bomb disposal and demolitions. The training is rigorous; the working conditions are, at best, daunting. Units regularly deploy globally to war zones and, when the need arises, small teams go about their business in hazardous waters and shorelines, generally unseen, the challenging nature of their work being often discretely recognised as going "beyond the call of duty" – as the list of honours and decorations awarded to members of this community in the past hundred years confirms. Whilst individuals are regularly awarded medals for operational campaigns, gallantry and even heroism, the close-knit community of small ships and the technical nature of support teams help to form strong bonds of trust and friendship that last for decades: to portray this complex legacy in a statue will be a tough task for the sculptor chosen at the end of this selection process.

*"This is a special challenge we have considered undertaking for many years"* says Commander Paul Jones, Royal Navy, Chairman of the Minewarfare and Clearance Diving Officers Association, one of the professional service organisations closely involved in the project that represent serving and retired diving and minewarfare specialists. *"We're looking for a particular sculptor who can encapsulate technical accuracy with dynamic activity and artistic passion in a 15ft static bronze statue"*

Between the two World Wars, countless old, British, moored-mine casings were converted to collect cash donations for nautical charities: these ex-weapons were often found mounted conspicuously on seafront promenades, around the country. Other than these well-known examples, there is no significant public monument to those who perform the particular roles of diving & minewarfare, or the countless others who supported, trained and served with them: many of whom passed through HMS Vernon's Main Gate, to learn and practice their respective trades.

Peter Emery, Centre Manager of the Gunwharf Quays site, now owned by Land Securities plc, acknowledges: *"We are very aware of the unique historical legacy and nautical heritage of Gunwharf Quays. Working in close partnership with Portsmouth City Council, to ensure the final design meets rigorous conservation, design and safety criteria, we are looking forward to having the finished monument mounted here in the centre of the ex-HMS Vernon site – I'm sure it will prove a very suitable addition to our collection of artwork and exhibits in the public area."*