

# LIVERPOOL NAUTICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY



## **HMS EAGLE 74**

*by John Smart and Edward Jones*

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# H.M.S. *EAGLE* 74

## Thrice a Flagship

by JOHN SMART and EDWARD JONES

*Read 13th November, 1958*

### INTRODUCTION

Thirteen days ago, on the 1st of November, 1958, the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve were amalgamated into one organisation to be known as the Royal Naval Reserve. It is therefore not inappropriate that the subject of our contribution this evening is the old wooden 74-gun ship *Eagle*, which for 64 years was the home of both Reserves on Merseyside.

It is now some thirty years since a boy with a deep and abiding interest in ships and the sea spent an occasional Saturday afternoon hard by the Custom House in Liverpool. He stood and gazed at the stern of the old *Eaglet* in Salthouse Dock, but a healthy respect for the helmeted guardian of the dock estate at that particular point prevented any further venturing. To his subsequent regret, the boy never saw any more of his favourite veteran ship than her wide solid stern with its innumerable windows. Her taffrail was surmounted by a staff which bore a somewhat grimy and listless White Ensign and the heavy cables which secured her to the quay crossed a small expanse of dirty water, whereon for ever floated greasy pieces of wood and other odds and ends of flotsam.

In an endeavour to preserve at least some part of the memory of a ship which to him was a visible reminder of a fleet and an age which has gone for ever, he who once gazed offers this modest tribute.

Tonight therefore in the short time at our disposal, we intend rapidly to span the 123 years which lay between her launching in 1804 and her destruction by fire in 1927. To do this has necessarily entailed the omission of many interesting events in which she took part. During her long service afloat the *Eagle* had the honour of wearing an admiral's flag on three occasions. She was flagship off the Texel in 1804, again on the South East Coast of America Station in 1844 and yet again seventy years later when she became flagship in Liverpool between 1914 and 1919. Throughout her long service she was not at any time destined to take part in any of the better known actions. Not for her the point-blank slogging actions which were such a feature of sea warfare 150 years ago but, like so many other ships in this and other wars, hers was the undistinguished but arduous service which maintained Great Britain's command of the world's oceans.

Until the middle years of the 19th century the ships of the Royal Navy were classified by Rate. This system had originally been based upon the rates

of pay to which captains of warships had been entitled according to the sizes of the vessels which they commanded. In course of time this system came to refer to the number of guns which these vessels carried. Thus the First Rate mounted between 100 and 120 guns, the Rate decreasing with the lesser number of guns mounted, until the lowest Rated ships were the Sixth Rate frigates of twenty to twenty-eight guns. The smaller fry, gun-brigs and so on, were not defined by a Rating. By far the most numerous vessels were those of the Third Rate, seventy-four gun ships which were considered excellent for convoy work, patrolling and so on; and, for their size, were relatively easy to handle. We might perhaps consider them as the battle-cruisers of their day—a compromise between the mighty ninety and 100 gun ships-of-the-line and the cruising frigates.

#### *H.M.S. Eagle*

In February, 1800, the contract for the construction of a seventy-four gun ship was awarded to Thomas Pitcher, a shipbuilder at Northfleet in Kent. The Thames neighbourhood had long been the cradle of warships and building against the new contract commenced in August. Four years and three days after the placing of the order His Majesty's seventy-four gun ship *Eagle* was launched into the Thames on the 27th of February, 1804. It is not proposed to burden our listeners with statistics, suffice it to say that her main dimensions were—length of gun-deck 174' 1", breadth extreme 47' 9" and depth of hold 20' 0". In accordance with the method of calculation then in vogue this resulted in a measurement of 1,723 tons burthen. A photostat of her original draught is preserved aboard the present drill-ship *Eaglet*, and by way of rough comparison the Mersey ferry steamers are about 150 feet in length and 40 feet beam.

The armament of a seventy-four consisted of carriage guns firing solid round shot. These guns, smooth bore muzzle loaders, were not particularly reliable by later standards, but when well served they were tried and trusted weapons. Actions, of course, were fought at very close range, indeed upon occasion, muzzle to muzzle. She mounted her guns upon two continuous decks, clear of impediment fore and aft and her heaviest weapons, 28—32 pounders, fired through ports in her gun-deck. Above these, on the upper-deck she mounted guns of lesser power, 28—18 pounders, fourteen aside were located here, with 4—12's on the quarter-deck and 2—12's on the fore-castle. For close action she carried 10—32 pounder carronades on the quarter-deck and two on the fore-castle. These were shorter pieces of ordnance and, as we have noted, fired heavier shot. First manufactured at the Carron Works in Scotland they caused considerable damage when discharged at close range.

At the November meeting three years ago Mr. Ryan told us how these ships were manned—of the volunteers, the pressed men, the quota-men, etc., and, as with her armament, so the number of men in a ship's company was fixed by Establishment. As Mr. Ryan explained, establishment and actual complement was not necessarily the same thing, sometimes far from it, but the *Eagle's* complement was in the region of 600 men. Her officers were the captain and five lieutenants, a master and his mate and a lieutenant of marines. His detachment consisted of about ninety scarlet-coated rank and file. The non-

military officers were the surgeon and his assistant, the chaplain and the purser—these gentlemen carried no rank.

Her seamen ratings numbered some 556 men and thirty boys exclusive of officers' servants and "widows' men". These latter were non-existent and in theory amounted to one percent. of the actual crew. The books of the *Eagle* carried about six as her share of these mythical sailors, whose pay and allowances, by very old naval custom, provided a fund from which was paid pensions to the widows of officers. These fictitious "widows' men" continued to be borne on the books of H.M. Ships until about 1830 and their rate of pay was that of an able seaman.

#### *Eagle's Career*

The first captain of H.M.S. *Eagle* was David Colby. He had been first lieutenant to Captain Edward Thornborough in the *Robust* at the time of Warren's action off Ireland in 1798. During this action he lost an arm and received a pension for his disability, and for his services upon that occasion was promoted to commander. He subsequently received post rank and, as we shall see, David Colby was later to serve again under his old commander. He was an officer who, contrary to prevailing custom, enjoyed little or no patronage to further his career. He never achieved flag rank, held but two further commands at sea and died in about 1835.

The opening entry in the log of the *Eagle* is dated the 16th of March, 1804, and on the 4th of May she cast off her moorings and made sail for the first time. Indicative of how deeply laden was a seventy-four in full seagoing trim is the entry in her log at noon—Draught forward 21' 2", aft 22' 7" and the sills of her gun deck ports amidships were only 5' 0" above her waterline. She dropped down to the Nore and on the 15th was lying at single anchor off the Texel. At 12 minutes past 10.00 a.m. on the 16th of March, 1804, and with the ceremony due to such a solemn occasion, she hoisted to her mizzen mast-head the white flag of Rear-Admiral Edward Thornborough commanding at the Texel who, to quote the contemporary news item "came aboard with his retinue". Colby was once again under his old captain.

Life in a blockading squadron is much the same in any century, especially in winter time. A letter from an officer serving in the *Glatton* in the Texel Squadron most graphically describes the damp, cold misery of life afloat. "Here we are", he wrote, "peeping at a dastardly cowardly enemy, superior to us in force. We have been now three weeks at anchor, the greater part of that time riding bower under, with three cables ahead, sometimes cannot see masts nor yards of Line of Battle Ships not half a mile distant from us. . . . We in general lie about 14 miles distant from the Texel. This is the most turbulent, inhospitable climate I have ever experienced, as we are seldom four hours without a gale". As if to emphasise the grim and dreary life which he describes, in November H.M.S. *Romney* of the squadron drove ashore off the New Deep and became a total loss.

In the early months of 1805 the *Eagle* again had the dreary task of maintaining an apparently endless watch in hostile waters, this time off the Spanish coast. This duty came to an abrupt end when the French made their dash for the West Indies and the *Eagle* took part in the general chase. She played no very

great part in the activities aroused by the arrival and departure from the West Indies of the enemy ships, but was detached for service there and in Halifax. About this time Colby's tenure of command expired.

Events subsequent to the October battle off Trafalgar led to her commissioning under Captain Charles Rowley for the Mediterranean in November. Here, but this time as a private ship, she later came again under the command of Edward Thornborough, now a vice-admiral. Thornborough was a remarkable example of the seaman of his day. A Devon man, he served almost continuously from 1761 to 1818, a period of 60 years. He died in 1834 at the age of 80, and of him it was said that as a practical seaman he had few rivals and certainly no superior.

Wars were then much more leisurely affairs than they have since become and traditional military courtesy was maintained. When the *Eagle* lay off Capri as part of the squadron under Sir Sydney Smith, the commander of the French garrison of Capri was summoned to surrender. He declined and ended his reply with these words: "You are, Sir, too good and brave a soldier to blame me if I do not accept your polite invitation". The British attacked and took the island and Articles of Capitulation were signed jointly by Charles Rowley, captain of H.M.S. *Eagle* and the senior surviving officer of the defeated garrison.

During the ill-starred and indecisive expedition against Walcheren in 1809, the *Eagle*, together with a number of other ships, landed her lower-deck guns and acted as a troop-ship conveying horses, men and guns across the North Sea. By 1810 she was experiencing her third spell of blockade work, this time off Cadiz, but events livened up during the following year. Charles Rowley was then senior officer in the Adriatic and during the three years which followed, the *Eagle* and her consorts were engaged in a number of events in that long and narrow sea. Attacks upon defended shore positions, a running action with French frigates, boat actions, landing parties; her crew had their share of the danger and excitement which is war and, it may be added, their share of the compensating head money and prize money.

In 1814 she came home and paid off at Chatham, after having served for ten years and Captain Rowley received the blue flag of a junior rear-admiral. By way of contrast to the career of David Colby her first captain, that of Charles Rowley may interest you. Upon reaching flag rank Charles joined an illustrious company of admirals. His grand-father, his father, father-in-law, Charles himself, his brother, his brother-in-law, a cousin and at least two of his nephews all obtained their flags. Charles Rowley became Admiral Commanding-in-Chief, Portsmouth, in 1842 and died in 1845 aged seventy-four years, in receipt of a Good Service Pension of £330 per annum.

In contrast to the rewards which certain officers obtained as a result of their services, it is interesting to note how the seamen fared in those days. With the conclusion of the war hundreds of ships, including the *Eagle*, were paid off and the crews dispersed to find their way to their respective homes as best they might. Their service under the crown was completed and the country thereupon lost all further interest in them. Campaign medals were not generally issued in those days. It was not until the award of the Naval General Service Medal in 1848, that the sailor received any visible distinction to

commemorate his service. In that year was awarded a medal to cover certain naval events between 1793 and 1840. It could only be claimed by those still living who had participated in events so long ago, and among the many awards was one to each member of the boats' crews of H.M.S. *Eagle*, in respect of an expedition which had taken place in September, 1812, thirty-six years earlier. One wonders how many of her crew survived to make good their claims and to receive their country's belated award. Among our exhibits this evening you will see one of these General Service Medals and, although this particular one was issued for the Syrian campaign in 1840, except for the difference in the bar, it is identical with that issued for the Napoleonic campaigns. As one might perhaps expect, the captain fared better than his crew and was awarded the insignia of a Knight of the Austrian Order of Maria Theresa for which, incidentally, he did not have to wait thirty-odd years.

The many disasters incurred by our ships at the hands of the large American fifty gun frigates had emphasised the necessity of having vessels large enough to engage them on equal terms. The seventy-fours could, of course, do this, but they required a relatively large crew and seamen, as always, were hard to come by. In any case, they were rather larger than was really necessary. The ghosts of the large American fifties haunted naval designers for years thereafter and at the time there was a rush to build fifties and to reduce existing seventy-fours. This reduction involved a most interesting exercise in ship-surgery and in 1830 the *Eagle*, then lying in ordinary at her home port of Chatham, was one of the vessels selected for reduction. Briefly, it consisted of the complete removal of the forecastle and the quarterdeck down to the clamps. This meant that instead of having the distinctive raised forecastle and quarterdeck with a deep waist amidships she now had a flush upper deck. The result was a curious state of affairs whereby she still had two decks of guns yet was classed as a frigate. The true frigate, incidentally, was a single decked vessel.

Another feature which was introduced during this refit was the complete alteration of her stern. Sir Robert Seppings, who had succeeded Sir William Rule as Surveyor, had introduced the new elliptical stern to replace the traditional square stern of the man-of-war. This new feature was designed to strengthen a ship at a point which had been found to be extremely vulnerable. By rounding the quarters it was possible to work in at least one additional gun on each quarter and thus provide a greater arc of all-round fire astern. It also meant the abolition of the old picturesque stern walk with its quarter-galleries, which had been found to offer considerable resistance to the wind under certain conditions. In place of these features came the lantern-like projections which were a feature of the Seppings design, and the *Eagle* was the last ship so fitted.

During all this time, of course, she had been lying in what we would today refer to as reserve, and it was not until 1844 that she was again brought forward for sea service. After lying up for thirty years, she was commissioned in 1844 by Captain George B. Martin for service as flag-ship to Rear-Admiral S. H. Inglefield, C.-in-C. South East coast of America Station, and so became a flag-ship for the second time. We have not so far uncovered very much information about this period in her story but, as one might perhaps expect,

she became involved in one of the periodic political upheavals to which that part of the world was accustomed. Since the overthrow of Spanish domination some two decades earlier there had been frequent discord, and in 1844 Brazil and Argentine were at loggerheads regarding the future of Uruguay. The British and French squadrons in the Plate became involved and matters became even more complicated. As usual, however, the trouble eventually fizzled out and the *Eagle* departed for northern waters and later for the Mediterranean. By March 1848 she was home again and her overseas voyaging was over.

Although she was now almost fifty years old, not a great age for such stoutly built vessels—she was still to serve for a further eighty years in the western waters of the United Kingdom. The advent of steam propulsion had made it extremely unlikely that she would ever again serve overseas and the outbreak of the Russian War in 1854 did not involve her in any way. In 1856 a number of old vessels were commissioned for service as District Ships to the eleven Coast Guard Districts. The vessels chosen were all rather elderly and the *Eagle* was selected to act as District Ship for the Falmouth District, which extended from Plymouth Sound around the west of England and terminated at Gloucester. Two years later she moved north to the Milford District, which covered the seaboard from Gloucester to Caernarvon, which was the southern limit of the Liverpool District. After two years as Milford District Ship she returned to Portsmouth and again paid off.

The famous *Boscawen* training establishment for boy seamen had its origin in the conversion of the *Eagle* for training duties in 1860. In this service she was first stationed in Southampton Water and remained there until relieved by H.M.S. *Boscawen* in 1862. *Boscawen* was subsequently removed to Portland, and although the establishment eventually moved ashore it survived until 1906.

It was at this period that the *Eagle* commenced her long association with the Naval Reserves and with the port of Liverpool. A brief explanation of how this association came about will not be out of place at this juncture.

#### *Naval Reserves*

It may perhaps be traced by devious paths to the wars with Napoleonic France between 1793 and 1815. Under Pitt's Militia Act the Sea Fencible Corps was raised and the first unsteady foundations laid of voluntary service in association with the Royal Navy. After the Invasion scares of the time had subsided, the Sea Fencibles were disbanded and it was not until a short time before the Crimean War that a similar force was again raised. In 1853 the Royal Naval Coast Volunteers came into existence and, like the Sea Fencibles before them, recruiting was confined to fishermen, coastal seamen and so on. This force was not very successful and received little or no official encouragement. Some very limited training was available in the Coast Guard District Ships and no doubt from time to time the *Eagle* had her share of not very enthusiastic volunteers. The number of enlistments steadily declined and in 1873 the force was disbanded.

The Royal Naval Reserve had a more stable existence and still survives, although in somewhat altered form from that which prevailed until a year or so ago. It was founded in 1860 as a result of the failure, despite the offer of

bounties, to attract sufficient deep-water seamen into the Royal Navy during the Russian War in 1854 and 1855. It was in fact a repetition of a similar failure during the great wars of half a century earlier. Compulsory service had been placed into what we have since discovered was merely a deep freeze, and had been replaced by voluntary service at the end of the war which defeated the French. Although the Fleet Reserve was instituted in 1852 and continuous service in the following year, it was realised that there would be a dearth of trained seamen in the Navy for some years, and particularly in time of war.

Recruitment of merchant seamen into the Royal Naval Reserve commenced in 1861 and officers in the merchant service were first offered commissions in the following year. Times change and there are now no merchant seaman ratings although the officers remain. To train the newcomers in the ways of the Navy three drill-ships were established, in London, North Shields and in Liverpool. So commenced the long association of Her Majesty's Ship *Eagle*, the Naval Volunteers and the port. The first Liverpool drill-ship was the old warship *Hastings* which had been District Ship of the Liverpool Coast Guard District, but she did not remain here long and departed for Queenstown upon the arrival of her successor.

#### *Eagle as a Drill Ship*

The drill-ship *Eagle* arrived from Spithead in tow of H.M. paddle sloop *Geysler* at 4.40 a.m. on Sunday, June 29th, 1862. In the excitement of reporting the fratricidal conflict between Confederates and Federals, Monday's paper overlooked any mention of her arrival, but a few days later she took up her berth in the north-east corner of the old Queen's Dock. In those days the layout of the docks in that area differed considerably from that which now prevails. Entrance was by way of Queen's Basin leading into Queen's Dock. King's Dock, much smaller than the present dock, was entered by a short passage on the north side of the Basin. Despite her having been in Liverpool for over sixty years, very little information is available with regard to the ship or her berths. One supposes that being such a familiar feature of the dockland of her day she was taken very much for granted.

The R.N.R. continued to drill aboard her until 1911, although her captain was a commander, R.N. Between 1862 and 1908 this appointment was held in succession by nineteen officers, and she had the honour of claiming that, of all the R.N.R. centres in operation in 1898, those of Liverpool and Stornoway had trained a number of men far in excess of any others in the country.

#### *R.N.V.R.*

The Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve may be said to be descended from the Royal Naval Artillery Volunteers. Hitherto such volunteers as had been available were professional seamen, but the R.N.A.V. opened enlistment to young civilians who were interested in matters naval. The Liverpool Corps of the R.N.A.V. was formed in 1873 with headquarters in H.M.S. *Eagle*. Each Corps was composed of two or three batteries, each consisting of a sub-lieutenant, a chief petty officer, 1st and 2nd class petty officers and from fifty to seventy gunners. The combined Liverpool and Southport Corps

united to form the Liverpool Brigade in 1876. A brigade comprised of from four to six batteries with an establishment of from 460 to 480 men.

The volunteer gunners were intensely enthusiastic and at its zenith the Brigade had units in Liverpool, Southport, Bangor, Caernarvon and Birkenhead. By this time the *Eagle* had changed berth from Queen's to King's Dock and in the 1880s lay at what is now the berth of the Booth Steam Ship Company at North 2 King's Dock. Unfortunately, as had happened with the Sea Fencibles and again with the Royal Naval Coast Volunteers, official encouragement was lacking. The guns were vintage pieces, the gear scanty and there was little or no provision for sea training. In effect the gunners were soldiers dressed as seamen. An interesting feature of the uniform was that the blue jean collars had waved tapes, the officers' silver stripes were waved and both these features were revived in later years upon the formation of the R.N.V.R. The waved lace, in gold instead of silver, continued to distinguish R.N.V.R. officers until recently replaced by the regular pattern, but can still be seen upon the sleeves of officers of the Sea Cadet Corps.

In 1892 the Admiralty who, truth to tell, had never cared for anything less than the genuine article, saw fit to disband these eager young men and today an In Memoriam notice preserved aboard H.M.S. *Eaglet* proclaims that the R.N.A.V. "Died of Neglect".

In view of the volunteer spirit so evident in the latter half of the last century, it is indeed strange that the Board of Admiralty were not as ready as the War Office to direct it into useful channels. Even the formation of the R.N.V.R. in June 1903 was accepted somewhat sceptically by authority and not with the enthusiasm which its sponsors had expected. Be that as it may, tradition has it that the first enrolment into the Mersey Division of the R.N.V.R. took place on board H.M.S. *Eagle* in King's Dock on New Year's Day 1904. The target of 300 men was very soon reached and the first drills were held on board the old ship on the 8th of March. It was then a few days over 100 years since she had been launched, and her appearance was such that neither Colby nor Rowley would have recognised this Noah's Ark-like structure as a once proud seventy-four gun sailing ship of the line.

The Royal Naval Reserve had continued to use the *Eagle* as a drill-ship for forty-one years, but forsook her in 1903. In that year was introduced a more realistic scheme of training in seagoing cruisers, but this only lasted for two years and in 1905 the R.N.R. returned to the *Eagle*. In the meantime, owing to the proposed rebuilding of King's and Queen's Docks, she had been moved to the north side of Salthouse Dock in 1904. When the R.N.R. re-occupied the ship in 1905 the Volunteers moved across to the Custom House in Canning Place and, although that grim pile lacked the naval atmosphere, it had at least one advantage. The drill hall was in the north-east corner of the building and was large enough to accommodate the whole of the Division when mustered for drill and inspection.

#### *Eagle to Eaglet*

On the 31st of March, 1911, the R.N.R. vacated the *Eagle* and she was turned over to the Volunteers for their sole use. They were not however to enjoy possession for very long. International events were slowly moving to a gigantic climax which, among its lesser results was to embroil even the cen-

tenarian *Eagle*. Shortly after the outbreak of war she was once again on active service, although in a stationary capacity. Captain H. H. Stileman was appointed to her as Senior Officer, Liverpool, and upon the 2nd of November, 1914, he received his flag. Thus once again, and for the third time in her long and somewhat chequered career, she became a flagship. This duty she performed for the duration of the war, and of her service then and of life aboard you will hear later.

Among the vessels building at the outbreak of hostilities was the battleship *Almirante Cochran* which had been designed and laid down by Messrs. Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. Ltd., in February, 1913, for the Chilean Navy. Work on her ceased in August, 1914, and she lay idle on her slip until 1917, when she was purchased by the British Government. A complete recasting of the design resulted in her completion as an aircraft carrier, to be named the *Eagle*, and in accordance with Naval tradition it was therefore necessary to rename the existing vessel. Most appropriately the name *Eaglet* was chosen for the older vessel and the re-naming was carried into effect on the 8th of June, 1918, upon which day the aircraft carrier was launched.

The *Eaglet* continued to act as base ship in Liverpool for the remainder of the war, as accommodation ship for ratings in transit and for the many duties which are undertaken by base ships in time of war. During this period there was little or no connection with the R.N.V.R. as such.

Upon the outbreak of war in August, 1914, some R.N.V.R. officers and ratings were drafted for sea service, but by far the majority were mustered into Naval Brigades and, by some curious process of official reasoning, were turned into soldiers. The Brigades were sent into Antwerp in an attempt to stem the German invasion and those who were not captured or interned were later reorganised into the Royal Naval Division, which served at Gallipoli and on the Western Front until disbanded after the armistice.

By the time the *Eaglet* paid off in 1919 she was looking rather the worse for wear, outboard at any rate. Gone was the familiar white streak broken by the line of her gun-ports, her black hull had been repainted in the standard navy grey. What remained of her lower masts had at some time been cut down to the level of the roof ridge over the upper deck, and she now looked more like Mr. Noah's famous craft than ever.

With the return of peace the *Eaglet* was once again paid off and in 1921 the Mersey Division, R.N.V.R. was re-formed with a strength of 400 men under the command of Commander Wm. Maples, R.N.V.R. The composition of the Division was by companies, each 100 strong, of which numbers one, two, three and seven paraded in the ship at Salthouse Dock. Number four company was located at Southport, number five mustered in Caernarvon and number six in Birkenhead. In 1922 the Southport company was disbanded but in September, 1923, a new Sub-Division came into being in Manchester. For its accommodation the war-time sloop *Sir Bevis*, now re-named *Irwell*, was berthed at Fairbrother Street Wharf, Salford. We may perhaps be forgiven for disclosing that the local wits referred to her as H.M.S. *Neverbudge*.

### *The End*

By 1926 the old *Eaglet*, which had now been afloat for almost a century and a quarter, was deemed to be unfit for further service and was ordered to

be paid off for disposal. It was originally intended to replace her by H.M.S. *Goole*, a war-time minesweeper, but the *Goole* was too small for this duty and was transferred to Manchester. In August, 1926, for a short time, all three drill-ships, the *Irwell* on the west side and the *Eaglet* with the *Goole* alongside, lay in Salthouse Dock together, an unique occasion. Without going into too much detail regarding the change-over, the *Irwell* from Manchester became the present *Eaglet* and the *Eaglet*-designate, late the *Goole*, became the *Irwell* which we know today, and both ships now lie side by side on the west side of Salthouse Dock.

A farewell banquet had been held aboard the old veteran on the 2nd of June and upon the evening of Thursday, the 2nd of September, 1926, the Division was mustered on board for the last time. The ship's company mustered aft and at eight bells, as the notes of the Last Post echoed across the quiet dock, her ensign was slowly lowered for the last time and her service as one of the King's ships was ended. She had served under a queen and five kings in the 126 years which had elapsed since Sir Wm. Rule designed her. Her ship's company marched away to the new ship and she was left, silent and deserted as she had been left so frequently before. Again the bugles rang out across the still waters, signalmen aboard the new *Eaglet* hoisted her ensign and the change-over was completed.

There had been a movement afoot to preserve the old ship as a floating maritime museum but, as with so many projects for the preservation of surviving links with our historic past, it was doomed to failure and the old ship was sold for demolition. The work commenced with the removal of her upper works as she lay in dock, and her guns were removed by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board floating crane *Samson*. Work continued during the ensuing months and on the 16th of February, 1927, she was towed away to be broken up. Few saw her leave on that misty morning. Some workmen on the quay raised their caps in silent salute, the ship-keepers on board her successor watched her slowly move past and she left as she had arrived sixty years before, slowly and quietly. Guided by tugs and almost un-noticed she disappeared into the morning mist and Liverpool saw her not again.

She was towed to a ship-breaking wharf at Mostyn where she was beached preparatory to the difficult task of taking apart her aged timbers. On the 19th of April she caught fire as she lay and was burnt out. Her epitaph is contained in a few pages of verse preserved aboard the present *Eaglet*:—

“Now not a vestige of her remains—the old ship has gone for good,

To some special Valhalla for seventy-fours and the ships which were  
built of wood.”

Fortunately this is not quite the case. Aboard the present ship there are preserved the old ship's magnificent figurehead, a bearded and helmeted warrior, her wheel and an original door and door-frame giving on to the wardroom. If we look at the top of the shed doors on the north side of Salthouse Dock where she lay for twenty-two years, there beneath the gathering dust of passing years may still be discerned the faded words:

H.M.S. *EAGLET*