

Honoured at last



A STATUE commemorating the Royal Docks and their workers was officially dedicated on Monday – ten years after the idea was mooted.

The bronze sculpture, outside ExCeL and by the Royal Victoria Dock, depicts dockers at work as goods are moved from a hoist to a barrow.

The three figures represent real people – Johnny Ringwood, a former seaman who later worked in the Royals, Patrick Holland, a stevedore for 20 years and who is shown as the tally clerk, and Mark Tibbs, a former professional boxer from Canning Town.

Johnny, formerly of Murray Square, Custom House, was among dozens of former dock workers who attended the ceremony, along with Newham councillors and VIPs.

Addressing the gathering, Johnny said: “We spent a lot of time in the Port of London archives to make sure the statue was historically correct. I also wanted it to be of the 1950s.”

He said he first had the idea for the sculpture while visiting Sheffield’s Meadowhall shopping centre, which contains a statue of steelworkers to commemorate the site’s former use.

The initial model was created by Johnny’s friend Wally Taylor, a former Custom House resident now living in Gosport, Hampshire.

Johnny and Wally then launched a fund-raising drive for the project, which received a boost when the Royal Docks Trust took over its management.

The campaign was joined by Cllr Pat Holland. Her father was a stevedore as was her husband Patrick, the model for the tally clerk.



REPORT By DAVE WILLIAMS PICTURE: STEVE POSTON

Cllr Holland praised the statue’s Australian-born creator, Les Johnson, as “the best sculptor in the country”. And Johnny hailed Les as “one of the finest artists in the world”.

Johnny concluded by voicing the hope that “future generations will be as proud of their heritage as we are. This wonderful statue truly reflects that.”

Newham Mayor Sir Robin Wales also spoke, as did London City Airport Chief Executive Richard Gooding on behalf of the Trust.

The Rev Canon Ann Easter, of All Saints Church, West Ham, anointed and blessed the statue.

Standing 9ft high, the work is one of the largest figurative sculptures in London. More than £250,000 was raised to pay for it, the most high-profile contributor being the Queen Mother, who felt a special affection for East Enders.

The first donation came from ExCeL, which gave £30,000 when Ian Shearer was Chief Executive.

Other donors included the Trust, Canning Town Partnership, MWB Management, the airport and the Transport and General Workers’ Union.

● Men at work: Left, Johnny, driving force behind the statue, in front of the work of art. Above: Supporters of the campaign