

CHAPTER 7

CASTLES SHIPBREAKING

The re-organisation of the shipbreaking activities after the bankruptcy of Henry Castle & Sons Limited was a complex affair and involved different parties in developing the way forward. We have therefore dealt with individuals and business organisations separately, rather than chronologically, and the period mainly covered falls between 1905 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and then up to 1942.

It has been noted that Henry Castle & Sons Ltd was placed in liquidation on 14th December 1904. The winding up of the company lasted until 5th March 1909.

The re-organisation after 1904 was particularly difficult for the Company and Sidney Nash Castle had become insolvent¹ and the Liquidator of Henry Castle & Sons Ltd was under an obligation to realise as much as possible for the creditors. 1905 and 1906 were active years for the disposal of ships by the Admiralty² and it was imperative that if the opportunity was to be grasped a new company would need to be formed to take over the shipbreaking business and facilities so that an active participation in the business on offer could be exploited.

As Castles Shipbreaking could seemingly not be formed and become operational until 1906 it was the firm of J. B. Garnham that stepped into the void and started to purchase ships during 1905 so that breaking work could continue on the by now idle wharves. Clearly, this would have to have been done on a contract basis between J. B. Garnham and the Liquidator where a price would have been agreed for the breaking work undertaken, whilst allowing Garnham to benefit from the subsequent sale of metals from the applicable ships involved. Unfortunately, we have not had sight of any such agreements.

Alternatively, the breaking up contracts may have been between Garnham and the Admiralty, thus avoiding the costs of purchasing the vessels and therefore facilitating the payment of the breaking up proceeds to the Liquidator of Henry Castle & Sons Limited via Garnham as an intermediary. As an agent Garnham may have been paid an agency commission or fee by the Liquidator for acting in this capacity, as the Admiralty would probably not have wished to deal direct with a company in liquidation.

Normally a Liquidator would primarily be concerned with the orderly realisation of assets, however the imminent prospect of a new company being formed to take over the assets and the business would have been sufficiently attractive so as to allow enough time for this proposed course of action to take place. Certainly, this was the intention as the Memorandum of Association of Castles Shipbreaking Ltd states that it was taking over the Assets, Liabilities and Business of Henry Castle & Sons Limited as a going concern:

"To acquire and take over as a going concern the business of shipbreakers, timber merchants and barge owners now carried on at Baltic Wharf, Millbank, Westminster and elsewhere, by Henry Castle & Sons Limited and all or any of the assets and liabilities of that company or in connection therewith and to develop and extend or to limit and restrict such business".³

Nonetheless, there must have been a deficit remaining in Henry Castle & Sons Limited after the transfer of assets and liabilities into Castles Shipbreaking Limited, in view of the length of time taken to complete the winding up of the bankrupt company. Calls may have been made on the assets of Sidney Nash Castle, which would have taken some time to be realised under the bankruptcy procedures.

The Castle family did not appear as shareholders or as Directors of the new Company, who were as follows: ⁴

Herbert Leonard Mitchell - Colonel (late) Royal Artillery
Charles Kennington - Chartered Accountant
David Harris - Retired Chemical Manufacturer

The initial shareholders, holding one share each, were as follows: ⁵

Herbert Leonard Mitchell – As above
Charles Kennington – As above
David Harris – As above
Alfred James Emberson - Stockbroker
Edward Brett Schartan – Photographer
William Bushell Pritchard - Solicitor
Garrett O'Moore - Accountant

With regard to the new Board of Directors, David Harris, as a chemist, was representing the interests of the firm of J. B. Garnham, Harris & Elton Ltd of which company he was a director and undoubtedly contributed much needed expertise in the field of metals, particularly those taken from ships acquired for breaking. Charles Kennington, as a chartered accountant, clearly provided the financial and accounting expertise, whilst Herbert Mitchell, ex-army colonel, may have been a man of considerable standing in the London community. Very little information about these three gentlemen has survived and it is doubtful if their involvement was on a full time basis. This largely meant that the two principal Castle family members Sidney junior and Philip, previously directors and shareholders of Henry Castle & Sons Limited, together with William Ball, might have been running the Company on a day-to-day basis as employees.

Sidney Nash Castle, in bankruptcy, was not conspicuous after 1904 for obvious reasons, but he would undoubtedly have been contributing substantial knowledge and expertise in assisting the renewed shipbreaking activity wherever possible. As far, as is known, he was always in reasonably good health until his unexpected death in 1910 of a heart attack.⁶ The strains and stresses certainly would have taken their toll over the preceding years. However, his name is not recorded within the new company records from the date of its formation onwards.

James Coote Garnham was later appointed to the board but resigned in 1912⁷ when Philip Castle, who it appears had been involved in an administrative role at Baltic Wharf, was appointed to the Board of Directors.⁸

Nothing has been traced regarding Sidney Castle junior's role during this period, but it is believed he continued to assist at the Charlton and Long's Wharf Yards, whilst Philip remained at Baltic Wharf. As mentioned below Sidney did not leave the Thames until 1911, the year after his father's death, and his skills and services, courted by Hughes Bolckow, could not have been maintained unless he had continued to be actively involved in the shipbreaking business on the Thames. William Ball was also continuously involved in the management of the company. Consequently, his subsequent involvement in the business in later years has therefore warranted a separate narrative regarding his career - see below.

We do not, surprisingly, have a great deal of information about the life and times of Philip Castle. He was two years younger than his brother Sidney and was reputed to possess good business ability and clearly managed the administration of the new company from the offices at Baltic Wharf, where the previous Head Office had been based. However, his progression after 1912 was steady. By 1916 he held 350 of the 4950 shares issued. By 1926 his holding had increased to 675 and that of his wife Jessie was 875, thus by 1926 a Castle family member controlled about 30% of the shares in issue.⁹ We believe that Philip's services grew significantly in importance from 1919 as sadly Herbert Mitchell died on 5th July that year.¹¹ Philip later became Managing Director.¹⁰ Charles Kennington remained as



PHILIP CASTLE
Castles Archives

a Director and Chairman until 1931 when he retired from the Board, after 25 years' service, and Philip Castle then succeeded to the Chairmanship.¹² It is noteworthy that all through the years from 1911 and up to 1933 Sidney Castle junior was not involved in the business activities of Castles Shipbreaking Ltd - see biography below.

As regards the level of shipbreaking activity, after 1904, it is noted that a total of 29 ships was acquired and broken up by Castles Shipbreaking (CS) between 1905 and 1914. Garnham undertook the purchase of 13 of these ships - see below - of which 6 took place in the interregnum between 1904 and 1906. Thereafter he continued to purchase ships or negotiate a breaking up contract for the new company, as outlined in page 1 above, presumably to aid the total funding required in arranging the acquisitions involved. What we do not know at present is how many of these ships were supplied on a breaking up contract basis with the Admiralty rather than by a private treaty sale. If they were all purchased outright the total funds involved would have been extremely large. Certainly the balance sheet of Castles Shipbreaking, in our possession for the year 1916,¹³ shows that the capital and resources of the Company would not have previously supported the outright purchase type of contract.

Ships Broken Up 1905 -1914 ¹⁴

<i>Arethusa</i>	1905	2nd Class Cruiser	Garnham
<i>Cossack</i>	1905	Torpedo Cruiser	Garnham
<i>Mohawk</i>	1905	Torpedo Cruiser	Garnham
<i>Monarch/Simoom</i>	1905	Iron S Ship	Garnham
<i>Pembroke</i>	1905	3rd Rate 74	Garnham
<i>Severn</i>	1905	2nd Class Cruiser	Garnham
<i>Belvidera</i>	1906	5th Rate 36	Garnham
<i>Boscawen/Trafalgar</i>	1906	1st Rate 110	CS
<i>Caledonia - late Impregnable</i>	1906	2nd Rate 91	CS
<i>Camperdown/Trafalgar/Pitt</i>	1906	1st Rate 106	CS
<i>Formidable</i>	1906	2nd Rate 84	CS
<i>Impregnable/Caledonia</i>	1906	2nd Rate 98	CS
<i>Mildura ex Pelorus</i>	1906	3rd Class Cruiser	Garnham
<i>Skylark</i>	1906	Wood S Gunboat	Garnham
<i>St. Vincent</i>	1906	1st Rate 120	CS
<i>Superb</i>	1906	Battleship	Garnham
<i>Widgeon</i>	1906	Compos. S Gunboat	CS
<i>Conquerer</i>	1907	Battleship	CS
<i>Alexandra</i>	1908	Battleship	CS
<i>Calcutta</i>	1908	2nd Rate 84	CS
<i>Lily</i>	1908	Brig 16	CS
<i>Orontes (late Swiftsure)</i>	1908	Iron Armoured Ship	CS
<i>Seaflower</i>	1908	Training Brig 8	CS
<i>Thunderer</i>	1909	Turret Ship	Garnham
<i>Tenedos II/Duncan</i>	1910	Screw 1st Rate 101	CS
<i>Daedalus</i>	1911	5th Rate 46	Garnham
<i>Hardy</i>	1911	Destroyer	Garnham
<i>Trafalgar</i>	1911	Battleship	Garnham
<i>Indefatigable</i>	1914	4th Rate 50	CS

Total Number of Ships **29**

With the advent of war in 1914 all Naval shipbreaking activity within the company appears to have ceased and the negotiations with Holloway Brothers regarding the acquisition of the Baltic Wharf site in 1913 - see below - meant that the use of the wharves there had to be discontinued. We have little information about activity during the First World War years,

although there was considerable debate about what to do with the many ships figureheads in the possession of Castles - see Chapter 9.

Following the period after the end of World War I there is a record of only 9 ships having been bought by Castles Shipbreaking. It is during this period of decline in the availability of wooden sailing ships for breaking up that we become aware of the change in activity from shipbreaking to garden furniture manufacture. The way in which this developed is explained in Chapter 8.

Ships Broken Up 1915-1939 ¹⁵

<i>Challenger</i>	1921	Wood S Corvette	Garnham
<i>Helena</i>	1921	Brig Sloop 16	Garnham
<i>Hindustan/Fisgard III</i>	1921	2nd Rate 80	Garnham
<i>Impregnable/Howe</i>	1921	1st Rate 110	Garnham
<i>Dido/Actaeon II</i>	1922	Wood S Corvette	Garnham
<i>Ariadne/Actaeon/Vernon II</i>	1923	Wood S Frigate	CS
<i>Newcastle</i>	1929	Wood S Frigate	CS
<i>Arethusa</i>	1933	4th Rate 50	CS
<i>Defence</i>	1935	Iron S Ship	CS

Total Number of Ships 9

J.B. GARNHAM

The firm of J.B. Garnham, which was established in 1867, continued in existence until the mid-1960s. It had a long and interesting association with the Castles shipbreaking companies. James Bird Garnham, the founder of the firm, was born in Clerkenwell in 1842 and by the age of twenty-five had set up his own metal merchant business in the City of London, specialising in the non-ferrous scrap metal business in particular. Over the years the firm also specialised in metallurgical by-products and secondary raw materials generally. They possessed a considerable knowledge of the antimony, aluminium, nickel, cobalt and tungsten commodities trade, but were especially involved with copper and zinc as well as tin and lead.

James lived in the City, at 19 Gordon Road, and was obviously well connected. Many of the metals purchased were held in secure storage facilities and specially graded for foundry use. Large stocks were usually held. It is clear therefore that the firm was very interested in the metal available from the breaking up of HM ships and would naturally have developed close connections with the Castle shipbreaking family. James Bird was clearly a very successful businessman and became wealthy as result of his metal merchandising activities.¹⁶

James's son, James Coote Garnham, born in 1870, joined the family company and worked with his father in continuing to build the business during the 1890s. The firm had offices at Upper Thames Street and afterwards at Plantation House, Mincing Lane EC3. The firm became a limited company called J. B. Garnham Ltd and later became Garnham, Harris & Elton Ltd, metal merchants and smelters, following the admission of new directors and shareholders. David Harris, a chemicals manufacturer, became a director of Castles Shipbreaking in 1906 as mentioned above. Searches of the name Elton has yielded no result. The association of the Garnham business with Castles started in 1903 - see below - and continued until the death of both Garnhams in the early 1920s. James Coote died in Cairo in 1921, at the early age of fifty, and his father James Bird died the following year.¹⁷

The company continued to trade for many years after the deaths of the original family members until it was purchased by Wolverhampton Metals in 1965, which in turn was taken over by Imperial Metal Industries in 1967. Unfortunately, there do not seem to be

any Garnham records at I.M.I. or at the Public Record Office and the company did not actively continue its connections with Castles after 1921.

We first hear about Garnham in connection with HM ship purchases in 1903 when the *Gorgon* was sold to them for £8,600.¹⁸ We have subsequently traced a further twenty one ships as having been sold to Garnham between 1905 and 1922 – see list below.

Perhaps the most interesting connection with Castles was in 1904 when Garnham put up the finance for the purchase of the *Duke of Wellington*, the *Hannibal*, the *Algiers* and the *Edgar* in a complex series of transactions with Henry Castle & Sons Ltd - see Chapter 6. The contact name is shown as James Bird Garnham of 132 Upper Thames Street, London. Clearly, the metal sales arising out of the breaking of these four ships was expected to be substantial.

Overall, it is evident that the Garnhams were acting as ship brokers and purchasers of ships sold out of the Navy from the early 1900s onwards. Whilst no documentation has been traced for the breaking up of the Garnham purchased ships there is little doubt that Garnham was using Castles as the principal breaker. It is likely that a separate contract existed between Garnham and Castles whereby the metal was sold or given back to Garnham, Castles being allowed to keep the ships timber and other artefacts. There may also have been a loan arrangement which had to be repaid to Garnham to cover his financing of a ship's purchase. We also consider that some of the contracts may have been on a percentage basis whereby all proceeds of sale of the broken up material had to be used to repay the Admiralty, via Garnham. However, this conflicts with the retention of much of the timber by Castles and used subsequently in their furniture manufacturing activity and other timber trading arrangements - see comments in Chapter 10.

The relationship between Castles and Garnham continued for many years afterwards and James Coote Garnham is recorded as a director and shareholder of Castles Shipbreaking Co. Ltd.¹⁹ By 1921 the firm of Garnham was still linked to the London Castle Company and to Sidney Castle junior who had first moved to Hughes Bolckow at Blyth in Northumberland around 1911 and then later to Plymouth towards the end of World War I. It is likely that James Coote Garnham and Sidney Castle worked well together and it is noted that the former resigned from the Board of Directors of Castles Shipbreaking Ltd in 1912²⁰ at the probable wish of the Garnhams to keep themselves more independent when dealing with appropriate shipbreaking firms. In this connection it is worthy of note that the *Britannia* of Dartmouth fame is recorded as being purchased by Garnham and delivered to Hughes Bolckow for breaking in 1916.²¹ It appears therefore that James Coote may have been dealing with Sidney junior and needed to adopt a more neutral stance between the two shipbreaking companies. Nonetheless their contacts and connections with Castles were ongoing although it is likely at this stage that J. B. Garnham would have been in semi-retirement, as he was in his mid-seventies by then, thus leaving much of the work and business decisions to his son.

A particularly interesting series of transactions concerns the purchase of a further four ships by Garnham, the *Hindustan*, formerly part of the Britannia Naval College, the *Impregnable*, *Challenger* and *Dido*. We know that the *Impregnable* re-named *Bulwark* was sold to J.B. Garnham at Castles Yard, Woolwich for breaking up in 1921. By this time the son James Coote had died in Egypt.²²

Subsequently the teak and oak from the *Impregnable* and the *Hindustan* was used in the construction of the Liberty's Tudor building in Great Marlborough Street, London which Higgs & Hill built between 1922 and 1924. According to Castles records over 24,000 cubic feet of old ships timbers were supplied by them for use on this project – see Chapter 8.

SHIPS SOLD TO J. B. GARNHAM

1903

13.5.1903 - *Gorgon* - Sold at Auction in Devonport DY to J B Garnham for £8,600

15.9.1903 - *Neptune* - Sold Garnham; Broken Up in Germany

1905

4.4.1905 - *Arethusia*

4.4.1905 - *Cossack*

4.4.1905 - *Mohawk*

4.4.1905 - *Monarch*

4.4.1905 - *Severn*

1906

3.4.1906 - *Mildura* - Sold £7,200

15.5.1906 - *Superb* - Sold £19,000

10.7.1906 - *Belvidera* - Sold £1,800

10.7.1906 - *Skylark* - Sold £1,120

1908

6.10.1908 - *Alexandra*

1909

13.7.1909 - *Thunderer* - Sold £19,500

1911

9.5.1911 - *Trafalgar*

1.7.1911 - *Hardy*

14.9.1911 - *Daedalus*

1914

13.11.1914 - *Prince of Wales* - Sold Garnham. Resold Hughes Bolckow and arrived 7.1916 at Blyth to BU

1921

6.1.1921 - *Challenger*

6.1.1921 - *Helena*

18.2.1921 - *Bulwark* (Impregnable)

10.5.1921 - *Hindustan*

1922

17.7.1922 - *Dido*

Holloway Brothers

In the years immediately preceding World War I immense challenges had been encountered by the Castle family, but by the end of 1910 many matters had changed allowing a clearer view of the future to evolve.

Sidney Castle senior had unfortunately died suddenly in 1910 and the following year his son Sidney junior had moved north to work for Hughes Bolckow. In addition, the final winding up of Henry Castle & Sons Ltd had taken place in 1909. We have no direct evidence that Philip Castle was working at Baltic Wharf but his subsequent appointment to the Board of Directors of Castles Shipbreaking Ltd a few years later in 1912 - see above - implied that his knowledge, experience and business skills may have been put to good use by the successor company to Henry Castle & Sons Ltd.

It is also worthwhile at this point to mention the name of William Ball, from Plymouth, who was later to play such a major role in the final days of the Castles Shipbreaking business. We were informed by his niece, Lady Bawden, that her uncle had joined Castles originally

by appointment through the Admiralty. It was also indicated by Gladys Bromley that he joined the firm around 1904 in order to assist the company with the then existing problems encountered with the breaking up of the *Ajax*.

After this time we hear little of him until he became a director and then subsequent owner of the Company. However, we believe that prior to that time he was the General Manager of Castles Shipbreaking and may have been closely involved with the yard at Long's Wharf, Woolwich. He was living in the area and later became Mayor of Greenwich, so he was an active and well-established figure in the community.

The other factor coming into play at this time was the expiry of the 70 year lease period from 1839 agreed by the Crown through the Commissioners of His Majesty's Forests and Lands in respect of the site at Baltic Wharf. Obviously, the renewal of that lease was of paramount importance to ensure continuity of the company's operations at that location, where they had been since 1842. It had been assigned to Sidney Castle senior around 1872, then to Henry Castle & Sons Ltd and thereafter to Castles Shipbreaking Ltd.

In 1908 negotiations had commenced with the Commissioners of Forests and Lands but it was proving to be difficult owing to the need to carry out substantial prior repairs and improvements to the site. After much negotiation it seems to have been decided to allow Castles Shipbreaking to continue as lessees by way of an agreement to a lease of the site, pending the resolution of the requirements to carry out the repairs and improvements before any further long-term renewal of a lease of the land and premises at Baltic Wharf and Bridge Wharf could be granted. The position remained unresolved until 1913 when an opportunity to provide a solution came to fruition.²³

First, it appears that the part of the site forming the original Lot 5 in 1842 would be leased to a company called M Fortescue and Sons Limited rather than the whole site as envisaged under the agreement to lease entered into on 4th March 1908.²⁴

Second, Holloway Brothers (London) Limited was interested in acquiring the remaining part of the site consisting of the original Lot 6 of 1842 and Bridge Wharf which had originally been leased to the Freeman family in 1839. Holloway Brothers were prepared to take a lease from the Commissioners, subject to their agreement, instead of Castles on the basis that they, Castles, would carry out the repairs and improvements needed. The Commissioners had specified on the 11th April 1913 that, in accordance with the plans and specifications provided, Castles must complete all the works costing £2,000 by 5th April 1914 and expend at least £1,000 of the total sum before 10th October 1913. When this was done the Commissioners were then prepared to grant to them a 30 year lease of the site at a rent of £500 per annum.²⁵

In consideration of this arrangement, Holloway Brothers agreed to pay Castles Shipbreaking the sum of £3,000.²⁶ In addition they also agreed to a 30 year underlease of part of the site to be known as 160 Grosvenor Road Millbank under the terms of which Holloway Brothers would erect a showroom and offices for the sole use of Castles and subject to the same terms as imposed on Holloway Brothers by the Commissioners in a head lease. The whole was also dependent on M. Fortescue entering into a certain agreement with the Crown. The Holloway/Castles agreement was dated 16th May 1913.²⁷

Clearly everything went well with this complicated arrangement and it is noted that the underlease was executed on 23rd November 1915 by which time the building work of the new showroom and offices had been completed and they were ready for occupation.

We do not know when exactly Castles vacated the former Baltic Wharf site but presume that Holloway Brothers took possession of it as soon as the lease with the Commissioners had been granted. We also presume that Castles may have been allowed to operate a small office within the old head office building or if not, the only alternative would have been to move to Long's Wharf pending completion of the new offices. However, we have possession of letters written by Phillip Castle to the Times in 1915 stating the company's address as Baltic Wharf, which confirms our former belief - see Chapter 9.

The above arrangements represented an excellent solution to the dilemma facing the Company during an unprecedented World War era. There would have been insufficient demand for the capacity of the two yards belonging to the company and the opportunity to divest themselves of the site at Baltic Wharf, at an attractive price, and on good terms could not be missed. The agreement also allowed Castles to continue in part occupation of the site in the offices built for them by Holloway Brothers, which became their head office and at least kept a presence on the historic location which savoured of past memories. The new office building was also adorned by six famous ships' figureheads, which continued the old association with the former large shipbreaking site and timber yard - see front cover.

Sidney Castle junior

Of all the Castles, Henry Castle's grandson Sidney Castle seems to have been the most flamboyant of characters and a considerable amount of information is available about his life and involvement in the Castles Shipbreaking story. Sidney also moved from the family firm as explained earlier in this chapter and eventually moved to live in Plymouth, Devon, where the successor company still survives to this day. The information has been provided by family members and from Castles Archives.

Sidney Castle, son of Sidney Nash Castle, was born on 21st January 1864 in Westminster, probably at the house on Baltic Wharf. Almost certainly Sidney's childhood would have been spent in and around the yard at Baltic Wharf where his father before him had learned his trade. Sidney was educated at Rugby School and we have it on record that he started working for his father in 1881, when he was eighteen years of age.²⁸

Little is heard of Sidney during the 1880s and it is presumed that he was busy with the whole range of business activities in the firm that was then called Henry Castle & Sons. Later indications regarding his character suggest that he was probably involved with the sales side of the business; however his detailed knowledge of the breaking up processes connected with wooden sailing vessels enabled him to emerge as a personality with strong general management capabilities, although it is known that his financial judgement and business acumen may at times have been questionable.²⁹

Sidney, his brother Phillip and their father between them worked to build the business and its reputation at the height of the wooden walls shipbreaking boom in the latter half of the nineteenth century. There is no record that either Sidney or Phillip were taken into partnership even after the retirement of their uncle Abercrombie Castle in 1877, which left Sidney Nash Castle as the sole proprietor of the firm. This state of affairs continued until 1894, when the firm became a limited liability company. At that time the two brothers received a small shareholding in the newly formed company - see Chapter 6.

However, this chapter is as much about the man as of shipbreaking and one of his great loves, throughout his life, was fox terrier breeding. He joined the Fox Terrier Club in 1878 three years after its formation, presumably while still at school at the age of 14. In 1888 he became a member of its committee, serving on it for over 30 years. In the same year his name first appeared in the Club's list of judges. From 1902 to 1909 he was a member of the Kennel Club.³⁰

Many of his own dogs were prefixed by the letters Ch., short for Charlton, a name he registered prior to 1904. This clue ties in with the probability that much of his time at Castles was spent at the Charlton Yard rather than at Baltic Wharf, where the head office was located. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Philip was much more administratively inclined and spent his time at Millbank while Sidney was down-stream at Charlton and also at Long's Wharf, Woolwich.

He was in constant demand as a judge and he judged both Smooths and Wires at the Kennel Club's Jubilee Show in 1905 when he had nearly 150 terriers to assess. He himself won the Fox Terrier's Challenge Cup in 1926 with Red Flag.³⁰ Sidney also wrote two books "Breeding Fox-terriers" in 1927 and "A Monograph of the Fox-terrier" first

published in 1910 and which achieved seven reprints. The proceeds of the former book were donated to the South Devon and East Cornwall Hospital.³⁰

As a young man Sidney was also a keen sportsman and it is on record that he was a successful club cricket player during the 1890s and even managed to play for Kent at county level. In fact he played for Kent on five occasions, but with indifferent results including a game against Australia at Gravesend in 1893. He was primarily a batsman but also a slow spin bowler and usually fielded at point. At club level he played for Surbiton and Charlton Park. He made over fifty centuries in club cricket, including a double century for Charlton Park against Surbiton in 1892. He later scored four centuries in successive innings at Charlton Park in August 1901.³¹

By playing cricket for Charlton Park we have further confirmation that Sidney was spending the greater part of his time at the Charlton Yard not far away. He lived at Bexley Heath and it was from there that he commuted to work. There is evidence from the Bromley papers that Sidney was keeping a kennel of fox terriers close by at a disused ropery in Charlton where he often could be found rather than at work, confirming the playboy image that has also been associated with him.

The turmoil caused by the 1904 bankruptcy of Henry Castle & Sons Ltd left Sidney's career in disarray and although he personally did not suffer financial embarrassment from the episode, unlike his father's bankruptcy, he clearly was able to continue assisting the business when the new reconstituted Company Castles Shipbreaking Ltd was formed in 1906. It is likely that at this juncture William Ball and Sidney became well acquainted with one another and that this friendship enabled the later business developments in Plymouth, Devon, to take place some twenty years later.

Sidney's father Sidney Nash died in 1910 and at this stage Sidney decided to break away from the Castle business and try working elsewhere in the country in the shipbreaking business. It is not known exactly what brought about this break in the previous family working arrangements, but it must have been personality related to some extent and to the impending break up of his marriage.

The two brothers were known not to like each other and Philip, as the more serious of the two, likely disapproved strongly of his brother's activities and of his extrovert nature. In any event, whatever the cause, Sidney departed in 1911 to work at Hughes Bolckow as General Manager of the fairly recently formed (1906) North Country shipbreaker.³²

The story of Sidney's work in Blyth is largely set out in the history book 'Battleship Wharf' by Horace White and the several references to Sidney Castle therein ably demonstrate the nature of the man more clearly than perhaps any other written document. The chapter 'The Move to Blyth' starts with an oft quoted statement from Sidney Castle that he was *"the most knowledgeable shipbreaker in Britain. My name is better known than any other. I am the third generation of shipbreakers in direct line; my father before me and his father before him, back to 1838 when the brave old Fighting Temeraire finished her days at Rotherhithe. My family have been described as the greatest naval heroes that ever lived: they have destroyed more ships than Nelson, Drake or Collingwood ever did"*.

It is likely that Sidney's duties may have been light at this transition period in the shipbreaking story of Castles and he possibly met Bolckow on a visit to the north probably when attending a dog show, and that they established a relationship, which coincided with the opening of the harbour facility at Blyth, known as Battleship Wharf.

Sidney brought with him some employees from the Thames yards, notably one of Castles most experienced foremen called Lovey and his two sons Sam and Alfred. Sam later became the foreman at Hughes Bolckow for a period of 25 years.³² The first naval ship purchased for breaking was a frigate, the *Southampton*, and it was with the arrival of this ship that Sidney Castle demonstrated his skill in public relations. He made elaborate plans to celebrate her arrival by arranging a luncheon on board together with other ceremonies such as persuading the principal guest Lord Ridley to inaugurate the work of dismantling the ship.

Immediately prior to this event Sidney had demonstrated his initiative by starting to construct the railway line connection between Battleship Wharf and the main North Eastern Railway line. It never occurred to him to ask the local authority for planning permission, but his style and persuasiveness eventually won the day.



A photograph, from the Dodds Family Archives, of Sidney's home in Hepscoth indicates a prosperous lifestyle.

Plymouth

The exact date of Sidney Castle's move down to Plymouth from Hughes Bolckow at Blyth is not known exactly but it probably occurred in 1917 prior to the end of the First World War in 1918. His eldest son had died in the Great War in 1916 and Sidney was still suffering from matrimonial problems. He had set up home with a new partner in Hepscoth, near Blyth, around the time of his move north in 1911. A son was born from this relationship in 1917. After moving to Devon, the family lived at Boxhill in a large house in the Crownhill area of the City of Plymouth.³³

Premises were leased in the Cattedown area of the City of Plymouth at Corporation Wharf and also at Passage Wharf and later, probably in 1921, at Ocean Quay near Richmond Walk in the Stonehouse area of the City.³⁴ In 1920 a number of surplus First World War ships were purchased, totalling seventeen, for breaking purposes.³⁵ Some of these vessels were resold, however, it is noted that all of these ships were of metal construction and the majority were cruisers and destroyers – see Chapter 10.

This seemed, again, to be a major departure from the Castles' traditional experience in the breaking up of wooden ships but it appears that the various experiences gained subsequent to the insolvency of the Henry Castle Business in 1904 and later at Hughes Bolckow had enabled Sidney Castle junior to acquire a greater understanding of this type of shipbreaking. Two further metal ships were acquired in 1921 and also the 4th Rate 50 gun wooden ship the *Vernon* indicating that there were still skills available and an interest in pursuing the traditional wooden ship breaking up business.



SIDNEY CASTLE
Castles Archives

By 1924 Sidney had developed the business as a Shipbreaker and as an Iron, Steel and Metal Merchant and the decision was taken to form a limited liability company called The Plymouth and Devonport Shipbreaking Company Limited (PDSC), as up to that time he operated as a sole trader in his own name.³⁶

The reasons behind this decision are not fully known, but the difficult economic conditions may have led him to seek the protection of limited liability and possibly to be able to arrange bank finance based on the value of the business assets. At the formation of the Company the value of the assets transferred by Sidney to PDSC amounted to £5,000 for which ordinary shares were issued in consideration of the transfer. The authorised share capital of the company was £10,000 made up of ordinary shares of £1 each.

There is little information on record of the level of activities of the Company and only one ship is recorded as having been sold to the Company, the *Sturgeon* an R class destroyer

purchased in 1926. However, correspondence with Cattedown Wharves Limited indicates that the company was actively trading as evidenced by the level of tonnage being passed over the railway siding at Passage Wharf.³⁷ There also appears to have been activity in the dismantling of regional railway lines, in particular the Barnstaple & Lynton Railway.³⁸

Despite continuing activity financial problems remained. Cash shortages occurred and further capital of £5,000 was subscribed by Sidney for shares in the Company in 1929. Records show that the amount of debt due from the Company in respect of mortgages and other charges at this time was £10,000. It does not appear that the financial position of the Company improved and in March 1930 it was placed in Receivership.³⁹

As a matter of further interest the records of the Receiver during 1930 provide evidence of financial transactions between William Ball and the Receiver of PDSC, who purchased certain assets from him including the ship *SS Maidstone*, valued at £7,250.⁴⁴ Clearly there were continued financial discussions and negotiations and by August 1931 PDSC had been struck off the companies register and the premises at Cattedown were now occupied by Shipbreakers Ltd, owned by William Ball. Sidney Castle subsequently continued in the employment of that company as General Manager until his death in 1937.

Shipbreakers Ltd was incorporated as a private company on 8th November 1930 in order to take over as a going concern and carry on the business of shipbreakers and iron and steel merchants formerly run by the Plymouth and Devonport Shipbreaking Company Limited.⁴¹ Shipbreakers Ltd described its business as a dismantler of HM ships and a metal merchant, together with various other activities, which were largely being carried out as well by the London Company of Castles Shipbreaking Ltd. These included oak beams, rafters, cladding, fencing, carriage gates, pergolas, loggias and treillage. Ships timber logs for sitting room fires are also mentioned. Accordingly, it is presumed that William Ball, then the General Manager of the London Company, was intending to promote their products into the South West region of the UK via the acquisition of the Sidney Castle business.

The breaking of wooden ships of the line during this period in the 1920s and early 1930s was significantly in decline - see Chapter 10 - and therefore the level of shipbreaking undertaken by Shipbreakers Ltd appears to have been relatively insignificant as only three HM ships have been traced as having been purchased by the company.

As the business direction of both the Plymouth and London companies was moving more under the control of William Ball it is interesting and worthwhile to examine what is known about his business life and connections with Castles Shipbreaking, which appear to have started at the beginning of the 20th century and continued until his retirement in 1956.

William Ball

William Ball was born in Devonport in 1882. The family lived there and it is believed they had working connections with the Dockyard. William was apprenticed in the Dockyard after finishing his education at Riders School in Devonport, the forerunner of Devonport High School for boys. Riders specialised in preparing boys for careers in the Navy and in engineering. After passing the Dockyard examinations he moved to London to work for Castles just prior to the collapse of Henry Castle & Sons Ltd in 1904.⁴² Mrs Gladys Bromley, in her memoirs, remembered Mr Ball as being transferred to Castles to assist with the then existing problems associated with breaking up the *Ajax*. It seems unlikely that this position, if correct, would have been a significant one as William would have been only around 22 years of age at the time.

In any event, it appears he survived the traumas of 1904 and 1905 and continued to work with the newly formed Castles Shipbreaking Company from 1906 onwards, working his way up into senior management. He seemed to be a popular and competent individual, who, it is noted, was elected in 1911, unanimously, as an Honorary Life Governor of the Seamen's Hospital Society in recognition of his services rendered to the charity.⁴³ The exact nature of the services is not known, but a letter written in 1974 to his niece, Lady Bawden, by the Society indicated that the election of someone as an Honorary Life Governor was a rare occurrence.

During World War I William Ball was in the Devon Artillery and served in Mesopotamia and in France where he was wounded. He later served in the War Office on special duties with the rank of Captain.

After the War William Ball entered into Local Government and was elected as a Councillor for the North Ward of Greenwich from 1922 to 1925. He served on the Education Committee and Housing Committee from 1922 to 1923 and on the Works Committee from 1922 to 1924. He was elected Mayor of Greenwich in 1924 and it is noted that he did not continue to serve on the Council after his year of office as Mayor due to ill health.⁴⁴

William continued to work for Castles as a senior manager throughout the post war period and although no direct mention of him is made in the records in our possession he was clearly an influential and hard working individual. He was a keen horseman and frequently went foxhunting with different Hunts when time permitted.⁴⁵

William clearly worked with Sidney Castle from time to time on business matters and from what we know of both personalities we imagine they got on quite well together. As explained above the relationship developed into a major business connection in 1930. William Ball was reasonably prosperous and an inspection of his diaries revealed the ownership of a considerable number of quoted investments and it was from this source of wealth that some of the funding for his loans to both Sidney Castle and to Castles Shipbreaking Ltd emanated. The remaining finance came from a business partner called Alexander Crawford who owned an investment company called The South Eastern Investment Company Ltd. However much of this source of wealth had become dissipated by 1938/39.



WILLIAM BALL
Castles Archives

1932 and 1933 proved to be significant years in terms of the Castle Company history heralding the merger of the two Castle company lines, the London based Castles Shipbreaking Ltd and the Plymouth based Shipbreakers Ltd renamed Castle's Shipbreaking Limited on 5th May 1933.

It appears that Castles Shipbreaking Ltd was experiencing considerable financial difficulties, which at the beginning of 1931 necessitated the provision of additional funds. At the time the Company was in debt to Shipbreakers Ltd for £3,000 to £4,000 and therefore to assist cash flow and avoid possible insolvency Shipbreakers Ltd advanced a further amount of £7,000 secured by a debenture over the assets of the company.⁴⁶

Within six months Castles Shipbreaking Limited was experiencing further severe financial problems and on 4th April 1932 a Receiver was appointed, the company being placed into liquidation on 21st March 1933.⁴⁷ Subsequently the business and assets of Castles Shipbreaking were taken over by Shipbreakers Ltd and a short time afterwards Shipbreakers Ltd changed its name to Castles Shipbreaking, thus ensuring the continuation of the Castles Shipbreaking name and utilising the same asset base in London and Plymouth as had previously existed. Philip Castle left the employment of the Company at this stage. He subsequently remained in retirement and died in 1938.

The original Castles Shipbreaking Company founded in 1906 therefore ceased trading under that name in March 1933, when the business was acquired from the Receiver, although it was not finally wound up until 1936. This event is little understood and has given rise to two Castles Shipbreaking Companies existing at the same time, the second in fact being Shipbreakers Ltd, when it changed its name two months later in May 1933. How this was allowed to happen, when the first Company had not been struck off the register is a mystery, but it has been suggested that the use of an apostrophe in the name of the second Castle's was the reason it managed to be accepted by the Registrar of Companies.⁴⁸ Sometimes the apostrophe is shown after the s' and sometimes before it, which shows the confusion that existed.

Despite the take-over activity and financing consequences, the financial position of the new Castles Shipbreaking company did not improve during the remaining years of the 1930s. After 1933 the Company struggled on with its garden furniture business model, which was successful, but was faced with marketing a largely seasonal product in a period of deep recession in the economy. Whilst concentrating on their traditional business the Directors decided to start tendering for Admiralty contracts for the manufacture of ammunition boxes. However, it appears that these contracts were at such competitive prices that they would not have fully covered the Company's overheads.⁴⁸

By 1939 the financial affairs of the Company were deteriorating. In addition, a fixed price Admiralty contract had been obtained in that year valued at £10,875. The contract experienced ongoing difficulties exacerbated by the outbreak of war in September of that year. Although the Company's costs were greatly in excess of the agreed contract prices William Ball believed that the Admiralty would reimburse the Company in due course for most of the shortfalls and went on to complete the contract by November 1941. Despite lengthy negotiations further payment was not obtained and although the matter was supposedly referred to the Treasury nothing further was finalised. The financial position became untenable and the Company was placed in Receivership on 12th June 1942.⁴⁹

Prior to the final decline outlined above one last attempt was made by Ball to find a commercial solution and he attempted to do this by instigating a scheme of amalgamation with Hughes Bolckow, which at first was favourably received by them and negotiations were commenced with Metal Industries who had themselves taken over Hughes Bolckow in 1939. A rationalisation of the activities of two similar companies was logical. Certainly the similarity of the furniture ranges manufactured by both companies brought about by previous connections with the Castle family could also have created an element of interest in the proposition.⁵⁰

The exchange of correspondence on the negotiations reveals an informative overview of the business turnover of the Company in the year 1.10.38 to 30.9.39.

The information gleaned from the papers indicates that the sale of furniture products amounted to 43% of turnover shared between London & Plymouth. The larger share of furniture sales, 38%, came from London whilst the remaining 5% came from Plymouth. The Admiralty contracts in Plymouth accounted for 47% of turnover demonstrating how significantly matters had changed over the preceding few years. Firewood sales accounted for a further 6% leaving around 4% from miscellaneous activities.

It is evident from the foregoing that the era of the breaking up of wooden ships of the line were long gone at Castles by the centenary year of 1938 and this is confirmed by the foregoing analysis and the figures shown above, only 9 ships having been broken up between 1915 and 1939.

William Ball's proposal was unsuccessful due to the financial position of Castles Shipbreaking Ltd, which as we know was highly illiquid at the time. In addition many if not all of the Admiralty contracts were loss-making and therefore an unattractive proposition to an incoming party at the time. The Metal Industries accountants, Graham Smart & Annan, accordingly recommended refusal on the grounds of liquidity problems and negotiations were then terminated.

Towards the end it does appear that William Ball's business acumen may have deserted him and he suffered needless losses through poor business management and failure to negotiate sound and profitable contracts.

With the imminence of war Ball's options were increasingly limited and he managed to carry on until the 1942 Receivership and ultimate liquidation.⁵¹ A new company, Timber Construction (Plymouth) Ltd, was formed to carry on the residual business of Castles Shipbreaking. This company survived successfully into the 21st century under new and more dynamic management and therefore ensured the survival of the Castle business name for posterity.⁵²

CHAPTER 7 - REFERENCES

1. The London Gazette - 13th January 1904 page 405
2. Castles Archives - internal analysis - Colledge, J.J. (1969) *Ships of the Royal Navy: An Historical Index Vol. 1.* Newton Abbott, David & Charles
3. PRO BT31/31943/89177 XC 9013 - Memorandum & Articles of Association
4. PRO BT31/31943/89177 XC 9013 - Directors
5. PRO BT31/31943/89177 XC 9013 - Shareholders
6. Castles Archives - Family History
7. PRO BT31/31943/89177 XC 9013 - J C Garnham resignation 1912
8. PRO BT31/31943/89177 XC 9013 Appt Philip Castle as Director
9. PRO BT31/3194/89177 XC 9013 - Shareholdings Philip Castle 1916
10. PRO BT31/3194/89177 XC 9013 - Appt. Philip Castle Managing Director 1919
11. The London Gazette 28th November 1919 Issue 14744
12. PRO BT31/3194/89177 XC 9013 - Change of Chairman
13. PRO BT31/3194/89177 XC 9013 - Balance sheet 1916
14. Castles Archives - internal analysis - Colledge, J.J. (1969) *Ships of the Royal Navy: An Historical Index Vol. 1.* Newton Abbott, David & Charles
15. Castles Archives - internal analysis - Colledge, J.J. (1969) *Ships of the Royal Navy: An Historical Index Vol. 1.* Newton Abbott, David & Charles
16. Castles Archives - Private research
17. Castles Archives - Private research
18. Colledge, J.J. (1969) *Ships of the Royal Navy: An Historical Index Vol. 1.* Newton Abbott, David & Charles
19. PRO BT31/31943/89177 XC 9013 - J C Garnham, Director
20. PRO BT31/31943/89177 XC 9013 - Resignation 1916
21. Colledge, J.J. (1969) *Ships of the Royal Navy: An Historical Index Vol. 1.* Newton Abbott, David & Charles
22. Colledge, J.J. (1969) *Ships of the Royal Navy: An Historical Index Vol. 1.* Newton Abbott, David & Charles
23. Castles Archives - Crown Estate letter re leases
24. Castles Archives - Agreement to Lease - Holloway Bros. dated 16th May 1913 - M. Fortescue
25. Castles Archives - Agreement to Lease - Holloway Bros. dated 16th May 1913 - 30 year lease
26. Castles Archives - Agreement to Lease - Holloway Bros. dated 16th May 1913 - £3,000
27. Castles Archives - Agreement to Lease - Holloway Bros. dated 16th May 1913 - Erection of Showroom & Offices
28. Castles Archives - Sidney Castle Family History
29. Horace White, (1961) *Battleship Wharf.* Hughes Bolckow Ltd.
30. Castles Archives - Family History Records - Fox Terriers
31. Castles Archives - Family History Records - Cricket
32. Horace White, (1961) *Battleship Wharf.* Hughes Bolckow Ltd.,
33. Castles Archives - Castle family records - Richard Pearson - re Boxhill
34. Castles Archives - Leases Plymouth Corporation - Cattedown Wharves
35. Colledge, J.J. (1969) *Ships of the Royal Navy: An Historical Index Vol. 1.* Newton Abbott, David & Charles
36. PRO BT31/28433 29.3.1924
37. Castles Archives - Correspondence with Cattedown Wharves 10th April 1924 and 2nd April 1925
38. http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Lynton_and_Barnstaple_Railway
39. PDSC PRO BT31/28433 - Receivership PDSC
40. PRO BT31/28433 – Receiver & Manager's Abstract of Receipts and Payments
41. PRO J13/17392 XC5960 - Formation of Shipbreakers Ltd
42. Castles Archives - Family History - William Ball
43. Castles Archives - Correspondence between Seaman's Hospital Society and Lady Bawden dated 23.8.1974
44. Castles Archives - Correspondence between London Borough of Greenwich and Lady Bawden dated 29.8.1974
45. Castles Archives - Diaries of William Ball
46. PRO J13/17392 - Statement of Affairs - Financial difficulties 1941
47. PRO J13/17392 - Liquidation 19th July 1943
48. PRO J13/17392 - Statement of Affairs - Tenders Admiralty contracts 1939 - 1941
49. PRO J13/17392 - Statement of Affairs - Admiralty contract problems
50. Castles Archives - correspondence between Wm. Ball and Irvine & Co. dated 25.11.1939 and Correspondence between Robert McCrone & Wm Ball 6.12.1939
51. PRO J13/17392 - 1942
52. Castles Archives - Company Records