

# Dockyard campaigner and former mayor dies

by Alan Watkins

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THE man who headed the campaign to keep Chatham Dockyard open died on Sunday after two years of illness.

Twice mayor of Gillingham, Harry Blease, 92, had been living in Pembroke House, Gillingham, where he had been administrator for 13 years.

He received an MBE in 1985 for his naval charity work after rising through the ranks to become a lieutenant commander.

As deputy governor of the Sir John Hawkins almshouses in Rochester, he helped organise the Queen's visit in 1994.

Although a shore-based administrator, he still succeeded in being sunk in action.

## Rescued

He was travelling to Alexandria in March 1941 aboard SS Britannia when she was attacked by the German raider Thor.

Armed with one small gun, Britannia fought for four hours before being sunk.

Harry Blease survived for three days on a lifeboat before being rescued and taken to Montevideo, Uruguay.

Half the 492 passengers and crew died.

After the war, he served aboard HMS Superb.

Retiring in 1967, he worked at Sea Cadet headquarters in London and became administrator for the both RN and RM Children's Trust and the Pembroke House residential home in Medway.

He was also a Conservative councillor for 20



Former mayor Harry Blease worked tirelessly for the community

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years. He was deputy mayor in 1974, mayor in 1976 and 1981 and spearheaded the committee fighting to keep Chatham dockyard open.

He also persuaded Gillingham councillors to save St George's Church from demolition. It is now Medway Council's debating chamber.

He signed Friendship Agreements with Ito and Yokosuka that link Gillingham with Japan.

He is succeeded by Joan, his wife of 64 years, their daughter Margaret and grandchildren Jessica and David.

The funeral is being held at St Barbara's Garrison Church, Brompton, on October 13 at 12.45pm. The family would welcome donations to the Pembroke House Amenities Fund.

Former Medway deputy mayor and close friend Cllr Steve Kearney said: "You could call Harry 'Mr Gillingham'.

"He did so many things for the community. It was people like him that have made Gillingham what it is today.

"Harry was a wonderful guy. He really cared about the community."

Handwritten text at the bottom of the page: "TO HIS"