

Projects undertaken by Shared History Interpretive Project (SHIP) during the period:  
April 2023 -March 2024

In April 2023, two facilitators from Belfast City Council interviewed four retired deep-sea dockers as part of the Belfast Stories project. The Belfast Stories project will be housed in the former Bank of Ireland on the corner of Royal Avenue/North Street, which will be part of a £100m development in the adjoining space. The project will be ready for 2028. This was followed with interviews carried out with another twelve retired dockers the following month. Some dockers brought along historic documents and badges that can be used for the project. A 50-year Commemorative badge for ITGWU membership was one example.

In June 2023 SHIP hosted historian Charlie McGuire from Teesside University who is keen to publish a short history of Belfast Deep-Sea Dockers. Charlie carried out interviews with several retired dockers that will be uploaded to the project.

In August, the City Council hosted several members of SHIP for a tour of the Bank of Ireland building to give us a practical insight into what shape the Belfast Stories project will take. Also, in August SHIP met with Former President of the American Trade Union “LiUNA” during his return visit to Belfast, Terry O’Sullivan. Also, in August another former President of an American Trade Union was back home in Belfast and had several meeting with SHIP in his capacity as “Honorary President.” Robbie Hunter who recently retired as President of the State Building & Trades Council of California. Also, in August the Lord Mayor of Belfast hosted the SHIP committee and fifteen retired deep Sea dockers for an afternoon of storytelling and refreshments in the Mayor’s Parlour. As part of the event the Mayor presented, SHIP stalwart and retired Deep Sea Docker, Jim Austin with a cake to recognise his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. August was a busy month for SHIP during which we also put on some private walking tours

In September, the owner of the Titanic Distillery Peter Lavery invited SHIP members to the official launch of one of his whiskey brands. At the event Peter connected SHIP members with retired members of Harland & Wolff members Club, and both groupings have met since.

Separately SHIP also completed the project “Learning from our people” which was part funded by the Departments of foreign Affairs. The project was delayed for several, reasons and the book finally launched in the Dockers Club

In October SHIP brought together 54 retired Belfast Deep Sea dockers for a reunion and a day of events in the Dockers Club. Some of those attending had not seen each other since they left the dock around 40 years ago. SHIP material that has been produced over the years, such as Banner displays, books, commemorative Trade Union badges was on display along with the 1962 “ITG&WU enrolment ledger” This ledger showed the names of some of those who attended detailing their age, when they joined, where they lived

and the subscriptions made to the Union. The guest speaker was the North Belfast MP John Finucane who detailed the progress of the Belfast branch of the ITGWU since it was established in 1911.

The SHIP Annual Remembrance Service was held on Sunday 26th November 2023, celebrated in the usual style by Father Gary and the Reverend Colin. Guest of Honour was Belfast First Citizen/Lord Mayor Councillor Ryan Murphy. Around 200 people attended and on the day, a fifth tribute board displaying faces of fifty deceased deep-Sea Dockers was unveiled by the Mayor

During January and February SHIP participated in a project called “Memory Anchors” which was part of the Maritime Mile/Sailortown initiative. This project was led by European artist Ekaterina Solomatina and was one of 6 innovation projects supported by Maritime Mile, HUB-IN, Belfast City Council and European Horizons programme. As part of the engagement Ekaterina recorded several interviews with SHIP members about the key cultural memories to help wider audiences understand better the history and livelihood of Belfast dockers. Another initiative Ekaterina worked on was to digitise and preserve images of the Statue of Our Lady which Belfast Deep-Sea Dockers presented to St Joseph’s Parish in 1954.