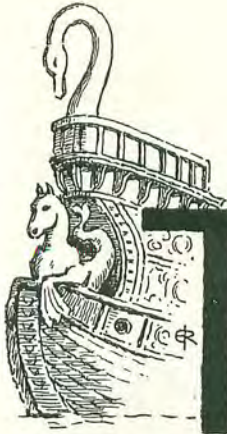


Figure-heads.



THE FIGURE-HEAD which decorates the prow of a ship is, as that personification of universal knowledge invented by Macaulay, "every schoolboy," knows, an institution of the greatest antiquity, and dates back to the time when men first began to "go down to the sea" and "do business in great waters."

The aforesaid schoolboy, who in the present day is an archæologist of no mean capacity, is familiar with the aspect of the Greek and Roman war-galleys as represented in marble and bronze remains of ancient times, and he can discourse learnedly about the prora, the rostrum, the gubernaculum, the cheniscus, and other details of the vessels of classic days. But it is with the more modern period that I propose to deal in the following notes.

All visitors to the Naval Exhibition have been struck with admiration at the wonder-

ful display of ships' models which have been collected together at Chelsea. From the magnificent half-model of the *Victoria* in the Armstrong Gallery, more than 30 ft. long, down to the little *Sea-horse*, on board of which Nelson served as midshipman in 1771-2, they all give evidence of the gradual development of our navy, and as far as the wooden ships are concerned, to the artistic skill lavished on the decorations of bow, stern and quarters. But with

the substitution of iron for wood the figure-head gradually lost its importance, and in Her Majesty's ships may now be pronounced almost extinct, the prevailing fashion being to ornament the two sides of the bow in a flat treatment, and to have no projection beyond the cutwater, as in the sketch of the ironclad *Nep-tune*.

Mr. Clark Russell says, with reference to the decay of figure-heads, "Whatever the new fashions may be termed, the old ones are yielding to them, and the figurehead proper survives chiefly

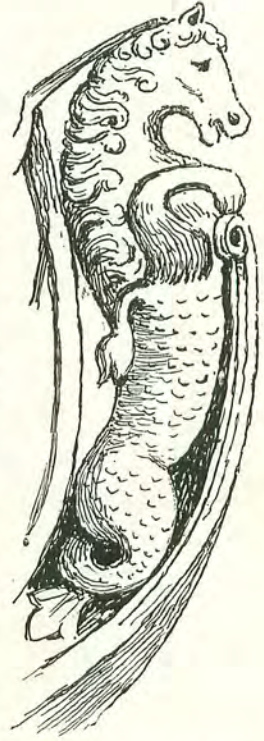


FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "SEAHORSE," IN WHICH NELSON SERVED AS MIDSHIPMAN.

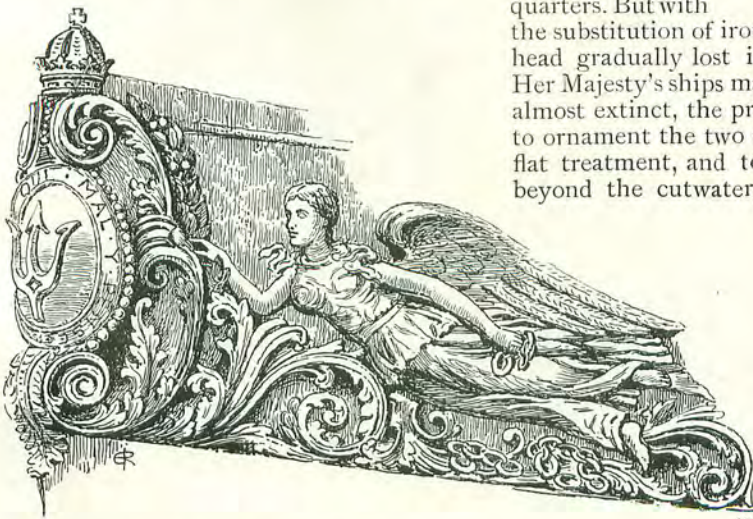


FIGURE-HEAD OF MODERN IRONCLAD. (FROM H.M.S. "NEPTUNE.")



FIGURE-HEAD OF H.M.S. "EDINBURGH."

—I will not say only—in ships of a type not likely to be replaced when they go to the bottom, or are sold for ice or coal hulks."

The affection entertained by the old salt for the figure-head of his ship, and which the modern scroll-work, like the *Neptune's*, can scarcely inspire, is well illustrated in the following letter, which my friend Mr. Stacy Marks,



FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "COLLINGWOOD."

R.A., has kindly allowed me to make public. Mr. Marks was at Lewes in 1879, the year in which he painted his picture of "Old Friends"—now in the National Gallery of Sydney, the subject being two old Greenwich pensioners in their quaint costume (now, alas! like the figure-heads, a thing of the past)—standing in a ship-breaker's yard, gazing at the effigy which had formerly adorned the stem of their old ship. While at Lewes, Mr. Marks met an old man-of-war's man, and, in the course of conversation, happened to describe his picture, and mentioned that one of the heads introduced was a Highlander. The old man thought the



FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "SHANNON."

Highlander was from his own ship, the *Edinburgh*, and Mr. Marks, on his return home, sent him a copy of a photograph of the painting. The letter was in acknowledgment of the gift:—

Lewes Castle, Oct. 11/79.

SIR,—I am much obliged for sending me the figure-head of my old ship, the *Edinburgh*. Sir i am confident its her head the more i look at it the more i reconise it. She was built in 1812 and i believe she fell into the hands of the ship breaker to break

her up in the Liberal Government's reign. (Childers to wit)

I am Sir
Your humble servant
JAMES MORGAN.

Sir i will have it framed and keep in remembrance of you and the old ship.—
J. M.

The sketch represents the figure-head as it now stands in Messrs. Castle's yard in the Vauxhall Bridge-road, and it has for neighbours the *Leander* and the *Collingwood*; the latter, it will be noticed, continues his career of usefulness by carrying a gas lamp in an extremely painful position. These vessels were broken up about the year 1866.

One of the most interesting figure-heads in the Naval Exhibition is that of the *Shannon*, whose encounter with the *Chesapeake* off Boston on June 1, 1813, will always be a glorious page in the history of England's Navy. Captain Broke, her commander,

who had had his eye on the *Chesapeake* for some time, addressed to Captain Lawrence, of the latter vessel, a letter of challenge, which (to use the words of James's Naval History) "for candour, manly spirit, and gentlemanly style, stands unparalleled." This is one of the passages in the letter:—"As the *Chesapeake* appears now ready for sea, I request you will do me the favour to meet the *Shannon* with her, ship to ship, to try the fortune of our respective flags." How the fight ended, and how the Bostonians were disappointed in their expectations of seeing the Britisher whipped, is a thrice-told tale, and need not be repeated here. A prophetic bard of the period sang:—

"And as the war they did provoke,
We'll pay them with our cannon;

The first to do it will be Broke
In the gallant ship the *Shannon*."

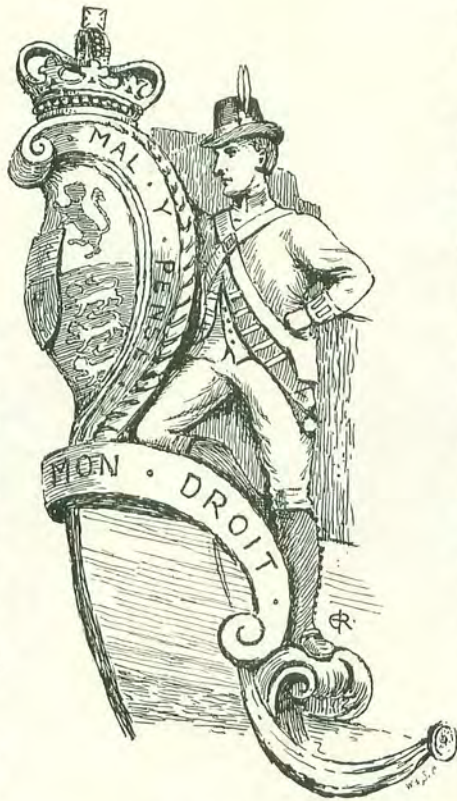


FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "VICTORY" AT THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR.



FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "BLACK PRINCE."



FIGURE-HEAD OF H.M.S. "AJAX."

Mr. Robert C. Leslie, in his interesting book "Old Sea Wings, Ways, and Words in the Days of Oak and Hemp," tells us that, "owing to neglect, and still more, perhaps, to the material—mostly English elm—used by ship carvers, very old figure-heads are not common;" and from my own investigation of the subject, I should say they are practically extinct. There is also great difficulty in locating those that have survived, and this arises partly from the fashion of continuing the names of ships after the original owners of the names have passed away, and also from some of the old ships having several figure-heads, which were changed according to the fancy of the captain or first lieutenant. Nelson's *Victory* had, in fact, four figure-heads at different periods of her

glorious career, and it is believed that it was the third, a shield with a crown over and supported by a sailor on the starboard and a marine on the port side, which she carried at the Battle of Trafalgar. At the present



FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "BRITANNIA."

day the old ship still has the shield and crown, but the supporters are two gigantic cherubs, and these Turner, with characteristic contempt for accuracy, has represented in his picture of the battle which belongs to Greenwich Hospital, but is now to be seen at the Naval Exhibition.

There is a good collection of figure-heads in Devonport Dockyard, of which the sketches here given are typical examples. The *Black Prince* belonged to the ship of that name, which is now in commission; the *Ajax* recalls the fate of her commander, Captain Boyd, R.N., who was drowned at Kings-town on the 9th February, 1861, while gallantly striving to save life when fourteen vessels were lost in the harbour in a



FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "CANOPUS."



FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "GRIMALDI."

terrible gale from the N.E. Other heads here given are from the *Canopus*, a ship taken from the French, and considered in her day the fastest sailer in the squadron; and the *Britannia*, now the training-ship for Naval cadets.

The sketches of the *Grimaldi* and *Eliza Jane* are examples of the figureheads met with in small coasting vessels.

The *Eliza Jane* is, I believe, still afloat.

vermilion exhausted on the lips was prodigious.

In the same Westcountry harbour I came across the old *Grimaldi*, a collier brig, a "Geordie," in fact—see Mr. Clark Russell for a description of this kind of craft. The local seamen told me the *Grimaldi* was ninety years old, and as sound as a bell, and



FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "CALEDONIA."

as *Grimaldi* was born in 1779, the age of the brig was, perhaps, not exaggerated. The figure was very comical, and there were distinct traces of a goose hanging out of the clown's starboard pocket. I heard with sorrow that the poor old *Grimaldi* was lost with all hands a few months after I had sketched her.

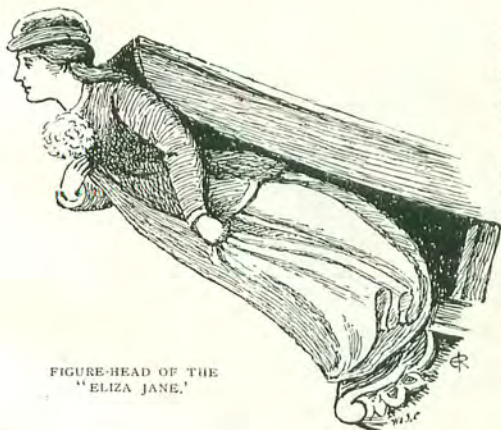


FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "ELIZA JANE."

She is a schooner of about 150 tons, and, judging from the costume, was built in the year 1855. It was amusing to watch, as I did in a Westcountry harbour, the artist of the ship painting *Eliza Jane* with the brightest colours which his palette could furnish. The bouquet of flowers took him about a day to work up, and the amount of

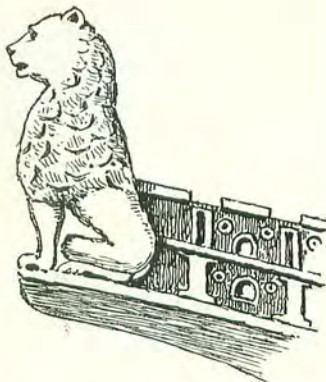


FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "GREAT HARRY."

The *Caledonia* is a picturesque figure. The figure-head of the *Great Harry*, Henry the Eighth's enormous vessel, represented the accompanying quaint image of the British Lion.

Lord Dufferin, in his charming book, "Letters from High Latitudes," pays great honour to the figure-head of his yacht *Foam*. "I remained on board to superintend the fixing of our sacred figure-head—executed in bronze by Marochetti, and brought along with me by rail still warm from the furnace." His Lordship apostrophises the effigy in some graceful verses,

from which I quote the following stanzas:—

"Our progress was your triumph duly hailed
By Ocean's inmates; herald dolphins played
Before our stem, tall ships that sunward sailed
With stately curtseys due obeisance paid.

What marvel, then, if when our wearied hull
In some lone haven found a brief repose,
Rude hands, by love made delicate, would cull
A grateful garland for your goddess brows?"

We cannot give a more fitting conclusion to these slight notes than the figure-head of the old *Nile*, a remarkably realistic portrait bust of Lord Nelson, after he had lost his eye.



FIGURE-HEAD OF THE "NILE."