

CHAPTER 5

CASTLE & BEECH

As we have explained, Henry Castle probably decided to bring his sons into partnership with himself, pending the imminent opportunity opening up in the breaking up of wood - built Naval ships. The formation of the family partnership was also made against the background of another major business decision to enter into a partnership with William Philip Beech, a close personal friend of Henry, who was also active in shipbreaking in Rotherhithe. There does not appear to have been a formal announcement of the partnership start date but in any event it was not later than November 1861 when the first Naval ship the *Espiegle* was sold to Castle & Beech.¹

This period in the mid to late 1860s also revealed just how much pressure was being applied within the Admiralty to dispose of surplus naval ships and how much should be paid for them either with or without the benefit of the metals and of the copper in particular. In addition, the basis of the contractual arrangements between the Admiralty and contractor were also substantially revised. In view of the importance of this debate and its influence on the shipbreaking activities of the Castles and of Beech we have detailed in full all the available correspondence and internal memoranda that have come into our possession regarding this period between 1861 and 1869. It is an illuminating and astonishing insight into the fascinating world of shipbreaking. Certain matters appertaining to the arrangements for breaking up old ships and the basis of the costings involved have also been included.

It is believed that Henry Castle was in occupation of the Anchor & Hope Wharf, Charlton, at this time as a consequence of the relationship that had been established previously with the Admiralty. The Beech partnership agreement most likely permitted the new partnership to operate together from the Charlton location. Beech had also taken over the Beatson Shipbreaking business at Surrey Canal Warf, Rotherhithe where the *Temeraire* had been broken up in 1838 – see Chapter 4. John Beatson had died in 1858 and his father David Beatson may have continued the business for a while longer until his own death in 1859. John Beatson's will had instructed his Trustees to dispose of the shipbreaking activity and it is at this point that Beech likely made the acquisition of the business.

Consequently, Castle and Beech were superbly positioned to take advantage of these developments and the time was ripe for a major leap forward in the shipbreaking business opportunity. It appears that during the partnership period the Charlton Yard always belonged to the Castle family and the former Beatson Yard to Beech.²

It should be noted that the two partnerships of Henry Castle & Sons (HC) and Castle & Beech (CB) existed separately and operated on their own account as appropriate.

For ease of reference we list all ships broken up between 1861 and 1869 by both partnerships. A close study of the pattern involved may have some bearing on other background events taking place at this time as well and which may also have a direct connection with the timing of the termination of the Castle & Beech partnership in 1869.

HM Ships Acquired 1861- 1871

<i>Espiegle</i>	1861	Brig 12	CB
<i>Crocodile</i>	1861	6th Rate 28	HC
<i>Messenger</i>	1861	Wood Paddle Vessel	HC
<i>Waterwitch</i>	1861	Brig Sloop 10	HC
<u>TOTAL</u>	4		1 3

<i>Cleopatra</i>	1862	6th Rate 26	CB	
<i>Tyne</i>	1862	6th Rate 28	CB	
<i>Vestal</i>	1862	6th Rate 26	CB	
<i>Britomart-resold S. Williams</i>	1862	Wood S Gunboat		HC
<i>Portland</i>	1862	4th Rate 50		HC
<i>Spartan</i>	1862	6th Rate 26		HC
<i>Teazer</i>	1862	Wood S Tender	CB	
<i>Vixen</i>	1862	Wood Paddle Sloop		HC
<i>Termagant</i>	1862	6th Rate 28		HC
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>9</u>		<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
<i>Eclipse</i>	1863	Brig Sloop 10		HC
<i>Prometheus</i>	1863	Wood Paddle Sloop		HC
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>2</u>			<u>2</u>
<i>Banshee</i>	1864	Paddle Packet	CB	
<i>Fury</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Sloop	CB	
<i>Gorgon</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Frigate	CB	
<i>Hermes</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Sloop	CB	
<i>Inflexible</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Sloop	CB	
<i>Penelope</i>	1864	5th Rate 46	CB	
<i>Retribution</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Frigate	CB	
<i>Sampson</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Frigate	CB	
<i>Sidon</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Frigate	CB	
<i>Trusty</i>	1864	Floating Battery	CB	
<i>Alacrity</i>	1864	Wood S Sloop		HC
<i>Cyclops</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Frigate		HC
<i>Daphne</i>	1864	Corvette 18		HC
<i>Daring</i>	1864	Brig 12		HC
<i>Dragon</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Frigate	CB	
<i>Fantome</i>	1864	Brig Sloop 16	CB	
<i>Firebrand</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Frigate	CB	
<i>Frolic</i>	1864	Sloop 16		HC
<i>Phoenix</i>	1864	Wood Paddle Sloop		HC
<i>Roebuck</i>	1864	Wood S Gun Vessel		HC
<i>Venus</i>	1864	5th Rate 46		HC
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>21</u>		<u>13</u>	<u>8</u>
<i>Achille</i>	1865	3rd Rate 74	CB	
<i>Eurotas</i>	1865	5th Rate 46	CB	
<i>Hecate</i>	1865	Paddle Sloop	CB	
<i>Odin</i>	1865	Wood Paddle Frigate	CB	
<i>Scourge</i>	1865	Wood Paddle Sloop	CB	
<i>Alecto</i>	1865	Wood Paddle Sloop	CB	
<i>Ardent</i>	1865	Wood Paddle Sloop		HC
<i>Hasty</i>	1865	Wood S Gunboat		HC
<i>Horatio</i>	1865	5th Rate 38		HC
<i>Snapper</i>	1865	Gun Brig 12		HC
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>10</u>		<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>
<i>Calypso</i>	1866	6th Rate 20	CB	
<i>Edinburgh</i>	1866	3rd Rate 74	CB	
<i>MV26</i>	1866	Mooring Lighter	CB	
<i>Terpsichore</i>	1866	Sloop 18	CB	
<i>Archer</i>	1866	Wood S Sloop		HC
<i>Devastation</i>	1866	Wood Paddle Sloop		HC
<i>Flying Fish</i>	1866	Wood S Despatch Vessel		HC
<i>Foxhound</i>	1866	Wood S Gun Vessel		HC

<i>Inconstant</i>	1866	5th Rate 36		HC
<i>Lightning</i>	1866	Sloop 18		HC
<i>Modeste</i>	1866	Sloop 18		HC
<i>Persian</i>	1866	Brig Sloop 16		HC
<i>Renard</i>	1866	Wood S Sloop		HC
<i>Seaflower</i>	1866	Cutter 4		HC
<i>Tartar</i>	1866	Wood S Corvette		HC
<i>Trident</i>	1866	Iron Paddle Sloop		HC
<i>Vulture</i>	1866	Wood Paddle Frigate	CB	
<i>Wanderer</i>	1866	Wood S Gun Vessel		HC
<i>Wrangler</i>	1866	Wood S Gun Vessel		HC
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>19</u>		<u>5</u>	<u>14</u>
<i>Arrogant</i>	1867	Wood S Frigate	CB	
<i>Chesapeake</i>	1867	Wood S Frigate 51	CB	
<i>Colossus</i>	1867	3rd Rate 80	CB	
<i>Cressy</i>	1867	Screw 3rd Rate 80	CB	
<i>Euryalus</i>	1867	Wood S Frigate	CB	
<i>Termagant</i>	1867	Wood S Frigate	CB	
<i>Collingwood</i>	1867	3rd Rate 80	CB	
<i>Imperieuse</i>	1867	Wood S Frigate	CB	
<i>Leander</i>	1867	4th Rate 50	CB	
<i>Orion</i>	1867	Screw 2nd Rate 91	CB	
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>10</u>		<u>10</u>	
<i>Emerald</i>	1869	Wood S Frigate		HC
<i>Niger</i>	1869	Wood S Sloop		HC
<i>St. George</i>	1869	1st Rate 120		HC
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>3</u>			<u>3</u>
<i>Queen</i>	1871	1st Rate 110	CB	
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>1</u>		<u>1</u>	
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>79</u>		<u>40</u>	<u>39</u>

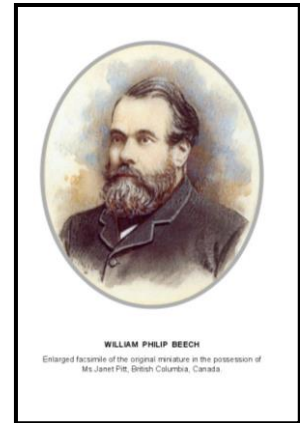
There is no specific evidence indicating that some of the Castle & Beech partnership ships purchased were taken to the Surrey Canal Wharf for breaking up as all the references are to Charlton for breaking as stated in Colledge's records and elsewhere. However, it is noted that all of the ships purchased in 1861 and thereafter were purchased by each partnership separately. In 1862 there were nine ships bought, five by H. Castle & Sons and four by Castle & Beech compared to one by Castle & Beech in 1861. In 1863 only two purchases were made and both of them by the Castle partnership alone. In 1864 Castle and Beech purchased thirteen out of twenty one ships and Henry Castle & Sons the other eight.

The above pattern continued into 1865 when only six out of ten ships were purchased by Castle & Beech and again in 1866 five out of nineteen. In 1867 however, the position changed dramatically and all the ships were purchased by Castle and Beech. It is significant however that no ships were purchased by either partnership in 1868 and in 1869 three were purchased by Henry Castle & Sons alone. Clearly therefore 1867 was the last active buying period and then there was a quite sudden falling away of the number of ships acquired and we explore below the probable reasons for this development and the impact it had on the Castle & Beech arrangements.

Meanwhile we comment further on the significant numbers of ships that were broken up separately by the Castle family and by the Castle & Beech partnership. We know of no other location than Charlton where substantial breaking up took place and therefore have assumed that most, if not all, of the ships involved whether by Castles or the Castle &

Beech partnership were broken up at this location. However, several of the smaller ships, depending on their size, purchased by the Castle family partnership may have been taken to Baltic Wharf. It is noticeable that the majority of the smaller ships were purchased by Henry Castle & Sons and that the Castle and Beech ships were almost all the larger wooden sailing ships and steamships. The exact date that Henry Castle took over the tenancy of the yard at Anchor & Hope is not available; however we believe that this may have been as early as 1856 when the *Janus* was purchased followed by the *Flamer* in 1858.³ Certainly it would not have been much later than 1860 in view of the future expansion plans envisaged by Henry Castle. The first ships purchased were in November 1861 when the *Crocodile*, *Messenger* and *Waterwitch* were delivered to Castle at Charlton and as previously mentioned the *Espiegle* to Castle & Beech. Accordingly occupation of the yard would likely have taken place well beforehand.

Beech's father Thomas had had some success in business with two different partnerships between 1815 and the 1820s.⁴ He also continued to work closely with the Beatson family, where he had been a foreman for some time and certainly introduced his own son William Philip into the shipbreaking business. William was born in 1815 and by the time his father died in 1844 he would have accumulated a considerable knowledge and understanding of the shipbreaking business. The Beech businesses were located first at the Pageants, but later at the Upper Globe Dock, which they appear to have owned. There is also evidence of the ownership of other property in Rotherhithe, particularly six houses close to Bull Head Dock, which also remained in William's ownership for many years. Furthermore, Beech was involved in the building of many properties at the new Cubitt town in 1847. It is clear therefore that his wealth was probably founded on property development and ownership as well as from the shipping business.⁵ Photograph of W. P. Beech provided by D. Dashwood-Howard.



There is no evidence that the Beech family ever experienced any financial difficulties during this period and it is therefore reasonable to conclude that W.P. Beech was a prosperous and wealthy individual before 1861. It is almost certain therefore he would have contributed a fair share of the finance required to purchase the many ships acquired during this partnership period of some eight years. We do not know the profit sharing percentages involved in the partnership agreements but the two sons would probably have received quite low shares in the Henry Castle & Sons partnership. Ideally, the Castle & Sons & Beech partnerships probably would have been on a fifty/fifty split but this would depend on the division of resources provided by each party and the value attributed to the amount of capital involved. Profit shares were usually based on the partnership capital contributed and any personal drawings only made from the profit element calculated each year. Unfortunately we do not have the details about the arrangements involved.

Henry Castle too, as we know, had been successful operating from Baltic Wharf for over eighteen years at the time of the partnership formation. He certainly would have had adequate funds to contribute as well to the purchasing costs involved where required. However, the evidence also indicates that the Admiralty were pursuing a new course of action under the direction of Vice Admiral Spencer Robinson, Controller of the Navy. Many breaking contracts were undertaken on a price per ton broken up basis with all the marked metals being returned to the Admiralty stores - see Chapter 11.

Nonetheless, the finance required to meet the overall opportunity was obviously better met by the combined efforts of two parties rather than one and the formation of the Castle and Beech businesses was certainly opportune and effective.

It is suggested therefore that some of the earlier ships may have been broken up on a contract basis thus preserving cash resources for outright purchases, which had also become a pressing priority from the Admiralty's point of view - see correspondence below and also Chapter 11. The latter have been reproduced in full as they demonstrate in detail the fundamental change in Admiralty thinking that was taking place at the time.

A further consideration concerned the background political position. The Navy and Parliament and indeed Queen Victoria had been concerned greatly at the growth in the French Navy and for years there was a fear of invasion which did not dissipate until about the mid-1860s. Thereafter there was a greater willingness to dispose of the surplus wooden ships which had been anchored in rivers and estuaries for many decades. The rapid advancement of steam propelled ships and the advent of the screw propeller also necessitated that many ships on the stocks had to be re-designed and rebuilt to meet modern requirements. All of this meant that the Admiralty needed to raise money and were anxious to dispose of the surplus wooden vessels at the best price available and to relieve the Navy of the ongoing and heavy cost of maintenance of older ships that would be unlikely ever to see active service again - see Chapter 11.

Up until 1865 the ships would have been sold mainly on an auction basis, by public tender or by private treaty. However, as the costs of purchase would still be high for an individual breaker the use of the contract basis, previously mentioned, may also have been utilised. This growing trend is evidenced by the preparation of a new breaking style of contract dated that year – see the full contract details in Chapter 11 - which sets out in considerable detail how that particular process would operate.

Whether the ships were purchased for breaking or broken up by contract we have noted the need to return the copper and metals to the Admiralty stores. This subject was also debated fiercely within the Admiralty where the Storekeeper General was against selling off the copper metals with the ships and wanted all the copper and marked metals to be returned to the Dockyards as had previously been the case. We have explained this development, which took place in 1867, more fully in Chapter 11.

The foregoing meant that these valuable commodities, whether returned or not to the Admiralty, had to be properly protected against theft and pilferage, which was a significant problem. Unfortunately just such an experience was encountered at the Charlton yard in 1864 and considerable time and effort was devoted to deciding how to deal with the problem. In the end rather than using the services of the Metropolitan Police Castle & Beech provided their own security to the satisfaction of the Admiralty. It is also noted that at this time the Yard had become known as the Admiralty Shipbreaking Yard indicating the significant relationship that had developed between the parties. The applicable letter is set out below.⁶

ADMIRALTY SHIPBREAKING YARD,
Charlton
30th January 1865

To A.Y.R. Bristow Esq.
Solicitor to the Admiralty

Sir

In reply to your favour of the 26th inst. proposing to place the property belonging to the Crown now and at future times in our charge as Contractors for the breaking up of H.M. Ships under the care of the Metropolitan Police. We beg to state that the property is now efficiently watched and guarded at the cost to us of a sum not exceeding £200 per annum. It would however be satisfactory to us as such as to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to place the property in the charge of the Police and we shall be willing to pay that sum viz £200 per annum towards the cost of the same.

We are Sir
Your obedient Servants
Castles & Beech

Controller of the Navy

With reference to the accompanying papers for your suggestion and if necessary I will take an opportunity of seeing you.

*A.Y.R. Bristow
1st Feby 1865*

As further clarification of the views of the Admiralty on the subject of policing the yard the internal memorandum written by Robert Spencer Robinson to Mr Bristow, the Admiralty solicitor, explains the final outcome.⁷

**EMPLOYMENT OF METROPOLITAN POLICE TO GUARD
CASTLE & BEECH'S PREMISES**

2nd February 1865

*A.R. Bristow Esq.
10 Lancaster Place
Strand.*

As a general rule I am of opinion that all the fetters and clogs put upon the transaction of business by strict and stringent definitions lead to more harm than good, and promote rather than prevent disputes, which may end in litigation.

*The Contractors are I should suppose sufficiently bound by the terms quoted in Mr. Beeby's letter marked * and as by their letter of the 30th January state that their property is sufficiently guarded and watched by themselves at a cost of £200 per annum. I do not see the necessity of pressing upon them the employment of Metropolitan Police.*

I think it quite natural that the Police should see everything in the light, that without them plunder would go on to a great extent. But some deduction may reasonably be made from their anticipations, and I do not think it would be fair to saddle the Contractors with any greater expense on account of watching their premises than the £200 they have voluntarily undertaken to bear.

I do not make out from the Papers whether that £200 a year would pay the expenses of the Metropolitan Police. I presume not, and in any case, the presence of the police, would I should say weaken the claim which the Admiralty can bring against the Contractors for the loss of copper and mixed metal articles.

If Mr. Bristow wishes to see me on this subject I am always at his orders any day except between 12 and one, when I may be at the Board.

Rob Spencer Robinson

The subject of theft and pilferage is a recurring theme throughout the decades in the nineteenth century as we have already seen from experiences gained in Sydney, NSW and as we will also see in future years - see Chapter 6.

The Admiralty had contracted out ships for breaking as we have already noted, but the preferred solution was an outright sale at a realistic and hopefully at a substantial valuation. Unfortunately, this did not turn out to be the case and debates, bordering on outrage, often took place in Parliament and in the Press. At the same time competitive prices also had to be achieved where a breaking up contract arrangement was negotiated. This was particularly the case in 1865, as indicated by the following correspondence between the Admiralty and Castle & Beech. However, this was about to change significantly and the debate involved at political level would continue for many years. Nonetheless, the discussions in 1865 indicated that the percentage costs payable to a

contractor were subject to considerable scrutiny and it became the subject of an exchange of correspondence between Castle & Beech and the Admiralty. Unfortunately, not all the letters written are available to us. However, the following letter and the comments on the reverse demonstrate the extent of the figures involved.⁸

ADMIRALTY SHIPBREAKING YARD
Charlton

15th August 1865

To the Registrar of Contracts

Sir

In reply to your letter of the 11th inst proposing a reduction in the percentage on our contract for "Breaking up Ships" we very respectfully leave to remark that our 15 per cent in London is not equivalent to 12½ in the country, i .e. labour is 25 per cent less than in London and the rent of premises there is actually nominal, which our rental with taxes is £1500 a year. Having also expended a large sum of money on steam cranes and plant we trust their Lordships will confirm to us the contract on the same terms.

Nevertheless should their Lordships decide otherwise, we are prepared to accept their conditions.

We are Sir,
Your most obedient Servants
Henry Castle & Sons
Wm. P. Beech

The comments shown on the reverse of the above letter are shown below

Contract Office

17th August 1865

On the other side is Messrs. Castles and Beech's reply to the letter which was written to them in pursuance of their Lordship's directions of the 10th inst. (Papers enclosed).

"In submitting Castle & Beech's answer for their Lordships directions, I beg leave to state that in the comparison they institute between their price and that of the other contractors, they omit to state that they have 6d a ton more for breaking than the other contractors, which will go far to equalize the price of labour. The London Markets offer better opportunities for disposing of the old materials, and I beg leave to point out that 12½ per cent will be a paying price or they would not accept it. Under all the circumstances of the case I beg to submit that I may be authorized to acquaint them that their Lordships accept the offer to continue the contract at the lower rate viz (12½ per cent) and will send the "Alecto" to take to pieces so soon as her machinery has been removed (see min: herewith) with such other vessels as their Lordships may hereafter see fit to hand over to them to be broken up under their Contract."

Antonio Brady
Registrar of Contracts

The Secretary of the Admiralty

It is noteworthy that the Admiralty refer to their - Castle & Beech - contract in the 17th August 1865 internal memorandum, thus implying that there was a specific contract with Castle & Beech as distinct from a separate contract between Henry Castle and the Admiralty and it may be that there were two contracts running side by side. Certainly the foregoing memo is proof that the breaking up type of contract arrangement was being utilised. This is supported by the introduction of the new contract format that came into use in 1865. It is interesting though that the Admiralty thought that Castle & Beech were expensive and requested a reduction of 2½% per cent in the contract payable rate.

The year 1866 was a busy one for the Castle family as 14 of the 19 ships acquired that year were on behalf of the family partnership and only 5 were for Castle & Beech, consequently a determined move was made by Castle & Beech to purchase all or any of the ships shown on the attached list of 32 ships which had been identified as possibly being for sale or to be broken up by contract. The sum involved was very considerable, amounting to £235,110 in total.⁹ The fact that this was a bold move is further confirmed by a subsequent letter dated 23rd January increasing the offer per ship by £500 for 28 ships and by £250 per ship for the other four, bringing the total amount offered up to £250,110.¹⁰

BALTIC WHARF,
Millbank,
London SW

19th January 1867

To the Controller of the Navy

Sir

We respectfully beg to submit for their Lordships consideration an offer (annexed) for the purchase of all or any of those Ships which are reported as being intended for sale or to be broken up. The marked copper & metal to be returned to the Admiralty at the usual marked prices and the Iron ballast (if any) and the Harbour Stores to be removed.

We have the honour to be, Sir,
Your most obedient Servants
Henry Castle & Sons
Wm. P. Beech

To Admiral R.S. Robinson
Admiralty
Whitehall

<i>Ships Name</i>	<i>Amount offered</i>
	£
<i>Agamemnon</i>	8756
<i>Algiers</i>	9550
<i>Caesar</i>	7117
<i>Colossus</i>	6275
<i>Diadem</i>	8207
<i>Hannibal</i>	8840
<i>Imperieuse</i>	6275
<i>Marlboro</i>	12100
<i>Nelson</i>	7840
<i>Neptune</i>	8000
<i>Prince Regent</i>	7905
<i>Queen</i>	9100
<i>Termagant</i>	4000
<i>Victor Emanuel</i>	8850
<i>Albion</i>	7700
<i>Brunswick</i>	6330
<i>Buzzard</i>	3000
<i>Centurion</i>	6475
<i>Defiance</i>	11000
<i>Exmouth</i>	7500
<i>Forth</i> £3000 <i>Seahorse</i> £3000	6000
<i>St. Jean D'Acre</i>	9000

<i>Jas. Watt</i>	9250
<i>London</i>	7000
<i>Leopard</i>	4360
<i>Majestic</i>	6615
<i>Nile</i>	7055
<i>Orlando (the boilers of this ship have been removed also the copper sheathing)</i>	7000
<i>Renown</i>	10000
<i>Royal William</i>	8000
<i>Sans Pareil</i>	6010

<i>32 Ships TOTAL</i>	<u>£235,110</u>

*Henry Castle & Sons,
Wm. P. Beech*

NB These vessels are all steamers, and this offer includes the purchase of the machinery now on board of such ships.

A few days later Castle & Beech amended their offer as set out in their letter below dated 23rd January 1867

*BALTIC WHARF
Millbank
London
23rd January 1867*

*To the Controller of the Navy
Admiral R.S. Robinson
Admiralty, Whitehall*

Sir

With reference to our offer of the 19th inst and in reply to your letter of the 22nd, we beg to inform you that if the "Hannibal" be sold as she stands including whatever stores she may have on board, and without any restriction as to returning the older copper & metal, we could give £500 in addition to the sum offered and the same amount extra for all the Ships excepting the "Leopard", "Buzzard", "Seahorse" & "Forth" the extra value of these 4 ships would be £250 each. With these additions the total offer for the 32 ships amounts to £250,110.

We beg to observe that it would be much more satisfactory to have the ships delivered over as described in your letter; we have therefore given the full value for what is the custom of the service to take out.

*We have the honour to be, Sirs
Your most obedient Servants
Henry Castle & Sons
Wm. P. Beech*

It appears that the offer was not taken up by the Admiralty as a significant internal debate ensued over the suitability of the offer and of the prices stated. Shortly thereafter the Controller of the Navy prepared a memorandum regarding this perplexing subject which is set out below.¹¹ In addition to the now well-known problem of returning the copper and other metals to the Storekeeper General the question of the prices received for the obsolete ships was now foremost as an issue.

ADMIRALTY S.W.

18th February 1867

With reference to the Controller's submission of the 25th January last relative to the sale of Old Ships, and to the Storekeeper General's remarks upon it, I beg leave to offer a few observations which may I hope help to place the subject in the clearest possible light before their Lordships.

I beg them to believe that if I am obliged for the purpose of putting this important matter before them in all its bearings, somewhat to criticize the Storekeeper General's arguments, I do so with the highest respect for his great talents and for the long and valuable services he has rendered at the head of a great Department.

I must recapitulate what several of my submissions, which do not appear to have been seen by the Storekeeper General, have made familiar to their Lordships, viz. that the object of the sale of Ships is two-fold.

1st. The saving of annual expense of maintenance.

2nd. The relieving of the Treasury from a portion of the charge upon it for Naval Construction by handing over to the Exchequer the largest amount that can be procured by the sale of these Ships.

In my former submissions (it was therefore unnecessary to repeat it in the submission of 25th January), I shewed distinctly that although there were several ways of effecting the first object, there was but one way of effecting the second and especially that compelling the purchaser of old ships to sell to the Storekeeper General the old metal proceeding from those ships, did not result in paying into the Treasury any money which could be used as a set off against expenditure on the construction of Ships, and this latter object was what we have been particularly called upon to aim at.

I am quite aware of what is to be said on the ultimate balance of account that may be come to, between the Treasury and the Storekeeper General's Vote (sic), if the copper is sold to him, but this arrangement does not meet the urgent want of a large payment into the treasury during the ensuing financial year and the argument of the Storekeeper General throughout is founded on a complete disregard of this necessity. When the Storekeeper General says that "there is no reason for the conclusions that the omission of that usual stipulation from the conditions of Sales of Ships would be an inducement to purchasers to pay more money for the ships." he is clearly mistaken, for the very papers that accompanied my submission of the 25th January shewed that the first party in the field augmented their offer at once by £500 on each of the larger ships as soon as they understood that the conditions might be relaxed, and this was by no means a final offer; the same remark applies to the sale of old Stores or fixtures in the ship, and it may further be observed that the quantity of old and obsolete stores procured by the breaking up of Ships is very large already and is not wanted in the Dockyard.

The Certificate or Bond which it is proposed to exact from the purchaser that he will only dispose of the copper in a certain way is a practical restriction, which has its weight as all restrictions necessarily have, but the obligation to sell at fixed prices to the nearest Dockyard is as injurious, if not more so, to the interests of the Purchaser. Against the theory that this obligation to return all old metal at some future time to a Dockyard operates beneficially to the Admiralty in procuring a higher price for old Ships I place the actual fact I have just quoted.

Unless I am quite misinformed the Naval Store Act would not stand in the way of an arrangement by which the purchaser bound himself to sell the old metal to a certain firm under an engagement from that firm to melt the metal. I cannot attach any serious weight to these objections, and if they

were of as much importance as the Storekeeper General supposes an amendment to the Store Act would remove this difficulty out of the way.

The other great point of the Storekeeper General's argument is the very low price that these ships will sell for as compared with their cost. Here it is necessary not to confound cost with value. The value of these ships may bear no proportion to their cost, and yet it may be sound economy to realize that value. The value of that which you do not want can only be ascertained by the price others will give for it. The retaining in one's possession what is not wanted, what is costly to retain, and what cannot be used without a large additional expenditure of money upon the article itself, is certainly uneconomical. This is an exact description of the case of these old obsolete ships.

It is not proposed to sell any but what are either quite unfit for modern warfare, or are in such an advanced state of decay as to make them thoroughly useless. When those which it is thought right to dispose of are gone, a great number will still remain; but to keep up in our harbours long lines of ships which no one will venture to repair on account of the expense, or to fit out for sea on account of their unfitness for warfare, because there are certain fancied difficulties in the way of realizing their value, because nothing approaching the original cost of such ships can be obtained is unbecoming to a vigorous Naval Administration.

The case can be stated in a few lines. How can a mass of costly but useless material be converted into a new and much wanted engine of war. The answer which must occur to everyone is "Dispose of what is useless on the best terms you can procure and apply the proceeds towards buying what is not only useful but of paramount necessity". I am not the least deterred from believing in the soundness of the suggestion I have made by Mr. Romaine's very forcible remarks on the difficulties the Naval Store Act puts in the way of what I have called an unrestricted sale, but which in reality does restrict in a great measure the sale of old metal.

If the purchasers of this metal agree to melt it, and it has been understood that the sellers and buyers will give security that this shall be done, and the Admiralty need deal only with Firms on whom it can rely, their Lordships need not I think anticipate any insuperable difficulties in using this Act for the conviction of Marine Store dealers who shall have pilfered in small quantities from their Dockyards.

At any rate, I cannot admit that an Act, the intention of which was to protect Naval property, must of necessity be an obstacle to the advantageous disposal of that property, or that if some difficulties exist they cannot be removed. The work has to be done, and I feel sure that if their Lordships are of that opinion, and act upon it with energy, there is a prospect of realizing a large amount of money, of saving a considerable annual outlay, and so converting decaying and useless materials into the modern engines of war, which we so much require.

Rob Spencer Robinson

In the event, a study of the ship list above indicates that only three of the ships in the list were actually sold to Castle & Beech the *Colossus*, *Termagant* and *Imperieuse*. The *Queen* was sold to Castles but delivered to Beech and we comment further on this arrangement below. The dissension within the Admiralty clearly affected the position and an inevitable delay occurred in negotiating the release of further ships for sale to the partnership.

Castle and Beech did pursue the matter further as noted in their letter of 29th February 1868, nearly a year later when they admitted they were looking for more work - see transcription below.¹² After this no further ships were acquired by Castle & Beech and the partnership was therefore moving towards its eventual conclusion.

BALTIC WHARF,
Millbank,
London S.W.

29th February 1868

To the Controller of the Navy

Sir

Referring to the sale of 13 Line of Battle Ships & Frigates which realised £87,533 it has occurred to us whether their Lordships would give the purchasers of those vessels an opportunity of continuing the demolition of another list of ships at the same rate per ton that the 13 were sold for viz average £2.15.0.

The following reasons prompt us to hope that the above proposal should be favourably entertained.

1st. That tenders were received from several firms & (we presume) the highest offers accepted.

2nd. That the process of breaking up has proved that the price obtained was fair and reasonable and therefore the contractors will not have more than a moderate margin for their trouble.

3rd. That ships since the sale of the 13 submitted to Public Tender have not realised so much in proportion & consequently not sold at all.

If the former suggestion should not be approved of we should like to know if our Tender would be entertained for the purchase of any ships. 23 vessels of the 32 we made an offer for 23 January 67 at Portsmouth and D'port are still on the Navy list besides nearly as many obsolete ships in the Medway.

We are now fast approaching the completion of the ships we bought last March and we are very desirous of finding more work for the employment of our staff, men & premises. Waiting the favour of a reply.

We have the honour to be Sir
Your very Obedient Servants

Henry Castle & Sons
Wm. P. Beech

Castle & Beech did not break up all thirteen ships as three of them, the *Majestic*, the *Brunswick* and the *Sans Pareil* held at Devonport, were sold to Marshalls of Plymouth, who made a higher offer. The other ten are shown above in the ships broken up list for 1867.

Whilst this debate was taking place a Parliamentary Select Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Charles Seely MP was set up to investigate the very matters which had been at the heart of the ongoing discussions between Castle & Beech and the Controller. The Committee was specifically "*Appointed to inquire and report as to the application of monies voted by Parliament for use of the Admiralty in the building, repairing and equipment of HM Ships.*"¹³ This only added to the overall delays that were taking place in releasing further large Naval ships for breaking. Castle & Beech were invited to submit their representations to the Committee and their response is detailed below.¹⁴

BALTIC WHARF,
Millbank.
London

2nd July 1868

To Seely Esq. M.P.
Chairman of the Select Committee
Admiralty Monies & Accounts
House of Commons

Sir

The name of our firm having been frequently brought before the Public in Connexion with the sale of H.M. Ships we beg leave very respectfully to forward for the information of the Committee a Statement of facts relating to that subject and we shall have much pleasure in attending for Examination should the Chairman or any of the Committee desire it.

The cost of breaking up Line of Battle Ships & Heavy Frigates including Tools & Labourers is 13/6 per ton, add to this for incidental expenses on each ship about (in round figures) £500 i.e. for towing, transporting, insurance, interest of money, rent of premises, plant, staff & sundry expenditure. The 13/6 per ton for Labour, Tools and £500 for incidental expenses makes the entire cost of each ship about £2250. This amount includes the removal of the engines and the cutting up of the old boilers. It is desirable to bring these figures before the notice of the Committee, having an important reference to the 10 ships we had the honor to buy off the Admiralty in March 67. The entire outlay after the purchase of the ships from first to last is about 17/6 per ton, or in other words a total expenditure to be added to the first cost of the 10 ships of £21268.12.6d. This sum added to the purchase money viz £66,773 gives a total of £88,041.12.6d to be realised before the purchasers can have any margin for their profit in the transaction.

The mode of sale of the 13 Line of Battleships & Frigates has been subject of much comment and objection generally taken to their being disposed of by Private Treaty, 5 firms being only invited to compete and inferring that the buyers had become possessed of their Vessels for less than their take and for less than would have been obtained had they been sold by Public Tender; we beg most respectfully to contradict these assertions, and we are prepared to prove that with regard to Private Sales H.M. ships have always realised in excess of those sold by Public Tender. By reference to the Parliamentary return "Navy Ships Sold" it will be seen that within 8 years 167 ships (of all kinds) have been sold 43 of that number are watch vessels & other small craft under 100 tons and that those sold Privately realised more than those sold Publicly.

A comparative abstract taken from the Parliamentary return "Navy Ships sold" (so far as relates to vessels for breaking up) to show the difference obtained for H.M. Ships between those sold Publicly & Privately.

	£	per ton
24429 Tons of Sailing Ships by Public Sale realised	£44413	= 1.16. 4
7539 Tons of Sailing Ships by Private Sale	£14559	= 1.18. 7
11276 Tons of Steamers Ships by Public Sale realised	£29562	= 2.12. 5
53954 Tons of Steamers by Private Sale	£172342	= 3. 3.10

These figures show the reverse of Private sales of old ships realising less than Publicly - in fact if all the vessels had been sold by treaty a further sum of £9,184.19.7d would have been obtained. In Oct 63 we bought HMS Vulture for £4,010 by Public Tender advertised to all the world and Aug 64 we bought by Private Treaty 7 Vessels almost facsimile to the Vulture for £33,724 or an advance of nearly £6,000 compared with the sum realised for the Vulture - as a rule when H.M. Ships are advertised to all the world and sold by Public Tender, the number of competitors at the time of sale is usually about 3 or 4 upon one occasion. The Teazer was put up for Public Sale and we were the only buyers & bought the ship entirely without competition.

With regard to the stores returned to H.M. Dockyards taken from the ships when broken up, these "Stores" simply comprise 2 items. viz old copper and old metal bearing the broad arrow mark - 21 instances (out of 167 ships sold) have occurred where the copper and metal taken from the vessel has exceeded the amount obtained by the sale of the ship. Out of 39 ships purchased by us not one single vessel has returned

anything like the amount (for copper & metal) that we paid for its purchase, therefore so far as we are concerned we should have no objection to the suggestion given by Mr. Samuda being adopted viz that a clause should be inserted at the time of sale that all the copper & metal bearing ↑ mark should be returned into H.M. Dockyards, but that the sum paid for the ship should be the maximum amount that the buyer of the vessel would receive whatever quantity of copper & metal the ship produced.

Referring to Dockyard valuations concerning old ships for breaking up, those returns do generally very far exceed the value that can possibly be realised. Vessels broken up in H.M. Dockyards & ships sold do by careful comparison afford the best guide as to the value (the value of a ship greatly depends upon the then present market price of copper & that material is now & has been for some time very low indeed & without any prospect of an advance). With a view to get at a comparison between Dockyard valuations and the amount offered for the purchase the case of the HMS Lily will afford a good opportunity of so doing. The Lily a steamer of 702 tons with engine taken out and having only her old boilers on board was last year put up for sale by Public Tender - the Public offered for the ship - our tender was £1750 and it was the highest offer - the Dockyard valuation being about 3 times as much as was tendered, the Admiralty, after the Lily was submitted for sale again a 2nd and 3rd time ordered the vessel to be broken up in H.M. Dockyard, Sheerness. The ship is now broken up and the old boilers were sold by Public Tender. We beg to submit that a return be obtained of the amount the Lily has realised including the boilers on board when offered for sale the first time and deducting the entire cost incurred in breaking up for the Shipwright & Labourers, moving the ship, removing the old boilers and a fair proportion for premises, tools, plant & incidental expenses.

With reference to the Collingwood (stated in particular to have been sold a great bargain) we did expect to be able to find a buyer for this vessel - we were not bound by our contract with the Admiralty to break the vessel up, at the same time we should not have sold the Collingwood or any ship without first attaining the sanction of the Government - the particulars of the Collingwood were circulated freely thro' some good houses who had interest with several foreign powers and offered for sale, we had numerous enquiries, but no purchaser was to be found - having failed to dispose of the ship as a whole we tried to sell the engines of the Collingwood, advertised them for sale & sent particulars to nearly every ship builder & Steam Ship Coy in England & all without success or even an offer - (these engines were new, ie they had not done any work although made 7 or 8 years since). Lastly we communicated with the makers of the engines of the Collingwood & we offered to dispose of them for £1700 but Messrs. Rennie after 3 or 4 weeks consideration declined to buy. The hulk of the ship & the engines are now nearly broken up & the entire proceeds will barely amount to the sum we paid for her purchase. As to the condition of the 10 ships viz. Cressy; Orion; Colossus; Leander; Imperieuse; Chesapeake; Arrogant; Collingwood; Euryalus & Termagant they were more or less absolutely rotten (excepting only the Collingwood) and waggon loads of rotten timber were taken from each ship - a fair specimen of this was forwarded to the Admiralty.

*We are Sir,
Your Very Obedient Servants,
Henry Castle
Wm.. P. Beech*

The figure of 39 ships confirmed as purchased, mentioned in paragraph 6 above, reconciles with our list, excluding the *Queen*, and the detailed analysis of the costs and prices involved offer an invaluable insight into the ramifications of the problems being discussed. It is particularly relevant that so much of the timber was absolutely rotten and that Castle & Beech were forced to send a sample to the Admiralty to prove this fact. Nine out of ten ships of the line purchased in 1867 were completely rotten. Generally, however the letter to Seely does attempt to justify the benefits of the Private Treaty method of purchase as opposed to a Public Sale. The persuasive nature and tone of the letter was probably also fuelled by the many stinging reports in the Press about the low amount of the proceeds raised from the sale of these famous Warships of the Line. The article in the Daily News in April of 1868 amply demonstrates the point.

"DAILY NEWS" (London, England)
Friday, 17th April 1868, Issue 6851
Category, News

THE BRITISH NAVY - A return was published yesterday of steamers and sailing vessels sold by the Admiralty since July 1859, stating the ages of the ships and their engines, the number and weight of spare screw propellers, the tonnage, the horse power and the amount of money obtained for each vessel. Particulars are also given as to the nature of the sale, the purchaser and the sum repaid by the Admiralty for the re-purchase of stores bearing the mark of the broad arrow. To these details is added a copy of the official reports relating to the sale and valuation of these vessels. It is, perhaps to be regretted that the original cost is not stated, but it is obvious that many of these once-famous men of war whose glory has departed, have been sold at what may be said to be "a tremendous sacrifice". We find, for instance, the *Orion*, a screw line-of battle ship of 3281 tons burthen, twelve years old, and fitted with engines of 600 horse power, sold as she stood for £8,650 and realising scarcely more than half that sum after the repurchase of stores bearing the government mark. Then there are the *Cressy* and the *Majestic*, ships of the same class but of less tonnage and horse power, only 13½ years old and considered to be effective vessels when England was called upon to "try a fall" with Russia - they were sold, the former realising a net sum of £991.11s.9d., and the latter £2,410.7s.9d. The *Brunswick*, also a screw two-decker, of 2492 tons burthen and 400 horse power, eleven years and three-quarters old, could not, it seems, obtain a purchaser for more than £1,995.18s.6d. while the *Colossus*, two decker of 2500 tons burthen and 400 horse power, sank to a lower indignity still, and fetched no more than £891.19s.6d. Frigates of the *Euryalus*, *Imperieuse*, *Arrogant* and *Termagant* classes, although sold also for breaking up seem to have been more fortunate in the prices they obtained; the former, a fine ship 2371 tons, which had the honour a few years ago of bearing Prince Alfred on his trial cruise, realising a net sum of £5,353.6s.8d. and the latter the smallest of the four sold for £4,324.16s.9d. The most startling fact for the British taxpayer is that the price tendered for the purchase of 32 steam-ships, including many that were the pride and glory of the country during the war of 1854/5 and one magnificent three-decker (the *Marlborough*) which four years before was serving her first commission as flagship in the Mediterranean - the sum offered for all these was not nearly equal to the cost of a single first-rate Ironclad of the British fleet at the present time. For these 32 vessels Messrs. Castle & Sons and W.P. Beech offered only £250,110 the vessels to be sold as they stood, including all stores on board, and without any restrictions as to returning old copper and other metal. In making his report to the Admiralty upon this offer, the Controller of the Navy expressed an opinion that it was worthy of consideration, but said that it required amending in several particulars. The Controller thought that the highest price obtainable had not been offered by Messrs. Castle & Beech and other terms were proposed by that official, and other contractors were invited to send in tenders. From the storekeeper-general's report we learn that the cost of five out of 13 ships proposed to be sold immediately was (including machinery) £513,474 and the total amount offered for them was only £31,505 or about one-fifteenth (sixteenth) of their original cost. The same authority tells us that the approximate cost of seven ships of the line and six frigates, including machinery, was no less than £1,313,223 whereas we find the actual sum realised on the sale of these did not exceed £50,000.

In the circumstances it is not surprising that there was a substantial pause in the volume of work on offer and this stalemate would have in itself led to the partnership possibly being viewed as having fulfilled its objectives. Whilst the situation drifted on into 1869 we then note from an announcement in the London Gazette that the partnership was dissolved on the 1st August 1869.

It seems at first to be a bit odd that such a successful partnership should be dissolved at this time in the late 1860s when so much shipbreaking opportunity was still to come in the years ahead. However, other background circumstances suggest a further complication linked with the Castle family estates and the likely difficulties that may have arisen. Henry Castle left his estate, in 1865, to his wife Harriet largely in trust and this certainly appeared to include Henry's share in the partnership with Beech. Harriet survived her husband for about nineteen months. She died in December 1867 and her will also left her estate in trust and with particular provision for the youngest daughter Maria.¹⁵

The foregoing in itself would not have been enough to threaten the working of the Beech partnership, although there would have been administrative problems to be resolved and the trustees would have had some considerable say in the overall situation. However, the trustee of Harriet's estate was her brother Samuel Nash, who was soon to be in conflict with the family over its claims on her estate and court proceedings were instigated. The

underlying circumstances are not fully known or understood, but the situation must clearly have had a detrimental effect on the day-to-day running of the business and finance previously available for the Castle partners would likely have been placed on hold until the outcome of the legal dispute was known. Clearly this situation was resolved in due course and it is noted with interest that Samuel Nash himself became bankrupt shortly thereafter. Such are the adversities of life - see further details in Chapter 6.

Undoubtedly it seems that the two Castle brothers Sidney and Abercrombie had amicably agreed with William Beech that nothing further could be transacted at that time, bearing in mind the Admiralty dilemma and the family dispute. It is assumed therefore that the prospects for further development of the partnership activities was somewhat bleak and that a dissolution of the partnership would probably be appropriate as soon as all the ships purchased in 1867 had been completely broken up. This would probably have been sometime in 1869 based on a reasonable allowance of the time required to break up a ship. In the Seely report it is implied that Castle & Beech broke up 10 ships in just under a year which is an average of about one per month. As we are not aware of the number of workers employed by the partnership it is difficult to be precise about the timings concerned. Our own calculations favour a three month time scale.

We have noted that the release of ships for sale by the Admiralty did in fact continue throughout 1868 and 1869, albeit mostly smaller vessels¹⁶ and that the combination of the two described problems facing the partnership did therefore create an interregnum in continuing the business along previous lines.

As the shipbreaking activity was continued subsequently by the two Castle brothers on their own, then clearly funds must have passed into their possession in order to allow Beech to withdraw from the separate partnership agreement. It is possible that payments were made over time or in kind as it is noted that the *Queen* is shown as having been purchased by Castle and broken up by Beech,¹⁷ which information has in the past been confusing to some researchers. It is possible therefore, in our opinion, that this ship was given to Beech in settlement of his share of the partnership capital and profit share. Beech broke up the *Queen* at Surrey Canal Wharf, the former Beatson Yard - see above.

In the event the partnership was dissolved on the 1st of August 1869 and published in the London Gazette on 12th November 1869.

Notice is hereby given, that the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned, Sidney Nash Castle and Abercrombie Castle, and William Philip Beech, carrying on the business as Admiralty Contractors, and Shipbreakers at Charlton, in the County of Kent, under the style or firm of Henry Castle and Sons, and W.P. Beech, was dissolved on the 1st day of August 1869, so far as regards the said William Philip Beech - Dated this 30th day of September, 1869.

*William P. Beech
Sidney N. Castle
Abercrombie Castle*

This event concludes the history of a most interesting time in the Castles Shipbreaking saga as it witnessed the dramatic upsurge in shipbreaking activity utilising the powerful connections of two determined men who were not only business colleagues but good personal friends as well. It is also a period during which sadly the deaths of both Henry and Harriet Castle occurred.

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