

# Celebrating 200 years of HMS Trincomalee



On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017 the Friends of HMS Trincomalee held a dinner party to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of HMS Trincomalee. The following morning, 200 years from the day that the ship was handed over to the Royal Navy at Bombay, some of us joined in the celebrations aboard the ship. With such a long history she has been connected with many events.

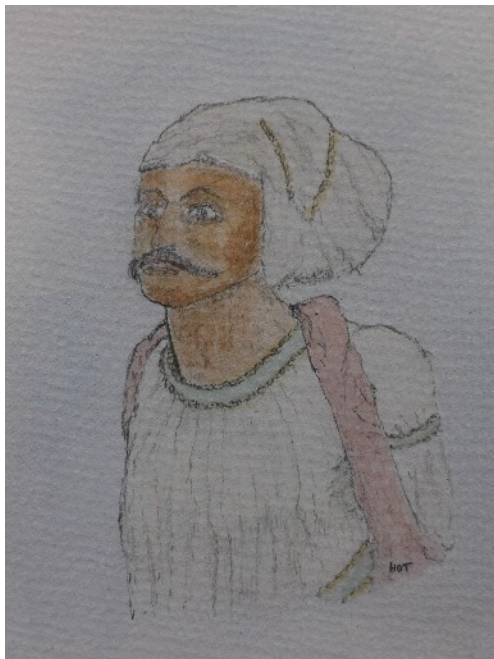
The following is a reminder of some of these, looking at the British war with America in 1812, Napoleon's exile at St. Helena after the battle of Waterloo in 1815, the slave trade in the West Indies in the 1840s, the gold-rush in British Columbia and in the 1850s the part our ship played in the search for Sir John Franklin after he went missing in the Arctic looking for the North-West passage.

HMS Trincomalee was also involved with the protection of Hawaii before it became a State of America and the Crimean War of the 1850s. The Naval Reserve group aboard the ship when it was at Sunderland in the 1860s took a significant stand on the American Civil war. In World War One HMS Trincomalee, under the name of TS Foudroyant, was a training ship and a number of those trained aboard her went on to serve in the Royal Navy. This occurred again under the auspices of the Royal Navy during the Second World War.

The ship has links to the founder of the scouting movement, Lord Baden-Powell, the painter Henry Scott Tuke, and some actors who include Gregory Peck.

## The Birth of HMS Trincomalee

The original plans for HMS Trincomalee were sent out from the Admiralty to Bombay aboard HMS Java in 1812. The plans were for a Leda class frigate, and a number of ships had already been built for the Royal Navy in the Bombay Dockyard by the Wadia family of master ship-builders. In 1812 England was still at war with the French, and warships were required.



Ship's Figurehead

Bombay Dockyard was used due to the excellent skills of the Parsi workers there and the ready supply of teak from the nearby Malabar teak forests. Britain was getting short of native oak, and it was found that teak was more resistant to boring worms than oak.

Unfortunately HMS Java, with the plans onboard, was sailing during an Anglo-American war and she met up with the American ship, the Constitution. The upshot was that the Constitution sank the Java, and the original plans of HMS Trincomalee were lost.

The Constitution, "Old Ironsides", is now the oldest warship afloat in the World. It is docked at Boston, USA. This leaves HMS Trincomalee as the second oldest warship afloat in the World, and the oldest warship afloat in Europe. How different things might have been if the Constitution had been sunk instead.

A fresh set of plans were sent from the Admiralty to Bombay aboard HMS Stirling Castle and this time they arrived safely.

HMS Trincomalee was handed over to the Royal Navy on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1817 and launched a week later on 19<sup>th</sup> October. The ship then sailed to the British Naval Dockyard at Trincomalee in Ceylon, present day Sri Lanka, for fitting out.

### **The Maiden Voyage**

Our ship's maiden voyage, Trincomalee to Portsea, commenced in October 1818. The Captain was Philip Bridges, and on route to England he married the daughter of the Comissionary-General of Mauritius at the Cape of Good Hope. Philip Bridges is related to the poet laureate from 1913 to 1930, Robert Bridges. The ship was escorted on this maiden voyage by HMS Towey.

We are fortunate that a diary was kept by one of the passengers on this maiden voyage, Eliza Bunt.

Eliza Bunt's husband was employed at the Trincomalee dockyard, and died from a fever. Eliza and her children therefore returned to England. However her diary is not full of sadness. Before leaving Ceylon, Eliza had formed an emotional attachment to a Naval officer there, whom she hoped to meet up with again in England. The diary is owned by a descendant of Eliza Bunt, and a Friend of HMS Trincomalee, Mary Hope Monnery. Mary transcribed the diary and published it in paperback. An e book version is available.

When the ship reached St Helena a further passenger was added to the list, Dr John Stokoe. John hails from County Durham. He was born at Ferryhill and after qualifying as a surgeon arrived at St Helena and briefly tended upon Napoleon Bonaparte who was in exile there. John noted the poor conditions Napoleon was kept in and got the wrong side of the Governor of St. Helena at that time, Sir Hudson Lowe. Consequently Dr Stokoe was offered the choice of a Court martial, or to return to England on board HMS Trincomalee. He chose the latter.

John kept in touch with Napoleon's family after his return to England, and he wrote a book about his exploits. John Stokoe lived awhile on Hallgarth Street, Durham. His grave is in Kirk Merrington, the gravestone tells of his good works for the local community.



John Stokoe

Our ship arrived at Portsmouth at the end of April 1819 and was placed "in ordinary". Not needed for an immediate commission the masts were placed in storage and the upper decks covered with a temporary roof. This state of "in ordinary" still required monitoring and repair of the ship's structures, and also re-coppering of the hull when needed. In this state the ship could be prepared to go on an active commission in two weeks.

### **The First & Second Commissions**

The First of the Two commissions of HMS Trincomalee during the mid-Victorian period was to the North American and West Indies station, 1847 to 1850. The Captain was Richard Laird Warren, and he was noted for being a strict disciplinarian. It is difficult to find details about this commission. HMS Trincomalee was much involved with monitoring and taking action on slave trading vessels in the West Indies.

After a further spell of being “in ordinary” the ship’s second commission was from 1852 to 1857 attached to the Pacific Station. By this time HMS Trincomalee was a relatively old ship, and steam ships were superior for warfare. However, being a sailing ship, our ship did have the advantage of not needing to refuel with coal during her commission.

With the lack of accessible coal stocks in the American North-East sailing ships still had a use in being able to be at sea for long periods of time without being limited due to coal shortage.

The main base for HMS Trincomalee during its second commission was Fort Victoria, and Esquimalt Bay in British Columbia. It was very much the pioneer days in the development of Fort Victoria, and our ship, under Captain Wallace Houston, was involved in incidents with the native indians. Captain Houston was much respected by his crew, who he had turn out in a uniform with red shirts.



Fort Victoria

The first known record of a theatrical performance in Vancouver Island is of a performance aboard HMS Trincomalee when she was docked there. A few diaries kept by inhabitants of Fort Victoria at the time mention our ship, amongst them one kept by a teenager, Martha Cheney. One entry in Martha’s diary says:

*“I had a ride with uncle around the plain ... I had to churn and make up the butter ... Ironing all day ... We set the goose on five eggs ... went to a dancing party on board the ‘Trincomalee’, kept up until four o’clock in the morning.”*

Our ship provided support to the ships searching for Sir John Franklin in the Arctic, bringing supplies to Port Clarence in the Behring Straits which were transferred to HMS Plover which had been iced up further North-East in the Arctic at Point Barrow the previous winter.

Captain Houston took letters from England to HMS Plover, and sent a dispatch from Port Clarence to the Admiralty detailing what had occurred. HMS Plover was to return to Point Barrow, and some of her crew were deemed unfit to continue in the Arctic search, they were transferred to HMS Trincomalee. These crew members that had been on HMS Plover were replaced by volunteers from our ship. The Commander of HMS Plover, Rochfort Maguire, kept a diary and he mentions how the Trincomalee brought up a large supply of live stock, including two bullocks and several pigs, and how the crew of our ship mixed with the Esquimaux and worked on boat repairs,



During the time of her second commission the ship was sent to Honolulu. At that time the Hawaiian islands were independent and ruled by King Kamehameha the Third. A most influential character was King Kamehameha's Minister of Foreign Relations, a character called Robert Crichton, a product of Scotland.

Due to their geographical position, the Hawaiian Islands were of great interest to Britain, Russia and America, providing a site for their ships to renew their stocks of food and water whilst on their travels in the Pacific ocean. The gold-rush around San Francisco had created pockets of unsavoury types. Some of these had heard that King Kamehameha the Third was faced with an insurrection from amongst his own people, and they travelled to Hawaii with the intent to support the rebels and seek their own fortunes there.

America, Russia and Britain all sent ships to Honolulu to protect King Kamehameha from the rebels. The three countries were also protecting their own interests.

The San Francisco brigands failed to have an impact on Hawaii.



King Kamehameha the Third

One occasion when HMS Trincomalee was at Honolulu, the Russian frigate Diana was there as well. Even though the Crimean War was in its early stages "Entire good feelings existed between the British and Russian officers, attending balls and fraternizing heartily together."

HMS Trincomalee was also present at Honolulu during the final days of King Kamehameha the Third. The King with Robert Crichton's help was preparing to annex the Hawaiian Islands to America, however the King died of alcohol related causes before this was completed.

HMS Trincomalee and her crew played rôles at the king's funeral in January 1855. In the funeral cortege, the body of marines from the different vessels in Honolulu at the time was led by the English marines of the Trincomalee in their red and white uniforms. Captain Houstoun was the senior officer in port and hence our ship marines led the rest.

The king's successor was the young Alexander Liliho, and he wished to savour the position of being king of an independent realm. For this reason it was a number of years later before the Hawaiian Islands became a State of America.

HMS Trincomalee did take part in the Crimean War at sea ....

A significant part of this war with Russia was waged at sea. HMS Trincomalee was sent to the port of Petropavlovsk in 1855. A member of her crew, Charles Parry, was the son of the famous arctic sea explorer Sir William Parry. Charles brother recalls that:

*"The voyage to Petropaulovski was full of expectation for the crew of the 'Trincomalee', who hoped to share in hostile proceedings which might redeem the British defeat at that place the preceding year; but their actual employment was of a very peaceful yet interesting nature. They visited her under a flag of truce, spending the last week of June in an interchange of hospitalities with the Russians, whilst affecting the exchange of prisoners."*

As well as Charles Parry in the crew during the ship's second commission, Sir Lambton Loraine served as a midshipman during the entire commission. Lambton's ancestral home is just north of Newcastle-upon-Tyne at Kirkharle. Capability Brown was born at Kirkharle, and you can visit the grounds of Kirkharle which were the first to be landscaped by Capability Brown. The hall is in private use, however there is a café and a few shops in the outbuildings.

Lambton became the eleventh Baronet Loraine at the young age of thirteen and recorded his time aboard our ship in his memoirs. Another member of the crew was Philip Saumarez who was a descendent of Admiral de Saumarez. Admiral de Saumarez was second in command to Admiral Nelson at the battle of the Nile.

After the second commission our ship was placed in reserve at Portsmouth.



Sir Lambton Loraine

## Naval Reserve Base

The next use of HMS Trincomalee was in the North-East of England, and in 1861 she became the base for the Royal Naval Reserve at Sunderland. The American Civil War was happening at this time and an episode known as the Trent Affair increased the likelihood that Britain would become actively engaged in the war. Two Confederate Commissioners, Mason & Slidell, were aboard the British mail steamer, the Trent, on route to England. They carried some dispatches.

Slidell was travelling with his wife and daughter. Whilst the ship was at Havannah, his daughter, Miss Slidell, danced at a ball with a Lieutenant Fairfax from America who had arrived aboard the ship, San Jacinto. Miss Slidell talked to Lieutenant Fairfax freely of the pleasant voyage to England she and her family were anticipating. Fairfax reported back to the Captain of the San Jacinto, and Captain Wilks became determined to seize the two Southern Commissioners.

Although the two Commissioners were seized from the British ship, the dispatches were saved due to the prompt transfer of them from Mr to Mrs Slidell after the San Jacinto had fired her guns. The hiding-place chosen for the dispatches relied on the fact that the right to search did not extend to crinoline. Miss Slidell kept watch at the door of her father's cabin, and when her once dancing partner, Lieutenant Fairfax, tried to force his way in she slapped him on his face. Fairfax's response was to order his marines to charge bayonets against the determined young woman...Fortunately a British Lieutenant interposed between Miss Slidell and the bayonets' points.

The fact that a British ship had been boarded by the Americans in such a way gave rise to a diplomatic incident.

In Sunderland the Naval Reserve based on HMS Trincomalee held a meeting on board the ship and pledged their willingness to fight the Americans should Britain join the war. In 1861 Disraeli visited the Naval Reserve in Sunderland, as Gladstone did the following year when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. They both thanked them for their support.

The ship was moved to Hartlepool in 1863 and continued to serve the Naval Reserve. The surgeon David Lyall held a post with the crew. David Lyall was born in Auchenblae, in Aberdeenshire in 1817 and qualified in Surgery at Edinburgh. He at first served on a whaling ship bound to Greenland before joining the Royal Navy in 1839. David Lyall, was assistant surgeon aboard HMS Terror and travelled



David Lyall

on Captain James Ross's voyage to the Antarctic. David , together with the botanist Joseph Hooker, collected 80 flowering plants, released sheep, poultry and rabbits, and planted a variety of vegetables and garden fruit.

The voyage did not return to England until late in 1842, by which time he had formed an important herbarium of over 1500 species.

Amongst several plant species his name is remembered by are "Anemone lyalli", the little mountain anemone, and trees such as the mountain ribbonwood, "Hoheria lyalli" and the subalpine larch "Larix lyalli".

David also has some islands named after him in Antarctica, the Lyall Islands having been discovered by Captain James Ross in 1841.

HMS Trincomalee left Hartlepool in 1877. By 1897 plans were afoot to have the ship broken up, however an incident off the North Pier at Blackpool in June 1897 saved her from this fate.

## Saved from the Ship-Breakers

Geoffrey Wheatley Cobb was a philanthropist using his family's wealth, to preserve Caldicott castle as his home near Newport, South Wales and also to preserve old wooden sailing ships. In 1897 Geoffrey was touring sea-side resorts around England with HMS Foudroyant which had been Nelson's flagship .Aboard was a crew which included young boys from deprived back grounds, for whom life aboard the ship was viewed good for their physical and mental well-being. Many of these boys went on to join the Royal or Merchant Navy.

In June the ship was wrecked in Blackpool, a blue plaque commemorates this on the promenade in Blackpool. Our ship, HMS Trincomalee, was saved from being broken up by Geoffrey and fitted out to become a replacement for the wrecked Foudroyant. Our ship was renamed the Foudroyant, and kept this name until 1986 when she converted back to the name of HMS Trincomalee.

As TS Foudroyant our ship was based at Falmouth from 1907 to 1930. During this time the artist Henry Tuke Scott visited the ship, painting some of the boys from the ship. Henry also helped Geoffrey Wheatley Cobb with the artwork for a brochure appealing for funds.



Plaque at Blackpool



Many of the boys who had been aboard the Foudroyant at Falmouth went on to serve at sea during the First World War.

For a time our ship was moored near to the Cutty Sark in Falmouth, the two ships being tourist attractions.

Geoffrey helped to preserve a second ship, the Implacable, and by this time he was supported by the Chief Scout, Lord Baden-Powell. The Implacable was saved until it was finally scuttled in 1949 with much ceremony.

Baden-Powell visited the ship and sea scouts spent time aboard her before the Second World War. Geoffrey died in 1932.

### **Naval Cadet Training**

At the time of the Second World War the Implacable and the Foudroyant were moored together at Portsmouth. The ships were used to train naval cadets during the war, and amongst the officers on board was Lieutenant Colonel Harold Wyllie. Harold was the son of William Wyllie, who was a professional painter living in Portsmouth and who had painted the diorama of the battle of Trafalgar on display at Portsmouth Naval Dockyard. Harold Wyllie was an accomplished artist in his own right.

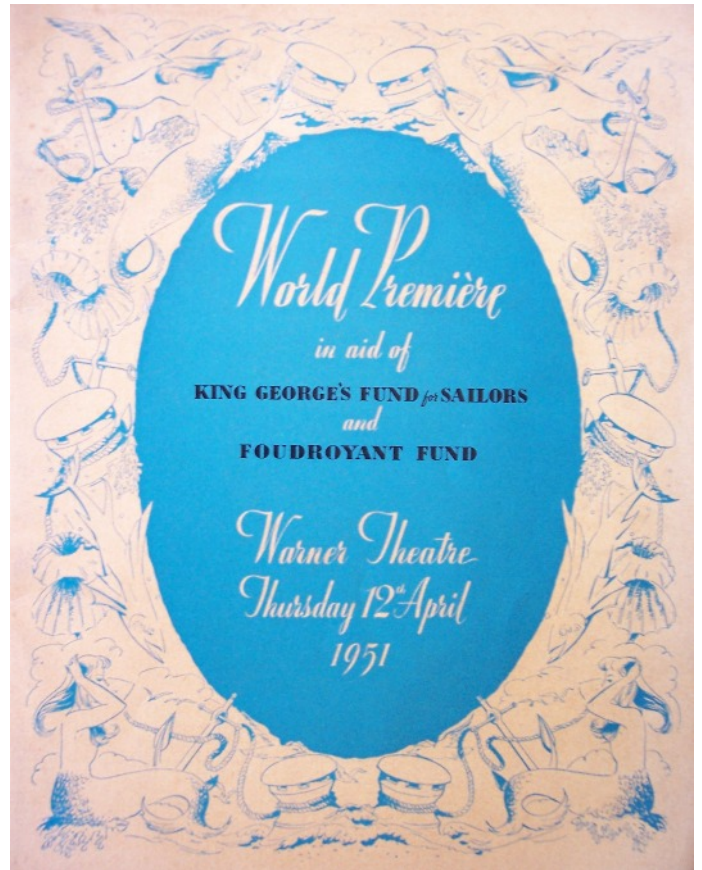
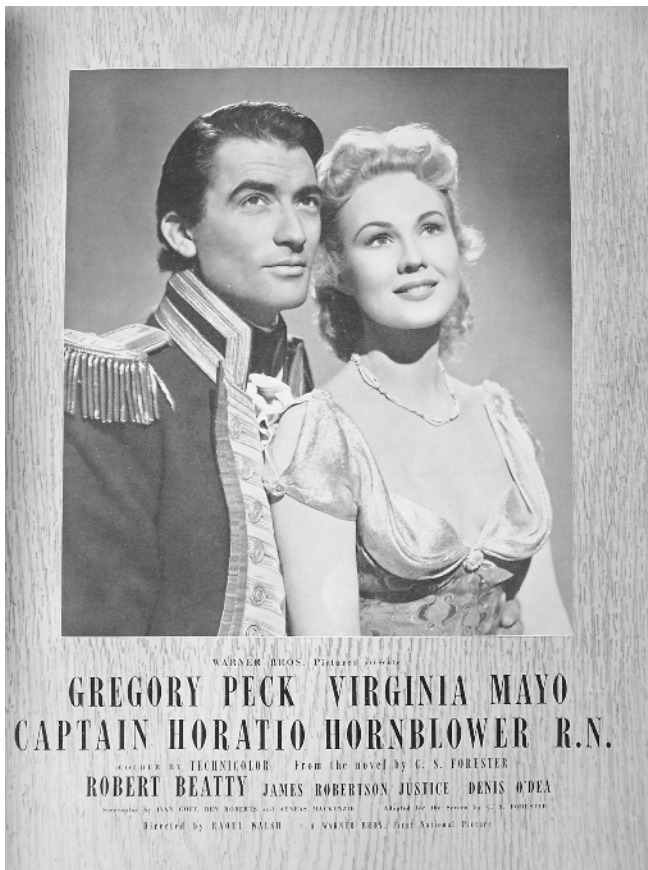


Sketch of the Foudroyant by Harold Wyllie

### **Since the Second World War**

After the war, the Foudroyant remained at Portsmouth and was used as an outward-bound type centre for school children, scouts, guides, sea cadets and sea rangers. In 1950 Princess Margaret as Commodore for the Sea Rangers visited the ship at the age of 19.

She sat on the seat that Baden-Powell had used when he wrote his famous book "Scouting for Boys" and she joined in singing songs with the rangers. A cake made by the sea rangers was presented to their Commodore. This cake was a representation of the Foudroyant, and Princess Margaret took the miniature cannons from the cake to give to her young nephew, Prince Charles.



Gregory Peck helped with an appeal for funds to preserve the Foudroyant, and the World Première of Midshipman Hornblower collected money for the Foudroyant Trust. This film première was at the Warner's Cinema in Leicester Square in April 1952, and was attended by Princess Margaret. A picture of our ship by Harold Wyllie was included in the souvenir programme.

Our ship has been used as a setting for many films, both for the silver screen and television. In 1927 Cedric Hardwicke starred in the life of Nelson .... more recently she appeared in the television history of the Royal Navy, and this year she features in the television drama about Queen Victoria.

HMS Trincomalee has been at Hartlepool for the last three decades. She has been restored there and is open to the public to visit.

The Friends of HMS Trincomalee was founded in 1993, and has since become a registered charity. Amongst our members are some who are related to those who built the ship at Bombay, and some who are related to those who were on the ship, from her maiden voyage onwards. There are also members who have first hand experience of HMS Trincomalee from their naval cadet or sail training days. Other members were involved with the ship's restoration here at Hartlepool Through its website, magazine and talks the Friends help to promote and preserve our ship. It is a fascinating vessel, with a history spanning two centuries.







The Secretary, Chairman and Patron with his Wife

The Friends of HMS Trincomalee  
Celebrating 200 years of our ship  
11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2017

**TK002: The main part of this article was originally the after-dinner speech given by the Chairman to the alumni and alumnae of the Open University at their annual weekend meeting, in May 2017.**

**In modified forms the material has been presented to a local Women's Institute group, and used in the souvenir brochure for attendees at the Friends' Dinner Party on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017.**

[Friendsofhmstrincomalee.org.uk](http://Friendsofhmstrincomalee.org.uk)