

William Cox Chapman

1st Lieutenant on HMS Trincomalee



Amongst the officers attached to HMS Trincomalee, William Cox Chapman is to be found listed as 1st Lieutenant aboard the ship from June 1852 to 1855, during the ship's second commission to the Pacific Station. Born at Southall, Middlesex, he had an eventful career, ending his days on 15 May 1895 at Lyme Regis as a retired Vice-Admiral.

His rise through the ranks was as follows:

2 November 1841	Entered the Navy as a Cadet
8 November 1847	Became a Mate
11 November 1848	Appointed Lieutenant
17 June 1859	Appointed Commander
11 April 1866	Appointed Captain
1 January 1881	Retired
31 December 1882	Received rank of Rear-Admiral on retired list
15 December 1888	Received rank of Vice-Admiral on retired list

Early Career

Entering the Navy as a cadet in November 1841, William served as midshipman of the Belleisle under Captain John Kingcome, in the first China war, taking part in the storming of Ching-Kiang Foo, and the final operations before Nankin. For these services he received the China medal.



West Gate of Chinkiang drawn by Thomas Allom, from a sketch on the spot by
Capt. James Stoiddart RN. Engraved by J.M. Starling

The Battle of Chinkiang was fought between British and Chinese forces in Chinkiang, Jiangsu province, China, on 21 July 1842 during the First Opium War. It was the last major battle of the war. The Chinese force comprised of a garrison of Manchu and Mongol Bannermen, and the British forces were commanded by Sir Hugh Gough. The successful capture of the stronghold allowed the British to proceed to Nanking. Fought near the confluence of the Grand Canal and Yangtze River, the battle effectively blocked operation of the Caoyun system, a transport network vital for the movement of grain throughout the empire. As a result, the Daoguang Emperor decided to sue for peace and agreed to sign the Treaty of Nanking, which brought hostilities to an end. Mass suicide was committed by the Manchu Bannermen who were defending the city.

In 1847 William was a midshipman aboard the *America*, serving under Sir Thomas Maitland in the capture of a Portuguese rebel squadron that year. In 1847 a British squadron commanded by Sir William Parker, was sent to support Queen Maria II. In May of that year a division of rebel troops, commanded by the Conde das Antas, was being ferried along the coast with the aim of securing the mouth of the Tagus, thus blockading the capital. The convoy was intercepted by the British squadron and ordered to surrender. When Antas refused, boat's crews put off from the British warships and boarded and captured all the transports, despite coming under fire from coastal batteries. Some three thousand rebel soldiers were disarmed and held in Fort St Julian under a guard of Royal Marines, until relieved by loyal Portuguese troops.

With his promotion to Mate in November 1847, William was appointed to the *Asia*, flagship of Sir Phipps Hornby in the Pacific. From June 1852 to 1855 he served as First Lieutenant of the *Trincomalee*, under Captain Wallace Houston, on the Pacific Station, and he was employed in relieving the Polar ships.

Commander of the gun-vessel Spitfire

From April 1858, William commanded the gun-vessel, *Spitfire*, on the west Coast of Africa, until his promotion to Commander in June 1859 which was specially due to his involvement with an expedition down the Scaries river. The following is from *The Times* of Tuesday 10 May 1859:

"We hear from Sierra Leone, west coast of Africa, that the tribe of Loosoos have been again encroaching on our frontiers, and have had the temerity to burn the next largest town to Sierra Leone, on the very river on which that stronghold stands. It was absolutely necessary to check the daring of this warlike tribe, as property was no longer safe on the river, and merchantile confidence was shaken. The mild administration of British rule is imputed by these savages to weakness, they considering themselves safe in their muddy rivers, where the pestilential fevers of Africa protect them more surely from the white man than all the guns they could bring into the field against us. An expedition was fitted out at Sierra Leone to attack the Loosoo stronghold up the great Scaries river, where they arrived on the 21st March. The force consisted of Her Majesty's steamers *Vesuvius*, *Trident* and *Spitfire*, having on board his Excellency Colonel Hill, Governor of Sierra Leone, with the 1st West India Regiment, and Commodore C. Wise, aide-de-camp. The following account of the expedition is given by a correspondent:-

'The steamers, not being able to enter the river, the ascent was made in boats, as follows:- 24 troop boats, in four divisions, under the charge of, - first division, Commodore C. Wise,

with boats of Her Majesty's ship Vesuvius; second, Commander F.A. Close, with boats of Her Majesty's ship Trident; third, Commander Truscott, with boats of Her Majesty's ship Heron; fourth, Lieutenant Chapman, with boats of Her Majesty's ship Spitfire. Grand total, 52 boats – including six boats carrying guns and seven rocket boats.

The ascent of the river was most difficult, and it required the energy of every naval officer to keep the troop boats off the rocks and in their places. On the third day we found ourselves only a few miles from our destination – viz., the stockades and mud forts of Kambia Town; but the most difficult part had now to be passed. Before us lay the river, rushing through a bed of rocks, the points of which were so numerous and so near together that it seemed impossible to pass.

Never shall I forget the scene that ensued as the cloud of boats, freighted with their human cargoes, were swept into the rapid; the noise of the waters nearly drowned the shouts of the officers. Pilots were useless; before they could speak you were driven past or on to the danger. It reminded me very much of a large hunting field charging a dangerous and difficult leap. How they all get through is a mystery, but at last it is accomplished; the danger is past, the stockades are in sight, and the boats anchor to re-form the broken line of battle, while Commodore Wise goes ahead to reconnoitre the enemy.

Once more the bugles sound the advance. In ten minutes we open fire, and under a storm of shell and rockets the 1st West India Regiment and Marines land with a battery of mountain howitzers; the boats now turn their fire upon the main stockade and the troops advance; the second division of boats pass higher up the river and pound away at a stockade on the extreme left, while a storming party under Commander Close makes a rush for the wall; but the Loosoos now think they have had enough, and run so fast that nothing but a rifle-ball can catch them.

The day was nearly a bloodless one, but, like the work in India, the sun is far more to be feared than gun-shot wounds in latitude 9 deg. North. The heat was frightful, and after the last skirmish we had in chase of the Loosoos, I saw his Excellency Colonel Hill, who commanded the troops, being brought to life again by means of bottles of water poured over his head.

The attack had been made at the top of high tide, and it was impossible to perform the service in one tide thoroughly, the boats had of necessity grounded in the mud under a cliff on which the stockades were built. Our fleet of boats had certainly rather a helpless appearance, but as the troops occupied the mud forts they were safe; nevertheless, the enemy were not blind to advantage they had, for after dark they peppered the boats with musketry from the opposite bank.

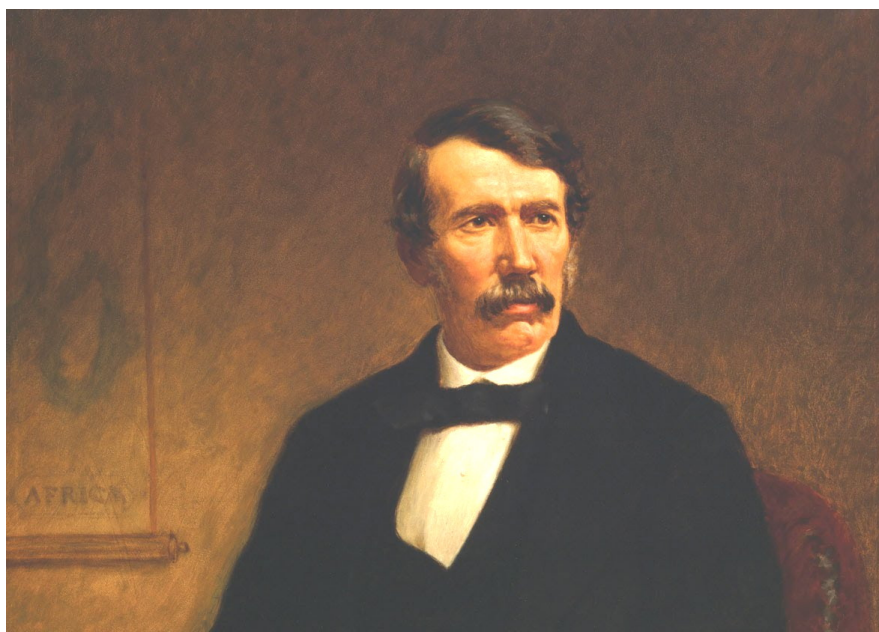
On the 24th the troops were re-embarked, and in due course of time got back to the steamers. Kambia was left in the hands of our neighbours and allies, the Timnees, from whom the ever oppressing Loosoos had wrested the town by treachery. The expedition had the happiest effect on the country, for which the Government deserve every credit, and I am glad to say that as yet the troops have not suffered from fever, which might have been expected after their exposure to the sun and malaria in open boats."

Whilst still with the Spitfire, Lieutenant Chapman captured an American slaver with 470 slaves on board.

In January 1861 he was appointed inspecting commander of the Coastguard at Fleetwood, in the same year he married his cousin, Catherine Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Hugo Mavesyn Chadwick (of New Hall, Warwick; Mavesyn Ridware, Staffordshire; Healy Hall, Lancashire; Callow, Derbyshire; and Leventhorpe, Yorkshire). In April 1862 he received the command of the sloop Ariel.

Commander of the sloop Ariel & encounter with David Livingstone

As Commander of the Ariel, William served on the East Coast of Africa 1862-64. He captured 18 slavers, being afterwards specially reported by the Commander-in-Chief for his exertions in the suppression of the slave trade. He also assisted David Livingstone the missionary, at the mouth of the Zambesi river, when a hurricane was raging. Livingstone was with the Pioneer and the Lady Nyassa vessels, and on 14 February 1864 HMS Orestes took the Pioneer in tow, HMS Ariel took the Lady Nyassa in tow.



David Livingstone

Livingstone wrote to his daughter Agnes from Mozambique on 24 February 1864:

“... When we reached the sea-coast at Luabo we met a man-of-war, HMS Orestes. I went to her with Pioneer, and sent Lady Nyassa round by inland canal to Kongone. Next day I went into Kongone in Pioneer; took our things out of her, and handed her over to the officers of the Orestes. Then HMS Ariel came and took Nyassa in tow, Orestes having Pioneer. Captain Chapman of Ariel very kindly invited me on board to save me from the knocking about of the Lady Nyassa, but I did not like to leave so long as there was any danger, and accepted his invitation for Mr Waller, who was dreadfully sea-sick.

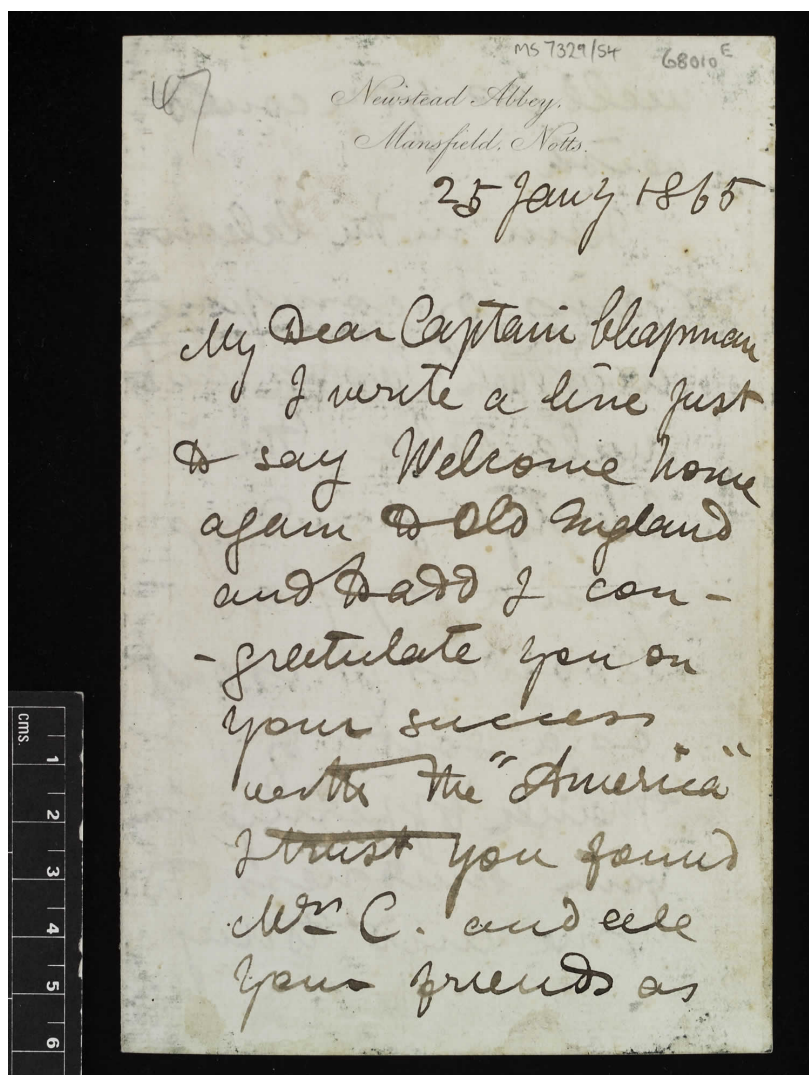
On 15th we were caught by a hurricane which whirled the Ariel right round. Her sails, quickly put to rights, were again backed so that the ship was driven backward and a hawser wound itself round her screw, so as to stop the engines. By this time she was turned so as to be looking right across Lady Nyassa, and the wind alone propelling her as

if to go over the little vessel. I saw no hope of escape except by catching a rope's-end of the big ship as she passed over us, but by God's goodness she glided past, and we felt free to breathe.

That night it blew a furious gale. The captain offered to lower a boat if I would come to the Ariel, but it would have endangered all in the boat: the waves dashed so hard against the sides of the vessel, it might have been swamped, and my going away would have taken heart out of those that remained. ...

... On 18th the weather moderated, and, the captain repeating his very kind offer, I went on board with a good conscience, and even then the boat got damaged. I was hoisted up in it, and got rested in what was quite a steady ship as compared with the Lady Nyassa. The Ariel was three days cutting off the hawser, though nine feet under water, the men diving and cutting it with immensely long chisels ... on the 24th we entered Mozambique harbour, very thankful for our kind and merciful preservation..."

The Ariel was paid off in Portsmouth 1 December 1864.



Letter to William Cox Chapman from David Livingstone

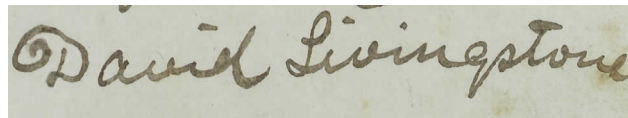
On 25 January 1865 David Livingstone wrote a letter to Captain Chapman from Newstead Abbey, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire:

"My Dear Captain Chapman,

I write a line to say welcome home again to Old England and to add I congratulate you on your success with the "America". I trust you found Mrs. C. and all your friends well as you could wish. I am in the labour pains of composing another book and will take the liberty of sending you a copy as soon as it is out as a sort of thank offering for your kindness to me and to me "Portuguese servant" by whom by the way I was informed this morning of your address – with my best now to your good lady and all manner of good wishes for your health and happiness,

I am &c,

David Livingstone"



William's next service was in command of the Winchester, drill-ship for the Royal Naval Reserve at Aberdeen, from May 1865, until April 1866 when he was advanced to the captains' list. At around this time he had a young daughter, his only child, Marie E C Chapman who was born at Mavesyn Ridware, Staffordshire.

Captain of HMS Dido



HMS Dido in 1869

In April 1871 HMS Dido, a new and powerful sloop of 1,277 tons, 6 guns and 350 horse-power (nominal) was commissioned at Portsmouth by Captain William Cox Chapman. He commanded this ship initially on the west coast of Africa and then from May 1872 on the Australian Station until paid out of commission in April 1876.

He received the thanks of the Foreign and Colonial Offices and of the Admiralty for services on the west coast of Africa, also for services as senior officer in Fiji, in preventing an insurrection and returning natives stolen by the brig Carl to their native islands. He became Commodore on the Australian Station on the death of Commodore Goodenough, and he received the thanks of the French Minister of the marine for services rendered when the French frigate L'Hermitte was wrecked on Wallis Island, 1874.

On 1 January 1876 William became Captain of the Valiant, on Coastguard service in the river Shannon, and from 1879 was attached to the Channel squadron.

Retirement

William retired on 1 January 1881.

"The Globe" newspaper of 17 October 1881 reports that "Captain William Cox Chapman, RN, has joined the board of directors of Claridge's Hotel (Limited)."

The "Army and Navy Gazette" 23 February 1884 has a report that "The members of the Royal Naval Club of 1765 dined together to commemorate the action of Sir John Jervis, off Cape St. Vincent, at Willis's Rooms, St. James's, on Tuesday evening. Admiral Charles F. Hillyar, CB presided, and there were present:- Rear-Admiral William Cox Chapman; Captain Sir Lambton Loraine, Bart., ... Captain R Kinahan" (and 17 others). Interesting Lambton served aboard HMS Trincomalee as Midshipman throughout her second commission, at the same time as William was First Lieutenant. In addition Captain Richard George Kinahan was in 1872 the Commander on HMS Trincomalee whilst she was a Drill Ship for the Naval reserve at West Hartlepool.

In the April 1891 census William is listed as a 64 year old widower, a Vice-Admiral RN living at Woodville, Lyme, Dorset as head of the household, with his spinster daughter, Marie E C Chapman, aged 27 years. William died at Woodville on 15 May 1895.

Woodville is a grade II listed building, and is now divided into flats. It seems fitting that with such a notable inhabitant as William Cox Chapman who served his country proud, that the building was used as the base for the 1st Battalion 16th Regiment of the US Army that were billeted at Lyme prior to taking part in the D-Day landings. To mark the 70th anniversary of the landings in 2014 the Stars and Stripes was raised outside Woodville, which is on Silver Street, Lyme Regis.



Hugh Turner

**QD063: Originally appeared in the "Quarterdeck" magazine
Ref: 2018 Issue 1 (Spring) pages 13 to 21**

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