

Scarborough Maritime Heritage Centre (SMHC)

The Scarborough Maritime Heritage Centre (SMHC) was formed in 2006 by Lindy Rowley, the wife of a local fisherman. Together with friends committed to promoting the history and heritage of Scarborough, they set out to find a home for the many artifacts recording the rich maritime history of Scarborough and the surrounding areas. After much work the centre opened in 2009 – the year after Scarborough’s last working boat yard closed.

The Assessors found that the project has had an identifiable impact locally, contributing a unique story with regard to a particular part of Britain’s maritime heritage – a story that was at risk of being lost without the passionate and professional intervention of Scarborough Maritime Heritage Centre. SMHC has made a sustained and developing contribution to culture and community pride in Scarborough, over a period of ten years; it is an outstanding volunteer-led centre promoting national and local maritime history for diverse audiences.

Scarborough’s history boasts a prominent fishing industry and it was also the first UK holiday resort. With fishing and home tourism now in decline, SMHC has stimulated local people to reflect on their important heritage, drawing on the memories and memorabilia of those involved and amassing a professional resource which can now serve a variety of differing needs. Knowledgeable volunteers visit local schools, old people’s homes, clubs and day centres giving talks with photographs, artefacts and educational tools, as appropriate. The 50,000 photographs donated at the start of the project are now in the process of being digitized, and thus will be available to a much wider audience.

Recruitment of volunteers and fund-raising have been a success, enabling the purchase of significantly improved premises, which became fully operational last January. This has provided space for the rapidly expanding themed and catalogued collection of artefacts, books, DVDs, reports and photographs which support the school visits, scholarly and media research as well as visitors from around the globe. The Centre’s impressive website attracts growing visitor numbers while the Centre itself is open 5 days per week, manned by volunteers who are the heart and soul of the operation. Some have special needs and all are all trained and supported in IT, interviewing, presentational skills as well as front-of-house reception duties.

SMHC is a highly visible presence at local events and festivals. Amongst the evidence of recognition for this work, in 2012 SMHC received the Mayor’s Big Thank You Award as well as the Max Payne Award for outstanding achievement. And Lindy Rowley has also received an MBE in recognition of her work. In 2014 SMHC instigated and fronted a widely acclaimed World War One centenary commemoration of Scarborough’s bombardment from the sea by German ships in the early days of the war.

Thus, this Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service is thoroughly deserved.