A unique and exciting aspect of the breaking up of the last of the wooden walls of the Navy involved the careful removal and preservation of the figureheads on the bows of the ships. It is truly a sentimental journey through the history of famous Men of War, the majority of whom achieved great honour in both service and in battle.

The figureheads would often be between 15 and 20 feet high and weigh up to 3 tons. They were frequently connected with members of the Royal family or with famous military and naval officers. Female figureheads were also common. Stern figures were frequently fitted to many ships and the great story of the Temeraire Mantelpiece and of the stern figures of Atlas taken from that ship have previously been related herein – see Chapter 4.

A large number of articles have been written and several books published about ships' figureheads and it is not our intention here to retell what has been stated extensively elsewhere about this subject. However, we are indeed fortunate that a recognised expert in this field, Richard Hunter, has amassed a wealth of knowledge and detailed papers regarding the Castles figureheads heritage and we are greatly indebted to him for his great interest in the Castles story and for access to his substantial collection.

We are also indebted to Eric Walker, a figurehead historian, whose unique experience in witnessing the bombing of the Baltic Wharf offices and showroom in April 1941 provides an illuminating and unusual record of the situation before and after the event. Both Richard and Eric in their different ways have recorded a remarkable involvement with Castles over a very lengthy period of time and we could not have completed our narrative about this subject without their advice, information sources and facts regarding the figureheads associated with ships broken up at the Castles yards. In addition, we are indebted to Rear Admiral David Pulvertaft (retd.) for his assistance in providing copies of the 1913 correspondence transcribed below and for his continuous support and advice. We have also utilised information from his two excellent books, published in 2009 and 2011.¹

We have gathered together the names of ships whose figureheads we know have had the greatest impact on the Castles scene over the decades. For years pictures and paintings have shown specific figureheads in the yards at Baltic Wharf, Millbank and at Long’s Wharf, Woolwich. Consequently, we have endeavoured to discover how many of these historic artefacts have survived the vicissitudes of the elements and the damage inflicted by war. No figureheads ever appear to have been stored or displayed at the Anchor & Hope Wharf, Charlton.

It is also important to note that a substantial number of other relics were collected off many ships. The existence of bow ornaments, name boards, small cannons, steering wheels, scrolls, bells and other items are shown in photographs of the yards and in the Company Museum, which was open to the public.

The photograph from the Richard Hunter Archives of the Museum at Baltic Wharf - prior to 1913 - located in the loft shows many fascinating relics and on closer inspection reveals the name boards of several ships including the Pearl, the Princess Royal, the Arrogant, the Royal Sovereign, the Albion and the Zealous. The figureheads shown are the stern figures from the Zealous; the figurehead of the Bristol is standing in the right hand corner and that of the Enterprise to the right of the picture. The head of the Galatea can just be discerned behind the bell. Finally, the beautiful carved bow ornament at the rear of the loft, from an unknown ship, must have been tragically lost in the bombing in 1941 as would have been...
the case with most of the other relics shown. For further pictures of relics see (Plate 27) the Prince Consort; (Plate 28) the Ocean; (Plate 29) the Serapis and (Plate 30) the Galatea.

In Chapter 10 regarding the Scale of Activities of the Company we have identified some 248 HM ships as having ended their days at Castles yards and, in theory, many if not all the figureheads should also have been acquired by the Castles’ companies over the years. However, this is not the case as a great many figureheads were removed at HM Dockyards prior to the ship concerned being delivered to Castles for breaking. The majority of these found their way to various Shore Establishments, Naval Bases and many were also kept at the respective Dockyards concerned.

Accordingly, we list below the names in alphabetical order of those ships where the figureheads still exist or specific information regarding their fate is known. However, where a special interest in a ship and/or of the figurehead is considered to be relevant to the history of Castles it has been listed even if the figurehead concerned has been lost or if its fate is unknown. These particular ships have been marked with the following symbol (♦).

The ships marked with B (Baltic Wharf, Millbank) or LW (Long’s Wharf, Woolwich) represent those ships whose figureheads were displayed prominently in either of these two yards or on the Head Office building at 160 Grosvenor Road Millbank, formerly part of the Baltic Wharf site. Where a picture of the figurehead is included within the illustrations at the end of this chapter the letter P together with the relevant plate number has been added to the list for ease of reference.

References:

BTM - Blue Town Museum Sheerness Kent
DC - Devonport Collection
HMAS - HM Australian Ship
HMNB - HM Naval Base
HMSC - HMS Caledonia
HMSN - HMS Nelson Portsmouth
Hull MM - Hull Maritime Museum Humberside
MMM - Merseyside Maritime Museum Liverpool
MMNN - Mariners Museum Newport News VA USA
NMM - National Maritime Museum Greenwich London
NMRN - National Museum of the Royal Navy Portsmouth Hampshire
NOC - National Oceanography Centre Southampton Hampshire
RHS Holbrook - Royal Hospital School Holbrook Suffolk
RNZNM - Royal New Zealand Naval Museum Devonport Auckland
RNR HQ - Royal Naval Reserve Headquarters London
WI - Whale Island Portsmouth Harbour Hampshire

Figureheads highlighted in **BOLD** have survived.

The dates shown below are the year that the ship was acquired by Castles for breaking up and not the year that the ship was built.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acteon</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>6th Rate 26</td>
<td>NMRN Portsmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agamemnon</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 91</td>
<td>Fate unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajax</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>3rd Rate 74</td>
<td>NMM Greenwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albion</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>2nd Rate 90</td>
<td>Hull MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Training Brig 8</td>
<td>MMNN USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anson/Algiers</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Screw Ship 91</td>
<td>Lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arethusa</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>4th Rate 50</td>
<td>Lower Upnor Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariadne/Actaeon/Vernon II</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>3rd Rate 72</td>
<td>HMNB Portsmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benbow</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>3rd Rate 72</td>
<td>HMNB Portsmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boscawen/Trafalgar</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1st Rate 110</td>
<td>NMRN Portsmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol - Head &amp; neck</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Wood Screw Frigate</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britomart</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Wood Screw Gunboat</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>2nd Rate 84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caledonia/Impregnable</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>2nd Rate 91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calypso</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>6th Rate 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canopus</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>3rd Rate 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castor</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>5th Rate 36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Wood Screw Corvette</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesapeake</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Wood Screw Frigate 51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleopatra</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>6th Rate 26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collingwood</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>3rd Rate 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colossus</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>3rd Rate 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbine</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Sloop 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constance</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>4th Rate 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cressy</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Screw 3rd Rate 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daphne</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Corvette 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daring</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Brig 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiance</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Wellington</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Screw 1st Rate 131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eclipse</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Brig Sloop 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar - Head only</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>3rd Rate 74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Ironclad Sloop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erebis</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Battery Ship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favourite</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Ironclad Screw Corv</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firebrand</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Wood Paddle Frigate</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formidable</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Wood Screw Frigate</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galatea</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>2nd Rate 84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganges / Impregnable III</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>2nd Rate 84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Wood Screw Frigate</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grampian/late Gibraltar</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Screw 1st Rate 101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>3rd Rate 74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannibal</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>3rd Rate 74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero/Wellington</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 91</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindustan/Fisgard III</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hood/Edgar</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 91</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horatio</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Wood Screw Frigate</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperieuse</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Wood Screw Frigate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impregnable/Caledonia</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>2nd Rate 98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impregnable/Howe</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Screw 1st Rate 110</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indefatigable</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>4th Rate 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leander</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>4th Rate 50</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neptune</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>1st Rate 120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Ironclad Ship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odin</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Wood Paddle Frigate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orion</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallas</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Armoured Corvette</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Wood Screw Corvette</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>2nd Rate 91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess Royal</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Screw 2nd Rate 91</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Consort</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Ironclad Frigate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pylades</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Wood Screw Corvette</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodney</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Screw 1st Rate</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Albert</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Screw 1st Rate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal George</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>1st Rate 120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serapis</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Iron Screw Troopship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scylla</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Wood Screw Corvette</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we have previously ascertained from the details of the Holloway Brothers acquisition of the main Yard at Baltic Wharf in 1913 there was a pressing need to dispose of certain of the figureheads at that time owing to the confinement of space and accessibility. The decision was made to fix six of the main figureheads to the new Head Office and Showroom erected and completed by 1914 and these are shown in the photograph of the building used as the frontispiece of this book and taken from our archives. We have also learned that certain other figureheads could not be easily moved at the time of the sale of the Baltic Wharf Yard, as they might have been significantly damaged. Consequently they were left on the site on secure plinths at the rear of or near to the new Head Office building. We do not have a complete list of the figureheads concerned – see comments below.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned items were the greatest casualties of the 1941 bombing and in some instances only fragments or parts remained of the original figureheads. What could be salvaged was in fact done so. However, prior to this event, which is detailed later, we have uncovered a remarkable story demonstrating the huge regard and concern that existed in 1913 when a major attempt was instigated publicly to save these major artefacts for the nation.

Correspondence between the then Managing Director of Castles Shipbreaking, Philip Castle, and the Naval & Dockyard Museum in Portsmouth, which was published in the London Times, has been traced. It is reproduced in full herewith as an indication of the considerable feeling that existed publicly about the future of these magnificent items.² They also contain much valuable and interesting information about the ships concerned.

HAMPSHIRE TELEGRAPH
9th May 1913

The Lords of the Admiralty have done a good turn to the Naval and Dockyard Museum, which, mainly through the instrumentality of Mr. M.E.P. Frost, has been formed at Portsmouth. It is now officially recognised, as in this month's Navy List, with the list of the officers of Portsmouth Dockyard appears the following:- "Naval and Dockyard Museum, Honorary Curator, M.E. Pescott Frost, Esq. Secretary to the Admiral Superintendent." This will, no doubt, bring the museum to the notice of officers and others interested in Naval matters in a manner that would otherwise have been impossible, and possibly more interesting Naval relics or curios may be either lent or given to the Museum.

THE TIMES
16th October 1913

NAVAL FIGUREHEADS

THE OFFER TO THE NATION

The figureheads of the historic vessels of the Navy of which Mr. Philip Castle wrote in The Times yesterday are a familiar site to passers-by at the Vauxhall Yard of Castle's Shipbreaking Company. Many of these huge carvings are too bulky to be housed in any of Messrs' Castles buildings, and they have perforce to remain in the open, exposed to wind and weather. In such conditions they cannot but suffer scattered about as they are in the midst of a timber yard and more than one of them have begun to either rot away in parts or have become damaged. For this reason it is suggested that these and similar relics to be found in our dockyards should be collected in some national nautical museum and Mr. Castle has offered in our columns to present to the nation any or all of the figureheads which his firm has preserved. American visitors with their keen sense of the historically interesting from time to time have sought to purchase these relics but the
owners looking upon them as a national possession have refused to make them the subject of a commercial transaction.

In addition to the two figures of Atlas, which supported "Admirals Walk" of the old Temeraire the firm possesses the figureheads of the Princess Royal, one of Nelson's ships: the Leander, which was captured after a gallant fight by the Genereux in 1798 whilst carrying dispatches announcing the victory of the Nile: the Edinburgh, a 74 gun ship built in 1812 which saw service in the Napoleonic wars, but was not broken up until 1866: the Gibraltar, a Spanish prize captured by Rodney in 1780: the 74 gun Colossus, which was in the very hottest part of the Battle of Trafalgar losing one man in three of her gallant crew. Besides these interesting links with the great fights of Nelson's day there are also the figureheads of the Wellington, launched in 1852 and so named at Queen Victoria's own desire in honour of the Duke: the Royal Albert, one of the last of the three deckers, which served in the Black Sea during the Crimean War: and the decorative carvings from the stern of the Caledonia, one of the first ten ships of the Navy to be fitted with armour-plating in the 60's of the last century. As for the Temeraire she was bought in 1838 for breaking up. The present Mr. Castle's grandfather gave £5,380 for her, a sum, which, it was said, was barely the market value of the copper bolts that held her timbers together.

It is interesting here that this article states that Mr. Castle's grandfather gave £5,380 for the purchase of the Temeraire when we know this payment was made by John Beatson for the ship and recorded in his journal - see Chapter 4. The only implication can be that in some way Henry Castle provided the funding to Beatson. However, as previously stated there are no records available to support this claim.

This article also highlights the predicament caused by the storage outside in the open air and that even in 1913 the position had become urgent if further irrevocable losses of famous figureheads were not to be incurred.

THE TIMES - 21st OCTOBER 1913

NELSON AND THE NATION'S RELICS

To the Editor of the Times

Sir. The never-to-be-forgotten days of England's wooden walls are fast slipping away, and, as time passes, each relic of them becomes more and more a national heirloom which it is our sacred duty to safeguard and preserve. Of all of these none is more precious, none of deeper interest, than the figureheads once the proud emblems of the gallant ships which bore them, ships of which all else save the memory of their undying deeds has passed out of existence. Many of these emblems are admirable models of a bygone art, striking in design and execution and in scheme of colouring, and of the deepest interest. Some colossal, some medium-sized, some small. At Chatham, Portsmouth, Devonport, and Sheerness the total number which escaped the fate of Christmas logs is just about 160; some in the open and painted uniform white, presumably to save his Majesty's paint and wages, but most of them either in the dockyard museum at Chatham, forlorn enough, or more commonly, stored away in the engine house and parade-shed, in gloomy but fascinating rigging-house and sail loft as old as themselves and scarcely less obsolete. Presently they too will leave to give way to modern needs. About 160; if we possessed - and it is a national discredit that we do not possess - a national naval museum they would, assembled, form a display unparalleled. As it is many of them might well be placed in one of the Great Halls of the Victoria and Albert Museum. But some of them, at any rate, are worthy of the highest honour we can pay them. If, indeed, it is fit and proper that our regimental colours should find their last bestowal in our sacred fanes, where none can look on them unmoved, would it not be fitting that figureheads associated with the nations grandest exploits should similarly be for all time preserved as memorials of them and of the glorious deeds of England's Navy? And just to think of the history with which some of these great relics are identified! The Polyphemus at Chatham, with its single staring eye; launched in 1782, 64 guns, the large bust of the Canopus at Devonport; the ship fought against us and was captured as the Franklin of the Nile, was renamed into our Navy, and was with Nelson before Toulon. And then the Bellorophen! a head and neck in the admirably cared for dockyard museum at Portsmouth. Launched in 1786, 74 guns, the Bellorophen "opened the ball" on the Glorious first of June, and four years later dropped out from the Battle of the Nile, hopelessly crippled and with 197 killed and wounded. Later still, at Trafalgar, where her captain fell. To crown her achievements, Buonaparte in 1815 surrendered on her deck, and the ship conveyed him to Plymouth. And there are others.

Sir, I submit that if such memorials of their greatness were the proud possession of any other nation they would be enshrined and venerated. Yet we, as each one of to-day's great anniversaries comes round, recall
our Navy's glorious deeds and decorate great Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square in proud and pious memory of him and them, and give not a passing thought to relics so gloriously associated with their deeds and memory. But if the great Duke of Wellington's funeral car is not out of place in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, hard by his tomb, would it not be still more appropriate that the figureheads of some of the never-to-be-forgotten ships which Nelson himself led to victory should keep watch and ward beside their immortal leader's resting place? If ever his martial spirits visits his tomb, surely the sight would gladden it!

Your obedient servant,

DOUGLAS OWEN

N. & M. RECORD
22nd October 1913

FIGUREHEADS OF NELSON'S SHIPS (Part of this article duplicates content from the above letter)

A scheme is on foot to preserve perhaps the most picturesque of all the relics which link us with the days of Nelson - the figureheads of the ships which fought at Trafalgar. They are the nation's heirlooms, all too long neglected. Now they are to be collected and preserved in the form of a national museum in conjunction with the Royal Service Institution.

The suggestion for a collection of the figurehead heirlooms was put forward by Mr. Douglas Owen on Tuesday in a letter to "The Times". The never-to-be-forgotten days of England's wooden walls, he writes, are fast slipping away, and, as time passes, each relic of them becomes more and more a national heirloom which it is our sacred duty to safeguard and preserve. Of all of these none is more precious, none of deeper interest, than the figureheads once the proud emblems of the gallant ships which bore them - ships of which all else save the memory of their undying deeds has passed out of existence.

At Chatham, Portsmouth, Devonport and Sheerness continues Mr. Owen, the total number which have escaped the fate of Christmas logs is just about 160; some in the open and painted a uniform white, presumably to save His Majesty's paint and wages, but most of them either in Dockyard museum - at Chatham, forlorn enough! - or more commonly, stowed away in the engine-house and parade-shed, in gloomy but fascinating rigging-house and sail loft as old as themselves and scarcely less obsolete. Presently they too will have to give way to modern needs. About 160; if we possessed - and it is a national discredit that we do not possess - a national naval museum they would, assembled, form a display unparalleled.

The secretary of the Royal United Service Institution, in an interview with a representative of "The Globe" with regard to Mr. Owen's proposal, said:-- "I greatly appreciate the feeling which promoted the suggestion, but the great drawback to this plan lies in the fact that the figureheads of Nelson's ships were for the most part grotesque painted figures of animals and gargoyles rather than the Grecian type of carving which is popularly supposed to be the rule.

"When our new buildings are complete we can start whipping in all the figureheads we can lay our hands on, but until then we can do nothing. "When we have got them repainted and cleaned in a naval museum, and we can place them alongside the models of the ships to which they belonged, the interest becomes so much greater, after all, it is a more befitting end for a fine old figurehead to be near a replica of his or her own ship than being put in an ordinary museum or church.

Letters are coming in daily asking us to take in, not only figureheads, but swords, guns, binnacles, hack staffs, and so forth; but the chief advantage of the enlargement of the buildings is that there will be plenty of "sea room" for even the largest figureheads. We hope to get our buildings finished in a few months but even then we cannot hope to dry dock all the 160 figureheads which are a present lying around the Dockyards of Portsmouth, Chatham and Devonport."

One hundred and fifty figureheads from our old fighting ships are lying exposed in shipyards in the rain and mud said Mr Castle at Castles Shipbreaking yard when questioned by a representative of the Globe.

It should be noted that again that there were only some 150 to 160 figureheads left in Dockyards or Shipyards around the country, which indicates that only a small proportion of figureheads remained in total, at that time in 1913, that could be salvaged and preserved. This theme was regularly expressed.
NAVAL FIGUREHEADS AN OFFER TO THE NATION

To the Editor of the Times

Sir, We have read with interest Mr. Douglas Owen's letter in to-day's issue of your paper. Since the year 1838 we have broken up nearly 1,000 ships, representing over 1,200,000 tons dead weight. Amongst them we have had many historic vessels, including the "Brave Old Temeraire" immortalized by Turner's picture showing the old warrior being towed to her last berth, which hangs in the Tate Gallery within a few yards of these premises, where the figures which formed the supports of the Admiral's Walk are treasured up. We have now in the course of erection a showroom and museum where these figures and other relics will be placed, but regret that owing to their size some 20 figures similar to those in his Majesty's dockyards will remain in the open. These include the Duke of Edinburgh, Royal Albert, Edinburgh, Orion, Princess Royal, Collingwood, Hood, Gibraltar, Imperieuse and many others. If Mr. Douglas Owen's suggestion that a place can be found for figureheads of the "wooden walls" materializes, we shall be pleased to offer to the nation any or all of the figureheads that it has been our sacred duty hitherto to safeguard and preserve. We may mention that many times we have refused to name a price to would-be buyers of the Temeraire relic.

Yours faithfully
CASTLES' SHIPBREAKING COMPANY (Limited)
Philip Castle (Director)

It is interesting that in the content of this letter Philip Castle states that the Temeraire was included in the total of ships broken up by Castles, which of course flies in the face of the earlier evidence explained in Chapter 4. Philip Castle also points out that the new showroom and museum is under construction but that twenty of the figureheads will be left in the open air. Clearly, this situation prevailed right through until 1941 owing to the constraints of space and this statement appears to support our own findings that the total number of figureheads in the Castles Collection remained in the region of twenty. Consequently, most of the figureheads in the Castles Collection in 1913 did not make their way to Portsmouth.

The new building at Baltic Wharf was only 30' by 30' giving a total space of some 900 square feet for the two requirements of a showroom and museum. There were two floors in the building making a total of 1,800 square feet and the other 900 square feet of space on the ground floor would have been mainly for office accommodation. Consequently, very few, if any, figureheads could have been kept inside the building, as the upstairs showroom contained mostly garden furniture. The museum section therefore likely contained smaller artefacts and the Temeraire Mantelpiece.
Sir,

With reference to your letter in "The Times" of the 22nd instant, I desire (with the approval of the Admiral Superintendent) to bring to your notice the Naval Museum which I had the privilege of founding in this Dockyard several years ago.

I enclose for your information copy of the Catalogue (2nd edition) of its contents, and wish to mention the following points:-

(a). That a large number of gifts and loans have been received from various sources during the comparatively short period of its existence.

(b). That Their Majesties the King and Queen honoured this Museum by visiting it in July 1910 and have since been graciously pleased to contribute several exhibits.

(c). That the Secretary of the Admiralty has officially expressed the satisfaction of The Lordships at its establishment.

(d) That nearly 20,000 people have visited during the current year.

My reason for mentioning these points is to endeavour to show that the Museum here, though it has not been very long in existence, is officially recognised and supported in the highest quarters, and appears to be much appreciated by the public by whom it has been visited in such large numbers.

I therefore venture the contention that this establishment fulfils the requirements of, and is de facto, a National Naval Museum as advocated by Mr. Douglas Owen, and it has the advantage of being a "going concern" possessing much vitality.

Mr. Owen appears to consider London the best locale, but in view of the very large number of people visiting this Town from all parts of the country, the opinion is largely held that Portsmouth, which was recently referred to by His Majesty the King as the "principal home of the Navy", is the most appropriate place for such a Museum.

Under these circumstances, I hope you will consider that this Naval Museum of which I have the honour to be in charge, is qualified, at least, to share in the generous offer contained in your letter.

I am Sir
Your obedient Servant
M.E. Pescott Frost

Secretary to Admiral Superintendent, also
Founder and Honorary Curator of the Museum

Philip Castle Esq
Messrs. Castles' Shipbreaking Co., Ltd.
Baltic Wharf Millbank, Westminster S W

PS. Should this proposal receive your favourable consideration, there would be no objection to the publication of this letter in "The Times" with your reply.
THE TIMES
25th OCTOBER 1913

A NATIONAL NAVAL MUSEUM

------------------------

THE NAVY LEAGUE AND MR. CASTLE'S OFFER

We have received the following from the Navy League.

"The Navy League has read with much pleasure the important communication of Mr. Douglas Owen addressed to the Trafalgar Day issue of The Times on the subject of the preservation of British naval memorials, more especially the figureheads of famous fighting ships, and deeply appreciates the public spirited offer of Mr. Philip Castle, of the Castles' Shipbreaking Company, in The Times of Wednesday.

"The Navy League feels very strongly that the suggestion made by Mr. Douglas Owen and the generous offer of Mr. Philip Castle should receive the warm approval of the people of this country, and therefore will at the next meeting of its executive committee on the 19th prox. consider details of a scheme for the organisation of a national museum in a central and accessible situation in London, and perhaps small local museums at the principal ports, for the collection of historic naval relics, including the figureheads and other valuable relics of fighting ships".

27th October 1913

M.E. Pescott Frost, Esq.,
Admiral Superintendent's Office
H.M. Dockyard, Portsmouth.

Dear Sir

Your esteemed favour of the 23rd instant to hand enclosing a copy of the Catalogue of the Portsmouth Naval Museum for which we thank you.

At the beginning of this month we visited the Museum and thoroughly appreciated the treasures that you have collected.

We feel honoured that you should now approach us with the offer to find a home for some of our figureheads but, we would ask you to leave the matter in abeyance as there are several proposals to be considered by my Board.

Your kind offer shall have our consideration and we quite appreciate that the Portsmouth Naval Museum is, without doubt, quite qualified to share in the Relics now in our possession. We will, therefore, write to you again in due course.

Yours faithfully
Castles' Shipbreaking Company Ltd.
Philip Castle (Director)
The Curator, H.M. Dockyard Museum,
Admiral Superintendent's Office
H.M. Dockyard, Portsmouth.

Dear Sir

RE FIGUREHEADS

Referring to our previous correspondence, we are now in a position to offer you the Figurehead of the old Three Decker "ROYAL ALBERT". This old Warrior was launched at Woolwich in the year 1854, and was christened by Her late Majesty Queen Victoria.

We broke the vessel up in the year 1884.

The Figurehead which represents the Prince Consort and is an excellent likeness, is in very good condition.

Estimated weight, 3 tons, length 16' 6" by about 6' by 6'.

We are anxious that the Figurehead be taken before Christmas. Will you, therefore, advise us as to delivery?

You may be interested to hear that the "Orion" is going to the Royal United Service Institution, the "Albion" to the South Kensington and the 2 scrolls from the wood built armour plated ship "Caledonia" to the Naval Base, Rosyth.

We only want one condition inserted in the records relating to this gift, and that is, in the unlikely event of your wishing to dispose of the Relic, that it be returned to us.

In the Inscription we hope you will mention that the donors are your humble Servants.

We anticipate having our own Museum open during January 1914, and needless to say we shall appreciate a visit from you if you will so honour us.

Yours faithfully,
Castles' Shipbreaking Co., Ltd.,
Philip Castle (Director)

The Orion was for a time kept at the Royal United Service Museum in Whitehall, London and could be found outside the Museum door before World War II. However, this museum was closed after the war, the collection was sold and no further trace of the Orion figurehead has been found. It is therefore presumed lost. It should be noted that the new
Museum and Showroom were planned to be open at the beginning of 1914 which information tallies with the building programme envisaged by Holloway Brothers in their lease agreement with Castles Shipbreaking in 1913 - see Chapter 7. The foregoing letter also confirms that the destination of the *Orion* figurehead would be the Royal United Service Institution.

Subsequent events show that unfortunately not all of the figureheads were gifted to other museums in the UK and evidence of sales to overseas museums have been found. In particular, the figureheads of the *Edinburgh* and the *Formidable* were sold to a museum in the Eastern United States. The auction details for these two figureheads show them as being purchased by Fred Hill on 25th August 1939 (* Plates 31 and 32*). We can only assume that Mr Hill was an agent or employee of the Mariners Museum, Newport News, Virginia where the two figureheads are presently kept.

With regard to the figureheads previously mentioned which for so long adorned the Head Office building at 160 Grosvenor Road, Millbank very little has survived as the 1941 bombing destroyed these very prominently displayed artefacts. There were six figureheads on the building, the *Bristol*, the *Hood*, the *Collingwood*, the *Imperieuse*, the *Cressy* and the *Leander*. The *Hood*, the *Cressy*, the *Imperieuse* and, we believe, the *Collingwood* were lost. The latter was thought to have survived but subsequently was found to be the *Leander*, rather than the original *Collingwood*, and is now located at the Collingwood Shore Establishment. The head of the *Bristol* survived the bombing and is kept at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

Other figureheads of significant interest to Castles and frequently shown in photographs and paintings were displayed on the gate pillars at the three entrances to Baltic Wharf prior to 1913. The *Colossus* together with the *Cressy* were positioned above the entrance nearest to Vauxhall Bridge, the main entrance. The *Orion* and the *Princess Royal* were positioned on pillars forming the central entrance, further down Millbank, and what is believed to be an as yet unidentified figurehead (*Plate 33*) is sited together with the *Constance* on the third entrance, the next one down from the central gateway and which is usually referred to as the North entrance.

During the period prior to 1913 and dating all the way back to 1861, the start date of significant shipbreaking activity at Castles, many figureheads were stored in the Baltic Wharf Yard in the open air or in the company’s museum accessed through the main gate entrance. Whilst the figureheads involved were occasionally moved, all existing photographs and paintings show that the same figureheads were located with consistent regularity within the Baltic Wharf yard, in particular the *Edinburgh*, the *Collingwood*, the *Imperieuse* and the *Leander*.³

The *Tenedos/Duncan* figurehead is to be found at HMS *Caledonia*, Rosyth and it was from this ship’s timbers that Castles started to make their range of Jacobean furniture - see Chapter 8.

The *Albion* for so long kept at the Long’s Wharf Yard at Woolwich and afterwards at the Science Museum in London is currently held in store at the Town Docks Museum in Hull. It is believed to be in a very poor condition. Three other major figureheads on display in the Yard at Long’s Wharf, Woolwich in the early 1900s - the *Castor* and the *Grampian/late Gibraltar* and the *Gloucester* - have all been lost. They were probably lost in the 1941 bombings if they were included with the stored figureheads described below.

The *Glasgow*, also kept at Long’s Wharf for many years found its way to the Eastern United States and is located at Fall River Massachusetts.⁴ It is assumed that it was purchased by a museum curator during a visit to London but we have not traced any record of the transaction.

The *Impregnable*, which was broken up in 1921, provided much of the wood for Liberty’s Tudor building off Regent Street London, as outlined in Chapter 8. The *Impregnable* started as the *Howe* in 1860, the year of launch. The name was changed to *Bulwark* in 1885 and finally to *Impregnable* in 1886 and back to *Bulwark* in 1919.³ However, it is usually known as the *Impregnable* due to its previous training ship fame.
The figurehead of the *Impregnable, Admiral Lord Howe*, was acquired by Ivor Stewart - Liberty and moved to the family home in Buckinghamshire. The figurehead was made of solid oak and weighed approximately two tons. Whilst the Liberty family home has since been sold the figurehead remains in the same location and has been restored by the present owner.

After the World War II bombing of the area around Millbank in April 1941 the figureheads there were largely destroyed and it is understood that remnants were found floating in the River Thames as well as in the bombed area. Eric Walker aged nine at the time was an eye witness to this event and described how three 500lb bombs dropped as direct hits on the site, leaving three huge craters. There was apparently little in the way of fires occurring after the bombs hit their target, which contradicts the story often told of eyewitnesses seeing figureheads on fire bowling down the road.

Messrs Thorneycroft Ltd assisted in the recovery process and all the items salvaged were removed to their boatyard on the Thames at Platts Eyot, Hampton. It is from there that the *Leander*, which had been recovered almost intact, made its way afterwards, albeit mistakenly, to the Collingwood Shore Establishment.

The figurehead of the *Enterprise*, shown in the Museum photograph on the first page of this chapter, was probably destroyed in the 1941 bombing as no trace of this figurehead can be found elsewhere.

As previously mentioned it is not known exactly how many figureheads were located at Millbank on that fateful day in April 1941 but it is understood that apart from the six figureheads already discussed there were more positioned on concrete plinths outside the offices. From a description given to us by Eric Walker, we understand that there was an L shaped extension at the rear of the main Showroom and Office building which contained an open yard within which there was enough space to store several figureheads. The lane down the left-hand side of the Showroom, viewed from the front, provided access to the river (Plate 34) and it was from this lane it is claimed that the figureheads stored outside could be viewed.

The main entrance to the Holloway Brothers Yard was through the gated frontage to the right of the rebuilt Castles Showroom, which was the former central gate entrance. Space here was almost certainly limited, as we know that the premises and land beside and behind the Head Office of Castles was subsequently developed into commercial and residential property after 1913 (Plate 35). Additional space may have been allocated for other figureheads to be stored near to the Castles Showroom building but this would have had to be within the Holloway Brothers site and with their permission. However, as it appears that the site was being commercially developed the likelihood of many additional figureheads being stored in this fashion would have been minimal.

The other factor to also bear in mind is that by the beginning of World War II Castles had closed the Long's Wharf Yard at Woolwich and therefore any figureheads kept there that had not been disposed of would need to have been transferred to Baltic Wharf. There was nowhere else for them to go. Apart from the Temeraire Mantelpiece there is no record of any other major figureheads being transferred to Plymouth except for the head, Admiral Rooke, of the *Grampian late Gibralter*. This head later became rotten and was lost in the 1950s. However, we know that some figureheads, particularly the *Edinburgh* and the *Formidable*, were temporarily sent to Devon as they were often displayed throughout the South West at agricultural shows such as the Devon County Show.

The net result of all the above described movements indicates that of the approximately twenty figureheads known to have been retained permanently at Castles for many years the following were probably lost in the 1941 bombing.

*Colossus*  
*Columbine*  
*Bristol (Body only)*  
*Grampian late Gibralter (Body only)*
The figureheads which survived the bombing in whole or in part were:

- Leander
- Bristol (Head only)
- Grampian late Gibraltar (Head only)
- Zealous (Stern figures)

In addition to the above mentioned figureheads there are photographs and pictures of several unidentified figureheads – two female and three male (Plates 23, 24, 25 and 26). The female figureheads were kept at Long’s Wharf until transferred to Baltic Wharf and the three male figureheads are referred to in a magazine article written in 1904, when a visit to Baltic Wharf was recorded. It is assumed therefore that they were kept at this yard. The pictures do not suggest that they were Naval figureheads but nothing further is known about them. In the opinion of the authors these three figureheads may not have been part of the Castles Collection of Naval figureheads. All of these unknown figureheads would have been lost in the 1941 bombing of Baltic Wharf.

A whole book could be devoted to the story of all the figureheads connected with ships broken up by Castles and several are mentioned in Eric Walker's book about ships' figureheads. However, the limits of time and space have meant that we have to confine our findings above to those ships of historical interest to Castles and where the figureheads were known to have been in the possession of the Company. This is largely a subjective view on our part and we hope that the record given complements much of what has been recorded elsewhere by other figurehead historians.

CHAPTER 9 - REFERENCES

3. Library, The Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth
4. Castles Archives - Various records
7. www.thelee.org.uk/history
8. Richard Hunter Collection - The Lost Collection
9. Castles Archives. Article "HMS Collingwood" by Commander Bruce Bulbeck, R.N. Source unknown
10. Western Morning News. 21st May 1934 - Devon Agricultural Show, Newton Abbott

See Plates 1 – 36 below
Plate 1. HMS ALBION  
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 2. HMS BRISTOL  
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 3. HMS CASTOR  
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 4. HMS COLLINGWOOD  
Castles Archives

Plate 5. HMS COLOSSUS  
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 6. HMS CONSTANCE  
Richard Hunter Collection
Plate 13. HMS GRAMPIAN
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 14. HMS GLOUCESTER
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 15. HMS HOOD
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 16. HMS IMPERIEUSE
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 17. HMS LEANDER
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 18. HMS ORION
Richard Hunter Collection
Plate 33. UNIDENTIFIED FIGURHEAD
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 34. HEAD OFFICE - SIDE STREET VIEW
Richard Hunter Collection

Plate 35. BALTIC WHARF COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Richard Hunter Collection