

ROUGH NOTES ON HMS FORMIDABLE - 1825 to 1906

(at Portishead 1869 to 1906)

1825 to 1840 - Completion and laid up in ordinary at Sheerness

HMS Formidable was one of the nine Canopus-class 84-gun two-deck second rate ships of the line designed by Robert Seppings (1767 to 1840), the eminent naval architect and Surveyor of the Navy. That class was in fact based on an enlarged version of the lines of the Franklin, a French third rate captured in 1798 and later commissioned into the Royal Navy as HMS Canopus, although that ship was not officially described as a member of the class. Sometimes referred to as the Formidable-class, the other members were the Ganges launched in 1821; Asia and Vengeance (1824); Powerful (1826); Clarence (1827); Bombay (1828); Thunderer (1831); and Monarch (1832).

The Formidable had a displacement of 3594 ton (builders measure 2289 tons), her deck was 230 feet long, of which the gun-deck occupied 193 feet 10 inches, while her beam measured 52 feet 5 inches, and her hold was 22 feet 6 inches deep. Her hull was pierced for fully 100 guns, there being twenty ports on the upper deck, thirty-six on the main deck, and forty on the lower deck, in addition to stern ports on each deck for stern chasers. However, her normal armament comprised 84 muzzle loading guns, made up of 28 x 32 pounder heavy guns and 2 x 68 pounder carronades on the gun-deck, while the upper gun-deck was equipped with 32 x 24 pounder heavy guns, her quarter-deck with 6 x 24 pounder heavy guns and 10 x 32 pounder carronades, and her forecastle with 2 x 24 pounder heavy guns and 4 x 32 pounder carronades. A typical compliment for HMS Formidable was 540 officers and men, 60 boys, and 150 marines, making her one of the Royal Navy's largest ships when launched.

She had been ordered on 8 May 1815, laid down in October 1819 using frames captured on the stocks at Genoa in 1814, and launched at the Royal Dockyard at Chatham in 1825, a ceremony that was subsequently reported in 'Baldwin's London Weekly Journal': "This beautiful ship of 84 guns was launched on 19 May, amidst several thousand spectators, who assembled upon the occasion. The day being remarkably fine, rendered the scene highly interesting. Such was the desire of Commissioner Cunningham to accommodate the company, that he directed not only several booths to be built on each side of the ship, but ordered that two sloops of war should be moored thwart the river, with booths erected in them for the reception of the company, declaring, that as the Public contributed to the support of the Navy, they should gratified with a sight of the launch, and to him they are much indebted for his kindness. The frame of this ship is composed mostly of Adriatic oak, and is so built as an experiment, amongst many others adopted by the Honourable Boards of Admiralty and Navy, with a view to prove the durability of various descriptions of timber, and upon which time alone must decide. About half-past one, the dog-shore was removed, and she went off the stocks in grand style, the bands of the various regiments playing "God save the King."

"This handsome ship may be considered another specimen of our improved system of naval architecture, having, in addition to a round bow, a circular stern, on the principle of

Sir Robert Seppings, which, when compared with the first of the kind built, fully proves how much in a few years has been accomplished by perseverance - for those non-essentials which were so strongly objected to, are now removed, without any alteration in the original design - viz., strength to the whole body of the ship, and great advantages in fighting the after guns, in almost any direction. When in the water this ship looked exceedingly handsome, surpassing any of the kind launched from this yard before."

At that period certain Royal Navy vessels still used carvings of classical figures as figureheads, although their ornateness was limited by an Admiralty order dated 1815 which allotted just £21 to those intended for a second-rate vessel. In the case of HMS Formidable the figurehead measured approximately 9 feet high, by 4 feet 6 inches deep, and 5 feet wide, and depicted Mars, the Roman god of war. The Formidable, which had cost £64,342 to build, was put out of dock at Chatham on 18 June, but having been completed, and in spite of all the expense lavished on her, she was not required for active service. Instead she was laid up 'in ordinary', which entailed having her decks covered by canvas and joining a reserve fleet in which each vessel was provided with only a skeleton maintenance crew. Such vessels were anchored for long term storage at various anchorages, and in the case of the Formidable it was off the River Medway near Sheerness which, in 1824, the Admiralty had decided would serve primarily as a refitting base, leaving Chatham to concentrate on shipbuilding.

She remained at Sheerness for over 25 years, and although on two occasions during that time plans were announced regarding preparations for service, neither appears to have come to fruition. The first occasion on which that happened was at the beginning of April 1828, when it was said that orders had been received at Sheerness Dockyard to get the Howe, the Formidable, and the Powerful in readiness for service immediately, but nothing more was heard of the scheme. The next published account concerning the Formidable was in 1833, when it was reported that on 24 April she had been taken into the dock at Sheerness to have her bottom examined and defects made good. That process took until 13 May when she was un-docked and placed in the basin from where, on the 22nd, the Formidable was moved to the harbour.

At times certain major ports or waterways were assigned a guardship, which could also serve as the naval headquarters for the area. By contrast to a ship in ordinary, these vessels carried sails and rigging, were de-fouled below the waterline to increase their speed under sail, and manned by at least one quarter of their normal crew. If an enemy fleet was sighted, a guardship could become fully manned and ready for sea in a matter of hours or days, as opposed to the months it could take to re-commission those in ordinary. In late January 1835 it was reported that HMS Formidable had been ordered to the basin at Sheerness for fitting out as the guardship there, and to be made ready for commissioning as the flag-ship for the Medway. It was anticipated that she would then take the place of HMS Ocean, which was to be sunk as a breakwater to protect part of the dockyard. However, the latter plan was never carried out, and the Ocean continued to act as the flagship at Sheerness for many years.

1840 and 1841 - Preparation for Service and Commissioning

By January 1840 the Formidable was still in ordinary at Sheerness, but towards the middle of September of that year the paddle gun-vessel Lightning was ordered from Woolwich to Sheerness in order to tow her to Chatham where she was to be docked and fitted for sea. That move had become necessary as the shipwrights at Sheerness were fully occupied working on other vessels. While at Chatham it was also ordered that the people were to work on the Formidable from daylight till dusk in order that the work could be completed in a month. On 24 October some nine ships of the line were recorded as being brought forward for commission "with every practicable dispatch." These were divided between Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Chatham, and it was there in mid-October that a correspondent described the Formidable as being "universally admired for the beauty of her structure." Then, at the beginning of December 1840, the Formidable was reported as quite ready for commission, being masted and all her stores prepared, while on 24 December it was announced that she had "arrived at that state which their Lordships directed." That was to have her lower masts rigged and topmast pointed, and consequently on the previous day orders had been received for her to be put out of the docks and sent to the Sheerness ordinary, where she was to remain until required for sea service.

Unfortunately the winter was very cold, and although on 5 February 1841 the Firebrand and Salamander steam tugs had been dispatched from Woolwich for the purpose of towing HMS Formidable and HMS London to Sheerness the severe frost caused the river to ice over preventing the order to be carried out. Nevertheless, by 1 March they were reported to be at Sheerness, where they were lying at their moorings ready for commission, but it was to be the first week of July before it was finally ordered that commissioning was to be brought forward. Consequently, on 23 August 1841 Captain Edward Thomas Troubridge, Bart., C.B., 2nd Lord of the Admiralty (*Appendix 1 No.1*), was posted to HMS Formidable, and on the morning of the 25th the Firebrand steam tug left Woolwich for Sheerness having on board Captain Troubridge who was to commission the Formidable. That having been done, on 7 September the Monkey paddle steamer delivered Captain Frederick Layton, Lieutenants Richard Meheux and Hugh Goold, a sergeant, two corporals, a drummer and sixty men of the Woolwich Division of Royal Marines to the Formidable, while the following day they were joined by a further body of Marines from Woolwich, transported to Sheerness aboard the Comet steam vessel.

On 6 November the Formidable was still at Sheerness, but by then she was in an advanced state, having not only the top-gallant masts pointed, but also the holds and tiers stowed and her guns and all her shot and associated stores on board. She was also about to be docked for the purpose of having her copper bottom cleaned and to take aboard the remainder of her guns, although she still required some good petty officers and able seamen. With the work almost completed, on 14 December, Captain Sir Charles Sullivan, Bart. (*Appendix 1 No.2*), took over as commander of the Formidable as on the 23rd it was announced that Captain Troubridge had been promoted to Rear Admiral on the Retired List.

1842 - Deployment in the Mediterranean

On 1 January 1842 the Formidable was reported to be almost ready for sea in spite of still being short of a number of crewmen and so, later in the month, the Formidable was ordered to Portsmouth to prepare to depart for Lisbon, prior to service on the Mediterranean Station. Consequently, she sailed from Sheerness harbour on 25 January but unfortunately, having sprung her capstan, was subsequently detained near the Nore Light at the mouth of the River Thames. While there, she was also ordered to remain a little longer in order to fire a parting royal salute to the King of Prussia as he passed by at 7 p.m. on 4 February on his return from a visit to England.

Early the following week the Formidable was finally able to continue her voyage to Portsmouth, but was detained for several more days in the Downs anchorage off Deal, on that occasion due to "foul westerly winds". After departing from the Downs on the 16th the Formidable then proved to be an excellent sailer, as having left four hours after HMS Alfred, her companion, she reached Portsmouth from the eastward on the morning of the 19th, half an hour before her. The Formidable then anchored at Spithead, and while awaiting the arrival of HMS Winchester, Rear-Admiral the Honourable Jocelyn Percy, Commander in Chief at Cape of Good Hope, temporarily hoisted his flag, blue, at her mizen.

Unfortunately, as she had again sprung her capstan, which probably had to be replaced by a new one, and her crew was still nearly a hundred hands short, yet another delay ensued. As a result the Formidable remained at Spithead until, with her compliment completed, wages paid, and in company with HMS Queen which was carrying the flag of Vice-Admiral Sir Edmund Owen, the Commander-in-Chief of the fleet in the Mediterranean, the pair finally got under weigh between nine and ten o'clock on the morning of 21 March 1842.

They then proceeded down the English Channel together, and the 84 gun HMS Formidable was reported to have arrived at Gibraltar on the morning of 28 March after a fine passage of seven days from Portsmouth. During that time she had again proved herself an excellent sea boat and a fast sailer. However, on arrival at the Straits of Gibraltar HMS Queen continued directly to Malta, while the Formidable was directed to take the place of HMS Malabar, which had been ordered back to England.

Tragically on 31 March the 12 year old Volunteer First Class Villebois Stuart, son of the Reverend John Lukin, the Rector of Nursling in Hampshire, died after accidentally falling from the mizen top of the Formidable while anchored at Gibraltar. In the short time he had been on board he had endeared himself to the ship's company by his bold, light hearted, good humoured and upright character. As he had all the promise of making a smart officer, he was buried with full military honours and a tablet was later erected in his honour.

HMS Formidable was to remain based at Gibraltar for the next six months or so, and on 22 June she was reported to have returned there from a four day cruise along the east coast of Spain. As HMS Thunderer had arrived at Gibraltar on 28 June, this allowed the Formidable to sail for Cadiz on 5 July. However, as she subsequently exchanged places with the Thunderer, by the 20th the Formidable was able to sail back to Gibraltar in

order to undertake a short cruise along the Moroccan coast. That having been accomplished, on 15 August it was noted that she was back in Gibraltar, while on the 30th the Formidable, accompanied by the Thunderer, took a cruise off Malaga to compare the rates of sailing of the ships, which were both of the same class. The results, observed by those aboard the Belvidera, revealed that the Formidable had "maintained her high character, beating her rival upon all points".

Throughout September and October 1842 the Formidable continued to be based at Gibraltar, where Captain Sullivan also acted as the senior naval officer. However, on 2 November she was relieved by HMS Rodney, and it was Robert Maunsell C.B., her Captain, who then took over as senior naval officer at Gibraltar. That freed HMS Formidable to transfer directly to Malta, to where she was also to carry a number of passengers including the protestant Bishop of Gibraltar, who embarked on the 24th. On the morning of the 26th the Formidable set sail, but the Rodney that departed later in the day, signalled her with fresh instructions from Captain Maunsell ordering her to proceed instead to Barcelona. There the Formidable was to await the arrival of the Rodney, their task being to protect British interests during an insurrection that had broken out in the Spanish city, and although French war ships were also in attendance, both nations maintained strict neutrality.

After were sailing up the eastern coast of Spain, at 3 p.m. on 29 November, and while Captain Sullivan and the Bishop were dining, land was reported in sight and clearly observed. HMS Formidable then proceeded at four knots towards the entrance of the Llobregat river when, at 8 p.m. and some 14 miles west of Barcelona, she struck heavily on the soft clear sand causing her rudder to be unshipped and carried away. A boat was immediately despatched to Barcelona for assistance and Captian Gautier, the French commander in the area, at once ordered the Gassendi to the scene, and consequently by daylight the French paddle steamer, along with many boats and small craft, had arrived to assist. Gautier also directed that the steamer Etna was to join the Gassendi as soon as she had arrived back from Tarragona.

As the Formidable was in four feet of water less than she drew, it became necessary to lighten her. Consequently, the all the lower deck guns and three on the main, a quantity of shot, and most of her fresh water, were thrown overboard, while pumping was also started as she was making nearly four inches of water an hour. Although the weather was fortunately very fine and clear, the ship had grounded near the breakers and some of the heavy rollers coming in made the ship thump heavily That resulted in her being carried at least half a mile, judging from the buoy of the rudder and the first gun thrown overboard.

During daytime on the 30th the stream had been got out and the Gassendi carried out a bowser, while at 5 p.m. HMS Rodney arrived and positioned herself a mile from the Formidable. The Rodney, whose two best bower anchors, in addition to the Formidable's own, were put out, and after the Rodney sent two cables an end and the Formidable two to meet them, both ships hove together. Finally at 11.45 p.m. that night, and with the assistance of the two French steamers and the Formidable's own company,

whose conduct during the whole time was beyond praise, the ship was finally drawn into deeper water.

However, as the Bishop and the other passengers were unable to land on account of Barcelona still being in the hands of the insurgents, they transferred to the Rodney for onward passage, while the Formidable was towed to anchor in the Barcelona Roads. By then the Cyclops steam frigate had arrived from Gibraltar and had been sent to try to recover the rudder and guns. Using a diving suit one of the carpenters from the Formidable was also able to descend several times to inspect the damage, and he subsequently reported, "The false keel is gone in many places, from ten to twelve feet in one place; the forefoot is nearly gone; 10 feet of her stern post is gone; the rudder gone; main keel damaged in places; two leaks forward; a small leak in the bread-room; the principal leak is in the aft magazine; between the main and mizen-masts she hung and thumped heavily."

The final task for the Cyclops was to tow the crippled ship over to Port Mahon in Menorca for temporary repairs, and on 6 December the Formidable was seen in the harbour. As it was discovered that she had been so completely heaved on the side that needed to be repaired, the officers and crew had been forced to leave her and to take up residence in Port Mahon.

1843 - Deployment in the Mediterranean

On 27 January 1843, a crew member from HMS Vanguard, which had just arrived at Port Mahon, reported that the Formidable was moored close alongside a jetty with her topmasts struck, her hold nearly cleared out, and making about eight inches of water an hour. The Vanguard was then provided with every article necessary to heave her down, and also with diving apparatus, but for various reasons it was thought best to take the Formidable to Malta, accompanied there by the Cyclops and the Vanguard.

Although for many days a gale had been blowing, on 8 January the three vessels left Port Mahon, but the weather was still bad causing the Formidable "to yaw about in a fearful manner," making her so unstable that it was expected that she would lose her masts. Although that failed to happen, she did lose a cutter by her heavy rolling, the boat being washed from her davits. However, on the 10th the weather at last moderated, and the Cyclops was able to take the Formidable in tow, after which all three vessels had a calm passage until, on the 12th, they finally arrived in the Grand Harbour at Valetta in Malta where the major repairs on the Formidable were to be undertaken.

A contemporary report in the 'Malta Times' stated that on Tuesday 31 January 1843, "The navy had an opportunity of witnessing a sight as magnificent as happily it is rare, at least in Malta, viz. the heaving down of her Majesty's ship Formidable. A little before nine o'clock, Sir Edward Owen, Commander-in-Chief, reached the dockyard and the operation immediately commenced. Upwards of 800 men having been employed in the work, in an incredibly short space of time she yielded to their power, and gracefully fell into the desired position. In an instant the full extent of her damage was seen."

“About nine feet of the lower part of her stern-post were carried away; six feet, or thereabouts, of her gripe and stem. Nearly the whole of her false keel gone, and some fifty feet of her main; her rudder was gone, and a quantity of ‘dead wood’. It is needless to add that the copper was, in several places, rubbed off her sides. Axes were instantly at work to cut away the useless wood, and at the same time the copper was here and there stripped off to examine her more closely.”

After a hard day’s work, in which her crew also ably assisted, the Formidable was ‘hove up’ again, and after taking moulds of the required repairs, was re-floated. The necessary timber having been obtained and prepared, on the 3rd she was hove down again and her repairs commenced. At that time it was acknowledged that the survey sent to the Admiralty, (which had been made by the carpenter who had gone down in a diving dress to examine her while she was off Barcelona), was indeed accurate and that had been fully confirmed when she was hove down.

While the crew of the Formidable was employed in getting timbers out of the dockyard magazine, “A young man named William Weldrake, who was engaged in prising up a heavy beam with a crow-bar, by some unfortunate accident was jerked upwards and struck him on the forehead. Sadly it laid it open and he lingered about an hour before passing away.”

On 16 February it was reported that the repairs on the Formidable were nearly completed, and “reflected great credit on the men of the Malta Dockyard”. Then, with the work finished, a Naval Court Martial assembled on board HMS Impregnable in Valetta Harbour on 27 February 1843, “for the purpose of investigating the circumstances which occasioned the running on shore, off Barcelona, of HMS Formidable, whereby serious damages occurred, and rendered it necessary for the vessel to be hove down to be repaired”. Rear-Admiral Sir Francis Mason, second in command in the Mediterranean, sat as President, while Captain Thomas Forrest of HMS Impregnable; Captain Samuel Chambers of HMS Monarch; Captain Sir David Dunn of HMS Vanguard; and Captain Robert Smart of HMS Howe; were the other members. After a patient investigation, and the examination of many officers and men, late at night on the 28th, the Court came to a decision regarding the Formidable, admonishing Sir Charles Sullivan, Bart., the Captain, and reprimanding Mr James Tonkin, the Master, “to be more careful in future in reference to the use of the lead and line as is usual when a vessel is in soundings”.

The following month it was reported that British naval forces in the Mediterranean were to be reduced immediately, and consequently on 25 March HMS Formidable set sail from Malta for England, where she was ordered to call in first at Spithead, and afterwards to sail to Sheerness to be paid off. On 11 April the Formidable was reported to have arrived at Gibraltar en route for England, but was detained there awaiting fresh orders from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Station. Eventually, on 11 May, it was revealed that for the time being HMS Formidable was to remain at Gibraltar, where Captain Sir Charles Sullivan was to act as Senior Officer. Instead HMS Howe was to proceed from Malta to England, and when she arrived at Gibraltar she was to take on board the invalids from the Formidable and the stores she had taken from Malta, after which the Formidable was to return to Malta.

The birthday of Queen Victoria was celebrated in Gibraltar on 25 May with HMS Formidable bearing the royal standard. Amongst the other vessels in the harbour were the American warship Delaware and the French war steamer Gassendi, both of which hoisted the British Ensign at the fore-top-gallant-mast. Royal salutes were fired at 12 o'clock from the saluting battery, HMS Formidable and the USS Delaware, while the Formidable, in compliment to the Delaware, returned the salute.

On 17 June the Formidable left for Malaga where a rising against the Spanish government was taking place, but upon arriving Mr Mark, the British consul, requested that she be withdrawn and returned to Gibraltar as he considered her presence there might increase the irritation against the British. As a result, the Formidable was reported to be anchored in the harbour at Gibraltar on 5 July. However, on the 12th she received orders to sail westward, via Cadiz, and on to Lisbon in order to relieve HMS Vanguard which was stationed in the mouth of the River Tagus, where the Formidable arrived on the 17th That enabled the Vanguard to sail for England the following day. HMS Formidable remained at Lisbon until, on 20 August, when she also left for England, arriving on the 29th off Plymouth, where she signalled outside the harbour prior to moving into the Sound during the afternoon.

She had in fact been ordered back to join a fleet of some 30 ships of all types under the command of the Port Admiral of Plymouth that was then was being assembled to greet Queen Victoria and Prince Albert during their forthcoming visit to Plymouth, Falmouth and Cherbourg. The royal couple arrived in the Royal Yacht Victoria & Albert at 5.30 a.m. on 30 August 1843, and the Formidable was one of the vessels that took part in firing a salute. After visiting Plymouth and Falmouth, on 1 September the Queen and the Prince returned up the Channel to be joined by the Formidable and a number of other ships that had been assigned to escort the Royal Yacht across to Cherbourg, where the party arrived the following day. The royals then travelled back to Brighton, after which HMS Formidable anchored up in the Downs. Consequently, it was from there on afternoon of 7 September that she set sail on her voyage back to Lisbon, arriving there on 13th in order to continuing her work of protecting British merchant's interests.

After remaining at Lisbon for about a month and a half, she was relieved by HMS Warspite, allowing the Formidable to proceed on to the Mediterranean, via Gibraltar, where she arrived on 11 November. She set sail again the following day, and on the morning of the 25th reached Malta, the base from which it was expected that she would operate for some time. Deployment from there began on 29 December, when the Formidable left to relieve HMS Indus at the port of Piraeus, near Athens.

1844 - Deployment in the Mediterranean

The Formidable arrived at the Piraeus on the morning of 6 January 1844, but was in turn relieved by HMS Warspite, allowing the Formidable to return to become the flag-ship at Malta. Consequently, on the morning of 6 April the Formidable, which was reported to have arrived from the Piraeus, appeared off the Malta, and the weather being calm the Devastation was sent out to tow her in, which she did on the same afternoon. Having

touched at Cerizo, an Ionian possession, the Formidable was admitted immediately with a clean bill of health; and no time was lost in sending carpenters and joiners on board to fit her with proper cabins for the reception of the Commander-in-Chief and his retinue about to be transferred from HMS Queen. As soon as those accommodations had been completed, on 23 April Captain Sir Charles Sullivan Bart. of HMS Formidable exchanged places with Captain George Frederick Rich (*Appendix 1 No.3*) of HMS Queen, as did number of officers, while the following day the flag of Vice-Admiral Sir Edward William Campbell Rich Owen was raised on the Formidable, thereby allowing HMS Queen to leave Malta at the start of her voyage back to Portsmouth.

Over two months later the Formidable was still anchored in the harbour at Malta, but on 25 June it was reported that HMS Formidable, commanded by Captain Rich and with Admiral Owen aboard, was ready for sea and would set sail on a cruise to Barcelona and Corfu, accompanied by HMS Aigle as far as Barcelona. Finally, following the arrival of the packet from England and the Hecla from Barcelona, the pair set out on the morning of 1 July and an extract from a letter from Barcelona dated 16 July 1844 describes the subsequent events:- "The Formidable was 13 days in her passage from Malta, which is five days more than the ordinary time in good weather. The delay was, it is said, occasioned by the Aigle, which is not much of a sailer. It had been the intention of Sir Edward Owen to have passed at least eight or ten days here, supposing that he had arrived sooner."

Meanwhile, on the 9th the Sydenham steam vessel from Devonport and Tangier had arrived at Gibraltar, but immediately sailed with despatches for Mr Bulwer, the British Ambassador at Barcelona. There, on the 14th, she also met up with the Formidable causing Owen's plans to be changed as he had been informed that matters were assuming too much importance on the African coast "to allow time to be unnecessarily spent anywhere, except at the places most required". Consequently, at daybreak on the morning of 16 July HMS Formidable left for Gibraltar, accompanied by the Sydenham steamer for the purpose of towing her in case the wind or weather became unfavourably calm.

From Gibraltar the Formidable, with Vice-Admiral Owen aboard were, if necessary, to proceed to the North African coast where hostilities were taking place between France and Morocco. While at Gibraltar, and preparing for possible problems with the French, an officer on the Formidable wrote, "Our cabins are thrown down and our guns double shotted and we are quite prepared for anything that might ensue." On 15 August the Formidable was still reported to be in Gibraltar Bay and, on 1 September, the Prince of Morocco visited HMS Formidable, aboard which he was received with full military honours and "in that spirit of friendship which has so long existed between the sovereigns of Great Britain and Morocco."

The formal treaty of peace between France and Morocco was signed on 10 September and, on the 13th, it was announced that Vice-Admiral Owen, whose flag was then being flown on HMS Warspite, was to travel to Malta aboard the Sydenham. Meanwhile, HMS Formidable had been sent away to a healthy position prior to making for Malta, as recently it had been reported that there were many sick with yellow fever on board.

Later, when she was about 47 miles west of Malta, she fell in with H.M. steam-sloop Vesuvius which took her in tow, the pair arriving at Malta late in the evening of 26 September. Even though the fever was still raging aboard the Formidable, she was nevertheless admitted to the harbour causing the Governor to send his family to Naples to escape the contagion. In spite of the health problems Vice-Admiral Owen shortly after re-hoisted his flag on the Formidable.

On 25 November 1844 the marriage of His Royal Highness Prince Henry, Duke d'Aumale, with Her Royal Highness the Princess Maria Carolina Augusta of Bourbon took place in Naples, and on the 18th the Formidable, towed by the war steamer Hecla, made their way there for the express purpose of honouring them. During the time the Formidable was away from Malta, Vice-Admiral Owen's flag was transferred to HMS Orestes. Although, as far as saluting went, the Formidable carried out the object of her mission, due to some unaccountable lapse on the part of Captain Rich, not one of her officers attended the ceremony in the Chapel Royal, in spite of all having been invited, and seats expressly reserved for them. The chagrin of the Royal bride and bridegroom and the Royal Family of Naples was so great as to give rise to an official inquiry being made by the British Ambassador, who came to the conclusion that Captain Rich had actually forgotten to deliver the invitations to the officers, although he did attend himself, as did the officers of the Hecla.

The French Ambassador gave a splendid ball, and every officer on board the Formidable, including even the mishipmen, was invited personally and separately, a thing, probably, never heard of before, while nothing could equal the attention paid by the Neapolitans to the British. The Neapolitan Navy gave a splendid dinner to the officers of the flag-ship, which was prepared by the King's own cooks, and a service of gold was sent from the palace for the occasion causing the British officers to return the compliment. During the stay of the Formidable the Tondo was open to them, the San Carlos for two nights, along with every public place, while carriages also were at their command, and the British uniform was a passport to every kindness and attention that could be shown. On 2 December 1844 HMS Formidable finally left Naples, arriving back at Malta on the 7th, enabling Vice-Admiral Owen's flag to be transferred back, and by the end of the month she was still flying his flag in the Grand Harbour.

1845 - Deployment in the Mediterranean and return to England

For her first local deployment in 1844 HMS Formidable left Malta on 12 January, having somewhat unexpectedly been ordered to Smyrna and on to Basika Bay in the mouth of the Dardanelles. However, due to the gale that had been raging for some time from the south-east she was unable to round Cape Matapan on the southern tip of Greece. Driven north, on the 16th she made the island of Cephalonia off Patras in Western Greece, but for the next five days "she did not make twenty miles good". As a result, she took shelter on the nearby island of Zante where she came to anchor at 3 p.m. on the 21st, having had her topsails, staysails carried away, and suffered other damage which included split sails. The Formidable remained at Zante until the weather moderated, and although it was still very unsettled, on the 28 January she finally arrived at Smyrna.

From there the Formidable was subsequently ordered to Athens, before being reported back in Malta on 21 February, and once again flying the flag of Vice-Admiral Owen. The Formidable was to remain at Malta for some time, and on 12 April the Neapolitan steamer Ercolano arrived there from Naples and Sicily, having on board the body of Sir Philip Charles Henderson Calderwood Durham G.C.B., who had died after a short illness at Naples. Upon being brought ashore the coffin was saluted by HMS Formidable, the flag-ship, which fired 73 minute guns, corresponding to the age of the deceased.

On 16 May it was reported that the Formidable, with Captain Rich and Vice-Admiral Owen, the Commander-in-Chief, was expected to leave her moorings at Malta for Gibraltar and England on the 20th, but this was subsequently postponed. Then, on 16 June, it was reported that HMS Formidable had bent sails, and crossed topgallant and royal yards. It was then thought that she would shortly put to sea for a trip to Corfu for the purpose of Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Owen being invested with the order of St Michael and St George, previous to the Formidable departing for England.

In July it was announced that the new Experimental Squadron, then under the command of Admiral Sir William Parker, Bart, G.C.B., would sail for Gibraltar, after which it would proceed up the Mediterranean to Malta to be joined by the Formidable, which would be relieved by HMS Hibernia. Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Owen, K.C.B., would then take command and bring the ships home. Nevertheless for the time being HMS Formidable remained at Malta, and on 17 August Ibrahim Pacha of Egypt arrived there on board the Nile, which was saluted by the Formidable. Then, on the 24th, HMS Hibernian eventually arrived to relieve the Formidable, and aboard the former was Vice-Admiral Sir William Parker, Bart., G.C.B., who was take over as the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Station from Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Owen, K.C.B.

Consequently, on 3 September the Formidable sailed from Malta, accompanied by the steam sloop HMS Devastation, and as she left her moorings, the Hibernia, Amazon, and Siren manned the yards, the respective crews "giving three hearty cheers as a cordial adieu." The Devastation then towed the Formidable via Malaga to Gibraltar, from where, on the morning of the 16th, she resumed her task by towing the Formidable out of Gibraltar Bay. The pair then remained together until 18 September, when the steamer parted company off Cape St Vincent in order to take on coal at Lisbon. That left the Formidable to complete the rest of her voyage under sail, before she finally arrived at Spithead on 29 September, where the flag of Vice-Admiral Owen was struck at sunset on 3 October.

The following morning HMS Formidable sailed for Sheerness and was reported off Deal on the 4th, having made the extraordinary run of 150 miles in nine and a half hours from Portsmouth to the Downs. She anchored at the Nore on the night of the 6th, and was towed into Sheerness Harbour by the steam-tug African on the afternoon of the 7th. The Formidable would have proceeded to Chatham at that time, but the wind was getting up, and so she was obliged to anchor, being towed the next day to Chatham, again by the African. However, instead she was then ordered to be paid off back at Sheerness, where she arrived on 10 October.

There it was instructed that none of her cabins, internal fittings or bulkheads were to be removed, as she was in a very good state for being re-commissioned. However, the rest of the dismantling continued apace, and nearly all her rigging was down from the masts by the 16th. Then, on the 20th, the African arrived at Woolwich with Captain Pratt, Lieutenants Meheux and Wylde, two sergeants, two corporals, a drummer, and 49 privates of the Woolwich Division of the Royal Marines who had disembarked from the Formidable, the vessel on which they had served upwards of four years. Finally, after the rest of the dismantling process had been completed, HMS Formidable was officially paid off by Captain Rich on 21 October 1845.

One of the marine chronometers that had been issued by the Greenwich Observatory to the Formidable on 13 January 1842 was the Thomas Earnshaw No.509, which had been manufactured around 1800, and had already been carried by a number of Royal Navy ships, including HMS Beagle on its famous second voyage. It remained booked out to HMS Formidable until 20 November 1845 when it was checked back into the Observatory, and today is in the British Museum's collection.

1845 to 1868 - In ordinary at Sheerness

After de-commissioning HMS Formidable was once again laid up in ordinary, and on that was anchored at Standgate Creek on the River Medway, near Sheerness. As she was still in relatively good condition, in August 1846 it was announced that HMS Formidable had been selected to take the place of HMS Agincourt as the flag-ship in the East Indies and China. Consequently on 7 September the Fearless and African steamers towed the Formidable down to Sheerness Dockyard, to be re-fitted for commission. That work appears to have been started, as the following month it was reported from Sheerness that the Formidable would be commissioned by Captain William Ramsey of the steam frigate Terrible on her arrival at Woolwich. Then, the captain and crew of that vessel were to be turned over to the Formidable, which was still at Sheerness, where it was said that she would be "ready for the pendant" by 25 October. However, it was 14 November before the Terrible arrived at Plymouth from Lisbon and, after calling at Portsmouth and Woolwich, was ordered down to Chatham to be paid off.

On 24 December 1846 the Formidable was still in dock at Sheerness, while by early 1847 Captain Ramsey and his crew had transferred to the Centaur steam frigate and were fully occupied taking vital food supplies to Ireland and Western Scotland. Alternative plans then had to be made regarding the Formidable, and it was subsequently reported that she would not be commissioned before March, but the date slipped and on 19 May she was still "repairing for commissioning", but would be ready to be taken out of the dock at Sheerness the following month. That also appears to have been a somewhat ambitious target, as on 10 July it was announced that the Formidable would not be ready to be un-docked at Sheerness before September 1847.

Even that estimate turned out to be wildly inaccurate, as HMS Formidable remained in the dock for over a year, due to the fact that the workmen at Sheerness had been employed on her only at intervals. Nevertheless, on 19 December 1848, it was finally reported that she would be the next advanced ship to be commissioned to take the place of HMS Ganges, which had left Sheerness on the 13th to winter at Cork. However, although it was said that the Formidable would be ready within a few days, it was noted that it was uncertain when she would hoist the pendant. That indeed turned out to be true, as on 25 December it was announced that she was in dock at Sheerness and would not be ready for commissioning until February 1849.

In March it was noted that, "the present inactivity in the dockyard ports will shortly give way to some little business", and that was because a couple of line-of-battle ships and a frigate were intended to be commissioned at Devonport; a line-of-battle ship and a frigate at Portsmouth; a first-class frigate at Chatham; and the line-of-battle ship HMS Formidable at Sheerness. Unbelievably, on 12 April, it was announced that she was still fitting and that the time of completing her commissioning had been deferred until the middle of May. Even then little progress appears to have been made, as on 14 July 1849 it was noted that, "the Formidable at Sheerness is advanced for re-commissioning." Amazingly nothing happened until 22 August 1851 when it was reported that the Formidable was to be, "brought forward and prepared for service at Sheerness," while on 28 November it was revealed that, "the two next line-of-battle ships for commissioning will be the St Vincent at Portsmouth and the Formidable at Sheerness." However, over eighteen months later the Formidable was still waiting and, in July 1853, could be seen anchored just downstream in The Swale off Queenborough.

The Crimean War broke out on 5 October 1853, and as it was obvious that Britain would soon be actively involved, the Formidable was initially selected as an advanced ship of the line, but was soon replaced by HMS Ganges, and the Formidable demoted to acting as a guardship and local naval headquarters. Consequently, on 22 March 1854 she was taken into the fitting basin at Sheerness and berthed under the masting sheers. The masts were then lifted out and landed for inspection, preparatory to the commissioning of the Formidable being brought forward as Britain officially declared war on Russia on the 28th.

On the 31st the Formidable was taken into No.3 Dry Dock at Sheerness, to enable part of her copper bottom to be stripped ready for inspection and to apply caulking prior to her being masted for commission as a guardship of ordinary at Sheerness and to be fitted for active service if required. On 5 April she was removed from the dry dock to make way for HMS Miranda, and on the 8th it was reported that although her rigging had been appropriated for another ship of her class, a complete new set had been quickly prepared for her and was then ready to go aloft. On the 11th it became known that the Formidable had stepped her mainmast, and by the 15th had shipped her fore and mizen masts. However, although by the 29th she had got her lower rigging over her mast heads, progress was slow as few hands could be spared from the dockyard to work on her.

Guardship of ordinary in Sheerness Harbour - 1854 to 1860

Nevertheless, on 2 May 1854, Commander Josiah Thompson of the Sheerness ordinary was given responsibility for the fitting out of HMS Formidable, and the following day he re-commissioned her for her new commander when he hoisted the pendant for Christopher Wyvill (*Appendix 1 No.4*), Captain-Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard and Aide de Camp to H.M. the Queen, who transferred over from HMS Wellington, where he had previously served as the Captain. The Formidable also filled the role of guardship of ordinary that up until recently had been carried out by HMS Monarch, so long stationed at Sheerness, but then serving in the Baltic. On the 10th HMS Formidable was taken out of fitting basin at Sheerness and moored at the basin buoy as it had been found necessary to clear out the mud from the bottom of the basin. At the same time the Longboat tender from the Formidable, under the command of Reuben Harvey, her acting Second Master and Queen's Pilot for the Thames & Medway, returned to Sheerness from Dover with volunteers for the Royal Navy. They were all fishermen, and in several instances masters of 'fore and aft' fishing vessels.

On the 13th John Clark Barlow, late HMS Wellington, took up his commission as First Master of the Formidable, but she was still progressing very slowly with her rigging as the riggers had been transferred to work more urgently required for immediate service. Nevertheless, it was the intention of the Admiralty that both the Formidable and the Wellesley were to be fitted and stowed so as to be ready for sea at the shortest notice.

The Formidable was reported to have been in the inner basin at Sheerness on 25 May, and on 7 June was advancing with her new equipment, still under the direction of Commander Josiah Thompson. The next change regarding the Formidable took place on 16 June when Captain-Superintendent Christopher Wyvill, handed over command of her to Captain John Jervis Tucker (*Appendix 1 No.5*), the newly appointed Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard. However, as Tucker immediately left on 14 days leave, Captain Lord Frederick Herbert Kerr of HMS Waterloo undertook the duty during his absence.

Then, on the 22nd it was announced that although the officers and crew of the Wellington had been officially transferred to the Formidable, they would remain hulked aboard their old ship until the Formidable was ready to accept them. That was because she was still progressing slowly in fitment as all the effort in the dockyard was being put into HMS Royal Albert. Nevertheless, her topmasts were set up, and by 25 June she had her three topmasts half ends and lower yard across the gunwale. In addition, the stowage of her water tanks below was very nearly completed, and if more hands had been available the Formidable could have been made available for service within two or three weeks.

On 4 July it was announced that the Royal William; St Vincent; Hannibal; Algiers; Powerful; Calcutta; and the Formidable were under orders to proceed to Cherbourg and embark French troops to operate in the Baltic. It was also reported that "every possible assistance was to be given to the ships to expedite the conveyance of the troops", but as the Formidable had no crew it was considered that she would take a little longer to make ready. Consequently, by the 10th the Formidable was being fitted out at

Sheerness with all possible haste, and it was conjectured that in another week, "this fine old ship will be ready for sea", and ready to assist in transporting the French troops. That was partly true, as on the 15th the extra shipyard hands allocated to her had been able to fit her rigging, while her Marines were busy loading her tanks &c. on board and stowing the hold. After that the Formidable was put out of the Fitting Basin and moored at the swinging buoy for the convenience of expediting her further fitment, under the direction of Commander Josiah Thompson, by then the second in command of the ship. That work seems to have been completed by 7 August, when it was observed that she was pretty well ready for sea, except that she had no sailors. Even that problem was soon solved, as on the 26th it was noted that the crew from HMS Wellington, then fitting as a prison ship, were finally being drafted to the Formidable, but that was far too late for her to take part in the conveyance of the French troops.

As numerous delays had been caused by dock yard workers having to prepare urgently required vessels for war service, the Formidable, allocated as a guardship in ordinary, had slipped well down the list of priorities, and it was not until 6 November 1854 that she had taken on board her lower deck and middle deck guns. The following day she completed her armament, and immediately after received her ammunition, shot, and shell, making HMS Formidable at last a fully operational guard ship, "that was in every respect ready for active service at short notice."

HMS Formidable then settled into a period of nondescript service as the guardship of ordinary in Sheerness Harbour, where by August 1855 she was recorded as having a crew of 305 men and lying off Sheerness Pier. Sadly, on Tuesday 28 August 1855, an inquest needed to be held on board her by Richard Prall, Esq., deputy coroner for the district of Rochester, whose task was to look into the death of John Kelly, aged 22, a private of the Royal Marines. George Lunn said that Saturday afternoon he was at work in the main chains with the deceased. "They were pumping water to serve the main deck with. The deceased made a false step on the spare jib-boom, which was lashed fore and aft to the main chains, and he fell into the river." He then gave an alarm, ran down the side-ladder and saw Kelly swimming, but the tide was drifting him astern of the ship. He then ran to the poop, and hove a line to Kelly, but it fell short, and he could not reach it. The tide then drifted him about 20 yards down the river, when he sank. Henry Smith, the signal-man, stated that he was on Jacob's ladder, which hangs over the stern of the ship, and reaches the water. He saw Lunn heave the line to Kelly, but it fell short him. Two of the ship's boats rowed to the spot where Kelly went down. His cap was picked up, but his body was not found. A shore boat also went to the spot, but not in time to save him. Smith heard John Clark Barlow, the First Master, who was then acting as officer commanding the Formidable, call out, "Lets go to the life-buoy," several times, in a loud voice. Francis Chambers, ship's corporal, heard Smith call out, "There's a man overboard" and directly, "Away the third gig." When he went on deck again, Mr Barlow asked him if the life-buoy had gone. He said didn't know and Mr Barlow said, "Call away the jolly-boats," and Smith assisted in getting them manned. The verdict was "Accidentally drowned."

The next event of any consequence took place in September 1857, when on the 10th, the Admiralty announced that Captain John Jervis Tucker had been promoted to Rear-

Admiral of the Blue. As a result, at about 4 p.m. on the 21st Captain John Coghlan Fitzgerald (*Appendix 1 No.6*) arrived at Sheerness where he was met by Tucker and Commander Thompson of the Formidable, to which he had been appointed the commanding officer on account of him being the new Captain-Superintendent of the Sheerness Dockyard. However, he was inheriting a ship which at that time was reported to have been nearly 100 men short of her complement for harbour duty.

Monday 25 January 1858 was the day chosen for the marriage of Victoria, the Princess Royal, the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria, to Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia, and at 1 p.m. HMS Formidable, another two ships, and a company of the Royal Artillery, fired a salute in honour. As the day was very fine, a number of people congregated to witness the spectacle as it had been nearly 100 years since such a salute had been fired on a similar occasion.

On 8 April it was announced that a portion of the crew of the Formidable had been granted leave of absence, while the rest of the men had been paid-off and transferred to HMS Royal George, a vessel that acted as the auxiliary screw guardship in Sheerness Harbour. It was also to be commanded temporarily by Captain Fitzgerald, who had also been transferred from the Formidable as it had been withdrawn for a refit. The Royal George in turn was put out of commission on 30 June, and Captain Fitzgerald, the officers, and crew transferred back to the Formidable, which was re-commissioned the following day, the pendant being hoisted at 8 a.m. On 18 September it was reported that by then the Formidable was fully equipped, and if needed for immediate active service would only require to be more fully manned and to have her ammunition and victualling stores stowed away. At that time the Formidable was described as the smartest rigged line-of-battle ship at Sheerness.

Captain Fitzgerald remained as commander of the Formidable and Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard until 30 May 1859 when, following a long and painful illness contracted while serving on the India and China Station, he passed away at his residence at Sheerness. His replacement was Captain Rundle Burgess Watson CB (*Appendix 1 No.7*) who was appointed on 9 June, and commenced his duties on the 11th, again as commander of the Formidable and Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard.

Flagship at Sheerness 1860 to 1868

A change was in the wind, as on 11 October 1859 it had been announced that HMS Formidable was to be converted as the flagship at Sheerness, but on 9 June 1860, and while still the guardship in ordinary, Vice-Admiral of the Red Sir Edward Harvey, the Commander-in-Chief at Sheerness, was promoted to Admiral of the Blue. In order to mark the occasion, on the 17th the flag-ship HMS Monarch hoisted blue at the main, and a salute of 71 guns was fired by HMS Formidable, which was returned by HMS Cumberland, the guardship of the steam reserve.

Then, on 30 June 1860, Captain Watson handed over the post of Captain-Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard to Captain Charles Wise, while the following day

Captain William Garnham Luard (*Appendix 1 No.8*) became the officer commanding HMS Formidable, which was about to become the flag-ship of Vice-Admiral Sir William Hope-Johnstone, who was replacing Admiral Harvey. Consequently, on 2 July Hope-Johnstone hoisted his flag, white at the fore, on board HMS Formidable in Sheerness Harbour, and saluted the flag of Admiral Harvey, blue at the main, with 17 guns, which was returned by HMS Cumberland with 13 guns. The guns were in action again on 9 November 1862 when the Formidable, along with the Royal Artillery on land, fired a Royal Salute in honour of the 21st birthday of the Prince of Wales.

Early on the morning of 4 January 1863 HMS Formidable parted company with her moorings in a heavy swell, but was fortunately brought up at the Little Nore without sustaining any damage. She was then towed into the harbour at Sheerness by the Medusa and Otter steam tugs, and placed at temporary moorings until her own could be replaced. The next change in command took place on 2 July 1863, Vice-Admiral Sir George Robert Lambert, KCB, hoisted his flag, red at the fore, on board HMS Cumberland, as the new Commander-in-Chief at Sheerness, replacing Vice-Admiral Sir William Hope-Johnstone whose term of office had expired. His flag was hauled down at sunset from HMS Formidable, the flag-ship, and the flag of the new Vice-Admiral was delivered to her. At the same time Captain William Garnham Luard, her commanding officer, was replaced by Captain John Fulford (*Appendix 1 No.9*).

However, Lambert's tenure as Naval Commander-in-Chief at the Nore and of all vessels at Chatham was to be short, as on 15 December 1863 he was gazetted Admiral prior to retiring. Consequently, on the 28th, he hoisted his flag, blue at the main, on board HMS Formidable, and as it was agreed that he was to leave Sheerness at the end of February 1864, at sunset on 1 March he finally struck his flag. On the same day his successor, Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Talbot, KCB, had hoisted his flag, white at the fore, on board HMS Cumberland, still acting as the guardship of the steam reserve, and on the morning of 2 March finally transferred it to HMS Formidable.

For the next couple of years, during which time the Formidable had several tenders assigned to her including the three gun Lizard, the Wildfire, the Hart, and the Fearless, nothing of particular note was reported regarding HMS Formidable, which continued to act as the flag-ship in Sheerness harbour. However, 1866 saw another change of commanders, both at Sheerness and aboard the ship. On 2 April Captain John Fulford of the Formidable was promoted to Rear-Admiral, creating a vacancy as officer commanding the vessel, while on the same day Vice-Admiral Talbot became an Admiral, and therefore a replacement was needed to act as Commander-in-Chief Sheerness. In response, on 5 April, it was announced that Vice-Admiral Sir Baldwin Wake Walker, K.C.B., had been appointed Commander-in-Chief, Sheerness, and on the 19th he hoisted his flag aboard HMS Formidable. Then, on the 21st, Captain Donald McLeod Mackenzie (*Appendix 1 No.10*) was appointed flag-captain to Walker, thereby becoming the last officer commanding the Formidable while she served as the flag-ship in Sheerness Harbour.

On 12 December 1868 it was announced that HMS Formidable and HMS Cumberland, the guardship of the Sheerness Steam Reserve, had both been ordered to be paid out

of commission. The stores of each ship were to be returned to the dockyard, and while their topmasts were to be struck, the lower masts were to remain rigged, although the rigging was to be placed under cover. It was also noted that HMS Agincourt, an iron clad screw driven man-of-war then at Devonport, was to replace the Formidable as the flagship at Sheerness, and that once Captain McKenzie, the officers and crew of the Formidable had been paid off, they were to be transferred to the Agincourt as soon as she was ready to receive them. In fact the Agincourt arrived at Sheerness on the afternoon of 28 December 1868, and on the 31st HMS Formidable was officially paid off.

HMS Formidable - Industrial Training School - 1869 to 1906

Industrial Schools, for children under 14, along with Reformatories for children aged 14 to 18, were originally set up following the Youthful Offenders Act 1854. The aim of the Industrial Schools was defined in the Industrial Schools Act of 1857 as being for “the better training of poor and neglected children who were in danger of becoming criminals”. That was to be achieved by giving magistrates the power to sentence homeless children between the ages of 7 and 14, who were brought before the courts for vagrancy, to a spell in an Industrial School. Further Acts that followed in 1861 and 1866 increased the scope for entry, consolidated previous legislation, and clarified the procedure for setting up the schools. Consequently, by then magistrates had the power to send to an Industrial School any child, apparently under the age of 14, whose parents declared him to be beyond their control, or to be found begging or receiving alms, wandering and not having any home or visible means of support, or in company of reputed thieves, as well as any child apparently under the age of 12 who had committed an offence punishable by imprisonment or less.

Reformatory and Industrial Training School ships were introduced in the mid-nineteenth century at a time when England had a constant need for seamen and growing concerns about juvenile crime. The idea was for locally established associations or committees to borrow from the Admiralty wooden men-of-war recently made redundant by the introduction of steam driven ships, and then to house suitable boys aboard them in order to train them to be sailors. It was hoped that mooring such ships out in a river would remove them from their previous corruptive influences, while by educating the boys and teaching them a trade might lead them to go on to earn an honest living, rather than drifting into to a life of crime. However, the Admiralty was at pains to point out that the ships were offered on condition that any local organization making a request not only paid for their vessel to be fitted out as a school ship, but also the cost of towing her to the final destination.

The first to be established were the Reformatory Training School ships, with the old Akbar being moored in the River Mersey near Liverpool in 1856, followed by the Cornwall in the Thames at London in 1859, and finally the Clarence, again at Liverpool in 1864.

It was the committee that ran the Ragged School in Cardiff that was the first to apply to the Admiralty for the loan of a vessel that was to become an Industrial Training School Ship. Initially provided to establish a floating ragged school, the Havannah arrived at the

East Bute Dock in Cardiff in July 1860, but soon after was moved to a mooring on the River Taff alongside the Penarth Road. Then, in December 1861, the Havannah was officially certified as an Industrial School under the terms of the new 1861 Act, allowing her to take boys committed by the courts, and consequently she ceased to be a ragged school.

Several applications were then made by interested parties in North-East England to open similar schools certified under the terms of the Industrial Schools Act of 1866, and in 1868 this resulted in the Admiralty sending HMS Wellesley to South Shields on the River Tyne, and HMS Southampton to Hull on the Humber. The following year it was the turn of Scotland, and in August HMS Mars appeared on the River Clyde at Helensborough, to the north-west of Glasgow, while in September HMS Formidable arrived in the Severn Estuary off Portishead, near Bristol.

The leading light in the acquisition of the Formidable had been Henry Fedden of Westbury on Trym, a sugar refiner and foreign & colonial broker, who was one of the leaders of Bristol's business and social communities, and a man who had an outstanding sense of social responsibility. As Fedden was also a magistrate at Lawford's Gate he had first hand experience of the plight of boys brought before the courts on charges of truancy, theft, and begging, and immediately saw the value of the new floating Industrial Training Schools. After having frequent communication with those in authority respecting the steps to be taken, it became clear that the idea of securing a ship for Bristol might meet with success. As a result he then consulted at length with Augustine Fielding Woodward, a vinegar manufacturer of Cornwallis Crescent in Clifton, who entered into the scheme with equal ardour, and in March a committee was formed with Fedden and Woodward as joint honorary secretaries.

On 20 March 1869 the 'Bristol Times & Mirror' reported on the progress being made to obtain a training ship and that they were, "glad to learn that efforts have been since January made by some gentlemen in the city to obtain such a ship for this locality, and we are glad to add, with every prospect of success; the answers received from the Government authorities having been favourable. It is very likely that early in April, about the 8th, a public meeting will be convened by the Mayor, when all will have an opportunity of attending and seconding it by their voices and assistance. The training ship will be established under the Industrial Schools Act. There will be allowances from Government for each boy per head, this being supplemented by private subscriptions."

The meeting, well attended by the great and good of Bristol, took place on the afternoon of advertised date at the Athenaeum Club, with his Worship, Francis Adams, presiding. In commencing the proceedings he stated that the meeting had been called, "for the purpose of establishing a training ship for the street Arabs of our city." As the promoters at once found themselves supported by many who took a deep interest in the education and reformation of youth in Bristol, along with other philanthropic work, an executive committee was appointed, and by July the Bristol Training Ship Association found itself in possession of around £2700.

Wishing to acquire one of the old line-of-battle ships then lying redundant in various harbours, they obtained an order from the Admiralty to visit various dockyards to examine some of the old vessels. The first they considered was HMS Centurion, but subsequently found it would cost some £2000 to put her in order, and so they had to give up the idea of obtaining that particular ship. However, after the matter had been referred to the Home Office and the Treasury, HMS Ajax was granted to the committee, but again it was discovered that the vessel would have cost such a large sum for necessary repairs that the funds of the committee would have been hard pressed to cover them. Nevertheless, during their rounds they had come across HMS Formidable, still lying at Sheerness, and consequently, application was made for her, but with the rivalry and opposition from two or three northern ports, that was refused. Not wishing to lose her, the repeated representations subsequently made by the Committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association and its prominent members, including the local MPs, resulted at length in the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty agreeing to lease them the Formidable. Even then something like £600 was spent on her before she could be removed to Bristol.

Meanwhile the Committee needed to appoint a Captain-Superintendent, and the man they selected was Commander Edward Poulton (*Appendix 1 No.11*) who had been born locally, and whose father had been rector of Filton church for 48 years. At the beginning of 1869 Poulton was serving with the gunnery training ship HMS Excellent, at the Royal Navy's principal gunnery establishment in Portsmouth, but on 28 May 1869, the Admiralty granted him permission to accept the offer from the Bristol Training Ship Association. By the time of his appointment Poulton had twenty years' experience in the navy, and had been an officer since 1853. In addition to this his unassuming though polished manners, the inimitable courtesy with which he received all who approached him, and the humane Christian feeling which was evidently one of his ruling characteristics, favourably impressed many who met him. At the time it was said that the youths to be placed in his care, would meet with one well fitted to watch over their moral and intellectual progress. It was also Poulton's responsibility to bring the Formidable from Sheerness to the Severn Estuary and accounts of the voyage, which lasted from Tuesday 7 until Saturday 11 September 1869, were published in several local newspapers, the following being compiled from the pages of the 'Bristol Mercury' and 'West Somerset Free Press':-

The voyage from Sheerness to Kingroad has cost the committee over £400. The charge for towing alone reached £200, the Liverpool Company undertaking the work for that sum, the London Company requiring £250. In addition to this expense, a special crew of from 40 to 50 men had to be engaged to bring her round to Kingroad, and there was the further expense of pilots and other fees. The big ship was to have left Sheerness on Monday 6th, but owing to the rough weather the voyage did not commence until the following day, branch pilot Hall having been sent round from Bristol to pilot her up the channel. The powerful tug-steamer United Kingdom was sent to tow her round. In addition to Captain Poulton, Mrs Poulton and party, there were on board the Formidable Henry Fedden (one of the honorary secretaries) and Mrs Fedden, Miss Fedden, Mr Crosby Leonard, and Mr James Eberle. The vessel left Sheerness under favourable auspices, the weather being smooth, but towards evening it began displaying

a threatening appearance. Some anxiety was then being felt by the crew, which were weak in numbers for such a vessel, and this caused her to drop the anchors in the Downs. However, the wind did not increase during the night, and so on the following day the party were favoured with fine weather, which attended them for the next two days. Then, after entering the western part of the channel on Thursday the 9th, they began to feel the roll of the Atlantic swell up the channel.

“In addition to the towing, the Formidable had been sailing under her fore-topmast and main staysails, and her fore and aft canvas prevented her rolling very much until she rounded Land’s End and presented her broadside to the swell; and then, in the words of her officers, ‘it was case with the crockery,’ and some of the passengers who had held out well till reaching this point at length succumbed. The tug United Kingdom hung on bravely through thick and thin. As midnight of the 9th approached heavy squalls set in, but the big ship bore the rough weather exceedingly well, and on the morning of Friday the 10th the dreaded Wolf Rock was sighted and safely passed. On Friday at noon, the towing hawser (a stout warp ten inches in circumference) suddenly parted in consequence of the continued strain upon it, and the injury it doubtless sustained by the heavy plunges of the vessel during the preceding night. All possible sail was then made in the Formidable, the foresail and spanker being immediately set to get the ship manageable in steerage way, and she ran along very comfortably till communication was re-established with the tug-steamer. The vessels had fair weather up Channel, and accepting the assistance of the Joseph Hazell inside Lundy, the Formidable arrived in Kingroad at mid-day on Saturday the 11th”.

“Some few weeks ago Captain Poulden had taken soundings about 400 or 580 yards off the Portishead Pier, and selected a place known as the ‘poole’s’ in which the vessel, drawing 18 feet and 21 feet of water, might be safely brought to an anchorage for her permanent position. It was at first arranged with Captain John Drew, the harbour-master, that the spot should be buoyed by the time the vessel arrived, so that she might at once drop her anchors there. Owing, however, to branch pilot Poole being absent at the time it was necessary to leave for Sheerness, and Hall going away to join the Formidable and bring her round, the place was not buoyed; and it was left to the ship to anchor out in the roads and be finally moored on Monday 13th.”

“Coming in on the top of the tide, however, and everything looking favourable, it was determined that an attempt should be made to pick out the spot and drop her four anchors at once, thus keeping her in her permanent position without the possibility of swinging with every tide. One of the steamers was sent forward to clear the way, but not till the monster ship, with her towering masts, huge spars, and majestic build, was close upon them did the diminutive craft occupying her station get a full understanding of the matter and clear away. In dropping the anchors, the one on the port quarter with 75 fathoms of chain was lost, the ‘messenger rope’ sent out after paying out the cable, unfortunately parting, and thus rendering it impossible to complete the mooring. It was found that the huge ship grounded very satisfactory, however, as the tide receded, and it was arranged that her moorings should be completed today, when means will be taken to recover the anchor and cable. This necessarily involved the detention of the crew, who had contracted for the voyage from Sheerness to Kingroad, and it gave some

dissatisfaction, which appeared to be soon overcome by Commander Poulden and as it became necessary to pay out or take in the cables the lusty voices of the men as they joined in chorus during the work at the capstan betokened a satisfactory return to their work.

“During the afternoon of Saturday the 11th Mr. A. Woodward, Mr. D. Davies, Mr. C. Nash, representing the Executive Committee, Mr. Richards, Mr. J. F. R. Daniel (of the Portishead Railway Company), and others visited the ship, and the lady passengers left for Bristol in the evening, highly gratified at the courtesy and kindness they had received throughout the voyage at the hands of Captain and Mrs Poulden. The crew of the ship will probably consist of a limited staff for the care and instruction of the youths sent on board her, and with the chief officer, three instructors, a cook, and the occasional services of a shoemaker, tailor, and a bandmaster, the possession of a band among the boys being in some measure dependent on the state of the society's funds.”

Following the arrival of the Formidable at Portishead she had to be fitted up with a school room, cooking compartments &c., which cost £300, and by the time the ship was ready to receive the boys £3500 had been expended. A newspaper reporter was then allowed on board, and he wrote the following account:- “As in the well-known types of the old men-of-war, her cabin bulk-heads forming the officers' apartments on the main deck are fitted for tricing to the beams, thus giving room for the free working of the guns at the ports close to the stern of the vessel. In the rooms themselves there are the ringbolts and all the necessary appliances for turning the officers' berths into a busy scene of action in case of an emergency; but guns, unless in exceptional instances, would be carried into the bare extremities of ships. The huge hull of the two-decker, running up a sufficient height from the water-level to cast into too shade all the ordinary craft around her, at once impresses the visitor with her vast size; but no adequate idea can be formed of her immense capacity, till after climbing the sides of the big ship, one descends from the upper to the main and lower decks, and the eye takes the splendid sweep of her entire length from stem to stern, viewed from the lower deck. Her guns being out of her, there is nothing on this deck to interrupt the view, and the great length of the noble vessel is realised. Some further idea of her capacity will be gained from the fact that when in commission her full complement of hands, including officers, men, and boys was no fewer than 800. She has her own lower masts and a first-class 50-gun frigate's other spars, principally those of the Conquistador, a vessel named after a prize captured from the Spanish.”

“Her hull is of immense thickness, and altogether she appears to be in admirable condition; indeed this is borne out by two or three of the officials in one of the Government dockyards, who expressed their opinion to Commander Poulden that ‘she was a very solid, well-built, tight ship.’ She has not all the large boats which line-of-battle ships usually have; eight being the number which a vessel of her class would carry, but she possesses four good sized working boats, which will be used by her youthful crew. She is somewhat similar in size to the Cumberland, which has just been sent to the Clyde for a similar purpose; and she will have ample room for upwards of 500 boys, should the operations of the committee ever extend to so large a number. It is thought probable that the Government will grant six 32 pounder guns for the use of the ship, but this has not

yet been decided. Indeed, the youths will be chiefly instructed in seamanship, instead of gunnery, as the gunnery they would learn on board of the Formidable would have to be unlearnt when the pupils entered the Navy or the Naval Reserve Force; and the larger proportion of them will doubtless be trained for the merchant service. We understand that when the vessel is in trim the public will be afforded an opportunity of inspecting her, and at an early day there will be a public opening."

In fact the first occasion on which the public were able to visit the ship was when the Bristol Training Ship Association advertised that an Inaugural Luncheon was to be held on board HMS Formidable at 3 p.m. on the opening day, 2 October 1869. However, as donors and subscribers of the association would have preferential treatment with regard to tickets, only a limited number were available to the general public at 10 shillings each. The event was a success, and a "large and fashionable company attended" to enjoy the elegant luncheon that was served up on board among profuse decorations. Excellent speeches were delivered by a number of gentlemen including the Earl of Ducie, Sir Stafford Northcote, and the Reverend Canon Charles Kingsley, author of 'Westward Ho!' and 'The Water Babies'.

Much of the cost of the conversion of the Formidable was raised by organising excursions out to the ship for local people, and later in October the first of these took place. The advertisement read:- "The Committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association give notice that the Formidable will be open to the inspection of the public from Friday the 15th to Friday 22nd inst., between the hours of twelve and four o'clock, Sunday excepted. One shilling each person will be charged, Children and schools half price. The Fairy Queen starts from Cumberland Basin today (Monday) at 3.30 to visit the ship - fares 1s and 6d - and river boats at Portishead will convey visitors who go by train."

On 18 November the Formidable, which could accommodate up to 350 boys aged from 11 to 14, was certified as an Industrial School Ship, allowing her to take children committed by the courts, and the first boy was received on board on 1 December 1869. He was a curious lad who arrived covered in rags and filth, and so all his old clothes were taken off and thrown overboard, after which he was dressed in a suit of the neat uniform that was to be worn by all the boys in the future. On board the ship the lads were taught cooking, tailoring, shoemaking, and other necessary things, such as a sailor would find useful in after life. Half the boys went to school in the morning, whilst the other half were knotting, splicing and performing other duties in connection with the ship, and vice versa in the afternoon.

HMS Formidable - Industrial Training School - 1869 to 1906

During their annual tour of inspection of reserve men, arsenals and naval forts in the area, undertaken in 1874 by Lords of the Admiralty, they took the opportunity of conferring with the leading citizens of Bristol as to the best means of increasing the number and efficiency of the local Royal Navy Artillery Volunteers. The visiting group, made up of the Right Honourable William Ward Hunt (First Lord); Admiral Sir Walter Tarleton (Sea Lord); Sir Massey Lopes Bart., (a Civil Lord); and the Honourable Captain Francis Egerton (Secretary to the Admiralty), arrived from London by train on the

morning of 6 August and were immediately conveyed to the Council House for a conference and luncheon.

In the afternoon their Lordships inspected the Naval Reserve and the Naval Volunteer Artillery Corps on board HMS Daedalus at the Mardyke Wharf at Hotwells, before being driven to Portishead to inspect the boys on board HMS Formidable. "They were met on board by Captain-Superintendent Poulden, with who were the Reverend Arkill, rector of Portishead, Dr Wigan and a few members of the committee. Their Lordships examined the vessel in every part, and after writing their names in the visitors book and expressing themselves as highly pleased with the institute, their Lordships left amidst the cheers of the boys in the rigging." They then embarked on board the Admiralty yacht Enchantress that took them over to inspect Pembroke dockyard, and on across to Ireland.

By that time the committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association were being strongly pressed by the Lords of the Admiralty, the Government Inspector of Industrial School Ships, and the indefatigable honorary secretaries, Henry Fedden and Augustine Fielding Woodward, to set to work to raise money to acquire a sailing vessel on board which the more advanced boys of the Formidable might be exercised in practical seamanship by taking short cruises in the Bristol Channel. The problem was that the maritime education provided by the Formidable had up until then been incomplete, as the boys had been unable to become able seamen, having received only the theoretical instruction available on board.

The result had been that on leaving the ship they had been compelled to apprentice themselves in sailing ships, and consequently for some years had been obliged to work and learn at very low wages. As there were then about 340 boys on the Formidable, the most energetic efforts began being made to supply them with the means of acquiring a practical knowledge of nautical matters, so that when their time on board the Formidable had expired they would be qualified to occupy a better position in the merchant navy.

The acquisition of a tender would enable boys to be introduced to sail drill, mooring and unmooring, overboard drill, hoisting and lowering boats, signals, heaving the lead, and every other duty necessary to make a thorough seaman. However, unlike the Formidable, which was leased from the Admiralty, the tender was to be purchased outright by the Committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association using money subscribed during the fund raising campaign, and the result was the Polly (*see Appendix 2*).

On 12 October 1877 Rear-Admiral Augustus Phillimore, Superintendent of the Naval Reserve, made official visit to the Training Ship Formidable. This inspection was made in consequence the committee having accepted the conditions of the Admiralty circular, offering to provide gunner instructor for mercantile training ships, and also offering bonus to the managers for every boy entering the Royal Navy or Naval Reserve. The Admiral arrived alongside in the gun-boat Fervent about noon, accompanied by Captain St Clair, of HMS Daedalus, and was met on board by Captain-Superintendent Poulden, who was accompanied by William Henry Budgett, the chairman the executive committee, and Henry Fedden and Augustine Fielding Woodward, the Honorary

Secretaries. After making an inspection of the boys and the ship, he visited the school and the various industrial departments, expressing himself much pleased with what he saw. Before leaving he addressed the boys, 330 in number, drawn on the quarter-deck, and his request for a half-holiday was granted amid hearty cheers.

However, by then Commander Edward Poulden had tendered his resignation as Captain-Superintendent of HMS Formidable, a post which he was to vacate at the beginning of November. As a result, on 27 October it was reported that Committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association had received many applications from officers of the Royal Navy for the appointment of Captain-Superintendent in place of Poulden, and that they would shortly make their selection. The appointment had been open to officers both on the active and retired list of the Royal Navy, and was worth £400 to £450 a year.

On 6 November 1877 the committee of managers of the Formidable training ship met for the purpose of electing a Captain-Superintendent in the room of Captain Poulden, who had resigned. There were upwards of eighty applicants for the post, most of them naval officers of good character, but the unanimous choice fell upon Richard Bremridge Nicholetts, RN, (*Appendix 1 No.12*) of Norton-sub-Hambdon in Somerset who had retired from the service as a Captain on 1 October 1873.

In August 1878 the Admiralty issued a fresh order impressing on commanding officers of training ships the absolute necessity for carrying out most strictly the regulations of 1869 for instructing boys in swimming. Then, on 19 September 1879, it was reported that the inspection of Formidable Industrial School Ship revealed that it was in far better order than on the previous occasion. The health and general condition of the boys was satisfactory and order improved, and while discipline was firm and discriminating, punishments were decreasing both in frequency and severity. The boys appeared cheerful and in good form and spirits, and the inspector was well satisfied with the educational progress. An average of 299 had been maintained in 1878, while of the 241 discharged in 1875, 1866, and 1877, 205 were doing well.

Early in 1889 the fore mast of HMS Formidable was discovered to be in very defective condition, and on being surveyed by an official from Devonport Dockyard was pronounced to be in a dangerous state. An application was at once made to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty for a new mast, and the request being granted, an iron one, 79 feet long, weighing eight tons, was, with the accompanying spars, sent from Devonport Dockyard to Portishead by the Great Western Railway, where it arrived on Friday 19 July, and by the aid of two steam cranes in Portishead Dock it was lifted into a lighter ready for being towed alongside the Formidable on the following morning. In the meantime every preparation had been made on board for its reception and every precaution taken to prevent accident; and as the gear to be used had already lifted out the old mast, which weighed about 12 tons, it was confidently expected it would be quite sufficient for the work about to be done. On Saturday morning, 20 July, a tug brought the lighter alongside the ship, and no time was lost in slinging the mast. At 11 o'clock all was ready, and the order given to heave round the capstan. By 12.30, just one hour and a half from the first lift, this ponderous mass of iron, weighing eight tons and 79 feet length, lay on the deck of the Formidable.

The work, however, was only now half done. The next thing was to put the mast in its place, and this was successfully accomplished on Saturday 27 July. Work was commenced at one o'clock p.m., and at five minutes to eight o'clock p.m., just under seven hours, the order was given to ease up the purchases, and three ringing cheers from the boys announced the mast was stepped. That all connected with the Formidable were proud of that feat of seamanship it was needless to say, and well they might of been. Thrown upon their own resources, without the appliances of steam to aid them, they had accomplished the work by sheer manual labour and without the smallest accident. To get and lower the mast on board from alongside, and then into its place, was a fairly unique piece of seamanship, and of rare occurrence. In fact there were very few sailors who had ever seen such operation under like conditions, the universal method being to place the masts on board means of a steam sheen, and from a dockyard where every convenience and means of appliance were at hand. Although all that heavy work had been done solely by the men and boys of the ship, and without any extraneous aid whatever, even so it had necessitated an extra expenditure of about £120.

In January 1894 Captain-Superintendent Nicholetts, who for many years had most efficiently carried out his duties, tendered his resignation, although it had nothing whatever to do with his professional duties. The affair in fact arose from the events on 18 November 1893 when the ketch Harriet of Jersey, carrying a cargo of wheat from St Malo in France to Bristol, was driven ashore near Portishead pier. "The sea then made a clean breach over the vessel, the boat was washed off the deck, the hatches were swept away, and the vessel foundered. The crew took to the rigging, where they remained nearly three hours exposed to the gale. Mr Flory of the Seaman's Mission vessel, procured a boat, and with the help of his assistant, Mr Bunt, succeeded in saving the crew of four men. The poor fellows were much exhausted from the exposure, and one was quite unconscious when brought ashore. They were taken to the Royal Hotel, Portishead, where they received every attention."

However, some surprise was expressed by certain people that no boat was put off from the Formidable, anchored within a couple of stone's throw of the ketch. As a result, a letter on behalf of the Committee was then written to Captain-Superintendent Nicholetts asking him to answer the criticism, but he declined the request so absolutely that the Committee, sent him a strong remonstrance. The result was his resignation, which was subsequently accepted by the Committee, although at the time it was hoped that "sweet reasonableness" would prevail, and that there would be reconciliation. However, by late March it appeared that attempts to avoid the resignation had been abortive, as the new appointment was to date from 1 July 1894, with the Committee stating that applicants were to be officers of the Royal Navy not below the rank of Commander. The salary commenced at £300, increasing by £20 per annum to a maximum of £400, including quarters on board, as the Captain-Superintendent was required to live on the Formidable.

In June 1894 Henry Rogers, H.M. Inspector of Industrial Schools, presented his report on the Training Ship Formidable, and having inspected every department was glad to

find all was in good order and in a state of satisfactory efficiency. At that time there were 295 boys on board and 28 on the Polly tender. The boys were described as looking bright and cheerful, while good conduct throughout the year had, on the whole, been favourable, good order and sound discipline being carefully maintained with a minimum of severity.

On June 30, when Richard Bremridge Nicholetts relinquished his position as Captain-Superintendent of HMS Formidable, his successor being Commander Willoughby Edward Still (*Appendix 1 No.13*), who took over the following day, and at a time when the Committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association had been in communication with the Lords of the Admiralty regarding a replacement for HMS Formidable, which was practically worn out. However, the answer received was that it was regretted that they were unable to hold out any hope of that being done. In the first place, they said that they did not get any ships of the sort and size which would be necessary; and secondly, if they did they would sell them by auction as soon as they were no longer used by Her Majesty's Navy.

Consequently, on 1 July 1895, an application was discussed by the Somerset Joint Committee of the County Council for a grant in aid of the renovation of the training ship Formidable. It stated that after 25 years' service the ship required considerable repairs in order that the work of the Formidable might be carried on, but as the Admiralty had declined to provide another vessel, an outlay of about £1000 would be required for the present vessel. The managers had proposed making an appeal to the public for subscriptions, but before doing so they wished to bring before the Joint Committee the propriety of making a grant in connection with the proposed outlay. The Chairman considered the managers of the Formidable ought to have been treated in a more liberal spirit by the Government of the day with regard to a new ship, and so the motion was carried and the sum of £150 was granted.

At the 30th Annual Meeting of the supporters of the Formidable training ship held on 20 March 1900 it was revealed that HMS Formidable was in fairly reasonable condition, taking into consideration her age and the strain she has had to bear during the winter months in such an exposed position. Nevertheless, the Committee would soon have to face the serious outlay necessary to renew her lower decks, which was badly worn and in holes. Then, in 1905, it was announced that boys would not be allowed another winter aboard the Formidable due to conditions on board being considered unsatisfactory, with evidence of leaking and fears that she might break away from her moorings.

The end of the useful life for HMS Formidable finally came in January 1906, as on the dark and stormy evening of Sunday 21 January a service was held on board. As the wind rose and waves struck the old wooden walls with a loud but muffled thud, it appeared appropriate that the final hymn was "Eternal Father, strong to save," dedicated to those at sea. The following morning, the day of departure, opened fair and fine, with a clear sky and smooth water, and soon all were awake and the air filled with sounds of officers' orders and boys' voices. After breakfast prayers were read and the morning hymn sung to the accompaniment of the ship's band. Then the work of embarking the goods and chattels was begun. All the heavy items which were not required for

immediate use having been sent ashore, that left the rows of boys to be placed from the accommodation ladders to the gangway and, accompanied by music from the ship's band, hammocks, bedding, cooking utensils, chairs, benches, and numerous articles were passed from hand to hand and deposited in the boat below, which plied to and fro the pier, where vans awaited them.

After a brief interval for dinner, the work went on hour after hour, so that it was half past four before all had been sent off. The boys, having changed into their best clothes, were then taken aboard a steam tug waiting to take them ashore murmuring as they went "Good-bye old ship," while Captain-Superintendent Still was last to leave in the ship's 'life cutter.' On arrival on shore the boys were marshalled on the hill, and with their colours flying and the band playing "Auld lang syne" the march was begun to their new home, the National Nautical School on the Nore at Portishead.

HMS Formidable had then to be prepared for sale, but by July 1906 she was leaking so seriously as to be dangerous, and the Admiralty was employing, almost daily, twenty men to pump her out. That was prior to the public auction which took place on 10 July at Portsmouth Dockyard, at which time the Formidable was described as "until lately a training ship, timber built, copper fastened and sheathed." At the sale a question was asked as to the rudder, and the auctioneer replied that it was in the mud, and although sold without it, the rudder would be the property of the purchaser if recovered. Bidding commenced at £1500, but she was finally purchased for £4300 by James Coote Garnham on behalf of Castles Shipbreaking.

It was intended that the Formidable was to have been moved on Friday, 7 September 1906, and for that purpose the large London tug Oceana, commanded by Captain Reading, came round and lay by her. The week previous had been spent in preparation for her removal, but the moorings that had been so well and truly laid defeated them to cut her loose. It was thought that she would be ready to go on Sunday the 9th, and crowds assembled on the front to see the last of her, but again it was found that her five cable links held fast, and to the disappointment of many the attempt was abandoned, although a farewell service was held on board. The special cutting appliances that had been requested from London finally arrived on Monday 10th, and with much labour the chains were eventually cut through, requiring the Formidable to be steadied by hawsers during the night. With the tide rising, at 11 o'clock on the morning of the 11th the ropes were let go, and as the tug Oceana pulled her away the dredger at the pier gave three hoots, to which the tug replied.

A number of people also turned out to watch her depart, observing from the pier, the hotel grounds, the rocks, and Battery Point, while at the Nautical School Commander Still and the officers had all the boys out. Then, accompanied by their band, they proceeded to the seashore, where the strains of "Auld Lang Syne," taken up by hundreds of voices, was sent across the placid water. Then, came hearty cheers, and to music and hurrahs the Formidable headed out into the Channel on her last voyage to Castle's yard, which was then situated at the Baltic Wharf, Millbank in London, where she was dismantled during 1906 and 1907. Nevertheless, the mizen mast of the old ship remained at Portishead and was subsequently erected in the grounds of the new school,

while other timber was used to make the pulpit in the school's chapel. Finally, by pure chance an iconic memento of HMS Formidable is still in existence, as the figurehead was initially preserved as part of the collection assembled by Castles Shipbreaking. Although their museum was destroyed by enemy action during World War Two, back in the 1930s the firm had sold the figurehead to an American collector, and today it is on display at the Mariners Museum at Newport News in the USA.

Appendix 1 - Commanders of HMS Formidable

Operational

(1) Edward Thomas Troubridge

Commanded HMS Formidable - 23 August 1841 to 23 November 1841

Edward Thomas Troubridge was born c.1787 and baptised at Romsey in Hampshire on 24 May 1790, the only son of Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Troubridge (1757 to 1807), 1st Baronet Troubridge of Plymouth, and his wife Frances Northall (1750 to 1798). Edward was educated at Dr Charles Burney's school at Greenwich and was subsequently enrolled in the Royal Navy as a First Class Volunteer on 21 January 1797.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 22 February 1806.

Commander: 5 September 1806.

Captain: 28 November 1807.

To Retired Lists as Rear-Admiral of the Red: 23 November 1841.

Important life events:-

1 February 1807 - Succeeded as 2nd Baronet Troubridge of Longstock in Hampshire, when his father was given up as lost in HMS Blenheim, en route from the East to the Cape of Good Hope and England.

18 August 1810 - At St Marylebone, London, Troubridge married Anna Maria Cochrane (1793 to 1873), daughter of Admiral the Honourable Sir Alexander Forrester Inglis Cochrane.

20 July 1838 - Awarded the C.B. (Companion of the Bath).

7 October 1852 - Edward Thomas Troubridge died at 11 Eaton Place, Belgrave Square, London, aged about 65.

(2) Charles Sullivan

Commanded HMS Formidable - 14 December 1841 to 23 April 1844

Charles Sullivan was born in London on 28 February 1787, the second son of Sir Richard Joseph Sullivan, 1st Baronet Sullivan (1752 to 1806) and his wife Mary Lodge. He entered the Royal Navy as a First Class Volunteer on 4 February 1801.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 25 April 1808.

Commander: 24 March 1812.

Captain: 7 June 1814.
To Retired List as Rear-Admiral of the Red: 15 February 1850.
Vice-Admiral 12 May 1857.
Admiral 20 May 1862.

Important life events:-

14 April 1814 - Succeeded as 3rd Baronet Sullivan of Thames Ditton, Surrey.

21 November 1818 - At St Nicholas, Thames Ditton in Surrey, Sullivan married Jean Anne Taylor, only daughter of Robert Taylor, of Ember Court, Surrey.

21 November 1862 - Charles Sullivan died at 'Hurst House', Molesey, Surrey, aged 74, and was subsequently buried on 27 November at St Nicholas, Thames Ditton.

(3) George Frederick Rich

Commanded HMS Formidable - 23 April 1844 to 21 October 1845

George Frederick Rich was born c.1787 at Knightsbridge in London, the illegitimate son of Admiral Sir Thomas Rich (c.1733 to 1804) and Elizabeth Burt, the daughter of a general. He entered the Royal Navy in March 1795 and became an Acting-Lieutenant in June 1805.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 30 December 1805.
Commander: 26 October 1813.
Captain: 1 July 1823.
Serving in 1851 as Captain-Superintendent of the Royal Naval Hospital, East Stonehouse, Plymouth.
Rear Admiral: 2 April 1853.
Vice Admiral: 20 January 1858.
To Retired List as Vice-Admiral: 17 June 1859.

Important life events:-

24 July 1828 - At St Mary the Virgin, Widdington, Essex, Rich married Jane Agnes Wilhelmina Fraser, daughter of Charles Henry Frazer. However she died at Stoke Damerel, near Plymouth, in late 1842.

29 April 1854 - At Nether Wallop, Hampshire, Rich married Caroline Goldsworthy Pearce (1801 to 1899), youngest daughter of the late William Pearce, and widow of Algernon Langton Massingberd.

1 November 1863 - George Frederick Rich died at 80 Eaton Place, Belgrave Square, London, aged 76, and was subsequently buried in St Andrew's churchyard, Sonning in Berkshire.

Moored in Sheerness Harbour

(4) Christopher Wyvill

Commanded HMS Formidable - 2 May 1854 to 14 June 1854

Christopher Wyvill was born on 6 May 1792 at Finghall in North Yorkshire, the son of Christopher Wyvill (1738 to 1822) and his wife Sarah Codling (1765 to 1840). He entered the Royal Navy on 25 October 1805 as a First Class Volunteer.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 5 July 1813.
Commander: 29 July 1824.
Captain: 22 February 1832.
(*Captain-Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard: 1 April 1854*).
To Retired List as Rear-Admiral: 31 January 1856.

Important life events:-

29 January 1863 - Christopher Wyvill died unmarried at 'The Grange', Bedale in North Yorkshire, aged 71, and was subsequently buried in St Gregory's churchyard, Bedale.

(5) John Jervis Tucker

Commanded HMS Formidable - 16 June 1854 to 10 September 1857

John Jervis Tucker was born in London on 25 March 1802, the second son of Benjamin Tucker R.N. (1762 to 1829), later Second Secretary to the Admiralty and his first wife Jane Lyne. He was baptised at St Marylebone church, Westminster on 29 January 1804, before entering the Royal Navy as a First Class Volunteer on 19 August 1815.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 12 September 1822.
Commander: 15 June 1827.
Captain: 28 June 1838.
(*Captain-Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard: 29 April 1854*)
Rear-Admiral of the Blue: 10 September 1857.
Rear Admiral of the White: 2 May 1860.
Vice Admiral: 9 February 1864.
To Retired List as Vice-Admiral: 19 October 1864.
Admiral: 10 September 1869.

Important life events:-

16 October 1830 - At Horsley in Gloucestershire, Tucker married Sabina Anne Young (1808 to 1873), eldest daughter of Vice-Admiral James Young.

14 March 1886 - John Jervis Tucker died at his residence, 'Trematon Castle', near Saltash in Cornwall, aged 84, and was buried at St Stephen-by-Saltash church on 19 March.

(6) John Coghlan Fitzgerald

Commanded HMS Formidable - 15 September 1857 to 8 April 1858 and 1 July 1858 to 30 May 1859
(*commanded HMS Royal George 9 April to 1 July 1858 while Formidable was re-fitting*)

John Coghlan Fitzgerald was born at Stoke Damerel, near Plymouth in Devon, in 1803, one of the sons of Thomas Fitzgerald (c.1772 to 1844), a Royal Navy Purser. He entered the Royal Navy as a First Class Volunteer on 1 May 1818.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 18 April 1825.
Commander: 27 November 1829.
Captain: 23 November 1841.
(*Captain-Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard: 15 September 1857 - died in post*)

Important life events:-

29 August 1844 - At St Budock church at Falmouth in Cornwall, Fitzgerald married Mary Davey Symonds, eldest daughter of John Symonds of 'Stratton House', Falmouth.

30 May 1859 - John Coghlan Fitzgerald died at 4 p.m. at his residence in Sheerness Dockyard aged 56, following a long and painful illness originally contracted during service overseas. His burial subsequently took place at Sheerness on 3 June.

(7) Rundle Burgess Watson

Commanded HMS Formidable - 9 June 1859 to 1 July 1860

Rundle Burgess Watson was born at Portsea Island, Portsmouth, in 1809, the eldest son of Captain Joshua Rowley Watson R.N. (1772 to 1810), and his wife Mary Manley. He was baptised at Alphington in Devon on 7 May 1809, and subsequently entered the Royal Navy as a First Class Volunteer in November 1821.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 1 November 1821.

Commander: 6 May 1829.

Captain: 23 December 1842.

(Captain-Superintendent of Sheerness Dockyard: 9 June 1859).

Resigned due to ill health: 2 July 1860.

Important life events:-

24 December 1842 - Awarded the C.B. (Companion of the Bath) for service in China.

1 February 1845 - At St Mary, Cheltenham, Watson married Helen Bettington, the second daughter of John Bettington of Pittville.

5 July 1860 - Rundle Burgess Watson died at his official residence in Sheerness Dockyard aged 51. On 7 July his remains were removed to the steamer HMS Myrtle to be conveyed to Teignmouth in Devon for interment there.

(8) William Garnham Luard

Commanded HMS Formidable - 2 July 1860 to 1 July 1863

William Garnham Luard was born at Whitham in Essex on 7 April 1820, the eldest son of William Wright Luard J.P., D.L. (1786 to 1857) and his wife Charlotte Ann Garnham (1789 to 1875). In February 1833 he entered the Royal College at Portsmouth, and after two years there was rated Midshipman.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 6 May 1841.

Commander: 29 September 1850.

Captain: 11 March 1857.

Rear-Admiral: 1 January 1875.

Vice-Admiral: 15 June 1879.

Admiral: 31 March 1885.

To Retired List as Admiral: 7 April 1885.

Important life events:-

7 April 1858 - At Witham, Luard married Charlotte du Cane (1835 to 1912), the third daughter of the Reverend Henry Du Cane of Witham.

1 March 1865 - H.M. the Queen granted permission for Luard to wear the medal of the Legion of Honour, 4th Class, awarded for his part in conjunction with the French in operations in the Straits of Simonosaki in Japan.

13 March 1867 - Awarded the C.B. (Companion of the Bath) for his part in operations in the Straits of Simonosaki.

25 June 1897 - Appointed Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath during the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year.

19 April 1910 - While driving during the afternoon of 18 April, Sir William Garnham Luard lost control of his pony. The trap then ran on to the kerb close to a telegraph pole and he was thrown out, with his head coming in contact with the post and one of his ribs was fractured. He became unconscious, and at 3.45 p.m. the following day died of a haemorrhage of the brain at his residence, 'The Lodge', Witham. He was subsequently buried on 24 May at All Saints, Witham, aged 91.

(9) John Fulford

Commanded HMS Formidable - 2 July 1863 to 2 April 1866

John Fulford was born at Great Fulford, near Dunsford in Devon, on 16 February 1808, the third son of Baldwin Fulford (1775 to 1847) and his wife Anna Maria Adams (1780 to 1860). He entered the Royal Navy as a Cadet at the Naval College at Portsmouth on 6 December 1821.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 29 July 1831.

Commander: 4 November 1840.

Captain: 1 May 1848.

Rear-Admiral: 2 April 1866.

To Retired List as Rear-Admiral: 1 April 1870.

Vice Admiral: 7 May 1872.

Admiral: 5 August 1877.

Important life events:-

6 June 1844 - At Saint Cuthbert's in Edinburgh, Fulford married Isabella Russell (1809 to 1893), the eldest daughter of John Russell, the Principal Clerk of Session in Scotland.

15 February 1888 - John Fulford died at Bemerton near Salisbury in Wiltshire, aged 78, and was buried on the 18th in the churchyard of St John at Bemerton, the parish in which he had lived for 21 years. In recognition of his services to the Church a memorial plaque was subsequently erected in his honour in Salisbury Cathedral.

(10) Donald McLeod Mackenzie

Commanded HMS Formidable - 21 April 1866 to 31 December 1868

Donald McLeod Mackenzie was born at Edinburgh on 8 September 1815, the sixth son of Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, 7th Baronet of Coul (1780 to 1848), of Coul Mansion, Contin parish, Ross-shire, and

his wife Isabella MacLeod. He was baptised on 18 May 1816 at Lochbroom, Ross-shire, and entered the Royal Navy on 25 June 1830.

Naval commissions:-

Lieutenant: 23 November 1841.
Commander: 29 August 1854.
Captain: 13 December 1859.
To Retired List as Captain: 1 April 1870.
Rear-Admiral: 31 December 1876.
Vice-Admiral: 23 November 1881.

Important life events:-

20 April 1865 - At St Thomas' church, Portsmouth, Mackenzie married Dorothea Seymour (1830 to 1901), eldest daughter of Admiral Sir Michael Seymour, G.C.B., Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth.

25 January 1894 - Donald McLeod Mackenzie died at Eltham House, Eltham in Kent, aged 79, and was subsequently buried on the 30th in the churchyard at Blendworth, near Horndean in Hampshire.

Industrial Training School Ship at Portishead

(11) Edward Poulden

Captain-Superintendent HMS Formidable - May 1869 to October 1877

Edward Poulden was born at Winterbourne, near Bristol, on 8 October 1835, the third son of the Reverend James Bedford Poulden (1800 to 1876), Rector of Filton for 48 years, and his wife Harriet Schroder. He was baptised on 16 October 1836 at St Peters' church in Filton, and subsequently joined the Royal Navy.

Naval commissions:-

Mate (Sub-Lieutenant): 6 September 1856.
Lieutenant: 25 February 1858.
Commander: 16 October 1868.
(*Permission granted to join HMS Formidable: 28 May 1869*).
To Retired List as 1 April 1870.
Captain: 16 October 1883.

Important life events:-

24 May 1867 - At St Judes' church, Southsea, Poulden married Katherine Gawler (1836 to 1914), the youngest daughter of Colonel George Gawler, K.H., late 52nd Light Infantry.

9 May 1914 - Edward Poulden of 79 Harvard Court, West Hampstead, Middlesex, died at 'Allerton', 13 Beaulieu Road, Bournemouth, aged 79, and was subsequently buried at Clevedon parish church in Somerset on the 13th.

(12) Richard Bremridge Nicholetts

Captain-Superintendent HMS Formidable - November 1877 to June 1894

Richard Bremridge Nicholetts was born at South Petherton in Somerset on 17 February 1838, the son of John Nicholetts (1785 to 1866) and his wife Mary Toller (1797 to 1848). He entered the Royal Navy as a Cadet on 16 September 1850.

Naval commissions:-

Mate (Sub-Lieutenant): 7 March 1867.
Lieutenant: 19 May 1859.
Commander: 3 April 1868.
To Retired List as Captain: 1 October 1873.

Important life events:-

11 May 1871 - At Norton-sub-Hamdon parish church, Nicholetts married Gerogina Martha Garrow, eldest daughter of the late Reverend G.B. Garrow of Hadley Priory, Middlesex, formerly Rector of Chiselborough and West Chinnock.

24 August 1908 - Richard Bremridge Nicholetts died at his residence 24 Caledonia Place, Clifton, Bristol, aged 70. His funeral on the 29th began with a service in Bristol Cathedral, followed by interment in Portbury churchyard.

(13) Willoughby Edward Still

Captain-Superintendent HMS Formidable - July 1894 to January 1906
(Continued running the National Nautical School ashore until 25 February 1914)

Willoughby Edward Still was born at Norwood in Surrey on 30 December 1846, the son of Robert Still (1809 to 1875) and his wife Laura Frances Price (1818 to 1863). He was baptised at St John the Baptist, Croydon, on 3 February 1847 and subsequently enrolled in the Royal Navy as a Cadet on 11 December 1860.

Naval commissions:-

Mate (Sub-Lieutenant): 30 April 1867.
Lieutenant: 24 May 1871.
To Retired List as Commander: 30 December 1891.

Important life events:-

13 May 1878 - At St John's church in Sydney, Australia, Still married Isabella Susan Nation (1852 to 1925), second daughter of Colonel H.M. Nation, Bengal Army, of Auckland, New Zealand.

6 January 1917 - Willoughby Edward Still died, aged 71, at his residence, 'Tauranga', Coombe Dingle, Bristol, after an illness lasting 3½ years, and was subsequently buried in the churchyard of Saint Peter's in Portishead, where a memorial plaque still exists.

Appendix 2 - Polly tender to HMS Formidable

(Purchased by Bristol Training Ship Association - Never a Royal Navy vessel)

In 1874 the vessel chosen by the committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association to act as a tender to HMS Formidable was the Polly, a topsail schooner built at Brixham in 1864 which had previously been engaged in the Newfoundland, and the Mediterranean fruit trade. She had been constructed to order using best selected English oak, and classed A1, at Lloyds for 12 years. Her dimensions were 75 feet in length, by 19 feet 5 inches in beam, while her depth of hold was 11 feet 1 inch, her registered tonnage 88 tons N.N.M., and her dead weight capacity was about 140 tons.

She was brought round from London to Bristol during the winter months of 1874/5, during which voyage she proved herself to be a most excellent sea boat in heavy weather, while in the rough sea she was found to have reacted in a very lively manner. Although on 27 February 1875 she was certified as an Industrial School vessel, she still required the expenditure of a considerable sum of money in refitting and adapting her for her new task, work which was to be personally supervised by Mr R.W. Morris.

On arrival at Bristol the Polly was placed in the Wapping Dry Dock where all her old metal was stripped off, she was then caulked, all her fastenings overhauled and re-metalled. All her rigging was replaced using the best charcoal wire rope, and the running gear with fine Manilla rope. She also acquired a complete set of new sails, and two new boats, which were hung in davits amidships, and which would afford the young sailors an opportunity of being taught the lowering the manning of boats. The deck fittings were very complete, and having an unusual breadth of beam for her size, large deck space was offered for drilling and exercising the crew. In fitting up the between decks, due regard had been taken for the comfort of the boys and to the necessary sanitary requirements, while its ventilation was excellent, being provided by four large skylights communicating with the main deck.

The height between the decks was 6½ feet, and the cooking department, fitted with every requisite, was in the bows below, and was divided from the boys' berthing by a bulkhead. The whole of the space below abaft the mainmast was given up to the boys, and measuring 35 feet in length, with a breadth of 19 feet, it was provided with tables on hinges at the side of the vessel &c., while sleeping accommodation was provided by the slinging of up to 40 hammocks at a time. After conversion the Polly had a carrying capacity of about 140 tons, and beneath her lower deck, she was capable of stowing some 90 tons of ballast, the packing of which was so arranged that it did not shift in rough weather.

Abaft the main mast on deck was a conveniently fitted saloon cabin, with four sleeping berths intended for the use of inspecting officers or other visitors, who, with a view to testing the efficiency of the instruction imparted to the boys, might wish to accompany them on any of their trips. Farther aft was the original cabin of the vessel which was assigned to the master and chief mate. Having been converted from a topsail schooner into a brigantine carrying four square sails on her foremast, the boys could be exercised in furling, reefing, and setting sails and spars in a precisely similar manner as would be required of them in after life when they went into larger ships. The Polly had been so thoroughly overhauled that Mr Follett, the Lloyd's surveyor at Bristol, 'passed half-time survey', and she was found in such good and sound condition that he recommended her raised to a 13 year class.

It was proposed to keep about 30 of the largest boys from the Formidable in constant training in the tender for about three or four weeks at a time, so that all of them might in turn have experience of life at sea before entering into seamanship as a means of livelihood. From the opening of the training ship until the work on the Polly had been completed in early June 1875 some 233 boys had entered the merchant service and

gone to sea, out of 251, illustrating the great demand that then existed for ordinary and able seamen.

On 3 June 1875 the Committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association placed advertisements in the local press which read:- "We have pleasure in informing the public that the alterations to the Polly, the tender to the Formidable, are now completed, and that in order to afford the subscribers and friends an opportunity of inspecting her, she will be lying at the slip near St Augustine's church, College Road, nine to five o'clock. Such accommodation will be provided that ladies will be able to go on board without the slightest inconvenience." The days on which she was to be displayed were on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Monday, 3 to 7 June, and during the time that it was in the Float it was photographed by Cyrus Herbert Voss Bark of 'Strathearn House', near the Victoria Rooms in Clifton. The photograph was subsequently described as "an interesting memento of an interesting movement, and as it is executed with great delicacy, and is a very successful specimen of the photographic art", it was also said no doubt it would be highly appreciated among the subscribers to the Polly, which had cost the Committee of the Bristol Training Ship Association a total of about £1000.

Then, on the morning of the 8th, she set off on her first voyage down the Bristol Channel from St Augustine's Parade to Ilfracombe and back to the Formidable anchored at Portishead. Under the control of Mr Morris, she was initially towed down past Clevedon, before making her own way to Ilfracombe and most of the way back, although for the final miles she was towed by the Pelow steam tug from Cardiff.

Over the years the Polly went on to provide valuable training for the boys, although a considerable amount of money had to be spent regularly on her maintenance, and during the year ending 1899 that amounted to £319 13s 5d. Nevertheless, even after 1906, when HMS Formidable herself had been scrapped and the boys transferred to the new National Nautical School on land, the School Council retained the Polly. In fact the summer cruises around the coast of the Bristol Channel, Irish Sea and English Channel, visiting such places as Lundy, Ilfracombe, Portsmouth, Penzance, Milford Haven, Plymouth, and Plymouth, that had been undertaken annually for many years continued right up until the outbreak of war in early August 1914. By that time the Polly was becoming a very old craft and the Council were considering acquiring a newer and larger replacement. Consequently, once war began and no cruising was permitted, the Polly was sold off.