

## The Ships Bell - HMS Fulmar



The Ships Bell was used to tell the sailors of old what time it was. Time in itself was not very important on a day to day basis as no-one used time as we know it today. There were no clocks, phones or computers so the average person used more natural methods of organising their daily lives, the sun, the moon, the weather etc.

On board RN Ships the control centre of the ship used a 30 minute hourglass for keeping time. To communicate this to the Ship's Company a series of rings on the ships bell would inform everyone if they were required to be at their place of work. Each day was split up into Watches (a 4 hour period of continuous work\*). In turn each watch was then split into 8 periods (every 30 mins.) within the watch period. So in a 12 hour period, 1 bell would signify a time of either 12.30, 4.30 or 8.30 depending on which watch was being worked and 8 bells at 4, 8 or 12 noon or midnight. 8 bells also signified the watch (or work period) was over and a new man would then take over.

Other uses of the ships bell were for sending out warnings, welcoming dignitaries and VIPs onboard, and mourning the dead when 8 bells would be rung (remember your watch is over?). A more novel use was for the baptism of children when the bell was inverted, filled with water and used as a font. It was customary to engrave the names of such children on the bell.

The HMS Fulmar bell was first hung on the commissioning of HMS Fulmar on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1946 and remained a focal point of the Guardroom, or Main Gate until the handing over of the air station to the RAF on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1972. It was sent down to Portsmouth and appeared on the MoD sales and disposals sheet in 1973 where it was purchased by an ex Fulmar Navy man Terry Larbalestier and taken to Birmingham. On his death in 2008 it came under the ownership of the Nautical club in Birmingham. When the club were approached by the Fleet Air Arm Buccaneer Association in 2015 to consider returning the bell to Lossiemouth the remaining members agreed this would be the best future for the bell and arrangements began to return the bell to the Lossiemouth Community. And so at 4pm on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2016 the bell was officially handed over to the Lossiemouth community and the Bell was ceremoniously rang 16 times, 8 to signify one watch over and 8 to signify another watch has begun.

\*The "Dog Watch" between 4pm and 8pm were split into 2 for men to take evening meals and to ensure the men carried out a different watch each day.

Quirky fact: Most of the sailors who served at HMS Fulmar occasionally spent time as a MUP (Man Under Punishment) One of the more common tasks of punishment was to spend an hour cleaning the bell with Brasso or Wodpol and buffing it clean.