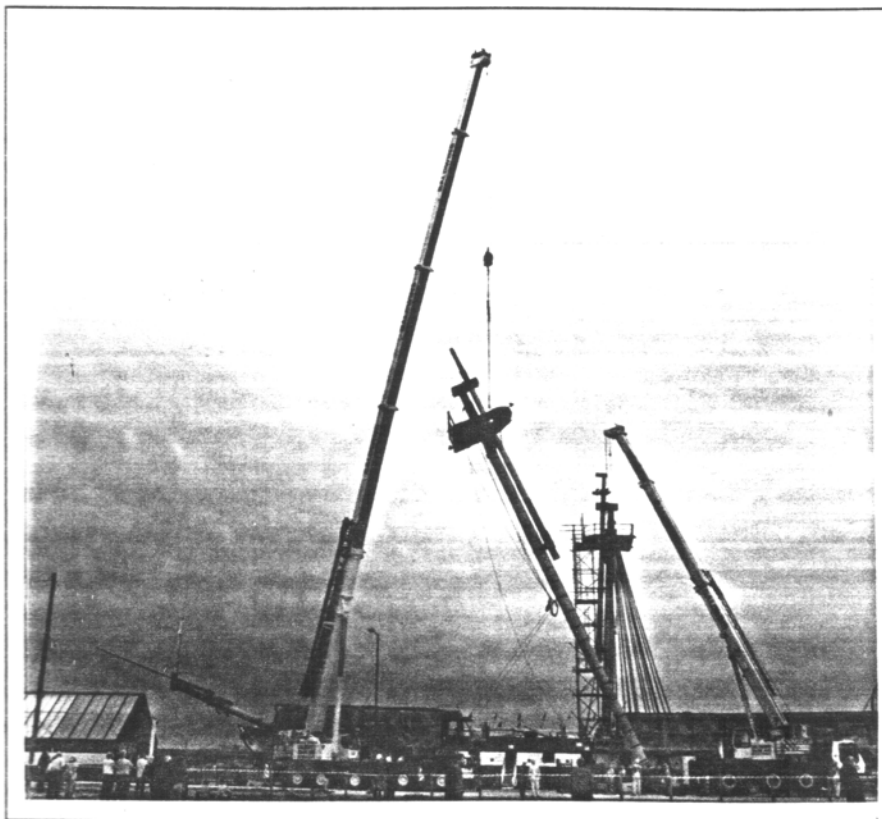




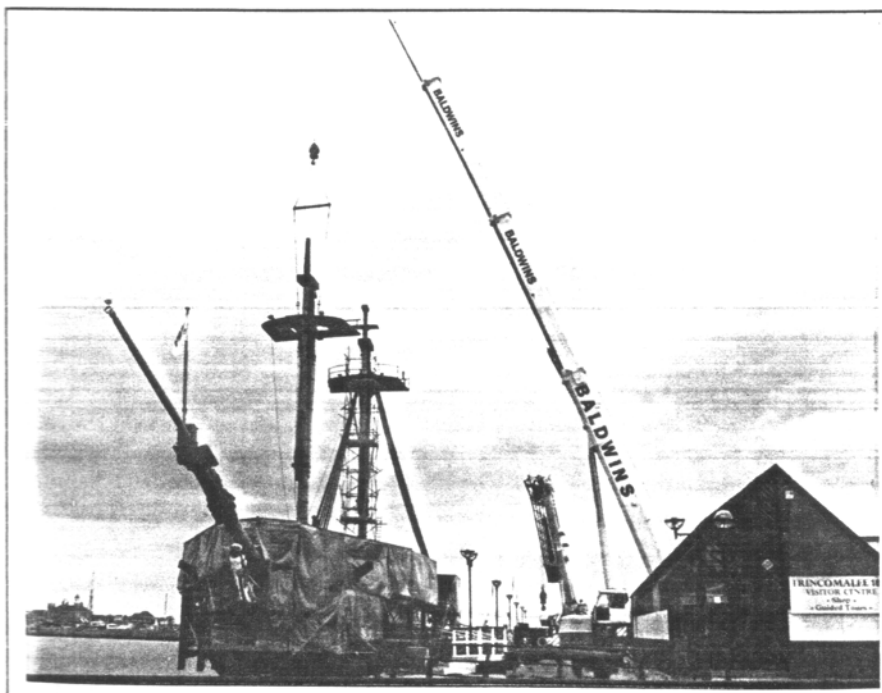
# Quarterdeck

The Newsletter of The Friends of HMS Trincomalee

February 1996



*Above: The foremast is lifted off the quay by two cranes prior to stepping. Below: The foremast slides into its mast channel at 14:00 on 30th August. Photos by Brian Mason*



**STOP PRESS: Weather permitting, the Mizzen Mast will be stepped on Wednesday 21st**

## TWO UP - ONE TO GO

The appearance of HMS Trincomalee changed dramatically during the summer of 1995 with the stepping of the Lower Mainmast Lower Foremast and Bowsprit. All being well, the Mizzen Mast will be stepped in the early spring and already visitors can gain some impression of how splendid the ship will look when all her masts and spars are in place. The stepping of the masts went virtually without a hitch and were widely reported in the press and on local television news.

The Riggers are making steady progress with the painstaking work of installing the 2000 feet of standing rigging and visitors are now able to see for themselves the craftsmanship involved in splicing, parcelling and serving these heavy ropes.

The Restoration team are continuing with the removal of the non-original weather decking and restoring the deck fittings as they go, in spite of the snow and biting winds which December and January have served up. This has meant that visitor access to much of the gun deck has been restricted, but it is possible to see from the open areas how impressive the progress has been since this part of the project started last year and how the appearance of the upper areas of the ship will be changed when the work is complete. A fine view of the ship can now be had from the jetty alongside the Jackson's Landing shopping complex and from the newly opened restaurant on its eastern end.

## MEET THE FRIENDS

On August Bank Holiday The Friends of Trincomalee manned a display in the Visitors' Centre in order to allow visitors to the ship to get their hands on the sailor's fighting weapons of the period. A good deal of interest was shown in the firearms and edged weapons of the 19th Century Navy, and visitors were invited to wield cutlasses, examine officers' dirks, brandish boarding axes and hook a brace of pistols in their belts. When time and space permitted, muzzle-loading pistols were taken outside and fired, much to the alarm of the seagulls on the Visitors' Centre roof.

Provided that sufficient volunteers are available, we hope to make this a regular feature of Bank Holidays and perhaps other summer weekends. During the Spring Bank Holiday a number of Friends will be putting on a similar display, selling souvenirs and of course recruiting new Friends at the Braunston Boat Show to be held at Braunston Marina, near Daventry, Northamptonshire, at the kind invitation of Tim Coghlan, an enthusiastic Friend of HMS Trincomalee and Managing Director of Braunston Marina.

## TRINCOMALEE IN THE NEWS

### Naval Inspection by C-in-C - 1874

From the pages of the South Durham Herald, February 14th 1874:

**NAVAL INSPECTION.**— Yesterday (Friday) afternoon, Admiral the Hon. G.F. Hastings, commander-in-chief at the Nore, accompanied by his secretary, Mr H. Perry, and Flag-Lieut. G. Ching, paid a visit to HMS Trincomalee, lying at West Hartlepool, for the purpose of making the annual inspection. The Union Jack and the white ensign were displayed fore and aft in honour of the visit. The Admiral not only inspected the ship and the ship's company, numbering 20 all told, but 28 men of the Royal Naval Reserve, who were put through the rifle, cutlass and big gun drill. Upon the men falling in aft, Commander Kinahan also being present, the Admiral expressed himself as being highly pleased with their efficiency, and likewise the very clean state of the ship, and everything in it. The Admiral also promised to give his serious attention to several personal matters which were brought under his notice by a few men, in reply to the usual enquiry.

Contrast this admirable report with the item that follows it!

#### HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH POLICE

Very few cases have occupied the attention of the borough magistrates during the past week. On Monday, before the Mayor (John White Esq.), J. Groves and W. Lisle, Esqrs., Amelia Lawrence and Ellen Rowell, two young women, charged as disorderly prostitutes, were sentenced, the former to 14 and the latter to 21 days imprisonment. Peter English, joiner, for being drunk and disorderly, was fined 5s and costs 7s 4d or seven days, and Andrew Peterson, a Norwegian sailor, for resisting Police-Constable Sweeting when in the execution of his duty, was fined 5s and costs 7s 4d, or seven days; and Margaret Thompson, for being drunk and incapable, was ordered to pay costs, 4s 10d.



*The Chairman of the Friends relaxes before the arrival of the day's visitors to the ship on August Bank Holiday Monday.*

## LOTTERY SUCCESS

Just a week before Christmas it was announced by the Heritage Lottery Fund that a grant of £975,000 had been awarded to The HMS Trincomalee Trust towards the costs of restoring the ship. This follows generous financial support from Hartlepool Borough Council and the Teesside Development Corporation and will help the Trust, which is undertaking the complete restoration, to achieve its target of completing the work in 1998.

In September it is planned to have the ship drydocked at the Historic Quay so that external work on the hull below the waterline can be carried out.

## Small Arms of HMS Trincomalee.....4

## THE BOARDING AXE

Axes of various types have been carried aboard ships from earliest times, to be used both as weapons and as essential items of equipment. "Boarding axes" or "Tomahawks" were part of HMS Trincomalee's armoury and Brian Horton records that in 1853 she was equipped with 20 "Tomahawks".

The shape and size of the British Navy's Boarding Axe appears to have changed little over a long period of time until the second half of the 19th Century when the practical applications of the axe began to supersede its fighting application. Trincomalee's axes would have been virtually identical to the example illustrated, which bears the Board of Ordnance broad arrow mark and the familiar "N" denoting Royal Navy issue.

Seafarers may recognise the shape of the head as being very similar to the fire axes with which modern ships are still equipped.

Fire was one of the worst disasters which could befall a wooden ship, and in a fighting ship the innumerable accidental causes of fire were compounded by the enemy's use of shot heated red-hot,

incendiary grenades and other devices designed to cause fires, not to mention lumps of burning wadding from the cannon of both sides. Cutting away smouldering timber, severing, dragging away and jettisoning burning cordage and hacking out sizzling hot cannon balls embedded in the ship's structure would make such an axe an invaluable tool while the ship was in action.

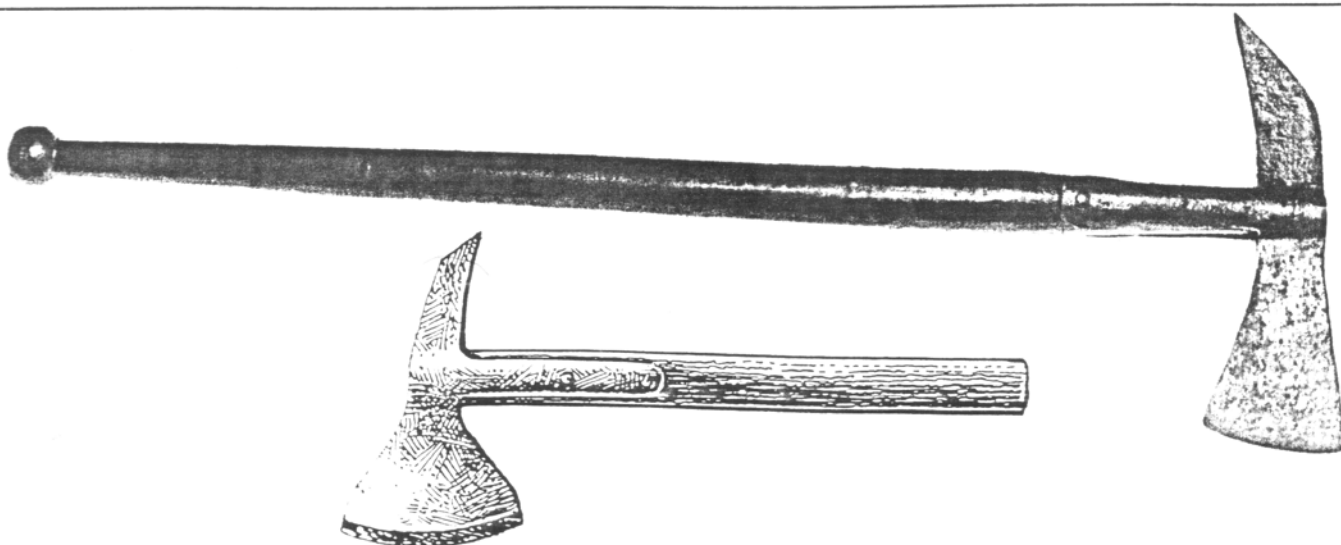
Anyone who has had the opportunity of examining some of the newly installed standing rigging of HMS Trincomalee will have been impressed by the thickness of the lower shrouds and mainstays, and if masts and spars are brought down during action, one can imagine the tangle of standing and running rigging which would descend onto the deck, seriously incapacitating the fighting efficiency of the ship. A sharp axe would be essential for removing this clutter and restoring order. In attacking enemy ships, or in "cutting out" operations, boarding parties would make use of their axes in bringing down the enemy's rigging to immobilise their ships, or in severing mooring lines to

make off with the enemy's vessel.

As a hand-to-hand fighting weapon the boarding axe must have been formidable, but unwieldy, as Lieut John Skynner RN wrote in 1802 *"The tomahawk is a weapon that when sharpened is of great service in cutting rigging and therefore may be of material advantage in action, and when slung by the wrist and handled by a cool active and enterprising seaman, will assist him in boarding to clamber up by the chains or side of an enemy ship, but it is inferior when opposed to thrusting weapons such as the musket and bayonet, pike or cutlass."*

It is reported that a cunning trick often employed by the French when closed with an enemy ship was to send a brave and nimble seaman to scramble along the enemy's wales with an axe and cut the port-tackle lanyards, so that when the ship hauled off, its crew would be unable to open the gun ports.

In 1855 the Admiralty introduced a shorter axe with a broader blade, though retaining the characteristic "tomahawk" spike. By the 1920s however, these axes were more or less obsolete and were sold off, most likely to end their days in coalhouses throughout the country.



Top: A Boarding Axe or Tomahawk as carried by the British Navy in the early 1800s

Below: The shorter boarding axe introduced in 1855.

## THE BOMBAY DOCKYARD AND THE WADIA MASTER BUILDERS

By the time the Bombay Dockyard shipwrights undertook the building of HMS Trincomalee they already had considerable experience of building ships for the British Navy. The Admiralty had indeed purchased a number of ships built at the Bombay Yard from their original owners (mostly from the Honourable East India Company) but by 1806 were placing orders directly with the yard. It would appear that the 36-gun "SALSETTE", launched in March 1807 was the first to be built specifically for the Admiralty, but this was soon followed by a number of other frigates, sloops and 3rd Rate Ships of the Line before Trincomalee's keel was laid. Several of the sloops were "brig sloops" of the type known unofficially as "coffin brigs", since they were evidently designed for speed at the expense of sea-keeping qualities and were prone to capsizing.

During 1816/17 the Bombay Dockyard completed four ships for the Admiralty, including Trincomalee. The others were:  
**CAMELEON** - a brig sloop of 12

guns, launched on January 6th 1816. Her deck length was 90 feet and the Admiralty paid just under £4000 for her. She was of the "coffin brig" design, and was lost in the early 1850s.

**AMPHITRITE** - a sistership of HMS TRINCOMALEE, launched on April 14th 1816. She was built as a 38-gun Frigate, but, like TRINCOMALEE, was cut down to a "24" in 1846. She is believed to have been sold out of service in 1874. She joined TRINCOMALEE on the Pacific Station in 1854 and the two ships are pictured together in the sketch shown below, now in the National Maritime Museum, entitled "*Her Majesty's Ships 'Amphitrite' & 'Trincomalee' beating out of San Francisco on Sept 23rd 1854*".

**MELVILLE** - a Third Rate Ship of the Line of 74 guns, launched on March 17th 1817 at a cost of £40,529. At the same time as she was built, an exact duplicate of her frame was constructed, which was carried back to England by the MELVILLE and re-erected at Portsmouth Dockyard, to be launched, when completed, as the "CARNATIC" in October 1823. The "CARNATIC" was evidently never commissioned, but was in use as a Powder Depot at Milford Haven in 1845. The "MELVILLE" was used as a cruising store ship and was sold out of service in Hong Kong in

1874.

Many of the ships built at the Bombay Dockyard survived to a ripe old age. In February 1815, for example, the yard launched "WELLESLEY" for the Admiralty. A Third Rate ship of 74 guns, "WELLESLEY" was commissioned and served as flagship, China Squadron, during the war of 1844-46. She was placed in "ordinary" as a guardship at Chatham in 1850, and later replaced the old "CORNWALL" as a "reformatory ship" at Purfleet, where her name was changed to that of her predecessor in 1867.

She remained at Purfleet until 1926, when she was removed and moored near Gravesend. Ironically she was sunk in 1940 by a German bomb which landed next to her at her moorings.



*Quarterdeck is printed and published by The Friends of HMS Trincomalee, P.O. Box 1817, Hartlepool TS24 7YE*

