

The Maiden Voyage Of HMS Trincomalee



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HMS Trincomalee departed from Trincomalee in Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka) on her maiden voyage to England on 27th October 1818. This was an age when pirates posed a threat in the area, there was religious unrest in Ceylon, and there was competition amongst nations for naval stations to support their fleets and trading vessels. It was also an age of slow communications as compared with today, with important decisions having to be made at a local level.

The three ships, HMS Minden, HMS Challenger and HMS Towey were all at Trincomalee, on the Eastern coast of Ceylon, prior to the departure of our ship, and they all play a part in the history of the maiden voyage.

HMS Minden

HMS Minden, like HMS Trincomalee, was built at the Bombay dockyard. This 3rd rate vessel with an armament of 74 guns, and tonnage of 1721, was launched at Bombay on 19th June 1810. On 28th July 1816 the Minden departed from Plymouth Sound as one of a fleet of nineteen ships bound for the Bay of Algiers. Amongst the passengers were John Bunt, boatswain, bound for the naval base at Trincomalee with his wife Eliza and their child.

On 9th August 1816 the fleet arrived at Gibraltar where it joined a Dutch squadron which had arrived the previous evening, and preparations were made for the Battle of Algiers. The passengers aboard the Minden were left in the safety of Gibraltar whilst the fleet was victualled and gunnery practice was held.

The trigger for the Battle of Algiers was that on 23rd May 1816, at Bona, near Algiers, the crews of 300 to 400 small vessels working in fishing for coral, whilst on their way to celebrate mass on Ascension Day were massacred by a band of 2,000 Turkish, Levantine and Moorish troops. Such an atrocity committed on defenceless Christians led Britain to act against the forts and shipping at Algiers. The Commander of the fleet was Admiral Lord Exmouth, and much destruction was done by the British and Dutch fleet to the defences and town of Algiers. In the battle seven of the crew of the Minden were killed and thirty-seven injured.

The Minden, under Captain William Paterson, returned to Gibraltar and picked up her passengers. John Bunt and his family were discharged from the Minden on 11th March 1817 at Trincomalee. The Minden was the flagship for the senior naval officer at Trincomalee, Rear Admiral Sir Richard King.

HMS Challenger

HMS Challenger was a sloop with 18 guns launched in 1813. In 1817, under the captaincy of Philip Henry Bridges, she had been cruising on the Persian Gulf, the nature of her mission is recorded in an extract of a letter from Captain Bridges received by the Governor of Port Louis, Mauritius, in 1817, concerning pirates in the Indian seas:

‘Their power at sea, in and out of the Gulf, is very great, comparatively with our merchant

vessels, who, without doubt, will be all captured, if they come singly, as the Lascars in general have an idea, that if they do not fight at all, their lives will be spared; every ship must fall without a chance of escape. The Challenger will do her utmost to protect the trade, and can do it completely with one or two cruisers. Your Excellency will understand it to be my intention, till I receive further orders from you, to arrange regular convoys between Muscat, Bushire, and Bussorah, and as I am aware of the number of ships likely to come up the Gulf, I hope to be able to ensure the safety of the British trade, till your Excellency's intention of humbling these horrid pirates can be carried into execution."

Prior to our ship's departure from Trincomalee, the Challenger was laid up at the same port, and it was her officers and crew that manned HMS Trincomalee on her voyage to Portsmouth.

The Port of Trincomalee



Map of Trincomalee c1750

In 1795 the important trading ports of Colombo, Galle and Trincomalee on the island of Ceylon were held by the Dutch, and revolution was rife in France and beyond. William of Orange issued instructions from Kew to the Dutch colonies in Ceylon, telling them to permit the entrance of British troops and ships of war for the purpose of protecting them from falling into the hands of French republicans, and orders were given to use force should they be refused admittance.

Governor Angelbeek was invited by Lord Hobart to place his colony in the possession of the British, to be restored to the Dutch when peace with France was achieved. The local Dutch Government found this unacceptable and they decided to defend themselves at Colombo, Galle and Trincomalee if the British attempted hostilities.

British forces arrived at Trincomalee, landing unopposed at the beginning of August 1795, however the Dutch at Colombo had learnt that the revolution at home had not only been led and supported by the French, but also had the support of their own nation. The decision was made by the local Dutch Government in Ceylon to break off all engagements with the British, and to defend the fortress at Trincomalee. This decision was conveyed to the British in a letter dated 15th August 1795.

The British, in response, bombarded Trincomalee and the forts there capitulated to the British under Colonel Stuart. Colombo was surrendered to the British on 15th February 1796. (Our ship, HMS Trincomalee, was named after a previous conflict between French and British forces, the Battle of Trincomalee , of 3rd September 1782).

There was still unrest in Ceylon around the time HMS Trincomalee was preparing for her maiden voyage. In March 1815 the British had signed a treaty with Kandyan chiefs, known as the Kandyan Convention treaty. This decreed that the provinces of Kandy, located in the central and eastern parts of Ceylon, be brought under British Sovereignty, but that all the traditional privileges of the chiefs be maintained. The Kingdom of Kandy was also to be governed according to its customary Buddhist laws and institutions, but would be under the administration of a British “resident” at Kandy, who would, in all but name, take the place of the monarch.

The changes were to reduce the power and influence of the chiefs, and the monks, in particular, resented the virtual disappearance of the monarchy, which was their traditional source of support. They also resented the monarchy’s replacement by a foreign Government. The monks began to stir up political and religious discontent among the almost immediately after the British annexation, and the resulting widespread rebellion was suppressed with great severity. Hostilities ended in 1818, and then the British issued a proclamation that brought the Kandyan provinces under closer control. British agents usurped the powers and privileges of the chiefs, and the institutional privileges accorded to Buddhism were reduced, in effect placing the religion on an equal footing with other religions. With this British consolidation over Kandy, Ceylon fell under the control of a single power for the first time since the twelfth century.

HMS Towey

HMS Towey was built by Balthazar Adams, at Bucklers Hard, a hamlet on the banks of the Beaulieu river in Hampshire. The ship was laid down May 1813 and launched 6th May 1814, being completed on 6th December 1814. She belonged to the Conway class sailing sixth rates of which ten were built to an 1812 design by Sir William Rule. All ten were ordered on 18 January 1812, with nine being launched during 1814. The last (Tees) was delayed and was launched in 1817, the same year that HMS Trincomalee was launched in Bombay.

HMS Towey was first commissioned at Portsmouth on 1st November 1814. In about December 1816, the Captain of the Towey up to that time, Captain Hew Stewart, was dismissed from the command of the ship by a Court Martial held at Trincomalee. As our ship prepared to leave Ceylon, William Hill was Captain of the Towey.

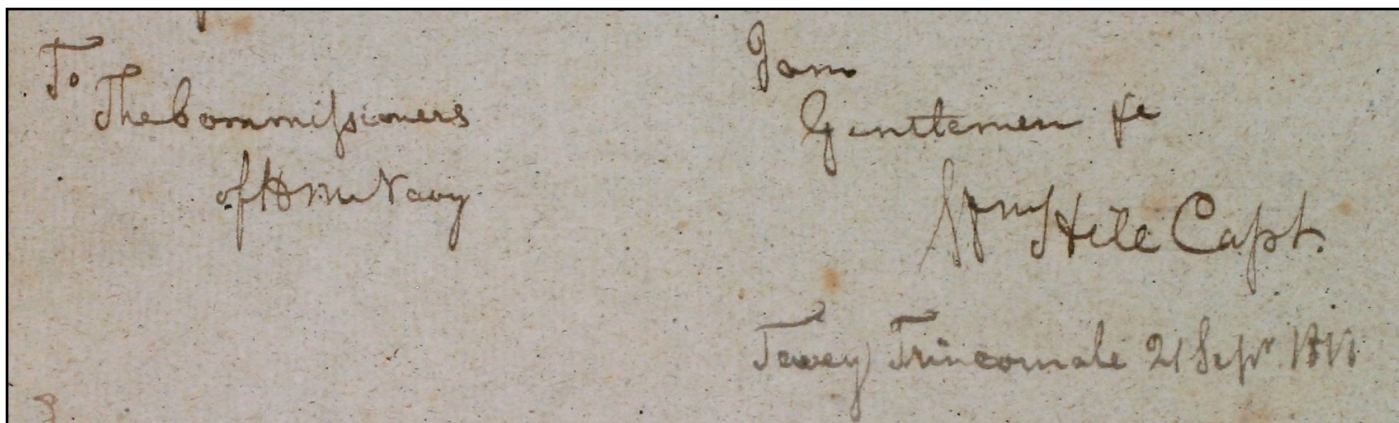
HMS Trincomalee was accompanied all the way as far as the vicinity of the Scilly Isles by HMS Towey. There are some letters logged in a diary kept by Captain Hill relating to the period.

As preparations were being made for the trip to England, Captain Hill wrote to Sir Richard King:

“Trincomalee 30 August 1818

Sir,

Mr Kent assistant Surgeon doing duty as Surgeon of HMS and under my Command, having



William Hill's handwriting - Captain of HMS Towey at Trincomalee 1818

represented to me that it is necessary the Sick onboard and the said Ship should be supplied with fresh Beef daily -

I have therefore to request you will be pleased to give our order to the agent Victualler forth at purpose.

To Sir R King Br & KLB

I have [?] William Hill Captain"

And then:

"Towey Trincomalee 3 Oct 1818

Sir,

there being no Shirts in Store I have to request you will give an order for His Majesty Ship under my Command to be supplied with

I have the honour to be Sir, William Hill Captain

To Sir Richard King Bt."

The surgeon of the Towey was also checking his stock of medicines, as revealed in this next letter:

"Towey Trincomalee 10 Oct 1818

Sir

Mr Charles Linton Surgeon of HMShip under my Command, having by letter of this date request me to apply for a Survey to be held on the medicines "

We trust that adequate medicines and shirts were provided to the Towey as she supported our ship on her maiden voyage.

The Voyage Commences – Ceylon to Mauritius

Whilst HMS Trincomalee was being fitted out, she was temporarily under the command of a Lieutenant Ellice, however in mid-October 1818 the ship was commissioned with the crew of HMS Challenger, and their Captain, Philip Henry Bridges was in charge of our ship. The Trincomalee had a temporary rig and an armament of four 12-pounder guns for the voyage to England.

On 27th October 1818 Eliza Bunt (now a widow returning to Portsea) and her children joined the ship, and the two ships HMS Trincomalee and HMS Towey sailed from Trincomalee.

On 31st October that year, HMS Trincomalee was anchored at Point de Galle with its fine harbour facing south, at the southern end of Ceylon, latitude 6 degrees north. She left the port on 4th

November to continue on to Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius, which she reached on 26th November 1818.

Eliza Bunt makes a few references in her diary to the Towey and Captain Hill during the passage from Ceylon to Mauritius:

1818

November 6: "Towey very near us Captain gone on Board of her to spend the day"

November 11: "The Captain informed us that Captain Hill had made a signal wherein he enquired after our health"

Friday November 13: "Captain gone to dine on board the Towey."

November 17: "Weather not at all settled ... a man fell over board belonging to the Towey a boat let down from the Towey and one from the Trincomalee the man picked up and saved by another man jumping over board with the life buoy ..."

[Captain's Log HMS Trincomalee: "Towey made a signal man over board shortened sail lowered the jolly boat observed the man saved by the life buoy and made sail."]

November 18:" Captain Hill and a Colonel of artillery came to dine with Captain Bridges. In the afternoon Captain Hill sent to say that he would pay his respects to me if agreeable of course could not refuse a formal visit from Captain Bridges Hill & Colonel Young [Colonel Young, the future father-in-law of Captain Bridges] found them very pleasant agreeable men"

The two ships reached Port Louis on 26th November 1818.

Mauritius

In September 1715 this island, having been abandoned by the Dutch, became a French colony when Guillaume Dufresne d'Arsel landed and took possession of this port of call on the route to India. He named the island "Isle de France". The French started their occupation of the island in 1721, and the capital, Port Louis, was developed as a naval base and shipbuilding centre.

During the Napoleonic wars the "Isle de France" was a base from which French corsairs made successful raids on British commercial ships, these raids continuing until 1810. In that year the British landed in large numbers. During 20th to 27th August 1810 the Battle of Grand Port took place between squadrons of frigates from the French Navy and the British Royal Navy, this proved a disaster for the British with them losing all of their four frigates involved in the action, one ship was captured after suffering irreparable damage, two were grounded and set on fire to prevent their capture by French boarding parties. and the remaining ship was seized as it left the harbour.

Later in the year the British forces overpowered the French capturing the island on 3 December 1810. By the Treaty of Paris in 1814, the island, renamed Mauritius, was ceded to Great Britain, with the British giving a guarantee that they would respect the languages, customs, laws and traditions of the inhabitants.

When the two ships arrived at Mauritius, just four years after the Treaty of Paris, the senior officer at Port Louis was Captain B Purvis of HMS Magicienne. This fifth-rate frigate launched in 1812 was given the same name as one of the four frigates lost by the British during the Battle of Grand Port.



Battle of Grand Port (1810) by Pierre Julien Gilbert

Captain Hill of the Towey addressed the concerns of his ship's surgeon to Captain Purvis:

"Towey Port Louis 30 Nov 1818

Sir,

I beg leave to enclose a copy of a letter this day received from the Surgeon of HMS Ship under my Command and request you will give the necessary directions for the same being ...

Signed Hill Captain

To B Purvis Esq. Capt, HMS Magicienne and Senior Officer at Port Louis

COPY:

Towey Port Louis 29 Nov 1818

I beg leave to request that you will ... to apply for a Medical Survey to be held ... Mr Fred. Burrows Doctor of HMS Towey

As there exists at present a strong disposition to Scurvy in a number of the Ships Company of HMS Towey under your command, and being of the opinion that a daily supply of fresh beef and vegetables to the whole of the ships company whilst in this harbour would essentially contribute to remove this scorbutic tendency, and act as a powerful preventative of its continuing more generally. I beg leave to request that you will be pleased to make the necessary application for a supply of the same

I have the honour
signed Captain Linton Surgeon

To Capt. Hill HMS Towey"

Port Louis was a safe port welcoming vessels from many nations, and was a place for socialising. Eliza Bunt records in her diary:

Sunday November 29: [At Port Louis, Mauritius] "Captain Bridges and Captain Hill introduced me to Captain Roye and Lady Miss Kennington English and Mr Pemburton and four French ladies and as many French gentlemen the party consisted of twenty one Ladys and gentlemen all very pleasant and agreeable."

Wednesday December 9: "The whole ship very busy in preparations for sea the Towey under weigh all the passengers things coming on Board a gun fired for the ladies to come off the ship ... the amiable Miss Young and her father with their retinue [came on board]. Set sail from Port Louis at two O'Clock in the evening.

The ships left Port Louis on 9th December and arrived in Simon's Bay, the Cape of Good Hope, on the 27th of the same month.

The Cape of Good Hope



Table Bay, Cape of Good Hope painted in 1818 by Thomas Whitcombe

It was whilst they were at Simon's Bay that Captain Bridges married Miss Harriot Louisa Young, the only daughter of Colonel Alexander William Young, Commissioner-General of Mauritius on 6th January 1819 at Cape Town. Harriot had joined HMS Trincomalee at Mauritius, and completed the voyage to England as Mrs Bridges.

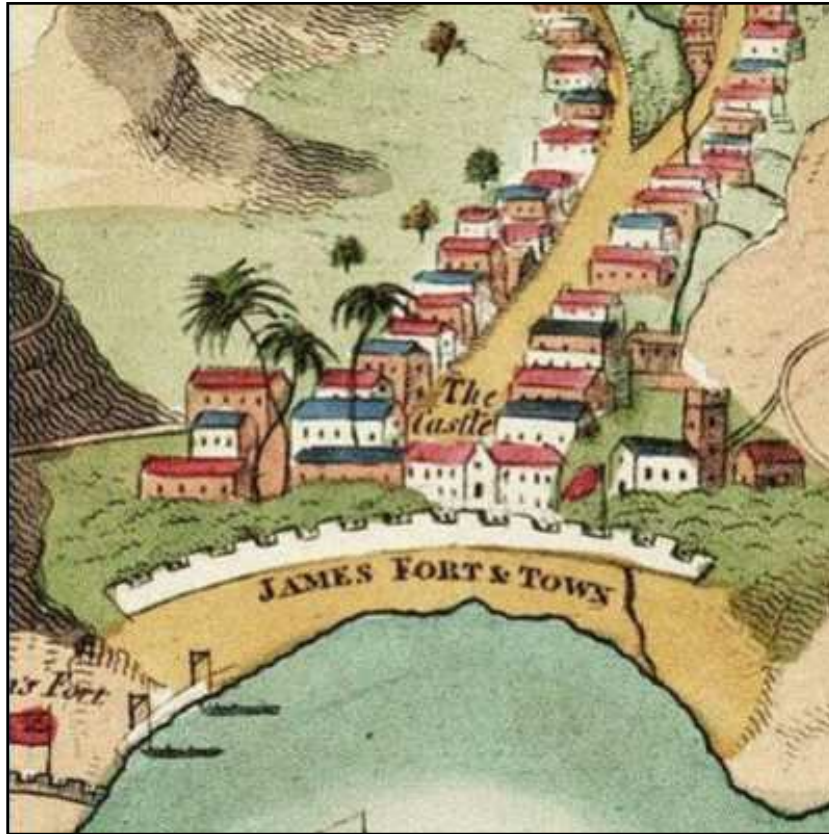


Cape of Good Hope in Cary's New Universal Atlas published in 1819



Simon's Bay, Cape of Good Hope

On the 9th January the ships left Simon's Bay for Table Bay, and having taken aboard a supply of live stock for the St Helena squadron, set sail from Table Bay on 13th January arriving at St Helena on 24th January.



1817 map of Jamestown, St Helena

St Helena

St Helena is only 28 miles in circumference, and prior to the arrival of Napoleon her population of under 4,000 was governed by the Honourable East India Company. The island was peaceful throughout the Napoleonic wars, not being affected by the naval actions between the French and British. The inhabitants looked after their flocks and crops, and socialised by visiting each other's houses. Their quiet life was occasionally broken when the Indian fleet was in Port, and Jamestown became not only the focus of trade, but also of entertainment in the form of dinners, dancing, plays and concerts.

Napoleon came ashore on 17th October 1815 with his French attendants and the squadron of HMS Northumberland with the 53rd Foot Regiment to guard him. Other troops arrived later helping to double the population of the island.

The social life at St Helena changed with the arrival of soldiers and sailors, and officials of both a military and civil type. The ladies of St Helena vied with each other to get invited to the houses of the titled wives of officials; Lady Malcolm, Lady Lowe, Lady Bingham, Countess de Montholon, Countess Bertrand and Baroness Sturmer. There were also Colonels' and Captains' wives adding to the social scene.

Rather than leave St Helena in the hands of the Honourable East India Company, since it was the British Government's responsibility to keep and guard Napoleon, the Government decided to appoint a Governor of their own choice, and on 14th April, 1816, Lieutenant-General Sir Hudson Lowe arrived at St Helena in HMS Phaeton to take the place of the incumbent Governor, Colonel Wilks.

Reports about the character of Sir Hudson Lowe vary. In his favour he played an important part in the abolition of slavery on the island. In August 1818 a slave girl in her early teens had been injured by a whipping on the island by her owner, Mr. Charles de Fountain. On becoming aware of this Sir

Hudson brought the matter of slavery up at the next Council meeting on the island. A meeting of the inhabitants was addressed by the Governor, during which he pointed out that public opinion at large was against slavery and that they should adopt the example set in Ceylon, by which all babies born to slaves were free. The meeting agreed to the principle suggested and a law was passed by which “all children born of a slave woman, from and after Christmas Day, 1818, were to be free, but to be considered as apprentices to the proprietors of the mothers if males, until the age of eighteen years, and if females, until sixteen; and that the masters and mistresses were to enforce the attendance of free-born children at church and the Sunday schools.”

HMS Trincomalee arrived at St Helena on 24th January 1819, just a month after this law had come into effect, and departed six days later, on 30th January. In port at the time were the ships HMS Conqueror (the flagship of Rear Admiral Plampin), the Tees, Dotteral, Redpole and Leveret.

HMS Conqueror

This 3d rate ship with an armament of 74 guns was launched at the yard of Mr Graham at Harwich on 23rd November 1801 and took part in the Battle of Trafalgar. In June 1817 she arrived at St Helena with Rear Admiral Plampin on board, who replaced Sir Pulteney Malcolm (1768-1849) as Commander-in-Chief of the naval forces stationed at St Helena.



Sir Pulteney Malcolm with his statue erected at Langholm, Scotland in 1842

Sir Pulteney had been in command since the previous year and had won the respect and friendship of Napoleon, although he had clashed with Sir Hudson Lowe, the Governor. With Plampin's agreement Lowe isolated the Inhabitants of Longwood House, where Napoleon was held, and he discontinued Sir Pulteney's practice of taking newly appointed officers to meet the famous captive.

The Conqueror stayed at St Helena until 1820, arriving at Spithead from the island on 14th September 1820.



Dr John Stokoe

Also on the Conqueror when she arrived at St Helena in June 1817 was a native of County Durham. John Sokoe was born in Ferryhill in 1775 and starting at the age of thirteen was an apprentice to his uncle, Dr Robert Stokoe, a retired naval surgeon. John attended medical classes in London, and became a full surgeon at the age of 23. He was bi-lingual, being able to speak Russian, and was a well respected surgeon.

Whilst on St Helena John was appointed as surgeon to Napoleon, however like Sir Pulteney Malcolm, he clashed with the Governor. John only met Napoleon five times, his opinion that the sub-tropical climate was inappropriate for his patient with his “chronic hepatitis” helped to trigger the threat of a court martial.

John applied for sick leave and said that he would leave his station, returning to England on HMS Trincomalee’s maiden voyage. On arrival at Portsmouth he was given a second medical and was ordered back to St Helena. 124 days after leaving Portsmouth he arrived at the island and rejoined the Conqueror. The result of his court martial, consisting of ten charges against him, was a foregone conclusion. No-one would conduct his defence and no witnesses appeared for him. His accusers, Lowe and Plampin had had several months to prepare the case against him.

Dr Stokoe left the navy, and was awarded a pension of £100 a year. In the census of 1851 he was living on Hallgarth Street in Durham. When he died of a stroke on 13th September 1852 he was a very rich man from his time at sea, and his wife and children had predeceased him. John left his fortune to the poor of Kirk Merrington and Ferryhill. The legacy enabled Christmas gifts to be given to the poor for almost 100 years, the bequest eventually running short of cash in the 1950s. John is buried in Kirk Merrington church yard next to St John’s Church where he once played the ‘cello in the Church orchestra.



Inscription on John Stokoe's Gravestone

Sacred
To the Memory of
JOHN STOKOE ESQ:
Late of Hallgarth Street,
Durham: and, for many years,
Surgeon in the Royal Navy.
He departed this life on
The 15th September 1852
Aged 77
The deceased by his will
Directs that the residue
Of his personal estate shall
Be invested, and the dividends
Yearly divided among the
Necessitous and deserving
Poor residing in Merrington
And Ferryhill.

Onward to Portsmouth

After departing from St Helena on 30th January 1819, the two ships with their crews and passengers went on to Ascension island where HMS Sappho was in port. They left Ascension island on 8th February, a day after the Tartar, under the command of Commodore Sir George Collier had left the island for the Coast of Africa.

HMS Trincomalee reached Fayal island in the Azores on 19th March where the Carnation, under Captain Glasscock was in port, and our ship left the next day.

On 27th March, near to the Scilly Isles, HMS Towey and HMS Trincomalee parted company. Our ship anchored at Spithead on 29th March, and later landed at Portsmouth on 3rd April.

So it was that our ship, manned by the previous Captain and crew of HMS Challenger safely arrived in England. Eliza Bunt and her children disembarked to stay for about the next eighteen months in rooms on Hawk Street near to the dockyard. Dr John Stokoe, as already mentioned, soon found himself sailing back to St Helena for unfinished business.

The Trincomalee brought home a quantity of stores, and a great number of invalids from the different ships and hospitals it had encountered. Among these invalids were Lieutenant Wilson from HMS Towey, Lieutenant Waterhouse from HMS Tartar, and Lieutenant Welchman, RM, of HMS Minden.

During the ship's passage to England twenty of the invalids who had embarked on her did not survive the voyage. HMS Towey's purser, Mr Burrows, had died at Mauritius and had been replaced by the Captain's Clerk of the *Magicienne*. On a happier note, Captain Bridges arrived at home with his wife whom he had married during our ship's maiden voyage. The ship was paid off at sunset on 27th April 1819.

Placed "in ordinary"

After arriving at Portsmouth HMS Trincomalee had the temporary armament for her passage to England removed, and the remaining stores sent across the dockyard. The ship was then taken alongside a sheer-hulk, her rigging taken down and her masts removed. A roof was placed over the upper deck for protection and as such she was moored up "in ordinary" not being required for immediate active service.

The cost of placing the Trincomalee "in ordinary" was some £2,405. This was in addition to £23,642 which was paid to the Bombay contractors for her building, and a further £6,681 which had been expended on victualling and stores for the journey to England.



The Saluting Platform at Portsmouth by E W Cooke, engraved by Finden

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