

Never a seaman, but his life's work



● Mr Heesom proudly shows his OBE and his signed photograph from Princess Marina.

STANLEY Heesom has an OBE for the work he has done for Merchant Navy seamen.

He spent 24 years as general secretary of the British Sailors Society At Home and Abroad. Yet he has never been a sailor himself.

Mr Heesom, a sprightly 82-year-old who lives at 28 Mill Lane, Gosberton, said his job as secretary meant he was involved with the domestic welfare of sailors and their families ashore.

"The Society provided libraries aboard the ships and accommodation at all the stations. Each station also had a chaplain or port missionary. It was my job to visit these stations regularly," he said.

The Society came into existence in 1818 at a gathering which took place on a sloop, the 'Speedy' of Nelson's famed fleet.

He is widely travelled and has been to most of the places between Iceland and New Zealand.

When 35 he went out to Palestine at the request of the Government to build a hostel for sailors, and had to join the Special Constabulary of Palestine Police.

The Society had a Prince of Wales Sea Training School. When he became King Edward VIII the Duke of Kent became patron — and when the Duke was killed in an air crash, his wife Princess Marina took over and she remained the patron until

her death.

When Mr Heesom retired, she wrote through her secretary to him thanking him for the assistance he was able to give her when she visited the school and wishing him well in his retirement. She also sent him a signed photograph.

Mr Heesom was London Commissioner for Sea Scouts for four years, their headquarters the ship that Scott took to the Antarctic.

The sea scouts' activities included boatpulling and sailing, compass reading, davits and boat launching, knotting and splicing, signalling with lamps and flags, swabbing decks and cleaning ship, and navigation on a replica of a ship's bridge.

Mr Heesom would visit the scout troops and keep the county commissioner informed about what was happening with sea scouts throughout the county.

Mr Heesom said: "I have also edited a deanery magazine for the deanery of Pewsey in Wiltshire, and have been a chairman of the Parish Council."

He retired from being general secretary in 1967, aged 65.

"Now I have retired I am involved in local church and school's activities — I helped during Christian Aid Week.

"I also enjoy playing golf about three times a week."