



Quarterdeck

The Newsletter of The Friends of HMS Trincomalee

November 1996

HIGH & DRY

Drydocking goes smoothly

Shortly after dawn on Saturday 31st August, HMS *Trincomalee* slipped her moorings at the berth in Jackson Dock which has been her home for over six years, moved serenely out into the dock and edged into the former William Gray graving dock at the Hartlepool Historic Quay, with the assistance of the fishing vessels TORUS and PROGRESS.

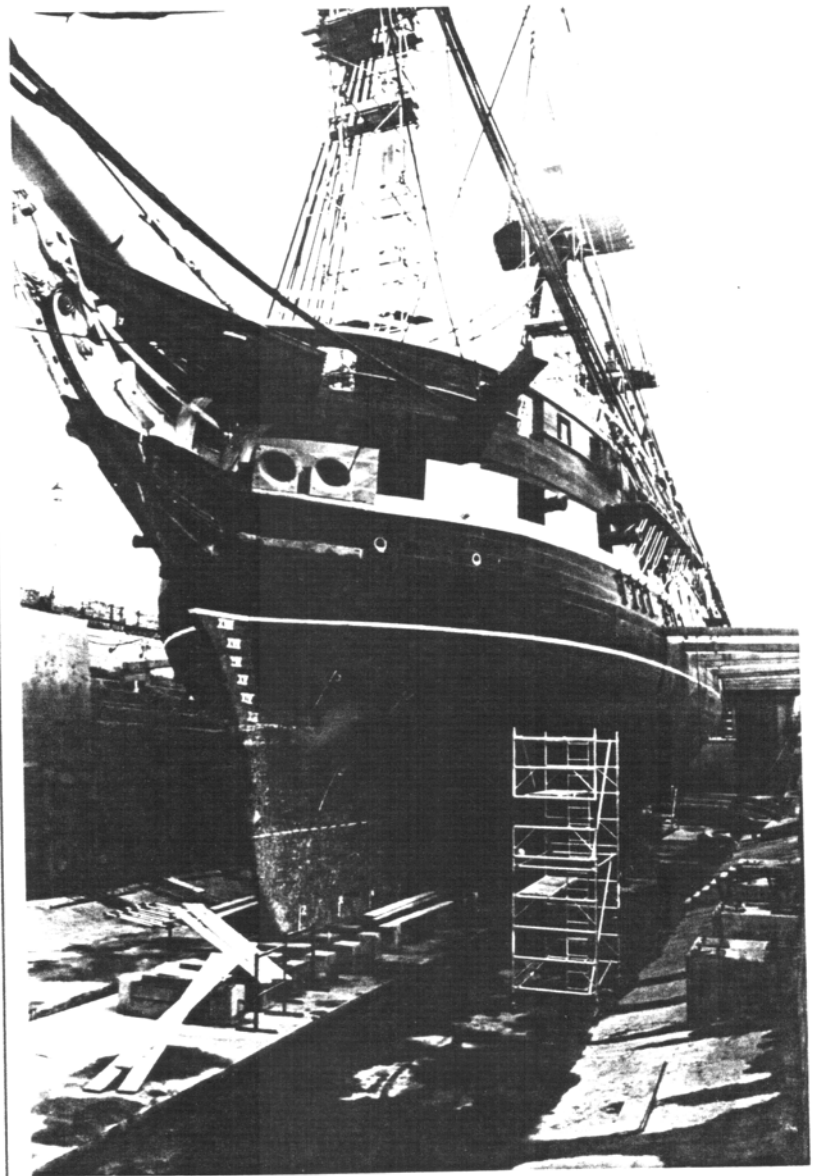
In a trouble-free operation carried out with the utmost care in near perfect weather conditions, the ship settled happily on to the keel blocks as the dock was pumped dry and is now safely installed in her new surroundings.

Visitors now have the benefit of seeing the ship against the background of the Historic Quay buildings which not only provide a "period" setting, but give a proper impression of HMS *Trincomalee*'s size. For the first time it is possible to walk round the outside of the ship, and the walkway over the drydock gates permits a first class close-up view of the stern galleries, now beautifully restored to their original state.

The drydock also provides a magnificent view of the whole ship and puts into perspective the elegant curves of the bow and stern, the delicate sweep of the deck line and the practical solidity of the hull shape. Perhaps the best view of the ship can be gained from the first floor windows of the William Gray Suite at the west end of the quay from which one can see the entire deck from a vantage point above the level of the bowsprit.

Trincomalee has of course been drydocked on numerous occasions in the past, as in common with other wooden-hulled vessels of the Royal Navy, she required the copper plating on her hull to be renewed at regular intervals. The fact that this was carried out regularly throughout her life has undoubtedly been a major factor in the remarkable state of preservation of her 180 year old underwater hull timbers.

Her first drydocking was on July 3rd 1829, just over ten years after her arrival in Portsmouth. During the whole of this period she had been lying at moorings "in ordinary", without her masts, rigging or guns, and marine growth flour-



HMS Trincomalee shortly after drydocking. Note the elegant curves of her hull. (Photo: Keith Johnson)

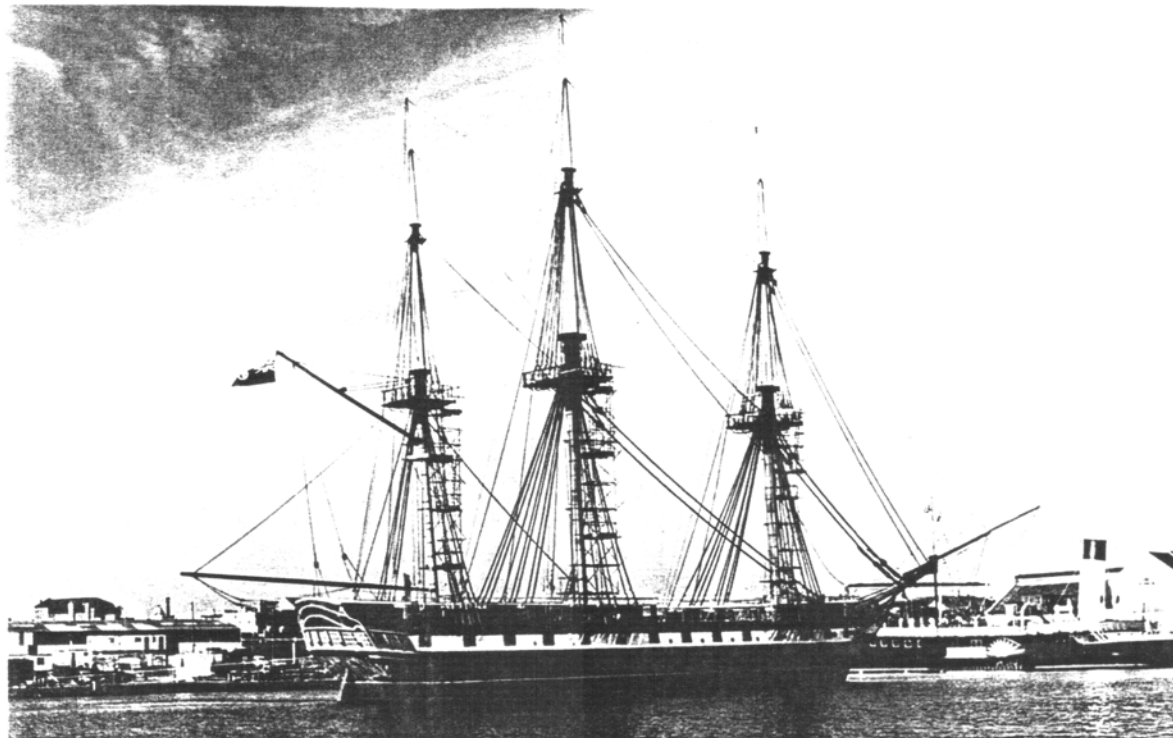
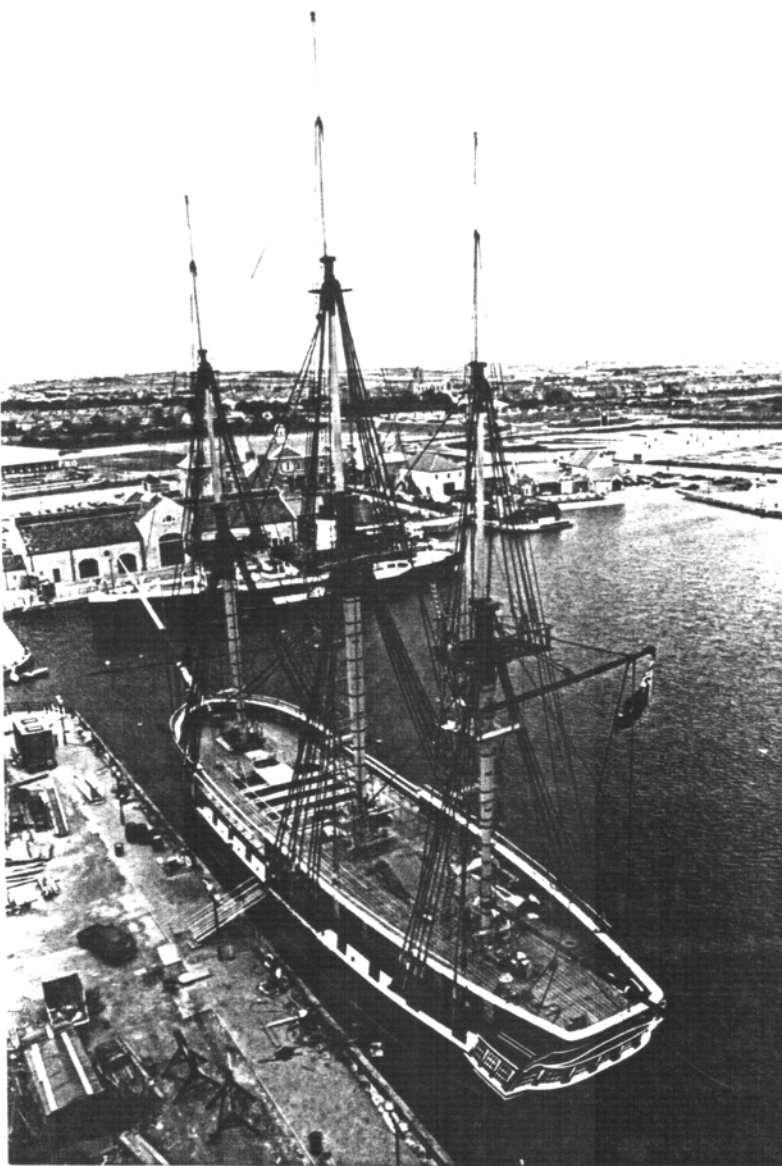
ishes on a stationary hull. The original copper was removed from her hull, which was then re-coppered before she was returned to her moorings. This process was repeated in 1845, two years before she was commissioned as a corvette and departed for the North American and West Indies Station under the command of Captain Warren. On her return from three years in the Caribbean she was once more drydocked - this time in Devonport in November 1851 - and her hull received its third re-coppering, which was to last her throughout her next commission, from 1852 to 1857 on the Pacific Station under the command of Captain Wallace Houston. Visitors can now see at first hand the removal of the old copper from the hull - the first stage of the long programme of work to be carried out during this drydocking.

RESTORATION PROGRESS

The fine aerial view of the ship (left) taken shortly before her move into drydock (the drydock entrance can be seen behind the stern of the paddlesteamer *Wingfield Castle*) shows the remarkable progress that has been made with the hull and upper decks, which now clearly show the original 1817 lines of the ship. The exposed deck beams over the "well" between the main- and fore-masts can be clearly seen. It was here that the ship's boats (three in all) would be stowed when not in use. Notice the gap in the solid bulwarks in way of this "well" area.

The tarpaulin which can be seen amidships aft of the mainmast covers the site of the upper deck capstan and access to the gun deck below. Although the upper deck wheel is not in place, the steering position can be seen just forward of the mizzen mast. Working platforms were still in place on the lower main- and mizzen-masts when this photograph was taken.

Although the main efforts of the restoration team will be concentrated on the underwater areas of the hull whilst the ship is in drydock, work continues elsewhere as the riggers press on with their daunting task of installing the standing rigging, and internal carpentry work in the area of the captain's cabin and other below-deck locations is proceeding unhindered. Considerable care is taken in programming the internal work schedule by the restoration team to allow as much visitor access as possible, but for reasons of safety some areas of the ship may not always be accessible and we kindly ask visitors to cooperate with the ship's guides.



Above: An aerial view of Trincomalee taken shortly before her drydocking.

Left: 31st August 1996. The ship moves across Jackson Dock towards the Historic Quay, passing the paddlesteamer Wingfield Castle.

(Photos: Keith Johnson)

Small Arms of HMS Trincomalee

THE FIGHTING DIRK

The Naval Dirk, nowadays more of a decorative accessory than a weapon, was still a useful fighting knife (probably of the sort that the UK Government would like to ban in the 1990s) at the time that HMS Trincomalee was commissioned.

Usually with a straight, double-edged blade suitable for thrusting and stabbing, the dirk was principally an officer's weapon, though seamen on sailing ships habitually carried knives for a variety of purposes and might well have found these useful in close-quarters engagements.

Edward Frazer's account of the Battle of Trafalgar mentions that "Many Captains wore .. dirks as well as their swords in battle, as being useful in boarding, for parrying cuts and thrusts" and many contemporary portraits show that Captains and Rear Admirals wore dirks at this time.

Until the late 19th century there was no official pattern of naval dirk, and styles varied considerably according to

fashion and the wearer's preference. Most late 18th and early 19th century dirks are straight bladed (though blade lengths vary from 5" to 18") with turned or reeded grips in ivory, bone or hardwood, a plain pommel and a simple style of crosspiece.

Variants include dirks with a sharply curving blade - a type which became popular following the removal of a number of curved dirks by British officers from the arsenal at Copenhagen in 1807 - and such patterns can be seen in paintings of that period in the National Maritime Museum.

Naval Dirks are frequently referred to these days as "Midshipmen's Dirks", but this is highly misleading, as the first Naval Regulations dealing with sidearms, promulgated in 1805, directed that midshipmen should wear swords, and subsequent uniform regulations in 1825 actually forbade the wearing of dirks by midshipmen. Flag Officers habitually wore dirks from 1827 until 1846.

It was not until 1856 that midshipmen and cadets were authorised to wear dirks "according to a pattern". The pattern is not described in detail, but the weapons of this period resembled the later "official" pattern, having a straight, double-edged blade 13½" long and 1¼" wide with a "lion's head" pommel, a white fishskin covered grip and quillons terminating in stylised acorns.

These were twice as heavy as the older non-standard dirks, and were not popular as fighting weapons. Midshipman E Hope Verney wrote home from Shannon's Naval Brigade in which he was serving during the Indian Mutiny "What humbugs these dirks are; they are all very well to walk about Portsmouth with, but they are no use for real fighting - I don't know what I shall do with mine against a sepoy."

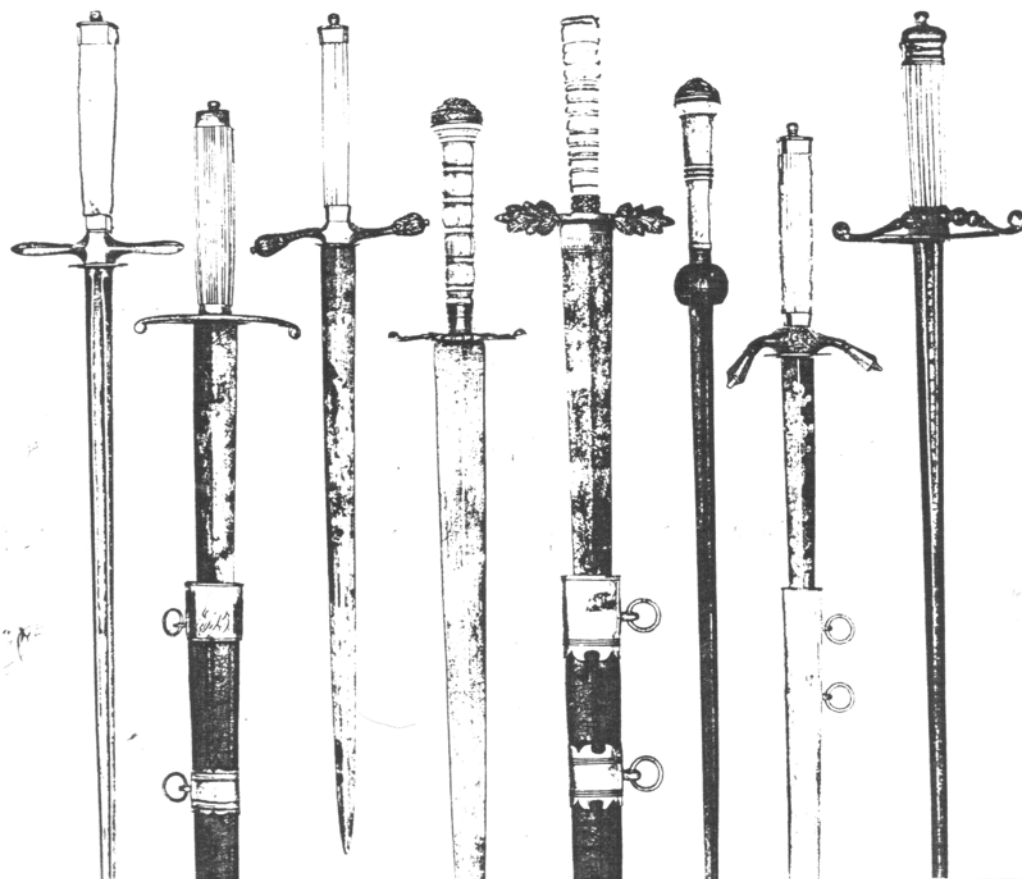
In effect, Trincomalee's active lifetime saw the transition of the naval dirk from practical fighting weapon to a ceremonial accessory.

Today, early naval officers' dirks are highly collectable items, and many were highly decorative, with blued and etched blades, gilt fittings and delicately engraved scabbards.

British Naval Officers' dirks 1800-1820:

Left to Right:

Octagonal bone grip with copper gilt mounts, 11" blade; Fluted bone hilt in leather sheath with copper mounts; Fluted bone hilt with reversed crosspiece; Turned ivory grip with lion's mask pommel; Turned ivory hilt, straight copper gilt crosspiece with oak leaf cluster finials; Poignard form with slim plain 11" blade and copper globe form of guard; Fluted bone hilt with copper gilt crosspiece in gilded copper sheath; Fluted bone hilt, crosspiece with "five ball" side loop, 14" blade adapted from a 17c rapier.



Memories of "Foudroyant" 70 YEARS AGO

A recent newcomer to The Friends of HMS Trincomalee is Mr Noel R Tyrrell of Pwllheli, Gwynedd, whose connections with the ship go back over 70 years. He and his older brother Leslie joined "Foudroyant" in January 1924 in Falmouth when she was moored next to "Cutty Sark". Both ships were moored at the bow swinging with the tide and on one occasion during a gale both vessels dragged their anchors and ended up on the beach. The Captain at that time was George Harman, who had been aboard the original "Foudroyant" which was lost off Blackpool in 1897. In those days Mr Cobb himself was regularly on board and Mr Tyrrell recalls visiting Caldicott Castle, Mr Cobb's home, on a number of occasions. Between 20 and 25 boys lived on the ship at any one time, and 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.

During Mr Tyrrell's time aboard the ship was towed by the tug "Victor" from her earlier moorings in the Carrick Roads to the River Cleddau in Pembrokeshire. Mr Cobb did his best to find employment for the boys when they were old enough with the merchant service, and Mr Tyrrell left "Foudroyant" in 1931, the year of Mr



Mr Noel Tyrrell (right) and his brother Leslie in 1924

Cobb's death, to join the New Zealand Shipping Company.

We were delighted to welcome Mr Tyrrell back aboard his old ship earlier this month together with his daughter and son-in-law - a visit which brought back many vivid memories of life aboard "Foudroyant" seventy years ago.

Mr Tyrrell will be celebrating his 85th birthday in December. We wish him Many Happy Returns and very much hope that he will visit us again.

MR NEVILLE WADIA

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death, in Bombay on 31st July 1996, of Mr Neville Wadia, a member of the Bombay family in whose shipyard HMS Trincomalee was built. Mr Wadia took a great interest in the restoration of the ship, visiting it in 1995, and was also instrumental in arranging a substantial donation to the Trust from the Wadia family trust.

Born in Liverpool in 1911, and educated at Malvern and Trinity College Cambridge, Neville Ness Wadia joined the family textile business, Bombay Dyeing, in 1933 at the most junior level, working his way

through every department and acquiring an intimate knowledge of the business. He became Chairman in 1952 and headed the company for twenty five years. Whilst a highly successful businessman, he was also a noted philanthropist and contributed to the building of hospitals, colleges and charitable foundations for Parsees in Bombay.

Rightly described by the "Times" of India as "quietly spoken and full of Victorian charm" Mr Wadia will be greatly missed by all who knew him, and we mourn the fact that HMS Trincomalee has lost a good friend.



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