

collected together at Portsmouth Barracks, while those up north caught up with a quick couple of days leave, during which period the ship was cleaned from truck to keel, stem to stern, by a terrific team of 'Mrs. Mops' whose efforts had to be seen to be believed. The ship reeked of paint and polish, and it was more than one's life was worth to try and get on board.

At last the ship was ready, and the Commodore arrived for his inspection of the ship. His tour was conducted almost against the clock, but he completed it in the day, almost reducing himself to the proverbial grease-spot in the process. After this, the ship was, subject to a final trial at sea, pronounced a fit and proper vessel to be accepted into Her Majesty's Fleet. Thus after almost three years of 'life', *London* was reborn to her proper destiny, the newest and—as of then—most up-to-date ship of war afloat.

Commissioning Day 14th November 1963

Dawn broke with frost on the ground and the odd snow shower lurking on the horizon. The rehearsals of the previous two days were over and *The Day* had begun.

The divisions (and the guests) were marshalled with a precision usually only associated with parade grounds, and most of us had not seen one of these for some time.

The principal guests at the ceremony were Admiral Sir Peter Cazalet, who commanded our predecessor, the 10,00 ton cruiser, at the time H. M.S. *Amethyst* made her dash down the Yangtse, and Alderman Sir Denis Truscott who represented the Lord Mayor and Corporation of the City of London.

The commissioning service was conducted by the Chaplain of the Fleet assisted by the principal Chaplain of the Church of Scotland and Free Churches.

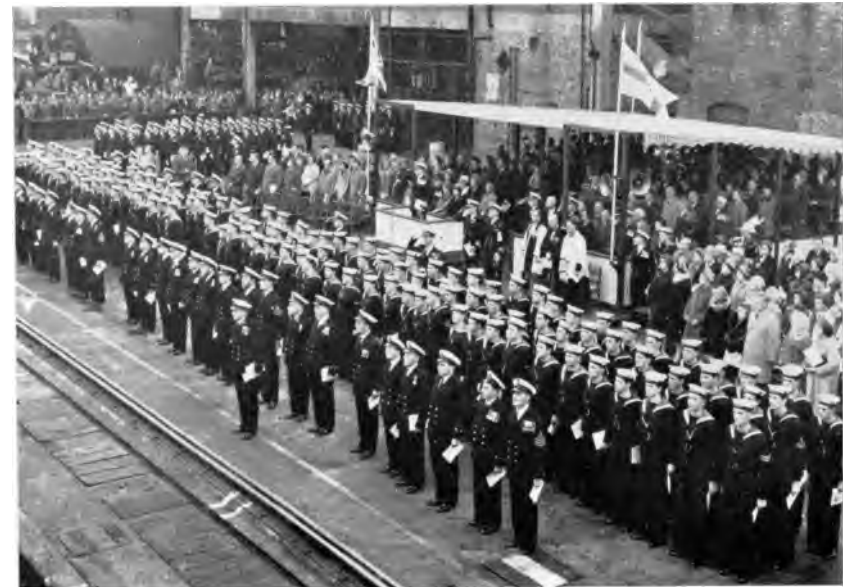
Sir Denis Truscott passed on a message from the Lord Mayor of London hoping that good fortune would always attend the Captain and the Ship's Company. He hoped, for the sake of world peace, that the ship would never have to face an enemy, but if she did, he knew that the ship's company would discharge their duty with honour.

Among the many telegrams received on Commissioning Day was one from the Duchess of Gloucester, who launched the ship in December, 1961.

Photographs on this page were taken by Philipson Studio New Castle-on-Tyne



Vice-Admiral Cazalet addressing the ship's company



The Early Days

Two days after the commissioning ceremony the ship sailed for her acceptance trials. Two hours after acceptance, a major steam leak developed in both boilers, necessitating the main engines to be crash stopped and causing loss of electrical power. The ship proceeded on gas and spent the weekend at anchor in the Firth of Forth whilst the defects were remedied.

Whilst at anchor in the Firth of Forth, the ship experienced an Easterly gale, a foretaste of what was to come. It was later apparent to those who remained that a sufficiently large sacrifice had not been made during the early days of the commission to the God of the Weather.

The ship passed by John O'Groats and Wessex 175 took off from Mother for the first time, although conditions were far from ideal. Southward bound towards the Irish Sea, the wind increased in strength and the waves began plucking the brand new paint from the ship's side. Lack of nice grey paint on D. 16's side caused many a heavy heart in the ensuing months.

Our arrival in Portsmouth on 25th November commenced a period which was known as 'Testing and Tuning'. It was during this time that the Green Empire under Vincent's command expanded with the assistance of W.S.T.G., Vickers Armstrong, Cossor Electrics and many others. Stand-easy coffee in the Wardroom was difficult to get and a newspaper or chair virtually impossible. When awaking in the middle of the night, little green men were seen on the march at the foot of the bed instead of the more usual pink elephants.

As the nights shortened and winter came to an end, the dreaded phrase 'Testing and Tuning' became replaced by talk of *Hats* and *Sats*, which to the uninitiated mean Harbour and Sea Acceptance Trials. During these trials many graphs were drawn and anxious eyes watched to see if they indicated whether we were ahead of or behind schedule. Balloons (some heavier than air) were filled and released. The final sea trial was completed in the Moray Firth by mid-April '64 and we set sail for Fishguard to fire our missiles on the Aberporth range. Each individual system had made the grade, but would the whole lot work together when the button was pressed? The little green men waited and wondered, some possibly surmising where they might be drafted to at short notice if the winged rocket failed to become airborne—America, West Indies, Stornoway, Loch Ewe or Rockall?

Conditions for the first firing were stringent since at least three of the four cameras set up on shore needed to see both the missile and the target aircraft before permission to fire could be given. Eventually all

was well, the button was pressed and everything went perfectly. The first firing was followed by others and we left Aberporth with a 100% record of successes and no failures.

We were now ready for our work-up at Portland which took up the ensuing seven weeks, but which was not quite as bad as people had been led to believe—there was actually long weekend leave given over the Whitsun weekend! It was later alleged that this was for the benefit of the staff and not for ourselves.

After leaving Portland, we were for the first time, some seven to eight months after commissioning, an operational ship of the Home Fleet.



All systems go



Two Royal Visits

H.R.H. The Duchess of Gloucester, 20th May 1964



H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, 11th/12th June 1964

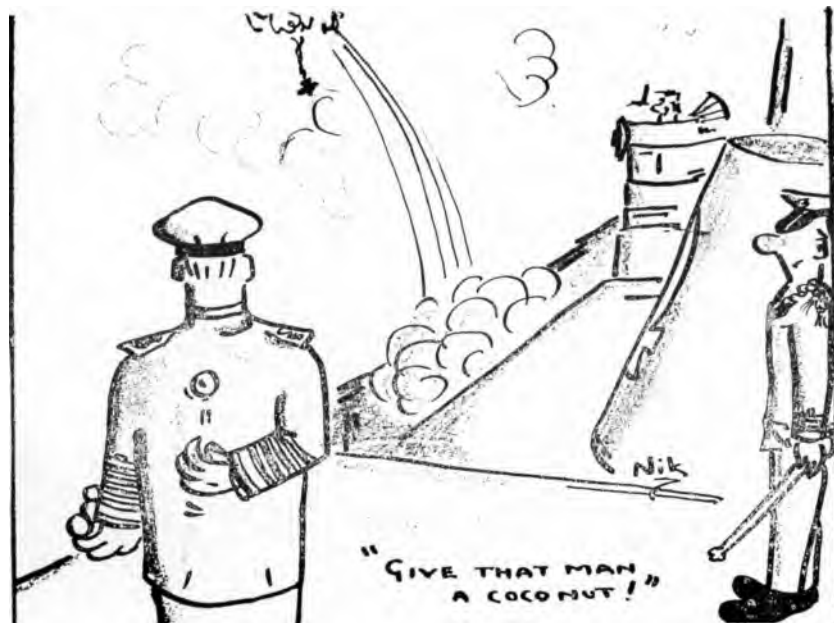


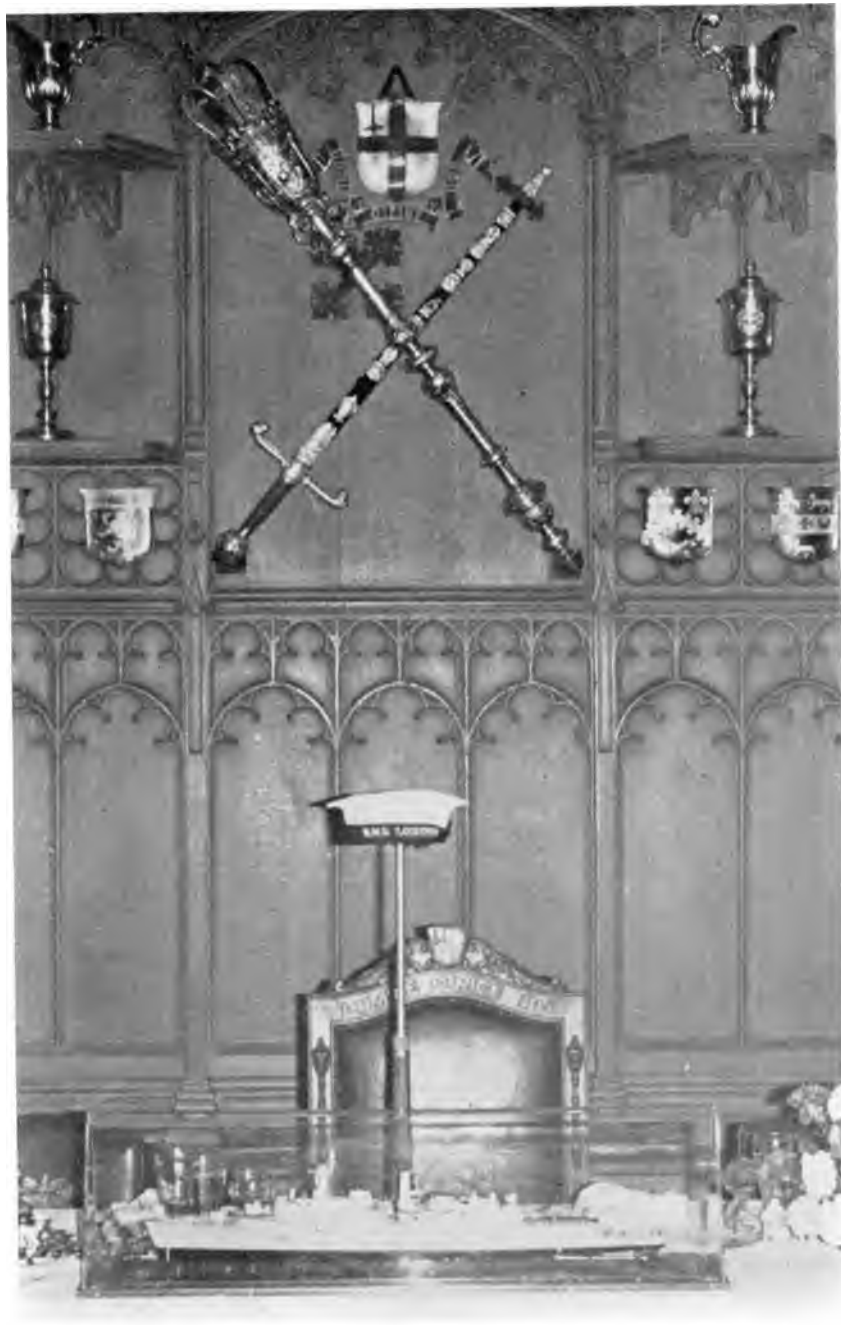
London

London's ship sailed up the Thames for the first time on 5th July, the occasion having been arranged to coincide with the city's festival. The last time that the capital saw a ship of the same name was 35 years earlier when the newly commissioned cruiser *London* paid an official visit.

The week was a very full one with a cricket match mixed in with parties, brewery runs and a reception for the whole ship given by the Mercer's Company. The highlight of the visit was the march by 25 officers and 300 ratings through the streets of the city, past crowded pavements with traffic stopped, the Lord Mayor (Alderman Sir James Harman, G.B.E.) taking the salute on the steps of the Mansion House. This march culminated with luncheon in the magnificent surroundings of the Guildhall, with the ship's company as guests of the Lord Mayor and City Corporation.

Visitors to the ship included the Lord Mayor, a party of peers and Members of Parliament, the Master, Wardens and Court of Assistants of the Mercer's Company, Sea Cadet Units and schoolchildren. In turn, representatives from the ship visited the Central Criminal Court, the Tower of London as well as attending social evenings in the social club of the Yeomen Warders and the sports club of Courage's Brewery.







Visit to Gordon's, 1964



Cilia Black on board to open L.T.V.



Houston, Texas

26th to 30th September

After crossing the Atlantic and calling at Bermuda for two days, avoiding two hurricanes en route, the ship sailed through the blue, sunlit waters of the Caribbean and on into the Gulf of Mexico when hurricanes 'ardly ever 'appen.

Most of us had never been given a Yankee welcome before and the reception by the small boats up the Galveston Ship Canal, the band, the girl baton twirlers and Miss Texas was quite overwhelming. Miss Texas was handed over to the Senior Birdman to look after as it was assumed (quite wrongly, of course) that he knew more than anyone else about handling birds.

At the reception, the Captain presented to the Mayor of Houston piece of marble from St. Paul's Cathedral, which was to be incorporated in Houston's new Town Hall.

The next few days were a whirl of activity, with various receptions dances, parties, swimming, drives in air-conditioned cars and also the occasional party. One Chief Petty Officer (and there were obviously others) was collected at the jetty by a party in a red sports car and returned the next morning. Things like this began happening to more and more people as the hours went by.

Unfortunately, over the horizon was another party called Hilda and she decided that she would like to horn in on the act. She had started life as a little tropical depression but had now grown to womanhood in the form of a very severe hurricane and was heading directly toward Houston. The odds were that the storm would curve away, giving Houston nothing more than a strong wind, but the risk could not be taken and the ship set sail on 30th September, four days earlier than intended. At that stage, all hoped that we could return once the hurricane was out of the way.

On reaching open water, after navigating the 60 mile ship canal between Houston and Galveston, we waited to see which way Hilda would pounce. By this time, the warnings from the New Orleans Weather Bureau were getting worse and Hilda was now classified as a 'dangerous' hurricane' having previously only been 'very severe') with winds of 150 m.p.h in the centre. With the increase in severity, the hurricane began to move more slowly and any attempt to return to Houston was abandoned the ship circumnavigated the storm to the South.

Hilda eventually claimed 23 lives when she crossed the coast to the west of New Orleans.



The Panama Canal Transit

by MIDSHIPMAN HOWARD

After her hurried departure from Houston, Texas, H.M.S. *London* steamed south to Cartagena to rendezvous with the rest of the South America Special Squadron consisting of H.M.S. *Tiger*, flying the flag of Vice Admiral Sir Fitzroy Talbot, H.M.S. *Penelope*, H.M.S. *Lynx*, H.M. Submarine *Odin* and the R.F.A. *Wave Chief*. At 0700 on Tuesday 6th October 1964, the squadron anchored in Limon Bay off Cristobal at the Atlantic end of the Panama Canal to await our 'slot' for the canal transit.

The original canal across the Panama Isthmus was designed in 1879 by Ferdinand de Lesseps (who was the builder of the Suez Canal), under the patronage of the French Canal Company. However this company went into liquidation in 1889 due to rising costs while the canal was only a quarter completed. In 1903, the United States bought the rights of the canal for £8 m. and began in 1905 on a new canal in a slightly different position from the old one. 45,000 men were employed to excavate 240 million cubic yards of soil and rock at a cost of \$366,650,000 and the 50 mile long canal was finally declared open in 1920.

H.M.S. *London* was the last ship of the squadron to pass through the canal and at 0900 we weighed anchor and made our way up the course of the old Chagres river to the Gatun locks which are about 5 miles from the Atlantic end of the canal. The Gatun locks consist of a double flight of 3 enormous chambers, each of which is 1000 ft. long which lift the ship 85 ft. up to the level of the Gatun Lake. The transit of the locks was a simple matter as it was all done for us by the Canal staff. On approaching the lowest chamber, four electric engines, known as Donkeys, which ran on rails on each side of the locks, were secured to the ship, two for'd and two aft. These Donkeys then pulled the ship into the lower chamber and held her in position while the enormous lock gates closed behind her and the lock began to fill. Each chamber flooded at a terrific rate from the one above and it only took 8 minutes for the ship to be lifted 40 ft.



Once clear of the locks, we steamed into the Gatun Lake which is a large fresh water lake formed by damming the old Chagres river to provide a reservoir to supply water to the locks. Here we anchored for an hour, during which time the Pre-wetting system was turned on accompanied by the pipe—'Dress on the upper deck; bathing trunks, optional caps'. At 1300 we weighed anchor and proceeded along the lake which forms a large part of the canal and was studded with scores of small, thickly wooded islands. At the other end of the lake we entered the canal proper to cross the centre of the Panama isthmus. This was the most beautiful part of the transit, with the rich jungle overhanging the water's edge on both sides of the canal. The names of the various stretches of the canal matched the scenic beauty----Buena Vista Reach, Manei Curve, Bas Obispo Reach, and Empire Reach. We crossed the centre of the Isthmus through a narrow defile cut in the central Cordillera called the Gaillard cut, named after one of the prime movers of the canal construction. At 1700 we arrived at the first of the locks to take us down to the Pacific Ocean, the Pedro Miguel lock, which was a single chamber lock which took us down to the Miraflores lake and on to the Miraflores locks. At the Miraflores locks we were delayed for an hour to allow shipping to come through from the other side, but at 930 we made our way through, out under the bridge at Panama city to join the rest of the Squadron in the Pacific Ocean.

South America



Visit by the President of Peru
The Andes Railroad



Peru, Chile, Argentina

After passing through Panama, our first stop was at Callao, the port of Lima, the capital of Peru. This visit was a memorable one for the ship's company and included a visit by rail to the Andes as well as an introduction to the local drink *Pisco*. Peruvian silver articles were purchased by the score and a large number of hats and slippers made from llama skins found their way on board. This visit to Peru was highlighted by the first visit of a Head of State to our ship when the President of Peru paid an official call.

Our next port was Valparaiso where the natives (particularly the females) were very friendly. Some people were lucky enough to get away for 24 hours on a visit to Santiago whilst others did noble work at Valparaiso entertaining orphans and helping to paint an old peoples home. Up to now, the cruise had not been all 'beer and skittles' since exercises had been held for our mutual benefit with the Peruvian and Chilean navies.

Valparaiso, Chile



The social pressure had been quite intense and we were happy to be on our way to Punta Arenas, the southernmost town in the world, where we had ten days to relax a little and carry out some self-maintenance. Prior to arriving at Punta Arenas, the squadron navigated the Trinidad Channel: this consisted of a 24 hour transit through narrow fjord-like waters. By this time our typical *London* weather had returned and we encountered frequent snow storms but with the advantage of giving a picturesque Scottish appearance to the surrounding hills. Activities beside the Straits of Magellan often took the form of expeditions or long hikes. A popular one consisted of taking a bus to the opposite side of a mountain and wending a way back in groups of four over **20** miles of rough country. This proved so interesting that the Supply Officer was actually witnessed doing it twice, although not on the same day.

The next scheduled ports of call were in Argentina. Unfortunately by this time friction over the Falkland Islands had come to a head and our visit was cancelled. Instead we visited Punta del Este in Uruguay, an intended four day visit. Nature once more interfered with our plans and we were forced to put to sea for 24 hours to ride out a gale. By this time the Meteorological Officer had become unpopular and it was rumoured that he was seen dancing around burning seaweed on the flight deck one morning.

By the 10th November, we had arrived at Rio de Janeiro and this proved to be the highlight of our South American cruise. *London* started off on the right foot by demonstrating our close range guided missile *Seacat* to our Brazilian friends and obtaining a direct hit on the target with the first shot. This city has so much to offer that everyone enjoyed themselves. Tours to local beauty spots by official parties and private groups gave us magnificent views of this majestic city and even the sun took pity on us and shone brilliantly for the last four days of our visit.

With empty pockets we set sail for Simonstown with the Commander-in-Chief Vice Admiral Sir Fitzroy Talbot and Lady Talbot embarked. On passage we hove to for a brief period at Tristan da Cunha, while two batches of officers and ratings were flown by helicopter to land on the island.