

The History of HMS Trincomalee

1812 to 1986



The history of the ship, HMS Trincomalee, spans two centuries, this presentation is intended to give an overview of this history for those less acquainted with the ship covering the period before its restoration at Hartlepool.

BUILDING OF THE SHIP:

Towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars against France, after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, a need to replenish lost, ageing and damaged ships in the Royal Navy was recognised. There was also a problem with dwindling supplies of oak in Britain for the purposes of shipbuilding, and a recognition that the Malabar teak found around Bombay - present day Mumbai - was more hard wearing. The average life of an oak ship was eleven and three quarter years, as opposed to thirty years for a ship built of teak.

Bombay was chosen for the building of HMS Trincomalee, and the original plans for the ship were sent out from England on HMS Java in 1812. However these did not reach Bombay. On December 28th 1812, off the coast of Brazil, the Java encountered the American ship, USS Constitution, at a time when America was in conflict with Britain. An exchange of fire occurred and on New Year's Day 1813 the Java sank.



The USS Constitution survives today at Boston, USA, as 'Old Ironside', however whereas our ship remains with 60% of its original structures, the figure for the Constitution is 5%.

If the USS Constitution had not survived the centuries, our Ship would be able to take the accolade as being the oldest warship afloat in the world, however we have to settle for being the second oldest warship afloat in the world, or the oldest in Europe.

A new copy of the plans for the ship was subsequently dispatched to Bombay aboard HMS Stirling Castle.

The design for the ship was based on that of HMS Hebe, a frigate captured from the French in 1782. The first ship that the Royal Navy built to this design was HMS Leda, and this class of frigate was called the Leda Class. During the period 1800 to 1830 forty seven Leda Class frigates were built, with HMS Trincomalee being the twelfth to be launched. These frigates were valued for their speed and mobility, useful for their scouting, and peace keeping roles in the Navy. The ship was originally built as a 46 gun frigate.

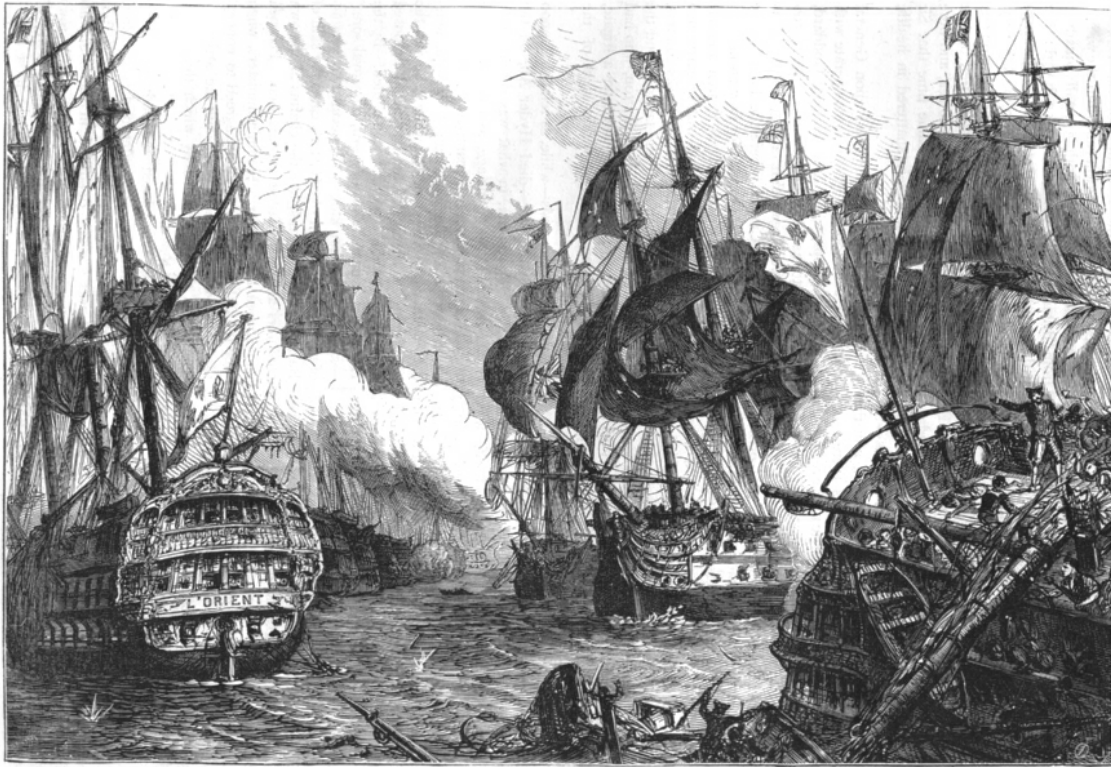


The master shipbuilder at Bombay overseeing the construction of HMS Trincomalee was the Parsee, Jamsetjee Bomanjee Wadia. Work on the Trincomalee began in May 1816, and with due ceremony an engraved silver nail was hammered into the ship's keel, this being considered vital for the ship's well-being according to Zoroastrian tradition.



The barley twist posts on board the ship are a trade mark of the Wadia dockyard.

The ship was launched at Bombay on 12th October 1817, and moved to the Naval dockyard at Trincomalee, Ceylon - present day Sri Lanka - for fitting out.



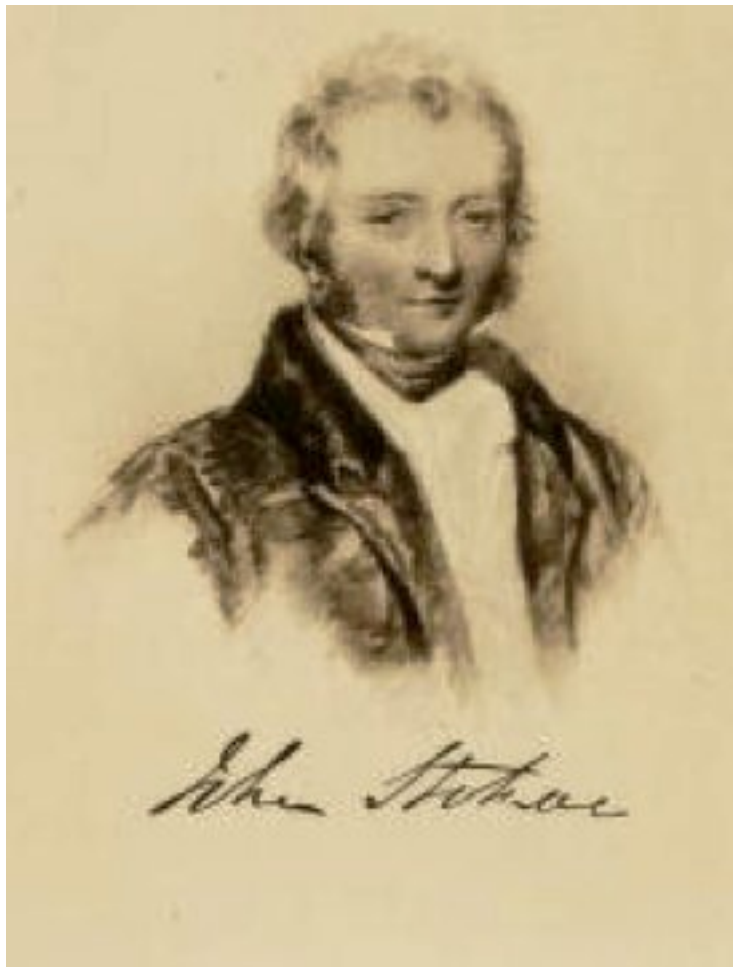
A sea battle was fought off the coast near Trincomalee in 1782 and our ship took its name from this victorious battle.

FIRST VOYAGE TO ENGLAND:

After fitting out, HMS Trincomalee proceeded to Portsmouth, under the captaincy of Philip Henry Bridges, and escorted by two ships, HMS Tovey and HMS Challenger. The captain got married on route at Cape Town on 6th January 1819, his wife, Harriot Louisa Young, being the only daughter of the Commissioner-General of the Isle de France - Mauritius - Colonel Alexander William Young.

Also on board was the recently widowed Eliza Bunt who kept a diary whilst on the voyage, which is presently in our exhibition gallery in Hartlepool. A further passenger was picked up at St Helena when the ship docked there for 9 days in December 1818,





Mr John Stokoe - born at Ferryhill, in County Durham - had briefly been in attendance as medical officer to Napoleon Bonaparte, who was in exile at Longwood House on St Helena. However he had incurred the displeasure of the governor of the Island, Sir Hudson Lowe, when he reported on the poor health and keeping of Napoleon on the Island. John Stokoe was given the choice of either facing a court martial or returning to England on HMS Trincomalee. He chose the latter.



The ship arrived at Portsmouth on 30th April 1819 and was placed 'in ordinary'.

This means that the demasted ship was stored with a protective covering, the only surviving original such covering from around the same era is to be seen on the frigate Unicorn at Dundee, which in 2011

became affiliated to the Royal Navy Museum and Dockyard at Portsmouth, as did our ship in 2010.

Whilst 'in ordinary' the masts and rigging were stored out of the weather, however if needed it would only take a fortnight to equip the ship for active service.

IN ORDINARY:

The Trincomalee remained 'in ordinary' until 1847. In 1829 the copper sheathing on the hull was replaced, copper sheathing preventing the accumulation of barnacles on the hull and aiding the ship to move faster through the seas. In 1845 the ship had her hull once more re-coppered and then the ship was 'Razee'd' - cut down - to reduce the number of guns in her complement. The gunports were altered to admit heavier guns – and she was re-rated as a 26 gun deck corvette. The ship's original square stern was replaced with a stronger, elliptical stern - allowing a much improved arc of fire for the after guns, and the after magazine was converted to a shell room. Also iron freshwater tanks, anchor chains and compressors were fitted. Due to her size and lack of steam power the ship was no longer suitable for front-line use, however she was ideal for distant waters where coal was not readily available.

FIRST COMMISSION:



The ship's first commission was from 1847 to 1850 on the North American and West Indies Station. The command of the Trincomalee was given to Captain Richard Laird Warren who gained a reputation as being harsh on his crew. The ship left Portsmouth on 21st September 1847 with a crew of 240.

On 6th November 1847 the Trincomalee arrived at Bermuda,

the ship then helped to police British interests in the Caribbean and South America. The crew helped with the suppression of riots in Haiti. During 1848 the ship was on the look out for slavers running slaves to the West Indies, and she later moved north to carry out fishery protection duties off Newfoundland.

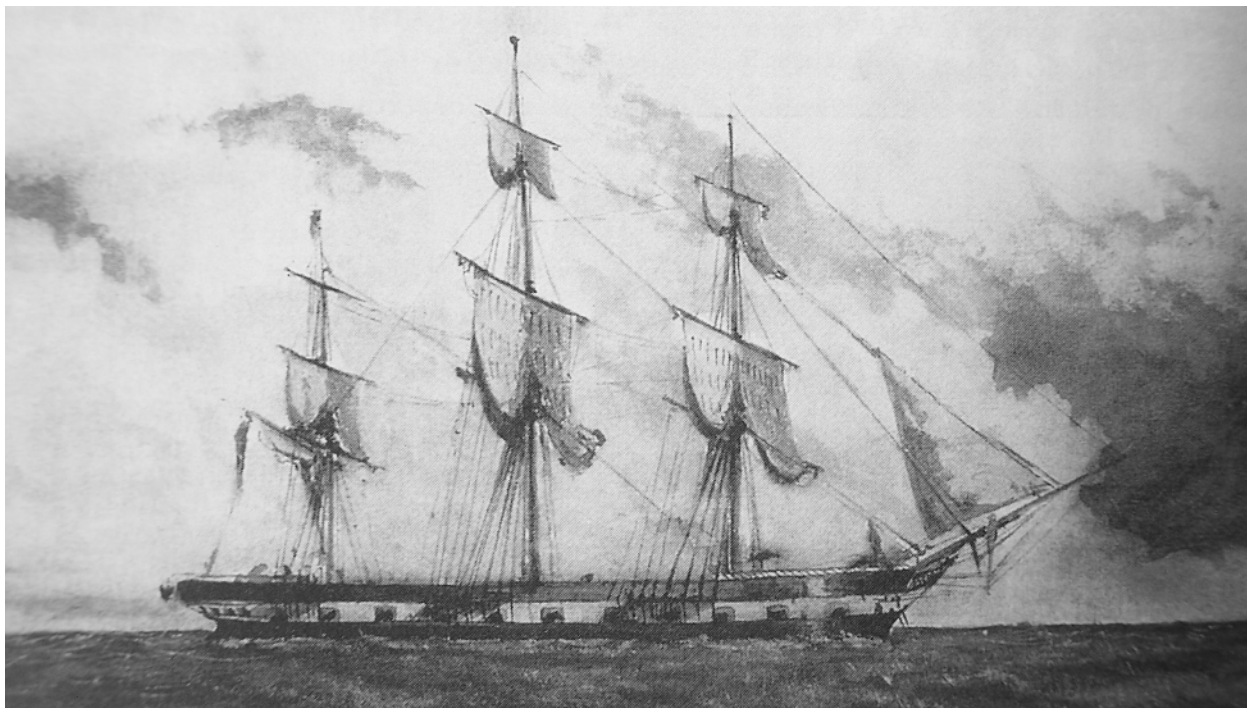
During 1849 the ship was to be found protecting Cuba, then held by the Spanish, from the United States which was expanding at that time. Unfortunately Captain Warren triggered a diplomatic row when conducting a firing drill on the island.

The first commission ended on 9th August 1850 when HMS Trincomalee arrived back in England, at Devonport, Plymouth.

SECOND COMMISSION:



More information is available about the second commission of 1852 to 1857 when the Trincomalee was attached to the Pacific Station. On 21st August 1852, under the command of Captain Wallace Houston, she left for Valparaiso in Chile, arriving there on 12th December. In 1853 she sailed on for Vancouver Island and was involved with policing a local gold rush at Queen Charlotte Island.



In 1854 the ship provided support to vessels looking for signs of Franklin's missing expedition to find the North West passage. She arrived at Port Clarence, near the Bering Straits, on 25th June 1854 where she was joined by HMS Plover, which itself was the supply vessel for the Investigator and the Enterprise, both of which travelled far along the North West passage in search of Franklin's missing expedition.

Interestingly in September 2010 the ship, HMS Investigator, was discovered nearly 150 years after it had been abandoned, frozen in Mercy Bay on the north side of Banks Island in the Arctic Ocean.

In December 1854 the Trincomalee joined a squadron of ships off Honolulu, this time to prevent the Americans from seizing the Hawaiian islands.

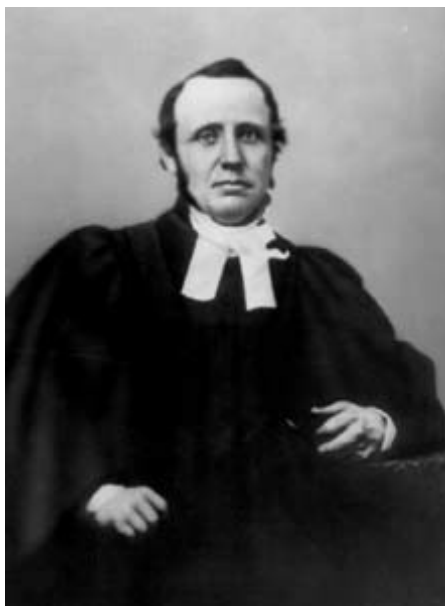
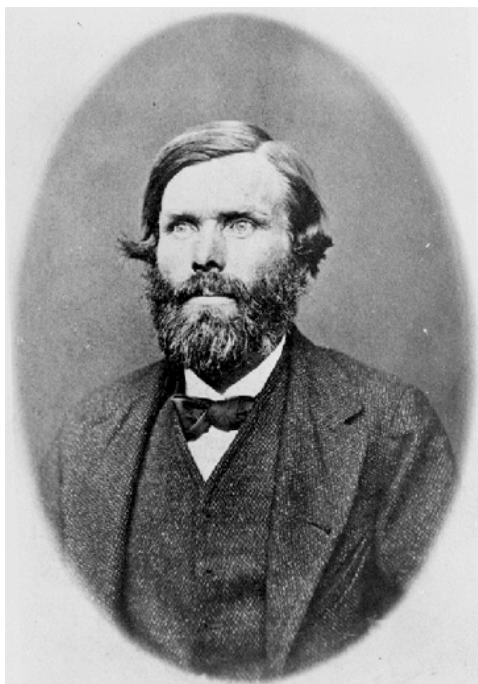
In April 1855 the threat now came from the Russians, the Russian War being fought on land in the Crimea. The Trincomalee joined five other ships to head north to take Petropavlovsk, however on arrival the port had already been abandoned by the Russians. Rear-Admiral Bruce, the Commander-in-Chief, wrote from HMS President at Petropavlovsk, in June 1855 the following dispatch to the Admiralty:

'I desire to add that although it has necessarily been a great disappointment to the squadron under my command to find upon arrival at this place, more than 2,000 miles outside their station, that the enemy had escaped, and the batteries were deserted, yet their Lordships will not fail to observe that not less credit is due for the great zeal and anxiety that has been shown by each of the ships in pushing onward, in the hope of being in time to take part in the anticipated operations at this port.'

The Trincomalee received on board at Petropavlovsk the two sailors, 'William Garland, ordinary seaman, of her Majesty's ship Pique, and Pierre Langois, of the French frigate Forte.' They had been prisoners of the Russians, and were freed in exchange for the release of three Russians who had been detained on



Returning to Vancouver Island the Trincomalee helped deal with incidents involving Native Americans, and the crew mingled with the pioneers at Fort Victoria, a new colony in British Columbia.



The diaries kept by a farm labourer, Robert Melrose, the Reverend Edward Cridge, and a farmer's niece, Martha Cheney all mention different aspects of the involvement of our ship with life at Fort Victoria. More information is to be found in the exhibition gallery. The following are extracts from Robert Melrose's diary of 1856:

August 12 HMS Trincomalee, 22 guns arrived in Esquimalt Harbour

August 29 SS Otter taken HMS Trincomalee in tow up to Coweighan

*September 4 The Indian hung who shot Thomas Williams
SS Otter and HMS Trincomalee arrived from their Coweighan trip.*

September 7 Mr Cooke, gunner, HMS Trincomalee held a prayer meeting in the schoolroom.

*September 30 Mrs Muir buried
William Newton and Miss Todd married
HMS Trincomalee Ball*

October 6 HMS Trincomalee sailed for the coast of Mexico

The ship is still remembered in British Columbia her name having been given to the Trincomali Channel in the approaches to Vancouver. There is also a Houstoun Passage, and a Wallace Island.

The Trincomalee returned to England in 1857, and after arriving at Chatham on 4th September was put back 'in ordinary'.

During this second commission the ship had been 944 days at sea, and sailed over 110,000 miles - an average of over 116 miles per day at sea. A further 882 days, 48% of the time of the commission, was spent in harbour.

DRILL SHIP:

In 1860 the Trincomalee was fitted out and then in January 1861 towed to Sunderland to become tender to the drill ship HMS Castor, this ship's role was to train Naval Volunteers, boys aged 15 to 16 years being signed up to serve for 10 years on reaching the age of 18 years. During this time the gunports of HMS Trincomalee were again modified several times to accommodate different types of training armament.



In 1862 the Trincomalee was moved to West Hartlepool, then the third largest port in Britain, and moored in the Union Dock she became an independent drill ship.

A report in the South Durham Herald describes how the Ship:

'was towed into the bay by three steamers, and in one of the steamers were stationed the band of the 4th Durham Artillery Volunteer Corps., which, as the vessel entered, played "Rule Britannia" and several other national airs. A large crowd assembled on the docks and on the piers to witness the arrival, and in making for the harbour, Captain Field, in compliment to the inhabitants of the Hartlepoons, fired a salute from the Trincomalee, which was responded to by the 4th Durham Artillery Volunteers from the battery at West Hartlepool, and a salvo of artillery was also fired from the harbour and the docks. The band continued its national strains until the ship was safely moored when, after several rounds of cheers had been given for the Queen, the Trincomalee, &c., &c., the band played through the town, and it was some time before the dock heads were cleared of the immense crowd who hung about the neighbourhood of the ship in groups.'

In April 1870 she was refitted with new guns, a re-caulked deck and a roof to protect her from the weather.



Amongst the crew listed on board HMS Trincomalee in the national census of 1871 is the surgeon, David Lyall. He was born in 1817, the same year as the ship was completed. After training as a surgeon in Edinburgh and Aberdeen he was later appointed for service under Sir James Ross in his scientific expedition to the Antarctic. In 1840, working with the botanist Joseph Hooker at Port Ross, over the course of 20 days he helped collect 80 flowering plants. By the time the ship returned to England in 1842 he had formed an important herbarium of no less than 1500 species.

It was in 1868 when Dr Lyall accepted the home appointment to HMS Trincomalee.

Amongst several plant species his name is remembered by are 'Anemone lyallii', the little mountain anemone, and trees such as the mountain ribbonwood 'Hoheria lyallii' and the subalpine larch 'Larix lyallii'.

The Lyall Islands lying just outside to Yule Bay, Victoria Land, Antarctica were named after him after their discovery in 1841 by Captain James Ross.

The Trincomalee appears to have become well established in the local community of the Hartlepools, her officer and men playing an active part in the towns' activities.

The Cleveland Mercury of 9 February 1876 carried an advertisement for 'Two Grand Nautical Spelling Bees', under the patronage of the town's mayor and the Captain of Her Majesty's Training ship Trincomalee. The first was to be held in the Temperance Hall, Hartlepool with the rector presiding. Alderman James Groves, JP, promised to read 'A Sailor's Love Yarn' on that occasion with a Mr Hoggett overseeing the music. The second nautical spelling bee was to take place at the Athenaeum, West Hartlepool.

Proceeds from both events went to the Missions to Seamen Society's work at the Hartlepools. In a later edition of the Durham and Cleveland Mercury, on Saturday 11th March 1876, it is reported that amongst the prizes, an aneroid barometer and eight day timepiece in oak, anchor pattern, value £4,

was won by a Mrs Baccham, of No. 1 William Street, who successfully competed against her husband. The sailor's love yarn, presented by Alderman Groves was entitled 'The Captain's Yarn, to Oblige the Ladies', and apparently this was appreciated by those present.

The ship was also mentioned in the local papers in May 1876, when a Norwegian vessel, the Europa, grounded in the Jackson Dock Locks shortly after High Water at 03.51 hours. The Europa was loaded with timber, and four tugs tried in vain to tow her clear.

Several ships were damaged in the incident, with one, the Deodar, being '...made to feel the weight of Her Majesty's Training Ship Trincomalee which lay next to her..', the report continued 'Still, some relief was afforded by the crew of Trincomalee, who kept their ship in as upright a position as they could by means of mooring chains and manifold warps. The circumstances, we understand, have been reported to the Admiralty, and it is feared that some of her timbers have been loosened. Fortunately there have been no other mishaps that we have heard of. The warehouses have not fallen down. The occasion, on the other hand, has been seized as a favourable opportunity for doing some necessary repairs under the watermark....'

The Trincomalee left Hartlepool on Monday 8th February 1877 when she was towed to Southampton. This departure was attended with less ceremony, Her Majesty's Frigate Valorous being commissioned to tow the Trincomalee. The South Durham Herald reports:

'...She was taken through the North lock, and from thence she was towed by the steam tug Conqueror, assisted by the William Charles, out into the bay. The dock head, and both the north and south piers were crowded with people to witness the departure. A drum and fife band from Middleton marched along the north pier playing a lively melody as the vessel proceeded along the harbour, and as she passed out between the piers a loud cheer was raised by the spectators, which was heartily responded to by those on board. The cheering lasted as long as the vessel was discernable, but this was only for a short time, as the night being dark, she was soon out of sight. It was eleven o'clock, however, before she got fairly under weigh in tow of the Valorous, the towing tackle, which consisted of two six-inch steel hawsers, taking a considerable time to adjust. We may state, as a rather remarkable feat, that Mr. James Pounder, who piloted her into West Hartlepool 14 years ago, had the honour of conducting her out again.'

On arrival at Southampton the Trincomalee was moored in Southampton Water as the drill ship for the district, in 1881 she received a new upper deck, galley house and other additions.

In 1895 the ship was replaced by HMS Medea, the Trincomalee being sold in May 1897 to Reed's of Portsmouth for breaking up. However the accidental wrecking of another ship, HMS Foudroyant, saved our ship from this fate.

THE FOUDROYANT YEARS:

HMS Foudroyant had been Nelson's flagship from 1799-1800, and had been bought by the philanthropist Wheatley Cobb as a training ship for boys at the end of the nineteenth century. Whilst touring ports around the English coastline, on 16th June 1897, during a storm this ship was wrecked near the North Pier at Blackpool.

It was noted that the ship had been sailing close to a lee shore with an insufficient number of competent hands on board. A number of photographs of the wreck survive, and many articles were made from the wood and copper of the wrecked ship to raise funds.

The copper from the wrecked ship was sent to the Birmingham Mint, where from 1897 to 1905 twenty five thousand medals commemorating Nelson and his Flagship were struck.



On board the ship today you can see a seat made from the wood of the shipwrecked Foudroyant.

Close to the North Pier at Blackpool is a blue plaque commemorating the wreck of this ship.



Our ship was purchased by Geoffrey Wheatley Cobb in 1897 as a replacement for the wrecked Foudroyant, and after extensive repairs and alterations in Cowes, the Isle of Wight, to convert her to a youth training vessel, she was towed to Falmouth in 1903 and renamed the Foudroyant.

For the next 90 years the ship was involved in providing a service for the youth. In 1912 our ship, then known as the Foudroyant, was joined by the Implacable.

Until the late 1920's she became home to hundreds of 11 to 19 year olds. Between 20 and 25 boys lived on the ship at any one time, and they received their schooling on board as well as learning the elements of seamanship and navigation. When they were not busy with this or with ship-keeping

duties, their entertainment consisted of rowing in regattas, playing football on the upper deck (the ball being made out of rolled up socks), and cricket matches against the crews of other ships, such as the fishery protection vessels HMS Colne and HMS Ettrick. Mr Cobb conducted a religious service on the ship every Sunday, and if he was not aboard the boys went to the local parish church.



Later in 1927 the Foudroyant was separated from the Implacable and relocated to Milford Haven. However on Wheatley Cobb's death, in 1932 both ships were reunited at Portsmouth.





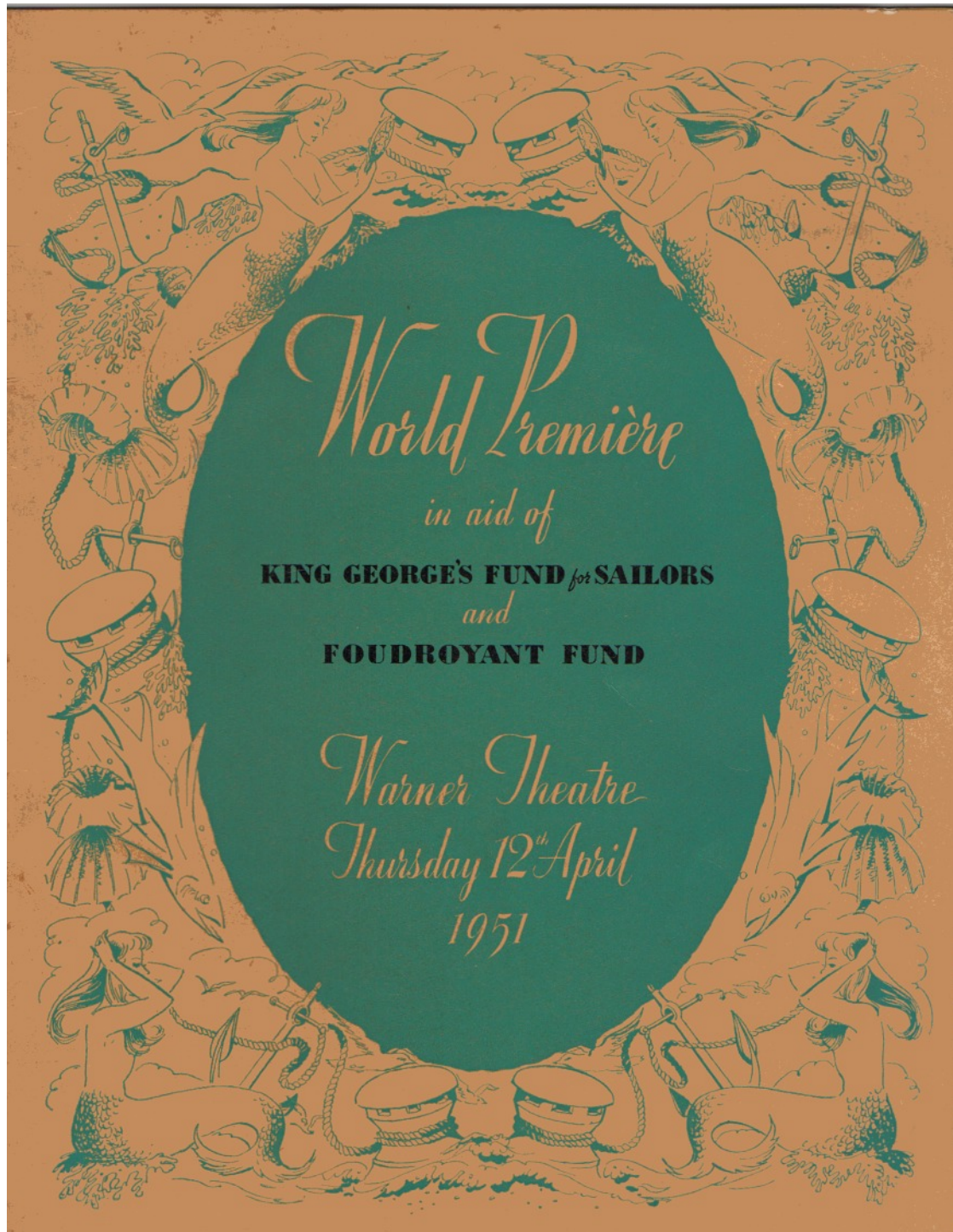
At the beginning of the Second World War both ships were requisitioned, initially for use as stores ships, and then in 1943 they were commissioned as a single unit for naval training.

Since there was already an aircraft carrier in the fleet named HMS Implacable, the unit took the name of HMS Foudroyant. Bounty Boys were trained on the ship, these being recruited from the Sea Cadet Corps enabling them to gain direct entry into the Royal Navy as communications ratings.



The title Bounty boys came from the name of the first point of entry for this scheme being the Training Ship Bounty based at Worcester. It appears that the Training Ship Foudroyant was used for Bounty Scheme training until 1947.

In 1949 the Implacable was decaying and deemed too costly to save, she was therefore scuttled leaving our Foudroyant to recommence her youth training work under the aegis of the newly formed Foudroyant Trust.

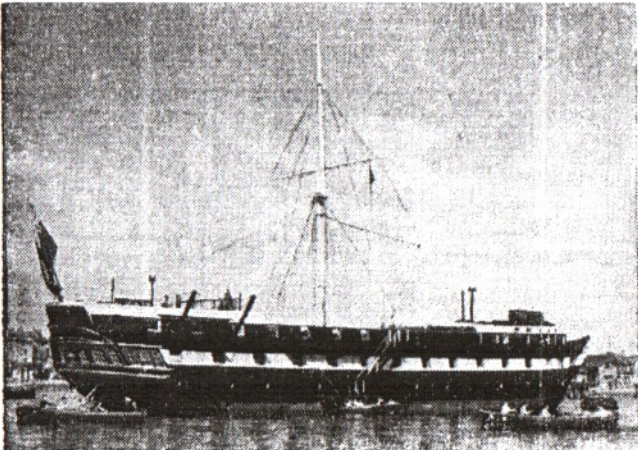


Fund raising for the Foudroyant Trust took a variety of forms, the most high profile one being the World Premier screening of the film Hornblower starring Gregory Peck.



Princess Margaret attended the event at the Warner theatre in Leicester Square on 12th April 1951. The programme lists that prior to the showing of the main film the Royal Marines performed, followed with a Merrie Melodies cartoon and a Pathe News reel.

The training ship was advertised in publications such as the Meccano magazine, and many teenagers spent time on the ship experiencing not only a degree of discipline, but also the freedom



HOLIDAYS and SEA-TRAINING combined in T.S. FOUDROYANT

- * The FOUDROYANT is the only surviving sailing frigate of the Royal Navy.
- * She lies just inside the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour amid the hum and bustle of modern naval development.
- * The week's course includes the handling of boats under oar, sail and power; swimming; signalling and all things pertaining to life in a sailing ship.
- * Visits to modern warships and to the old Victory are arranged; and trips are made to Spithead, the Solent and the Isle of Wight in the ship's launch.
- * A memorable and valuable holiday, in an atmosphere where the past is linked to the present and the future. The charge for individuals is £4 a week; for organised parties £3 15s. per head in the holidays and £3 10s. in the term. Boys and girls are taken in separate weeks.
- * Applications for bookings and other enquiries should be made to The Superintendent T.S. Foudroyant, Gosport, Hants. (Tel. Gosport 88700).

of being away from home.



In the late 1950's the Officer in Charge of the Training Ship Foudroyant was Stanley Noble, who had been the Captain of HMS Victory from 1954 to 1958 - this latter post being traditionally reserved for the most senior Commissioned Boatswain prior to retirement.

His second in command was John Chrisp, who was reported as being a quiet, reserved gentleman, however he had been a prisoner of war during the Second World War who had once successfully escaped from a prisoner of war camp, nearly crossing into Holland before being captured. Lieutenant Commander Chrisp also played a part in escape attempts from Colditz Castle after he was moved there in September 1942 prior to the liberation of the castle by the Americans in April 1945. His account of his time during the war was published in his book "The Tunnelers' of Sandborstal", reissued in paperback with the title of "Escape".

Training on TS Foudroyant ceased in 1986.

CREDITS:

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TK001: History of HMS Trincomalee 1812 to 1986

Part of a talk given in 2012 to the Friends of HMS Trincomalee by Dr Hugh Turner

Friendsofhmstrincomalee.org.uk