

In April 1939 an obituary printed in the Deganwy section of the North Wales Weekly News declared “Death of Zeebrugge Hero – Lieutenant Commander P T Dean, V.C. RNVR” – but why would the death of a First World War, Victoria Cross recipient, be of interest to the people of Deganwy?

Born in 1877 in Blackburn, Lancashire, Percy Thompson Dean was educated at Bromsgrove School and Manchester Technical School. Later, he went into business as a slate merchant and owned quarries at Llangollen and Keswick.

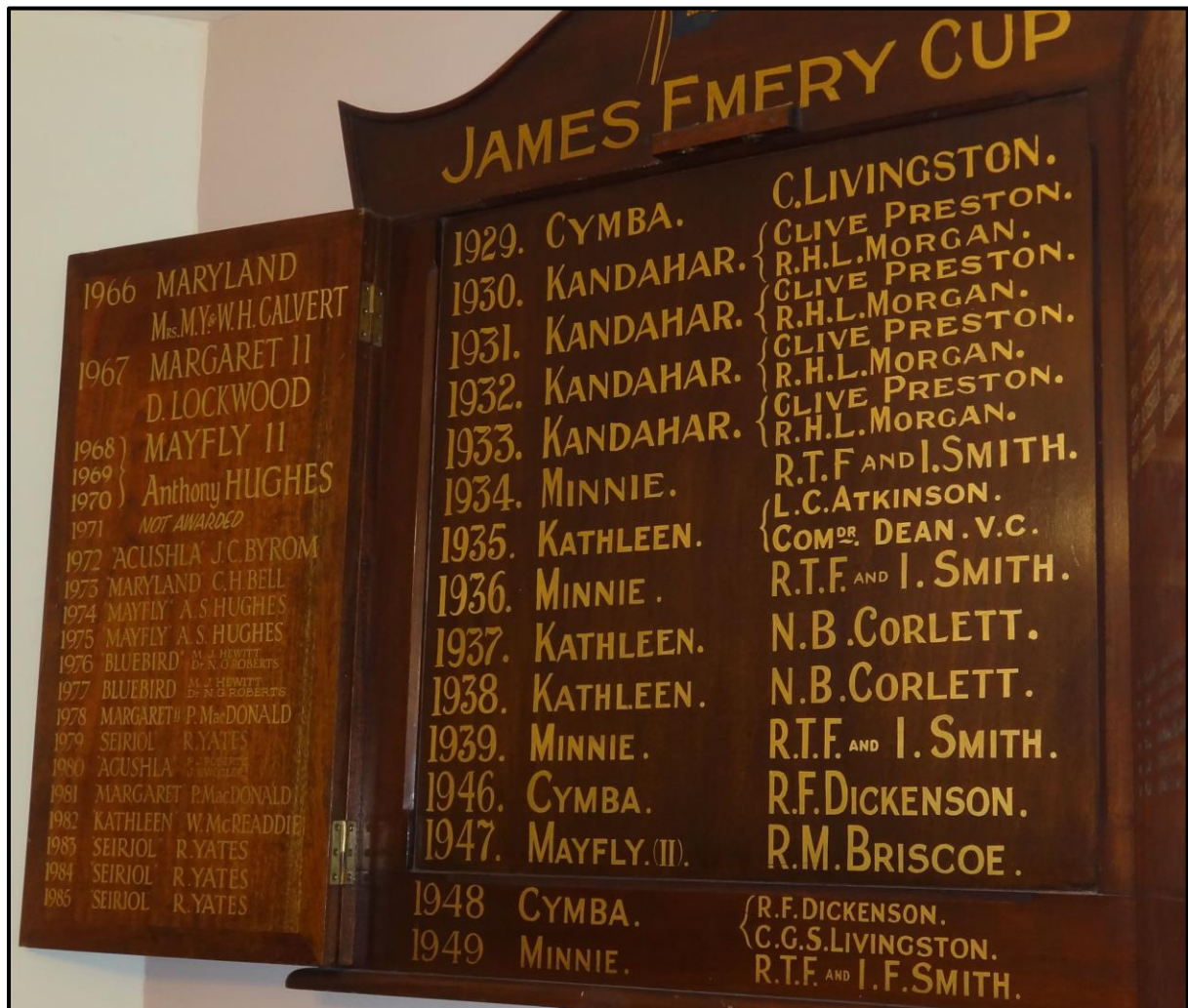
At the outbreak of the First World War, Dean joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve but was not immediately accepted for active service due to a previous injury. He carried out ‘normal’ duties until he was selected to be one of those to be trained, in secret, for the ‘St George’s Day’ raid of April 1918. Dean was in command of a motor launch tasked with rescuing the crews of the ‘blockships’, sunk at the entrance to the port of Zeebrugge, to stop the German Navy leaving port.

In all he took off over 100 officers and men while under an intense barrage of German ordnance and machine gun fire. Having accomplished the rescue of the crews, he was navigating his motor-launch out of the canal when he was told that there was an officer in the water. Immediately he turned his boat around, and after locating the officer, hauled him aboard. For his conspicuous gallantry that day, Percy Thompson Dean was awarded the Victoria Cross.



*Percy Thompson Dean (left) at a party given for Naval holders of the Victoria Cross by King George V at Wellington Barracks. Credit: Mrs Albert Broom via WikiCommons.*

After the Armistice, Dean returned to his business interests and sat as Coalition Unionist M.P. for Blackburn between 1919 and 1922.



*Honours board at Conway Yacht Club (Eric Smith)*

Dean’s love of the water continued and it was this that brought him to Deganwy, as a member of Conway Yacht Club. Sailing the Conwy One Design ‘Blue Bird’ in her inaugural season Commander Percy Dean won the Richardson Challenge Bowl (“Maryland Cup”) for the race from Beaumaris to Conwy, and Mr Lynton Vicar’s Cup at the annual regatta. In 1935 and 1936 Dean co-owned and raced the Conwy One Design ‘Kathleen’ with Mr Chetwynd Atkinson, winning the James Emery Cup as the most successful Conwy boat in the Menai Straits Regatta. In 1939, Dean was made vice-president of Conway Yacht Club but died at his London home on the 20th March the same year. His Victoria Cross is now part of the Lord Ashcroft Collection at the Imperial War Museum

*With thanks to Mary Meldrum, Betty Pattinson and Eric Smith*