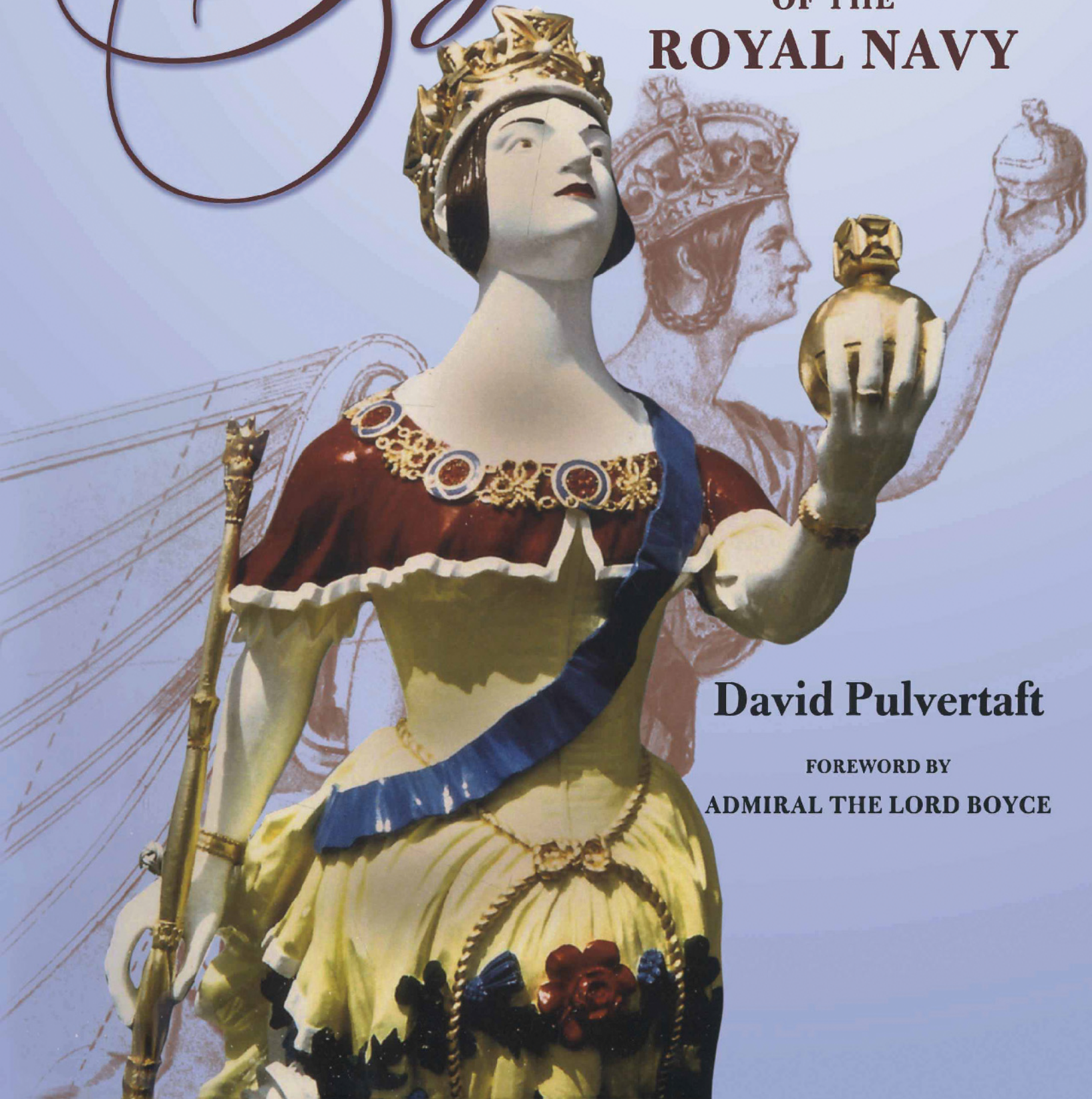


# *Figureheads*

OF THE  
ROYAL NAVY



**David Pulvertaft**

FOREWORD BY  
ADMIRAL THE LORD BOYCE

*Figureheads*  
OF THE  
ROYAL NAVY



*Figureheads*  
OF THE  
ROYAL NAVY

**David Pulvertaft**

FOREWORD BY  
ADMIRAL THE LORD BOYCE

**Seaforth**  
PUBLISHING

*Frontispiece:* Courtesy of the National Museum of the Royal Navy

Copyright © David Pulvertaft 2011

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by  
Seaforth Publishing  
An imprint of Pen & Sword Books Ltd  
47 Church Street, Barnsley  
S Yorkshire S70 2AS

[www.seaforthpublishing.com](http://www.seaforthpublishing.com)  
Email [info@seaforthpublishing.com](mailto:info@seaforthpublishing.com)

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A CIP data record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 84832 101 4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing of both the copyright owner and the above publisher.

The right of David Pulvertaft to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

Typeset and designed by Roger Daniels  
Printed and bound in China

# CONTENTS

	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	6
	<i>Foreword</i>	9
	<i>Introduction</i>	10
1	Ship Names and the Figurehead Carvers' Task	12
2	Figurehead Carvers	19
3	Figurehead and Associated Collections	27
4	Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Figureheads	44
5	Eighteenth-Century Figureheads	49
6	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Beasts	68
7	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Birds	77
8	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Famous People	86
9	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Geographic	112
10	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Miscellaneous	128
11	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – From Mythology	139
12	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Occupations	150
13	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Prize and Commemorative Names	157
14	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Qualities	166
15	Nineteenth-Century Figureheads – Royalty	178
16	Bow Decorations and Twentieth-Century Figureheads	197
17	Conclusions	201
	<b>FIGUREHEAD DIRECTORY</b>	<b>203</b>
	<i>Bibliography and Sources</i>	236
	<i>Index</i>	239

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I STARTED taking an active interest in the figureheads of the Royal Navy about a year before I left the service in 1992 as I realised that, once retired, I could no longer assume the easy access to the naval establishments and royal dockyards that I had enjoyed in the past and it was there that many of the carvings resided.

With the foundation of my database being the figureheads still under naval ownership, I investigated the collection of the National Maritime Museum (NMM) – the largest in the land – where the then Curator of Antiquities, Caroline Roberts, allowed me to make copious notes from their records and then to meet the figureheads themselves, most of which were in store and only available ‘by appointment’. I am indebted to her for such a start.

Through my membership of the South West Maritime History Society, the Plymouth Naval Base Museum Trust and The Society for Nautical Research (SNR) I have acquired many good friends who have in their own way encouraged my research and provided all sorts of clues to where I might find new examples of these fascinating carvings. Dr Michael Duffy of the University of Exeter provided an academic slant, Lieutenant Commander Lawrie Phillips was ever forthcoming in offering snippets that came his way and figurehead historian Richard Hunter has proved to be a long-standing colleague with whom I have been able to explore the more difficult identities and who has always been most generous with items from the Richard Hunter Archives.

Help from the many contacts who work in Portsmouth has been eased by my membership of the Friends of the Royal Naval Museum and HMS *Victory* with Matthew Sheldon and Richard Noyce, now of the National Museum of the Royal Navy, deserving special thanks for their help over the years. Jenny Wraight, the Admiralty Librarian, has been a mine of information; first when the library was in Old Scotland Yard in Whitehall and more recently from her desk in the Portsmouth Naval Base as a member of the Naval Historical Branch.

In preparing for this book, my thanks go first to its publisher, Robert Gardiner, who encouraged me to dig deep into my own archives to select a suitable cross-section of subjects and images to do justice to this rather specialist subject and then suggested that I should include what were the uncharted waters, for me, of ship plans and ship models. To enter these fields of expertise was somewhat daunting and I make no attempt to be authoritative on either subject but simply to show where each provides figurehead evidence. I was warmly welcomed to the Brass Foundry at Woolwich by the NMM's Curator of Historic Photographs and Ship Plans, Jeremy Michell, and his colleague Andrew Choong and given every assistance to search their vast collections. The NMM's Curator of Ship Models, Simon Stephens, was equally forthcoming in his area of expertise, not only guiding me through the collection at a time when much of it was being prepared for its move to Chatham, but also pointing me in the direction of other collections of ship models where further figurehead evidence might be found.

In the last few months I have had to make contact with a large number of curators, librarians, owners and copyright holders to check that the figureheads that I had recorded many years ago are still where I first met them, to discover details of model collections, to seek permission to use certain images and to explore many other details. To all of these I offer my grateful thanks and in particular to the present NMM's Curator of Artefacts, Barbara Tomlinson, who has helped me update my earlier records from their collection and the Editor of *The Mariner's Mirror*, Dr Hugh Murphy, for permission to use the 1913 image of the fire-engine house at Devonport. My special thanks go to Richard Blundell who owns the Dickerson Archive in Australia and allowed me to examine the whole collection when I last visited that country a year ago. He has been enormously generous in providing the scans that illustrate this previously unpublished source and answering the many questions that have resulted.

It has been reassuring to have my manuscript read by two of the maritime historians whom I have come to know and admire over the years, Dr Michael Duffy and Robert Gardiner. Each of them gave me sound advice that I was only too happy to follow and, while I thank them for this, any remaining errors are entirely mine.

Finally, I thank my wife, Mary Rose, for encouraging my interest in figureheads for the last twenty years and for remaining totally supportive, despite my almost complete dedication to the book's creation over the last twelve months!



# FOREWORD

**F**OR more than three centuries the bows of British warships were adorned with an elaborate decorative device, often in the form of a carved human or animal figure. These were emblematic of the ship's name, symbolized the fighting spirit of the Navy, and even reflected the political ideals and beliefs of the country. Sometimes large and always eye-catching, the artistic value of figureheads meant that many were retained when the ships themselves were sold or broken up – although, sadly, the later history of such collections was often one of neglect and dispersal.

In recent years there has been a revival of interest in these potent symbols of Britain's maritime heritage, much of it due to the painstaking work of Rear Admiral David Pulvertaft. He has identified and catalogued all surviving figureheads of the Royal Navy – which has encouraged a growing appreciation of their value – but in this book he has carried his research to a new level. For the first time he describes the process by which the Admiralty commissioned such work, analyses how the ship names were translated into sculpture, and looks at the lives and businesses of the carvers themselves. He has tracked down extant design drawings, some from as far away as Australia, and studied models and ship plans as objective records of figureheads that have themselves long since disappeared. All these sources are listed in a directory of immense reference value that will surely form both the starting point and inspiration for further research.

I have no hesitation in welcoming a work of real scholarship that throws much new light on this poorly understood aspect of naval history.

Admiral the Lord Boyce KG GCB OBE DL

*May 2011*

# INTRODUCTION

**F**IGUREHEADS have been mounted on the bows of ships from the earliest times, giving guidance and comfort to superstitious mariners and taking on something of the ‘soul’ of the ship. When on the bows of warships they provided an image of the fighting spirit of the crew and thus their nation, whether their role was warfare, exploration or the protection of trade.

This book looks only at the figureheads of British warships, charting their evolution from the days before there was an established navy until the period when ship design made the figurehead redundant. For three and a half centuries ships were given names that were appropriate to their function and the ships’ carvers created works of art that illustrated the names. During much of this period, the carvers also created the stern and quarter decorations that were sometimes several times more expensive than the figurehead, but this book does not stray into that field as these were demonstrations of the nation’s wealth and prestige rather than the character of the ship.

While it has been deemed important to identify the figureheads with the size and role of the ship on which it served, the exploits of the ships themselves have not in general been described as this is the figureheads’ story and not that of the men who manned the fleet.

There are today about 200 figureheads of the Royal Navy that have survived from their sea-service; mostly now in museum collections and naval establishments in the United Kingdom but with a handful overseas. With a few exceptions, these have not been used to illustrate this book as an interested reader can find them for himself or herself, providing they know where to look. Thus, in the ‘Figurehead Directory’ at the back of the book each of the survivors will be found with its present location – highlighted in *bold* type. Many of them have been repaired and restored over the years but it is not the intention here to assess how much original material remains and how much is new.

The exception to this policy is where a replica has been created in modern materials for display outside so that the original can be kept safe in controlled conditions. For those examples, both the original and the replica are listed in the Directory.

To capture the character and variety of the Royal Navy's figureheads over the years, the book has been illustrated with photographs of figureheads now lost and design drawings submitted by the figurehead carvers for approval, most of which are to be found amongst the Admiralty papers at The National Archives. As many of these have been folded within their letters of approval for well over a hundred years, image-wise their condition is far from perfect but, despite this, it is believed that photographs of the original documents show the carver's intention to best effect. For those periods when designs are not available, the figureheads shown on the plans from which the ships were built and those carved on contemporary models fill many of the gaps. Where these add to the overall knowledge of the subject, they have been included in the Figurehead Directory.

Ships that were not deemed suitable for a figurehead were given a 'scroll' – curling forward from the stem-post – or a 'fiddlehead' – curling backwards like the end of a violin. As these do not make any artistic contribution to the history of the Royal Navy, nor do they represent the name of the ship, they are not listed in the Directory. There then came a period towards the end of the nineteenth century when, due to ship design, figureheads were no longer appropriate to the bows of the Royal Navy's ships and yet some form of decoration seemed necessary. Bow decorations became the fashion, usually in the form of the royal arms within a cartouche surrounded by carved scrolls down the ship's side. Occasionally the decoration was particular to the ship and, as these were following the long-established practice of figurehead design, these too are included in the Directory.

## CHAPTER 1

# SHIP NAMES<sup>1</sup> AND THE FIGUREHEAD CARVERS' TASK

<sup>1</sup> Captain T D Manning and Commander C F Walker, *British Warship Names* (Putnam, 1959) – with a comprehensive alphabetical Dictionary that lists for each ship name, its meaning, the dates of ships that bore the name and the battle honours won.

<sup>2</sup> C S Knighton and D M Loades, *The Anthony Roll of Henry VIII's Navy* (Navy Records Society, 2000).

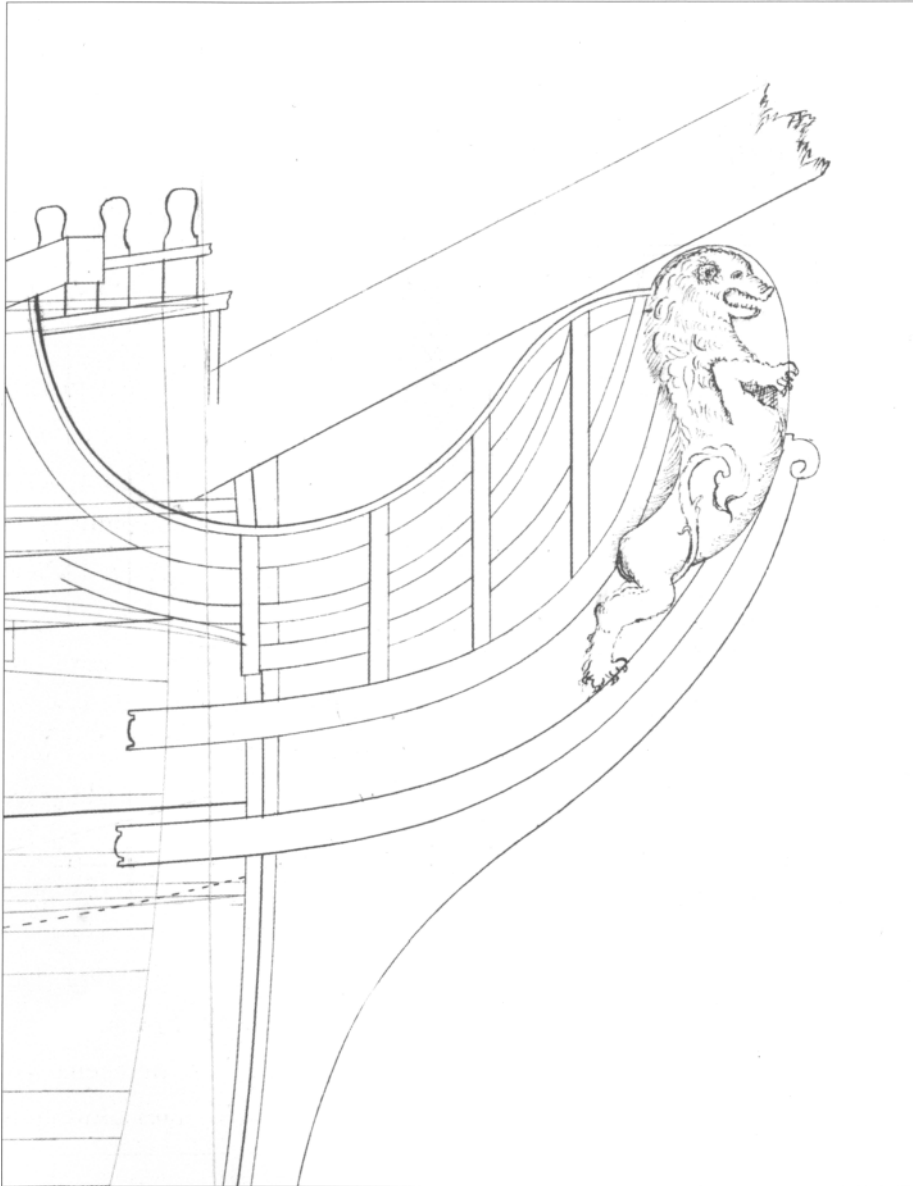
THE first English fighting ships to be given figureheads relating to their names appeared during the reign of King Henry VIII and it is from this period, therefore, that our examination starts. ‘The Anthony Roll’<sup>2</sup> of 1546 has some fifty-eight ship-portraits with, on the whole, uncomplicated names of people such as the *Mary* and the *Matthew* or animals such as the *Dragon* and the *Salamander*. Some of these are included in Chapter 4.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, ships were given names with warlike connotations such as *Victory*, *Triumph*, *Repulse*, *Revenge* and *Defiance* and compound names such as *Dreadnought*, *Swiftsure* and *Warspite*, all of which have continued to be used in the modern Royal Navy. During the relative peace of the first half of the seventeenth century few heavyweight ships were added to the fleet, notable exceptions being the *Prince Royal* and the *Sovereign of the Seas*.

Ships built under the Commonwealth reflected Cromwell’s victories such as *Naseby* and *Marston Moor* while others that were already in commission with royalist associations were changed, such as the *Prince Royal* becoming the *Resolution*. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, ships were renamed; *Naseby* becoming *Royal Charles* while others were given names alluding to the King such as *Royal Oak* and *Happy Return*.

The early part of the eighteenth century again saw few warships being built but the majority that were added to the fleet, whatever their rate, had lions as their figureheads, some uncrowned [1.1] and some crowned. An example of a stylised crowned lion will be found in Chapter 5. Other animals began to appear in a form that was similar to the full-length lion such as the *Licorne*, the anglicised version of the French ship *La Licorne* [1.2], captured in 1778 and still with her French figurehead. Less comfortable, perhaps, were the *Centaur* and *Sphinx*, to be found in Chapter 5.

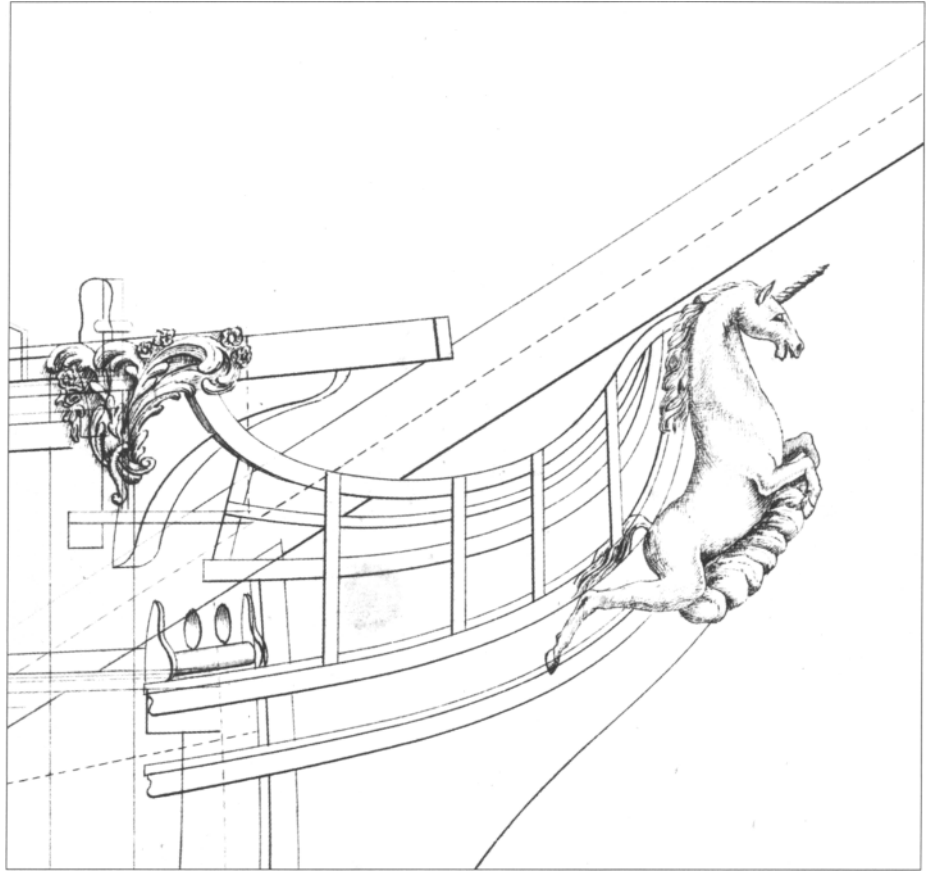
From about 1740, while lions continued to be carved for some ships, increasing numbers of others were given either a standing figure or a full-length figure that



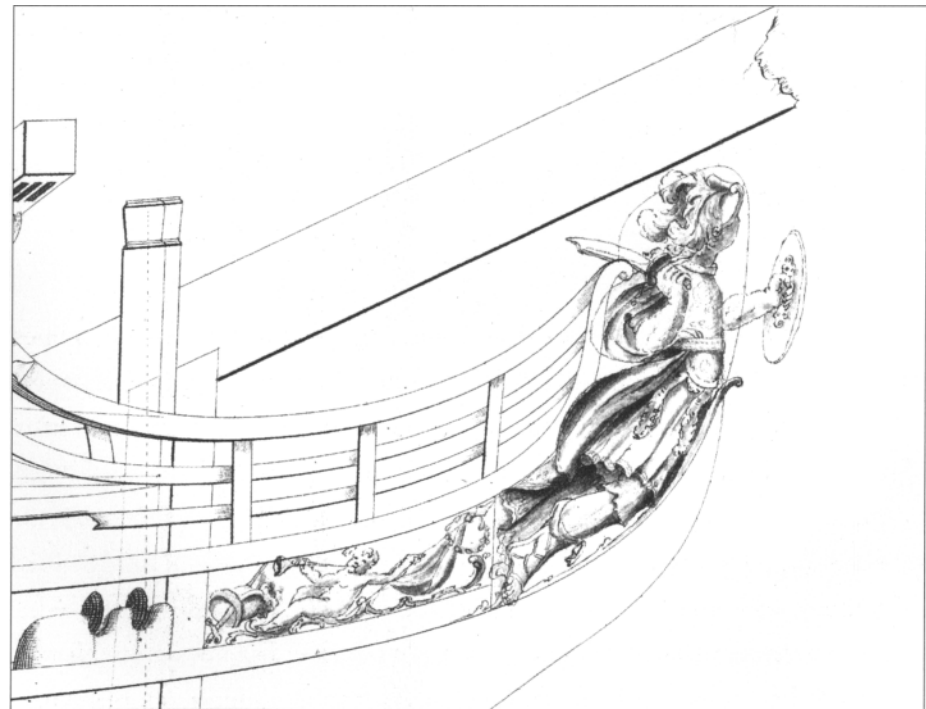
1.1  
*Belleisle 1761* –  
Ship plan detail.  
NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

straddled the stem-post and had its legs carved down the trailboards so that some appeared to be in a near-kneeling position. In most cases these single figures were made to represent the name of the ship, thus starting an art-form that lasted for over 150 years.

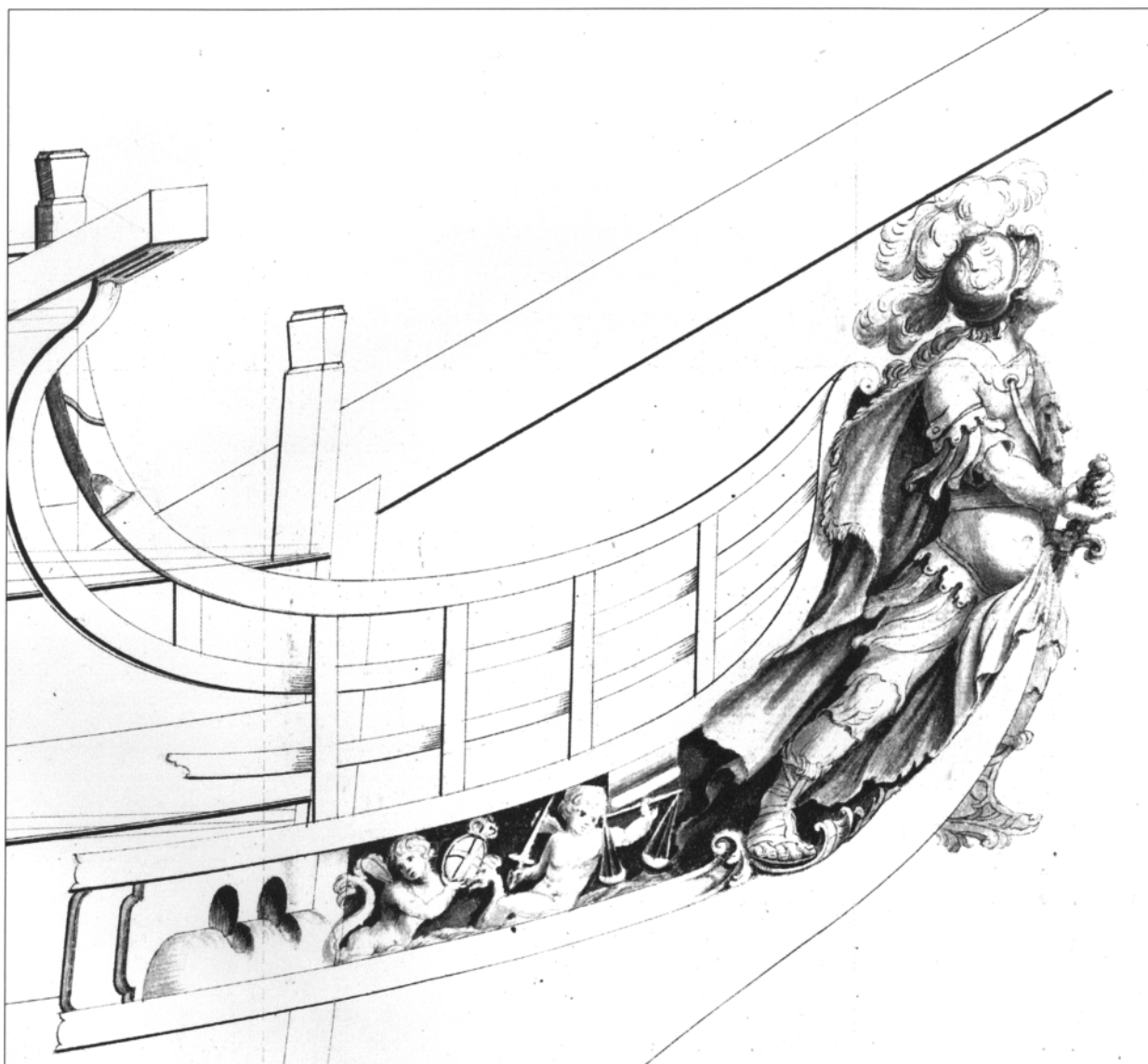
A selection of these single figures is included in Part III of Chapter 5, but the difference in style can be seen by comparing the designs of two unidentified ships. Both were drawn by the Dickersons of Plymouth, each ship clearly having a name with some warlike association. The first [1.3] is a full-length warrior dressed in classical clothing, wearing a plumed hat and holding both a shield



1.2  
*Licorne* 1778 -  
Ship plan detail.  
NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM



1.3  
Unidentified ship -  
Dickerson design.  
DICKERSON ARCHIVE



and a scimitar while a putto blows a trumpet of victory in the trailboards. The second [1.4] is a beautiful example of a standing figure with a plumed helmet and an elaborate costume with two putti in the trailboards, each with fishes' tails suggesting they are children of a merman. One holds the sword and scales of justice while the other has a badge that probably symbolises the City of London. This design is drawn on paper with a watermark of a fleur-de-lis in a shield above the initials 'GR' dating it between 1714 and 1820.

By the nineteenth century the lion had virtually disappeared, the full-length figures no longer had their legs curving down the trailboards and demi-heads and busts had taken their place. The alternatives that were offered when

**1.4**  
Unidentified ship –  
Dickerson design.  
DICKERSON ARCHIVE

HMS *Frederick William* (110) was building in 1860 were a demi-head for £60 [1.5] or a bust – with less work involved – for £54 [1.6]. Not surprisingly, the Surveyor of the Navy selected the latter.

The expansion of the British Empire and the transition from sail to steam resulted in many more ships in the fleet with a much wider range of names than before. In addition to those factors, the Navy Board required every figurehead design to be approved in the office of the Surveyor of the Navy and the letters seeking and granting approval between about 1810 and 1860 are now preserved amongst the ADM series of documents at The National Archives at Kew. This material forms the basis of the several chapters devoted to the nineteenth century.

The approval process was simple, if a little bureaucratic. If a ship was being built in a royal dockyard that had a resident figurehead carver, he would create a design appropriate to the ship's name and would quote an estimate of its cost,



**1.5**  
Demi-head design for HMS *Frederick William*.  
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

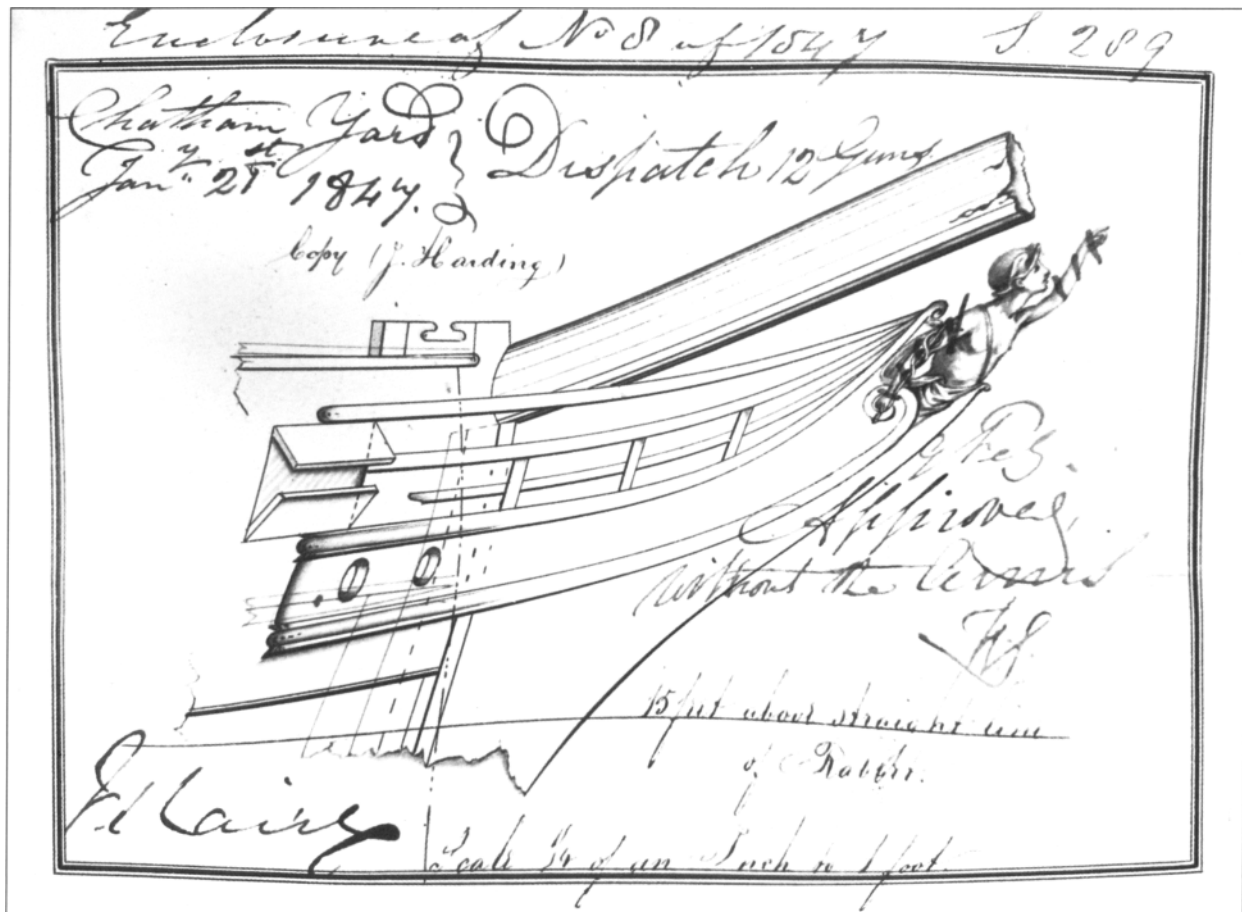


**1.6**  
Bust design for HMS *Frederick William*.  
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

sometimes offering the alternative of a full-length figure or a bust with a cost estimate for each. The Admiral Superintendent of the dockyard would forward the designs and estimates to the Navy Board where the Surveyor of the Navy would approve or amend the design and would agree, or sometimes reduce, the allowed price. The letter would then be returned for the information of the dockyard officers and, once noted, it would be returned once more to London for filing. The whole process was monitored in huge registers, many of which are also preserved in The National Archives.

If, however, the ship was being built in a royal dockyard where there was no resident figurehead carver, such as Pembroke Dockyard in South Wales, the Superintendent there would forward a scale drawing of the bow and stern of the ship requesting that 'carve work' be provided. This gave the Surveyor rather more flexibility as he would then send the paperwork to whichever carver he wished, based partly on which of them was providing the best value for money and partly on geography, as he had to take into account the ease of shipping the

1.7  
HMS *Despatch* -  
Hellyer design 1847.  
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES



final product to the building yard. On occasions the Surveyor invited more than one carver to submit designs and estimates to create an element of competition.

The whole process is neatly illustrated in the approval of the figurehead for HMS *Despatch* (12) building in 1847 in Chatham Dockyard [1.7]. The draughtsmen at Chatham created a small drawing – only 6ins x 4ins – showing the head rails of the ship, giving it the title ‘Chatham Yard Jan’y 21st 1847 – Dispatch [*sic*] 12 Guns’ and quoting the scale and where the structure sat in relation to the keel. It was signed in the bottom left-hand corner by Francis J Laire, Master Shipwright at Chatham. On its receipt at the Surveyor’s Office, the letter was registered in his ‘Register of In-Letters Relating to Ships’ and given the line number ‘S289’.<sup>3</sup> The register records that it was referred to the Superintendent at Portsmouth on 23 January and was received back on 2 February. During that time Hellyer & Son, the resident carvers with workshops at Cosham, drew the demi-head of Hermes, the messenger of Zeus, the supreme ruler of the Greek gods, identified by the wings on his helmet and the caduceus (the herald’s staff) that he carried – an appropriate figurehead for HMS *Despatch*. The estimate forwarded from Portsmouth was for £7.0.0 but the Surveyor, Sir William Symonds, decided that a bust-head would be sufficient and so deleted the arms of the figurehead in red ink and made the notation ‘9 Feb – Approved without the arms’ and added his initials. He noted on the estimate that only £6.10.0 was allowed and the package was returned to Portsmouth for the officers to note. Eventually, the papers were filed amongst the Surveyor’s In-Letters where they may be found today.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> TNA ADM 88/7 S289 (1847).

<sup>4</sup> TNA ADM 87/17 S289 (1847).



## CHAPTER 2

## FIGUREHEAD CARVERS

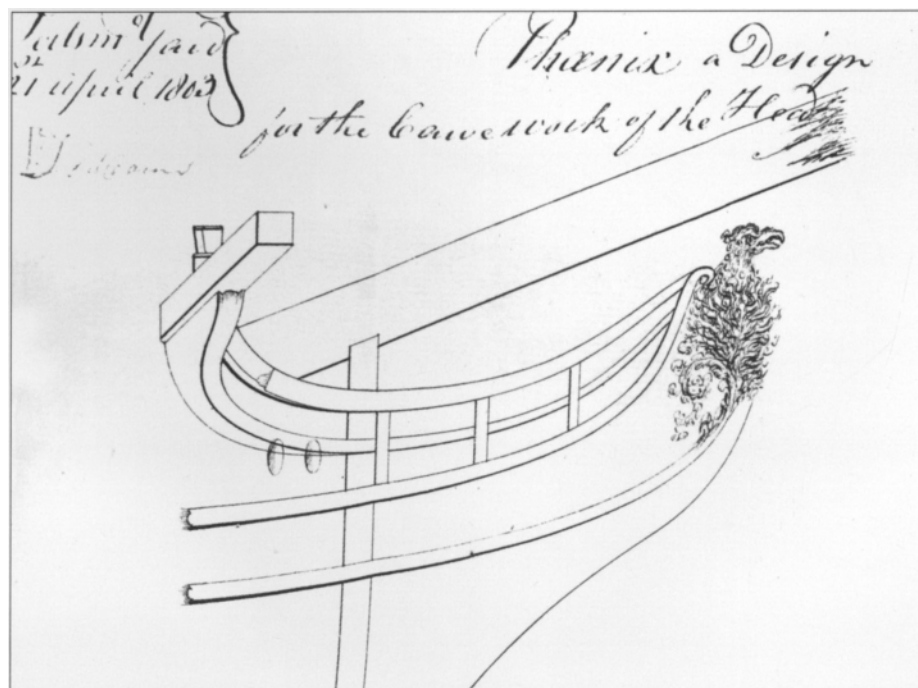
THE men – and occasionally the women – who designed and carved the figureheads of Their Majesties’ ships also carved the decorations on their stern and quarter galleries. While there were periods when the stern carvings were very extensive and included details that alluded to the ship’s name, it was generally on the quality of his figureheads that a carver’s ability was judged and has resulted in the shorthand of referring to them as ‘figurehead carvers’.

In his book *British Figurehead and Ship Carvers* the late Phil Thomas published his research into the carvers who worked on both merchant ships and naval ones, the larger half of the book being devoted to the merchant ship carvers.<sup>1</sup> Much of his evidence on carvers for the Royal Navy was gathered from the ledgers of the Accountant General<sup>2</sup> and the Yard Pay Books.<sup>3</sup> While this

<sup>1</sup> P N Thomas, *British Figurehead and Ship Carvers* (Waine Research Publications, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> TNA ADM 20 (1661-1795).

<sup>3</sup> TNA ADM 42 (1797-1815).



2.1  
HMS *Phoenix* –  
Hellyer design 1803.  
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

information provides a detailed picture of which carvers were working in and around the dockyards and on which ships they were working, its main focus was not on the actual figureheads that they were creating. The book does, however, include a number of details not found elsewhere; for example that Cuthbert Mattingly of Plymouth carved the lion figurehead for the *Jersey* in 1736 and was allowed £17.10.0, while Cornelius Luck of London was allowed £22.18.0 in 1861 for the figurehead of the armoured frigate HMS *Resistance*. It is thanks to Phil Thomas's work that such details appear in the Figurehead Directory.

The carvers who lived in Kent tended to serve both Chatham and Sheerness Dockyards with Thomas, Matthew and John Fletcher carving for the second half of the seventeenth century and including such prestigious ships as *Sovereign*

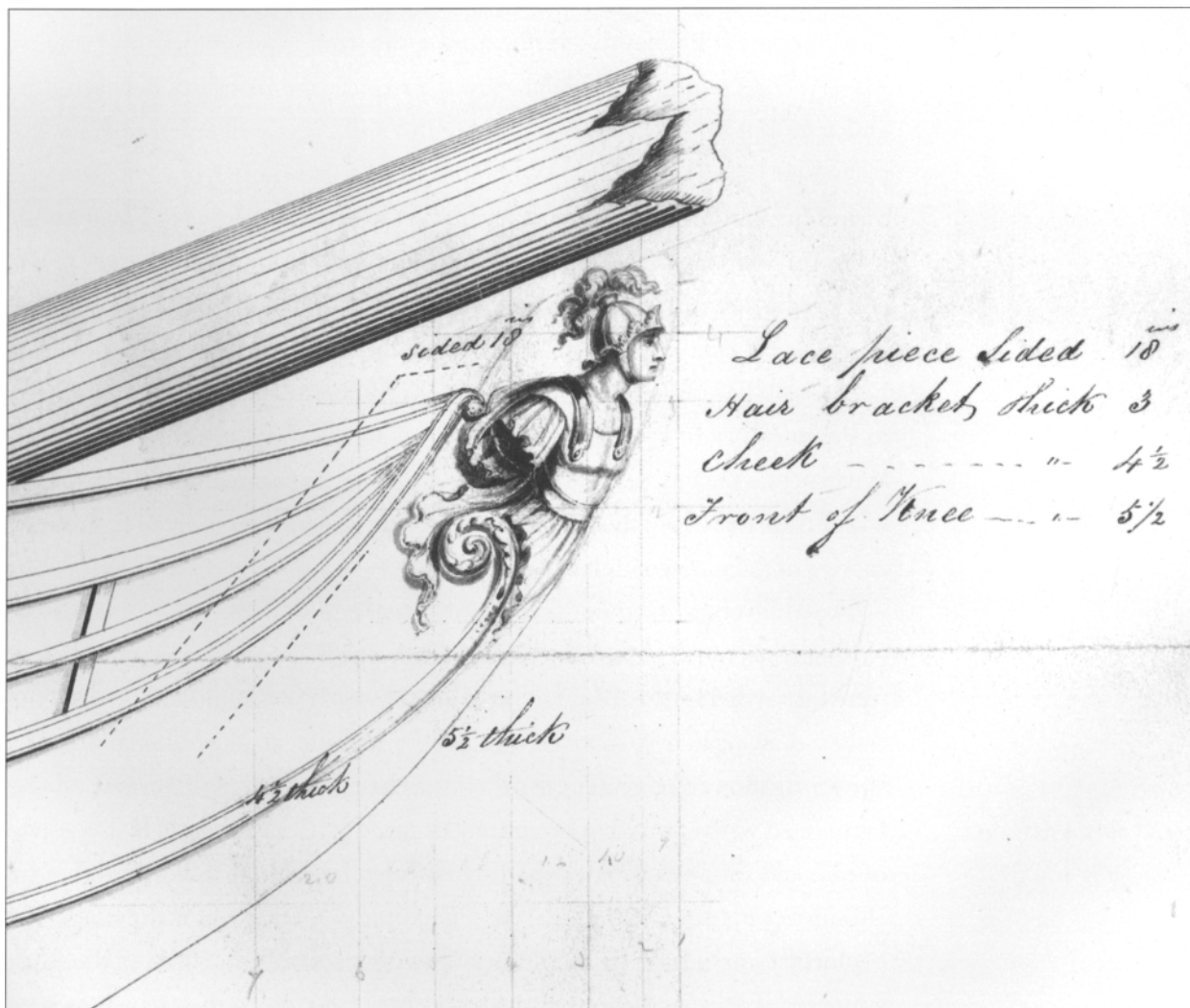
2.2  
HMS *Madras* –  
Hellyer design 1844.  
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES



of the *Seas* and the *Royal Charles*. Several members of the Crichley family carved there during the middle half of the eighteenth century – including Abigail and Elizabeth – with replacement lion figureheads for the *Chester* and *Nassau* in 1719 and the magnificent figure of Bellerophon riding on the winged horse, Pegasus, for the 1786 *Bellerophon*. It is generally accepted that when the 1765 *Victory* was building in Chatham Dockyard, her figurehead was carved by William Savage but Phil Thomas claims that William Savage was brought in to assist Richard and Elizabeth Crichley and, as his claim is based on the payment of fees, the work probably was shared between them.<sup>4</sup> The final Chatham-based carver worthy of a mention is George Williams who was appointed the ‘contract carver’ there in 1797 and so carved the replacement figurehead for HMS *Victory* in 1802 during her rebuild, for which he was paid £50.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, *British Figurehead and Ship Carvers*, p 98.

2.3  
HMS *Orlando* –  
Dickerson design 1856.  
DICKERSON ARCHIVE



Moving up the Thames to Deptford and Woolwich Dockyards, their proximity to each other allowed a number of carvers to serve them both. Joseph Wade was made Master Carver for both dockyards in about 1720 and was paid handsomely for the refurbishment of six royal yachts between 1724 and 1742 as well as the carved work for a number of new-build warships. Several members of the Burrough family carved there; Thomas made a great deal of money from the elaborately carved and gilded 1749 *Royal Caroline* and in 1756 was paid £424 for the carved work on the *Royal George* – see Chapter 5.<sup>5</sup> When William Montague Burrough took over in 1790, he too created the carved work for many ships building at Woolwich, including that for the *Boyne* whose figurehead is also to be seen in Chapter 5.<sup>6</sup>

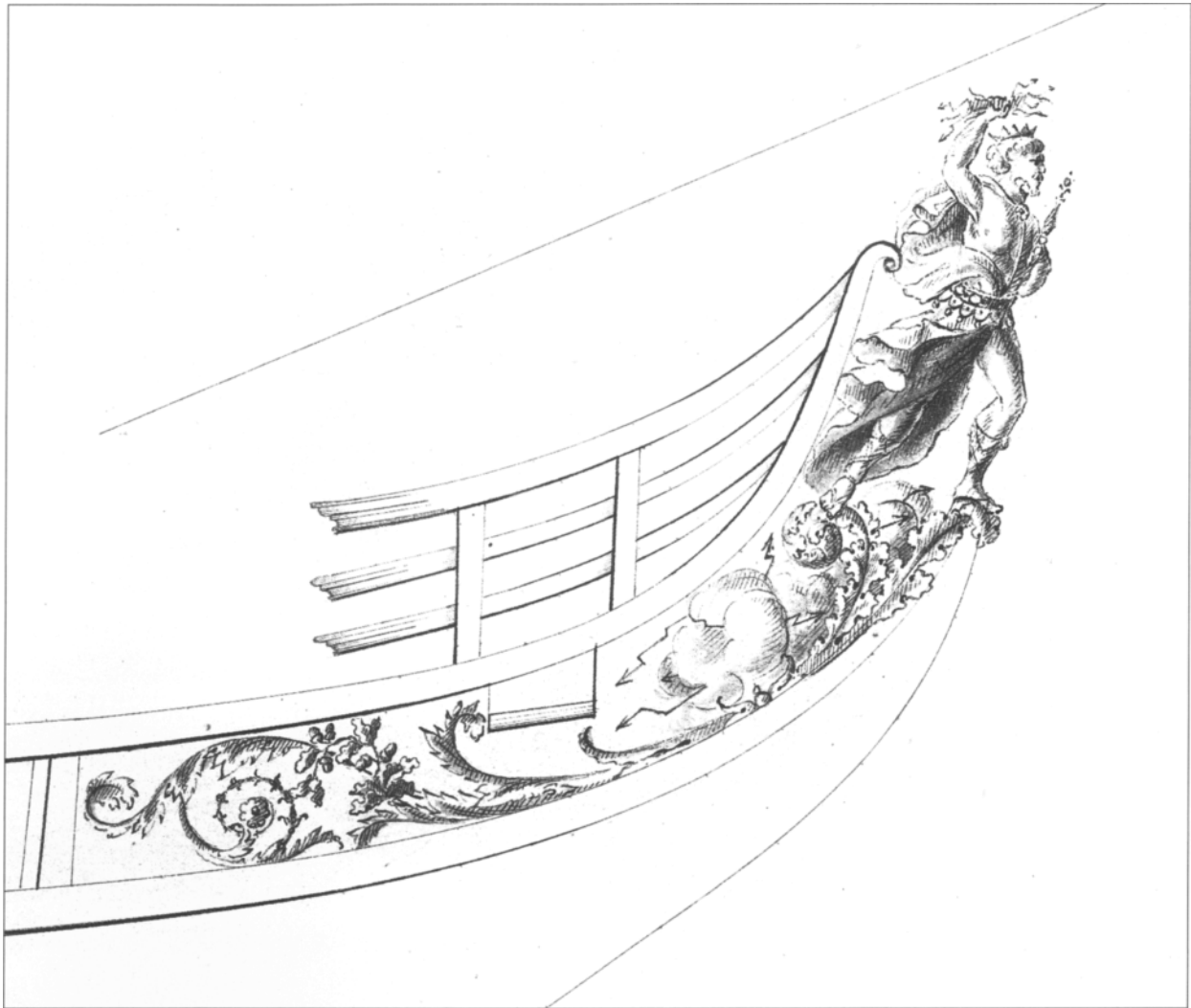
<sup>5</sup> Thomas, *British Figurehead and Ship Carvers*, p 76.

<sup>6</sup> TNA ADM 106/1788 (1790).

The two royal dockyards that are still supporting the Royal Navy today – Portsmouth and Devonport – each had a succession of resident carvers, although the dockyard at Plymouth did not acquire the name ‘Devonport’ until August 1843. At Portsmouth, Lewis Allen carved for a succession of ships between 1670 and 1704 but the payments to him are not sufficiently detailed to see what particular figureheads cost. William Smith carved there from 1724 to 1753, one of his first big contracts being the carved work for the 1737 *Victory* with its group figurehead, the ship model of which will be found in Chapter 5. For all her carved work he was allowed £142.12.0. In 1740 when the *St George* was rebuilt at Portsmouth with its mounted figure of St George as the figurehead, he renewed her carved work for £147.8.0. Cuthbert Mattingly carved originally in Plymouth from 1737 but moved to Portsmouth in 1760, bringing his son, William, into the business in 1778. It was William who eventually started working with Edward Hellyer, thus leading to the most successful family of figurehead carvers of the nineteenth century.

The Hellyers worked in the dockyard itself and in their own workshops at Cosham, just north of the city. The first figurehead designs by Edward Hellyer were forwarded by the Admiral Superintendent at Portsmouth in 1800 but the earliest drawing to have survived with its covering letter at The National Archives shows an 1803 replacement for the figurehead of the 1783 *Phoenix*, whose figurehead was reported to be entirely decayed [2.1].<sup>7</sup> This early Hellyer style of pen and ink without any shading can also be seen in the design that he submitted for the 1806 *Bulwark* – Chapter 9 – and, while they lack the sophistication of his later work, they were each successful in having the work approved. Between these early examples and 1860, when the records at Kew

<sup>7</sup> TNA ADM 106/1883 (1803).



cease, the Hellyers submitted more than 250 designs for approval, many of which will be found illustrating Chapters 6 to 15. The vast majority of their designs were submitted as pen and ink drawings with grey wash to give texture but occasionally they used colour to enhance an otherwise unimpressive design as in the design for an 1810 replacement for the 1757 HMS *Southampton* [Colour Plate 1].

While it was the Hellyers' prerogative to carve the figureheads for those ships building at Portsmouth, they were also occasionally summoned to work at Chatham and it was probably for that reason that they set up a workshop on the Thames in east London, first at Princess Stairs, Rotherhithe, and later in Brunswick Street, Blackwall. Between the 1830s and the 1850s they carved at least thirty figureheads there for ships building at Deptford, Woolwich, Chatham

2.4  
 Unnamed ship –  
 Dickerson design c1794.  
 DICKERSON ARCHIVE

and Sheerness as well as a couple that were later shipped to Pembroke Yard in South Wales. In 1844 the Hellyers wrote to the Surveyor of the Navy to say that, as work was slack, they would appreciate a contract to provide the carved work for the ships building at Bombay. They were instructed to submit designs that were ‘characteristic of the country’ for HM Ships *Madras* (84) [2.2], *Malacca* (26), *Zebra* (16) and *Goshawk* (12) and this they did with estimates ranging from £36 to £7.<sup>8</sup> The Surveyor required alterations to the *Zebra* design but approved all four, a decision that he may have regretted as *Madras* had already been renamed *Meeanee* in 1843, *Malacca* was eventually built in Burma, *Zebra* was renamed *Jumna* in 1846, making the bust of a black African woman inappropriate, and *Goshawk* was renamed *Nerbudda* in 1845, making the figurehead of a bird equally wrong. The Hellyer design for a replacement figurehead for HMS *Meeanee* in 1859 will be found in Chapter 13.

In Plymouth, early ship carvers included Anthony Allen, who carved between 1691 and 1701, and Cuthbert Mattingly between 1737 and 1760 when he moved to Portsmouth. The carvers, however, who worked in Plymouth through much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the Dickersons: Samuel, James and Frederick, competing with the Hellyers of Portsmouth. Samuel Dickerson worked between 1770 and 1790, one of his most prestigious figureheads being that of the 1786 *Royal Sovereign* (100). The figurehead’s design was reproduced in *Plymouth and Devonport: in Times of War and Peace* in 1900 being a group figurehead, the dominant figure being a full-length youthful George III in a frock-coat and breeches wearing a wreath of laurel leaves on his head.<sup>9</sup> He has a royal coat of arms in front of him, angels and Victory behind him and semi-naked figures below him trampling on a many-headed hydra. The caption records that the original Dickerson sketch was owned by Mr Sydenham.<sup>10</sup>

James Dickerson carved at first with Samuel, but by 1794 was describing himself as a Master Carver and amongst the numerous figureheads that he created were two that are illustrated in Chapter 5, the 1793 HMS *Caesar* and *L’Hercule*, captured from the French in 1798. One of his more lucrative contracts was the carved work for the yacht *Plymouth*, built in Plymouth and launched there in 1796 [Colour Plate 2]. The design that is in the Dickerson Archive in Australia is not actually named but it is described in a forwarding letter from Plymouth Yard as ‘Ceres holding a cornucopia in one hand and a wreath of corn in the other standing erect on the knee clothed in rich drapery’ so there is little doubt that this is his design.<sup>11</sup> The elaborate nature of the decorations

<sup>8</sup> TNA ADM 87/14 S1661 (1844).

<sup>9</sup> H F Whitfield, *Plymouth and Devonport: in Times of War and Peace* (E Chapple, 1900).

<sup>10</sup> Lewis John Sydenham (1834–1910) was married to Lavinia Goldsworthy Dickerson, daughter of Frederick Dickerson, carver at Plymouth.

<sup>11</sup> TNA ADM 106/1935 (1797).

on these yachts can be judged from the fact that his estimated cost for all the carved work for the yacht was £96.7.6, of which £11 was for the figurehead.

Frederick Dickerson was the last member of the family to carve in the dockyard, starting in 1832, describing himself as an ‘artist naval carver’ in the 1851 census, a ‘master carver’ in the 1861 census and a ‘retired master carver’ in 1871. During his service he carved some of the last full-length figures to be fitted to the navy’s First Rates – HMS *Royal William* in 1833 and HMS *St George* in 1840 – only to carve replacements in the form of large busts when the ships were cut down to allow them to be fitted with steam propulsion in the late 1850s. Details of each of these figureheads will be found in Chapters 15 and 10 respectively.

The records at The National Archives suggest that it was not uncommon for a carver to retain a design once it had been approved, to ensure that it was closely followed. This is evident from the fact that, when full-length and bust alternatives were offered, the one that was rejected is usually filed with the correspondence while the one that was approved is often missing. The practice was followed by each of the Dickerson family and resulted in a large collection of carvers’ drawings now in private hands in Australia.

It would appear that when Frederick Dickerson retired in the late 1860s he kept the designs and in due course they passed to his daughter Lavinia who was married to Lewis John Sydenham, the ‘Mr Sydenham’ mentioned in the book *Plymouth and Devonport: in Times of War and Peace*. They then passed to one of Lavinia’s sons, an engineer in the Royal Navy, who retired as a rear admiral to New Zealand and with him went the ‘Dickerson Archive’. They finally passed to the admiral’s nephew who had emigrated from Devon to Australia and it is through the generosity of his son, the present owner, that they are used as illustrations to this book.

The collection consists of about 130 sheets of cartridge paper of various sizes, eighty of them containing design drawings of figureheads of named warships, the remainder being made up of studies for further development, stern carving details and associated artwork. Some appear to predate the Dickersons so perhaps were inherited by them when they took over the work; most are created for ships building at Plymouth but a score or more are on outlines created in Pembroke Dockyard prior to their passage through the office of the Surveyor of the Navy. Some sheets bear watermarks that assist in their identification while others have the Surveyor’s register number that can be identified against the appropriate volume at The National Archives. It has proved to be a substantial