



HMS CHATHAM

COMMISSIONING BOOK



H.M.S. CHATHAM



UP & AT 'EM

BATTLE HONOURS

QUIBERON BAY - 1759
DARDANELLES 1915

CAPTAIN



Captain Forbes.

To be involved with any new endeavour, and in particular the birth of a warship, is a tremendous challenge. Swan Hunters have built us a fine ship of which they can be justly proud, and we will now follow their lead and mould her into an effective operational unit ready to take her place in the Royal Navy of this new decade and beyond. The standards that we set now and the attitude that we take to the task will do much to shape the character of HMS CHATHAM in the future. Such an opportunity is a unique privilege and one that we must all embrace wholeheartedly.

Today marks a significant milestone in HMS CHATHAM's life, and it is fitting that we can share such a special occasion with our families, our Lady Sponsor, old friends from the Tyne and new ones from our affiliations. Added to this, we are delighted to conduct our Commissioning in Chatham and thus renew a historic association between the Medway Towns and the Royal Navy that spans many generations. My initial impressions are of a great enthusiasm for the job in hand and I have every confidence that with teamwork and with the support of our families, HMS CHATHAM will quickly develop into an effective and happy ship, and firmly establish herself within the operational Fleet.

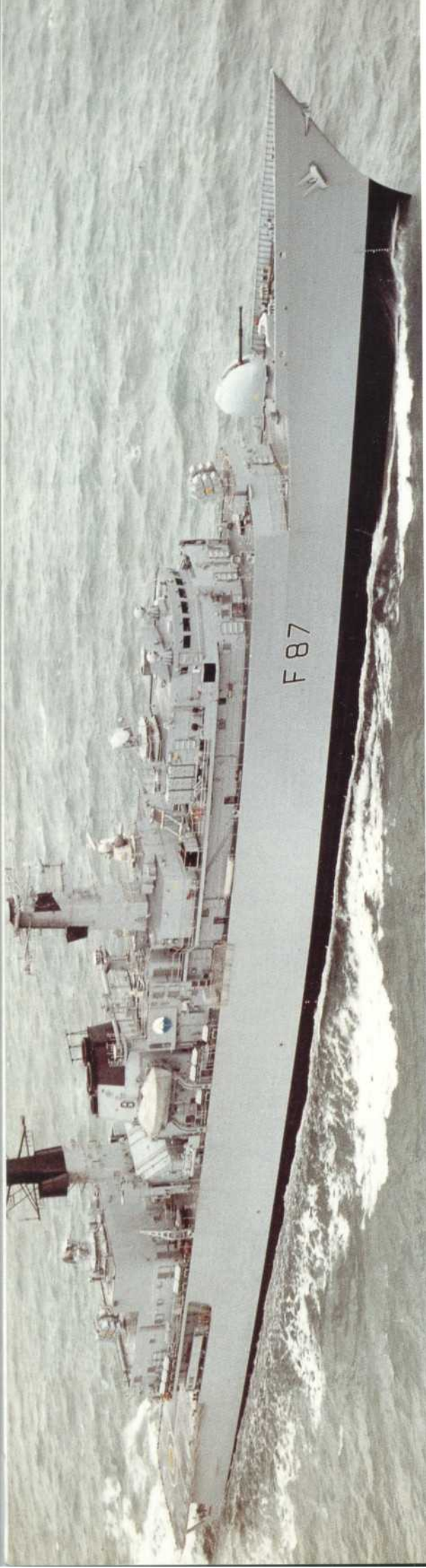


I was absolutely delighted when I was asked to be the Sponsor for the new HMS CHATHAM, and the launching ceremony, on that lovely clear January day in 1988, is something I will never forget. On that day four thousand tons of steel plate, wiring, machinery and equipment seemed to come alive and a new warship was born. Since then an enormous amount of hard work by Swan Hunter, by the Naval Overseers, by the Inspecting Authority and especially by the growing Ships Company has produced this well founded, well equipped ship and the trained, dedicated and thoroughly professional crew who now man her. As you join the operational fleet you can do so with the immense pride and satisfaction of knowing your hard work and determination have resulted in a first class ship in which you and the Royal Navy can take the greatest pride. To you all, and to your families, I offer my very best wishes for your future success and happiness and that of our ship.



Lady Oswald.





SWAN HUNTER SHIPBUILDERS

Swan Hunter rejoined the private sector in 1988, but has played a leading role in British Maritime History since the middle of the nineteenth Century. To date, the company's shipyards on the Tyne, near Newcastle, have constructed over 2,700 ships. This includes more than 400 Warships and fleet auxiliaries built for the RN and other navies. Recent HM Ship's include the destroyers NEWCASTLE (appropriately) and YORK, the aircraft carriers ILLUSTRIOUS and ARK ROYAL and the current COVENTRY and SHEFFIELD. Still building are RFA Fort George and HMS MARLBOROUGH, the second of the new Type 23 Frigates. The order for a further 3 Duke class Frigates (WESTMINSTER, NORTHUMBERLAND and RICHMOND) was won by the yard at Christmas.



Not only do Swan Hunters build ships but they also convert and repair them. They have experience of converting merchant ships to a combat role and have built a demountable flight deck for container ships that is capable of being fitted and put into operation within 24 hours. HMS SOUTHAMPTON is presently at the yard for repair and refit.

A MESSAGE FROM SWAN HUNTER

The Commissioning of HMS CHATHAM marks the completion of the line of fourteen Type 22 frigates. I would like to say, on behalf of all of us at Swan Hunter, how proud we are to have built this vessel.

We always have mixed feelings when such a fine ship sails from the River Tyne on her delivery voyage. Happiness at the thought of a job well done, sadness that she will no longer grace our shipyard. We know, however, that the friends we have made with the team from the ship will ensure that she visits Tyneside in the future for a good run ashore.

We at Swan Hunter Shipbuilders have a very special affinity with the personnel and ships of the Royal Navy, which is reflected throughout the community on Tyneside. It gives me very great pleasure, on behalf of all the people of Swan Hunter Shipbuilders, to express our best wishes for your successful future. We will follow the career of HMS CHATHAM with special interest.

May good fortune be always with you.

Roger Vaughan

THE COMMISSIONING

Commissioning ships for service with the Royal Navy dates back to the time when there was no standing navy. Any merchant ship sailing under the English flag was liable to be required by the King in pursuit of his military objectives. The term 'Commission' implied that a ship, crew or particular Officer, was under orders from the King for some purpose.

This reliance on private shipowners lasted until the reign of Henry VIII, who can be regarded as the father of the Royal Navy. He was the first to provide a permanent fleet of ships dedicated to the King's Service, but even they were not fully manned. A few permanent 'Standing Officers' were assigned by Royal Warrant to each ship, including the Master, Boatswain, Carpenter and Cook. The remainder of the crew were hired for the duration of a particular venture and then dismissed when the Ship was laid up (taken out of the water) or as it was later known 'taken out of commission'.

Although this situation is no longer the case today, the Commissioning Ceremony has remained as a climax for the crew of a new ship. It includes the presentation of the Commissioning Warrant, which is the formal authority for the Captain to command the ship. It marks the focal point of all the activities between the launch and the ship joining the operational fleet.

The ceremony itself has evolved over many years and consists of a non-denominational religious service followed by the Gaelic Blessing and responses of 1589 and finally the cutting of the cake by the Captain's wife and the youngest member of the Ship's Company.



THE NAVY IN THE MEDWAY TOWNS

The first evidence of the Navy's use of the Medway can be found in some Pipe Roll Accounts of 1547, which includes a reference to the hire of a storehouse in Gillingham water. By 1567, Chatham had superseded Portsmouth as the main fleet anchorage and had become one of the two destinations for pressed men to serve for 'ye repairing and mending of her Highness' Ships'. The first ship to be launched there was the 'Sunne' in 1586. Chatham played a major part in the wars with Holland during the 17th Century, culminating in the Dutch raid of 1667 when many of our ships were lost. It was in the early 1700's that the more important buildings were erected, but before the end of that century, Chatham lost her pre-eminence as a fleet base when England's attention returned to wars with France and Spain. The dockyard remained, however, an important building and repair yard, constructing many fine ships including Nelsons HMS VICTORY.

With the advent of iron steam ships, all the dockyards had to change. Chatham alone was fortunate that the new facilities were not built at the expense of the old, which still stand today as the only example of a Georgian/early Victorian dockyard of the age of Benbow, Anson and Nelson.

In 1905 the yard launched its last battleship, HMS AFRICA. At 16,350 tons she was the largest vessel which could be built on the Medway. Our immediate predecessor was built there in 1911. Thereafter, the yard concentrated on submarine construction, building 57 by 1966. After the Second World War the dockyard was often threatened with closure, although it continued to refit old ships and the Navy's early Nuclear Submarines.

The end finally came in April 1984, when the Navy left Chatham and the Medway after more than 400 years and after 400 warships had been built there.

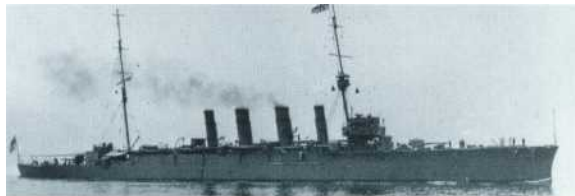
Today HMS CHATHAM is delighted to play a part in keeping alive this historic link with the Medway Towns.

Aerial view of the Medway.





Previous ship and some of her crew.



HMS CHATHAM'S HERITAGE

This HMS CHATHAM is the latest in a very long line of Ships of that name. Many of our 13 or so predecessors were only small harbour craft, the earliest of which was a Galliot of 91 tons renamed CHATHAM after she was captured from the French in 1666, the year of the great fire of London. The most famous of these small vessels was a yacht of 74 tons and 6 guns built in Chatham Dockyard in 1741. She and her crew of 10 men had the sad, but great, honour of transporting the body of Lord Nelson from HMS VICTORY, at Sheerness, to Greenwich where he lay in state until the funeral at St Pauls.

Our Battle Honours derive from the ships built in 1758 and 1911. The former was a 50 gun fourth rate ship completed in Portsmouth. She participated in the 50 hour bombardment of shipping at Le Havre in July 1759 and Admiral Hawke's subsequent victory over a French fleet at Quiberon Bay in the November. The latter, our immediate predecessor, was a very successful light cruiser built at Chatham Dockyard. She is shown in this photograph and her dimensions compared with the current ship's on the next page. Spending the early part of the First World War in the Red Sea and off East Africa, she joined the Mediterranean Fleet in 1915 to participate in the Gallipoli Campaign, where she gained the Dardanelles Battle Honour. After the war, she became the Flagship, first of the New Zealand Division, and then of the East Indies Fleet, before being scrapped in 1926.