

# Of Oak and Teak



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The fact that HMS Trincomalee was built for the British navy out of Malabar teak at the Bombay dockyard reflects in part concerns at the time about the durability of oak and its diminishing supply at home. The following extract from 'The Analectic Magazine 1813' is in the form of a review of a paper written by William Money, who had been Superintendent of the Marine at Bombay. In it the case for using teak is made:

*'Teak possesses the property of preserving iron; oak that of destroying it. The oil which teak contains preserves the iron and destroys the worm; while the gallic acid of oak corrodes the iron, and appears to be particularly grateful to the taste of the worm; nor has it come to our knowledge that the dry rot was ever met with in teak.'*

*A piece of teak plank, which had been bolted to the side of the Chiffonne frigate, was removed at the end of eight years; that part of the iron bolt which was buried in the teak was perfectly good, whereas that which had been in the oak was totally corroded. The Sceptre, of 74 guns, had nearly foundered at sea before she was five years old, from a hole about seven inches square in the bottom plank, close to the hooden ends, eaten by the worms: which, in many other places where the copper was worn off, had nearly perforated the bottom and destroyed the gripe. The preference, therefore, of teak to oak in the two important points of preserving iron, and resisting the worm, seems to be fully established: but a prejudice still existed against teak in this country, from its supposed heaviness. Mr. Money, however, tells us he has ascertained, by many experiments, that the teak of Malabar weighs one quarter less than oak, while that from the northward of Bombay is pretty nearly of the same weight. But we have an instance in point: the Minden was built from the same draught as the Culloden, and her tonnage is the same. When stored and victualled, the draught of water was found not to differ an inch, and the Minden carries her ports higher than the Culloden.*

*Another objection against teak was its particular disposition to splinter. This, too, seems an erroneous idea. Mr. Money produces a letter from General Abercrombie, who commanded the expedition against the Isle of France, in which he says, 'I can now vouch, that the effect of shot upon teak is far less dangerous than upon oak. On board the Ceylon there were very few men wounded by splinters.'*

The two dockyards of Bombay had the ability of building at the same time, two ships of the line, two frigates, and a large and small Indiaman. A supply of Malabar teak was nearby, and the Bomanjee family of builders was held in good esteem, thus the Bombay dockyard was well favoured for the construction of the Trincomalee.

**QD12: Originally appeared In the "Quarterdeck" magazine  
Ref: 2011 Issue 1 (Spring) page 10**