

# Quarterdeck

The Newsletter of The Friends of HMS Trincomalee

October 1997

## FOUR MILLION THANKS

At the end of June Captain David Smith, Chairman of the HMS Trincomalee Trust, was delighted to announce that the National Lottery Heritage Fund had agreed to give just over £4 million towards the restoration of HMS Trincomalee.

This very welcome news means that the Trust can now see their way clear to completing the full restoration of the ship and in addition can begin to develop plans for shoreside facilities in anticipation of the ship's return to her berth in the Jackson Dock following the completion of the

drydock operations.

This generous allocation of funds, following the grant of £975,000 by the Fund in December 1995, is the culmination of many months of work by the Trust in preparing and refining the application to the National Lottery Fund - a complex and sensitive task not to be undertaken by the faint-hearted!

The news is welcomed by all those concerned with the ship and reinforces our view that there are few more deserving or worthwhile heritage projects in existence in Britain today today.

## WELCOME ABOARD SIR!

### Visit of HRH The Prince of Wales

HMS Trincomalee was honoured with another Royal Visit in May this year, when HRH Prince Charles took the opportunity of seeing the ship for himself during a visit to the North East. His Royal Highness was shown around the ship by Captain David Smith and was introduced to the ship's guides and members of the restoration team. Prince Charles showed a keen interest in all aspects of the ship, and we hope that he will return at regular intervals to see for himself the progress that is being made.



*The Prince of Wales discovers the need for a hard hat while meeting members of the restoration team below decks.*

## THE OLD FOUDROYANT REMEMBERED

100 years ago this year, on June 16th, the old "Foudroyant" ran into difficulties off the north west coast of England and went aground near Blackpool.

All those aboard were saved, but the ship herself was badly damaged and broke her back, becoming a total loss; thus the fate of Nelson's former flagship was sealed. Traces of her frames are still visible at low water, but a good deal of timber, copper, iron and other fittings were removed from the wreck and turned into a wide variety of souvenirs and keepsakes (see Quarterdeck, March 1994).

As we all know, the loss of the "Foudroyant" prompted Mr Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb to look for another training vessel, thus saving HMS Trincomalee at the 11th hour from the hands of the breakers.



*The plaque presented by Mr Mitchell*

## THE NAUTICAL TRAINING CORPS HANDS OVER A PIECE OF HISTORY

We have to thank Mr Brian Mitchell of West Sussex for the handsome oak and copper plaque shown above, which commemorates the wreck of the old "FOUDROYANT". This plaque (and, we assume, a small number of others) was made up from the timbers and copper from the "FOUDROYANT" and bears a label authenticating the origin of the material under the name of "Fletcher's Antique Furniture and the *Foudroyant* Co. Limited". The bas-relief in copper depicts the wreck of the old ship and is engraved "*Launched Plymouth 1798, Wrecked Blackpool 1897. Made from the old Foudroyant.*" The Nautical Training Corps was formed in 1944 by the late F P Froest-Carr OBE, who in his youth had served in the Royal Navy during the final days of sail. The Corps was founded to provide instruction

and training for boys and girls aged 8 to 18 who showed an interest in joining the Royal or Merchant Navy, instilling in the process "the principles of discipline, loyalty and good citizenship".

Fifty three years later the organisation is still thriving, with thirty-six units in Sussex, Hampshire and the London area, and training centres in Portsmouth and Shoreham. All units offer a variety of activities and training, and many support their own bands. One of the Corps Bands has toured the eastern seaboard of the USA, and another has had the honour of playing next to HMS Victory during Navy Day - a privilege normally reserved for the Band of the Royal Marines.

On behalf of the Nautical Training Corps Mr Mitchell very kindly presented this plaque to the Chairman of The Friends of HMS Trincomalee on board the ship prior to the AGM in June - exactly 100 years and 9 days after the old "FOUDROYANT" was lost.

The plaque was originally presented to the Corps by the Foudroyant Trust in 1959, and when the new Visitors' Centre is complete it will be returned to the Trust for display alongside other relics of this fine old ship.

Small Arms of HMS Trincomalee

## THE SEA SERVICE PERCUSSION PISTOL

The mid-19th century was a time of dramatic development in firearms, one of the most significant being the eclipse of the flintlock by the percussion system and the subsequent invention of the metallic cartridge.

An Aberdeenshire clergyman named Forsyth had invented and patented the first percussion system as early as 1811, and a copper percussion cap using fulminate of silver as the explosive compound was patented in Paris in 1818.

It was not until nearly twenty years later however that the British Forces began to develop and issue percussion arms, and in their earliest form these were merely converted flintlocks.

The Admiralty embarked upon the conversion of flintlock sea-service pistols in 1836, though in practice most of the new pistols were built using spare parts which were held in stock for flintlock arms.

The new percussion sea-service pistols were adopted in 1841, and had a smoothbored barrel, six inches long, with a swivel ramrod and brass furniture. The pistol was designed to

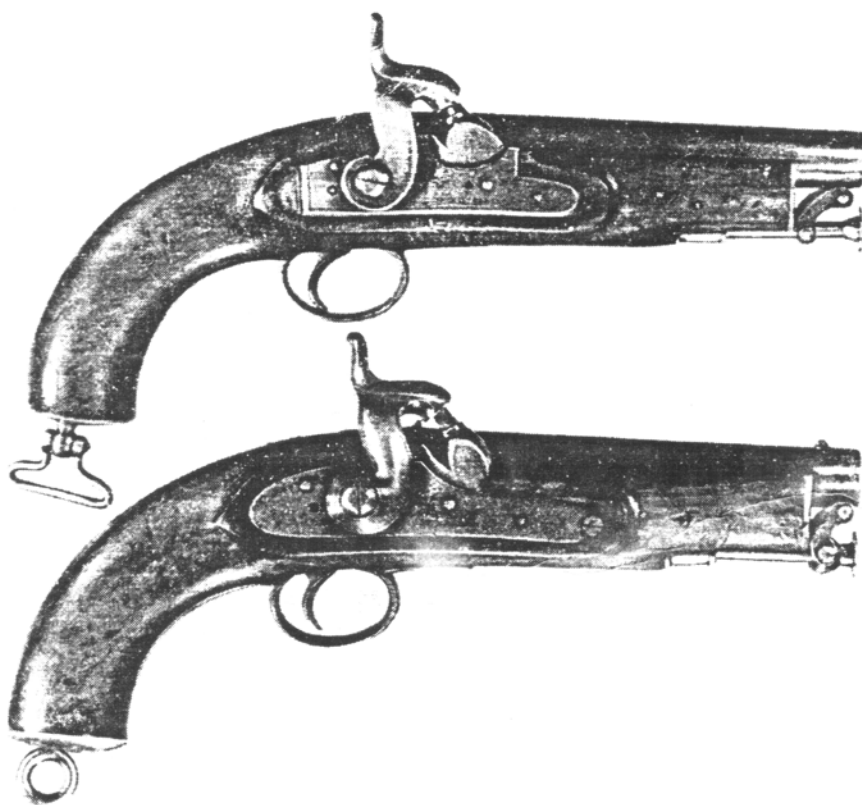
fire a 34-bore lead ball using 2 drams of black powder; a smaller projectile and charge than the equivalent pistols designed for the land forces.

Nearly all had to be made in the first instance from converted flintlock parts, resulting in at least a dozen varieties with differing locks, swivels, butt-caps and furniture. Pistols for Naval and Coastguard use had a steel belt hook on the left side of the stock. Similar pistols, but without the belt hook, were issued to HM Customs, some Police forces, the Land Transport Corps and military units in far-flung corners of the Empire such as Van Diemen's Land.

These pistols may have been an improvement on the old flintlock in that they were less liable to misfire, but they were nonetheless so inaccurate thanks to their large bore, lack of rifling and short barrel that they were suitable as close-range weapons only; but no doubt this is the use which the Admiralty had in mind. In a boarding-party action it is highly unlikely that the user would have time to reload in any case.

Ironically, the army had decided three years earlier to abolish the single-shot pistol (described by the Small-Arms Commission as "hopeless") as a cavalry weapon, though the Lancers were allowed to keep theirs for a few years more.

Early in 1854, noticing that the Russian Navy was issuing revolvers to its men, the British Admiralty decided that their ships should be similarly armed. This was the opportunity anticipated by one Colonel Samuel Colt, who had already established a manufacturing base in London, and on 8th March 1854 he secured his first contract for 4,000 "Navy Pattern" .44" percussion revolvers at £2.10.0 each. The following year he received a further order for 5,500 to equip the Baltic & Black Sea fleets and the single shot sea-service pistol was phased out. Even so, it took time to re-arm the entire Navy, and many of the old sea-service pistols were still in issue ten years later as they were gradually passed on to auxiliary units and reserve forces.



*Pattern 1842 percussion sea-service pistols*

*Above: an early model, constructed from flintlock parts. Notice the "scoop" in the top of the lockplate, originally intended to accommodate the flintlock priming pan.*

*Below: a later model with purpose-made percussion lock.*

*Both pistols have steel belt-hooks to the left of the stock and are equipped with lanyard rings. Similar pistols were still being made for service in India as late as the 1870s*

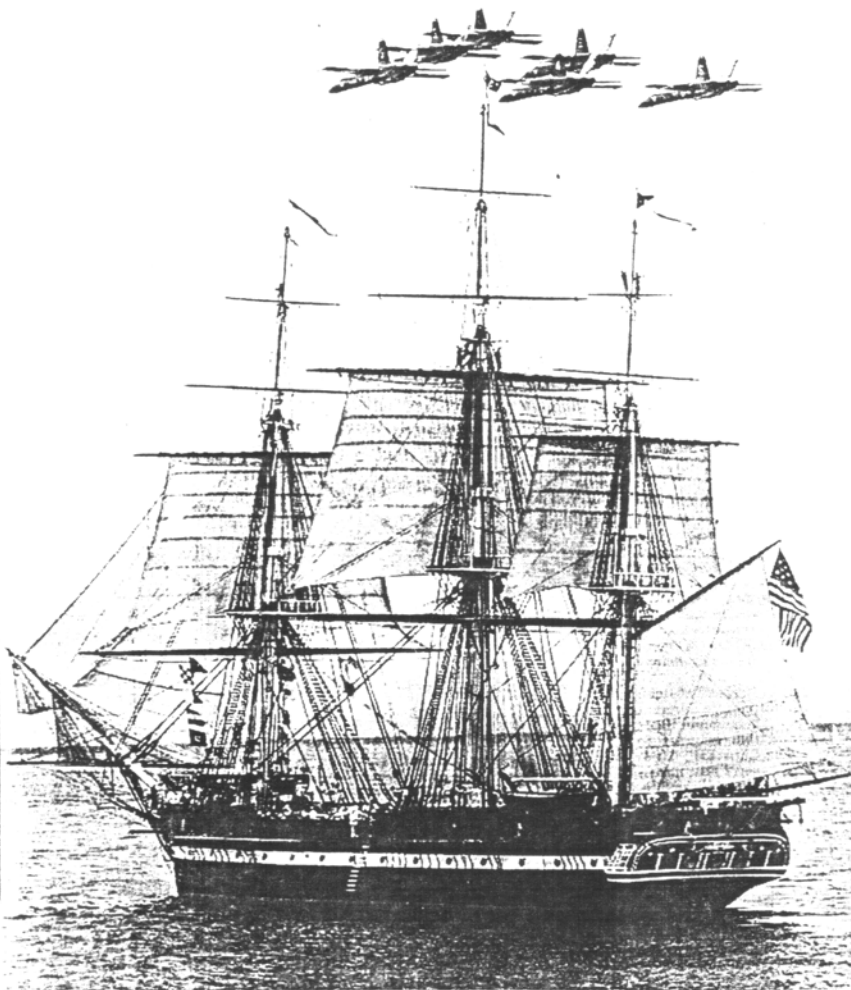
## OLD IRONSIDES PUTS TO SEA

USS Constitution, the oldest wooden warship afloat, demonstrated her seaworthiness on July 22nd this year when she was towed out of her usual berth in Boston to Marblehead (where she was originally built) and sailed back (at a reported four knots, carrying six sails as in the photograph) to her regular moorings. This was the first time the ship had been under sail since 1881 when she completed her final tour of duty, although for many years she has left her berth each 4th July to be turned around, to ensure even weathering. This year's outing is the culmination of over three and a half years of work to make her seaworthy once more.

"Old Ironsides" (supposedly named by her original crew, who claimed that British cannonballs just bounced off her sides) was launched 200 years ago. Her connection with HMS Trincomalee relates to an action fought in 1812 when the frigate HMS Java was sunk. Aboard HMS Java were the plans for two frigates - Trincomalee and Amphitrite - intended for the Wadia Shipyard in Bombay. The loss of these plans meant that further drawings had to be produced and despatched by another vessel, with the consequent delay ensuring that both ships were launched too late to take an active part in the Napoleonic War.



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*USS Constitution under sail off Marblehead on July 22nd 1997, complete with fly-past of more modern weaponry overhead.*

## BOB WYNN

We are very sorry to report that Bob Wynn, the Project Officer of the HMS Trincomalee Trust based in Hartlepool, died suddenly at his home on April 30th. Bob, who had spent most of his working life in the shipping industry, joined the Trust in 1993 and very quickly established himself as the primary point of contact for anyone contacting the Trust. Bob was well known to many of our members and was always willing to take time out to help any Friend of the ship, no matter how busy he might have been at the time.

His many friends will miss his cheerful personality and helpful nature and we extend our sincerest sympathy to Bob's family.