

LLOYD'S WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

December 26 1875

BURNING OF THE *GOLIATH* TRAINING SHIP

SAD LOSS OF LIFE One of the saddest accidents that it is possible to imagine, and yet not so terrible in its magnitude as it might have been, happened on Wednesday in the little port of Grays, opposite Gravesend. Here has been lying for some time the training ship *Goliath*, an old three decker, on board which nearly 500 boys taken from the Forest Gate and other parochial schools were instructed in seamanship and many useful trades. At 10 minutes to eight on Wednesday morning, as Captain Bouchier RN, commanding the ship, was leaving his cabin, he heard the alarm of fire. He hastened on to the main deck, and quickly realised the character of the misfortune – how quickly, indeed, may be judged from the fact that 10 or 12 strokes of the fire bell had hardly sounded when the whole of that deck was in flames. The rapidity of the ignition, says Captain Bouchier, can only be compared to that of gunpowder ; nor will this be wondered at when the whole story of the calamity is told. The cause was the upsetting of a lamp in the lamp room by one of the lads to whom the labour of that department was entrusted. Petroleum, in one of its trade forms, was the oil used on board this ship, as it is used on many others, freighted, it may be, to the water line with human souls. Driven from their fire quarters on the main deck, those of the crew who had been speedily collected at this point fell back on the deck below, and directed the hose upward at the blazing mass above them. Many of the boys were obedient to orders but, as was natural among an actual number of 480 children - the ship's total of 485 having been reduced by five absent – panic arose to some extent, and the screams of the terror stricken youngsters were terrible to hear. The extraordinary rapidity with which the flames spread was due, no doubt, to the gale that was blowing at the time, still more than to the inflammable nature of the fluid spilt upon the deck. It unfortunately happened, moreover, that all the port holes were open to dry the deck, which had been scrubbed early in the morning. The names of the officers who were on board at the time were, besides Captain Bouchier, J H Hall, chief officer ; Fenn, head schoolmaster ; George Thompson, head carpenter ; Tye, Alfred Thompson, Hurly and Wheeler, assistant schoolmasters ; May, carpenter's mate ; Gunton and Norris, seamen's instructors ; Storey, cook ; and Dowcott, steward. Captain Bouchier had likewise his wife and two daughters on board, as well as two female servants, a housemaid and a cook. Lying so close to Grays, it is customary for a certain number of the officers to sleep ashore ; and a few minutes before the outbreak of the fire, a boat was sent off, as usual, to fetch on board those who had passed the night at Grays. This boat, the whaler, was under charge of the master-at-arms ; and it had scarcely reached shore when the officers waiting to go back to the ship, with the postboy for whom they generally wait, saw and heard the signals of a terrible disaster. Mr D Murphy, chief seaman instructor, and Messrs Ponton, White and Kingdom, his subordinates, were those who hastily entered the boat and returned alongside with the master-at-arms. By that time the ship was doomed, and all on board were endeavouring to escape. Mrs Bouchier, the captain's wife, jumped, a height of 22 feet from the quarter gallery, into the river, and was picked up by the cutter, in command of Mr Gunton, who saved all the women on board. Miss Florence Bouchier, having knocked out the glass of her cabin window with the back of a clothes brush, crept out, made a rope fast, and slid down, tearing the flesh from her hands by so doing. Her younger sister, Ethel, aged 15, also made a rope fast, and descended hand over hand, in sailor like fashion, without the slightest injury.

Meanwhile, the flames had been seen by Captain Walters RN of the *Chichester*, from Greenhithe, a distance of three miles, or rather less, and he had all his boats speedily manned and, without waiting to dress, put off in his flannels to render assistance. But for this officer's prompt and gallant conduct, many more lives would have been lost than those which fell a sacrifice. He went close alongside, when no other boat would venture near. So rapid a hold had the flames gained on the old 84 gun ship that at eight o'clock, only ten minutes after the alarm bell began ringing, the fire was visible at the distance we have named, and was positively the first intimation Captain Walters

received of the disaster. In less than a quarter of an hour afterwards, Captain Jenkins, the harbour master, acting under the Thames Conservancy Board, had the news brought to him at his residence in Gravesend, and immediately ordered out his steam launch, in which he proceeded to the scene of the calamity. Before he could reach the burning ship, flames poured out from all her three rows of ports, and it was evident that, unless scuttled, she must simply burn down to the water's edge. But by the brave exertions of Captain Walters, the great majority of lives on board the *Goliath* had been



saved. An idea of the closeness to immediate peril in which all who escaped stood may be formed from the fact that at least half the number were scorched or burned, some rather badly. Captain Bouchier, the last man to leave his ship, was burned in many places, his hair, eyebrows and beard being singed, and his hands painfully blistered. Before going off, he rescued the last boy, a lad named Naylor, who was hanging to a line, and whose guernsey was so near being scorched that the captain had to throw his coat over it. There fortunately happened to be alongside the *Goliath* a tank barge for supplying the ship with fresh water ; and this convenient craft, being very light from the fact that she was out of ballast, was the means of saving 200 boys. Some few were hurt, one having his leg broken, by leaping into the barge. As for the ship's boats, there was no difficulty in the way of lowering them ; but the fire had gained such a hold on the vessel that, before they could be put over her side, the davits were loosened and the tackle burned by the heat and flames. Wheeler, one of the assistant schoolmasters, was lost. Another assistant schoolmaster, A Thompson, was struck by a blow from a falling spar, and received a scalp wound, rendering him insensible for a time. Two lads who were drowned were brought ashore, and these were the only bodies found on Wednesday. It would be well if these were the only fatal cases ; but there is too much reason to fear that at least 19 in all have perished. Mr Hall, the chief officer, who was attending the branch pipe and was paying it up from the lower deck, was pressed by the flames and obliged to jump overboard. It was then that Wheeler, who could not swim, was lost. Great pains had been taken to teach all the boys

swimming, and to the fact that they had mostly profited well from their instruction is ascribable the happy mitigation of the deplorable calamity. One affecting incident touched all who observed it so deeply that few of them could refrain from showing their emotion. A very little boy, hearing that the captain was to remain to the last, flung his arms around his neck and begged that he might stay and follow him, instead of being saved first. Other boys were sadly unlike this small hero ; for, not relishing the idea of being sent back to their several parishes, they made a start for London as soon as they got on shore, and nine of them have been brought back to Grays. It is hoped that among the missing may be some similar fugitives, so that the number of the lost may be diminished. Life lines and Jacob's ladders were burned while boys were clinging to them, but most of those who dropped in the water swam until they were picked up. Many were naked, and few indeed got off the ship with all their clothing on them. As one of the boats, filled with about 30 lads, was preparing to leave the side of the *Goliath*, another boat, the lowering tackle of which was burned through, fell on the first, and it was then that several, it is feared, were killed. Many of those who hung to the life lines were taken off by Captain Walters's boat, the one which kept closest and longest by the burning ship. This boat did not stay beyond the time of need for her good help ; for which at last Captain Bouchier left his vessel and entered the whaler in which his officers, Mr Daniel Murphy and the rest, had come from the shore, their boat was struck by the captain's funnel falling over the starboard quarter of the ship, and was caught so heavily on the lee gunwhale as to be instantly swamped. Mr Murphy jumped into the water, and was picked up by Captain Walters, who then rescued Captain Bouchier and all who were on board the sinking boat. After that, Captain Walters went back twice to see if he could give further aid and succour. There were 80 tons of coal on board the ship which, with about 100 gallons of petroleum, fed the fierceness of the fire all day. Pertaining to the *Goliath*, as an institution for the instruction of destitute lads, is an old mansion on the shore, called Sherfield House, which stands in four acres of land. Here is located the Infirmary, so that any case of sickness may be removed from the midst of the lads, who might otherwise suffer from contagion. Lately the building was largely tenanted by boys suffering from ophthalmia. It was turned to another kind of hospital on Wednesday, as well as to a house of refuge. Crowding every room and passage, great numbers of the boys were to be seen in all kinds of dress, but mostly without shoes or stockings. Some had their hands or foreheads swathed in cotton wool, but all seemed to put up well with their pain, and to be very grateful for the kindness shown them, as they had good cause to be. The hungry had been fed and the naked clothed, with ready charity, by the good folk of Grays, who turned out en masse to receive the boys on their landing. All those authorities under whose dominion the training ship had been conducted, for the benefit of Hackney, Poplar and Whitechapel districts, but chiefly in connection with Forest Gate, came down to the spot as soon as they had news of the catastrophe. Mr Scrutton, Mr Gr???? and other gentlemen of official or social influence were there ; and the kindest offers of help came from all parts, near and far. Mr Smith of Belmont Castle, a great friend of the ship, tendered his hospitality to Captain Bouchier and his wife and daughters ; Captain Morrell RN, in command of the *Cornwall* at Purfleet, who was in Captain Jenkins's steam launch, expressed his willingness to find room for a number of boys on board his ship ; and the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway conveyed, free of charge, in all about 350 boys, the greater number to London or Forest Gate, and 26 to Gravesend. As the Government tug *Locust* was on her way down the river from London to Sheerness, she was stopped at half past 11, in case of emergency, by Captain Jenkins, who subsequently received by telegraph from the Commander-in-Chief at Sheerness a message of approval and thanks. About five o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, Captain Jenkins endeavoured, by means of long augers, to scuttle the flaming hull of the *Goliath*, now burned below her lowest portholes, and, incautiously grasping a bolt which was nearly red hot, he scorched his hand, but not very severely. As the ship had burned away from her moorings, and was liable, on the flood tide, to drift among the neighbouring shipping, the harbour master was prepared, at the least indication of danger, to blow up the hull with dynamite. The probability, however, was that there would be no such necessity, but that the ill-fated ship would burn down to the water's edge, or drift ashore. This luckily happened to those of her boats that were launched by the burning of their tackle, the gale driving them high and

dry. The names of the two boys who are lying in the deadhouse are Denholme and McGrath. These, with Wheeler, the assistant schoolmaster, are the only bodies that have been recovered ; and the number supposed to be lost is 19.

GRAYS AND TILBURY GAZETTE

28 December 1901

CAPT BOURCHIER AND THE TS *EXMOUTH*

A NAVAL OFFICER'S REMINISCENCES

TALES OF THE TRAINING SHIP *GOLIATH* AND HER BURNING

SPECIAL INTERVIEW Preparations for the Christmas entertainments of 1875 were nearing completion when, on December 22nd, on the ill fated training ship *Goliath*, which for five years had been stationed on the Thames off Grays under command of Captain William Sutherland Bouchier, Staff Commander Her Majesty's Royal Navy – the cry of “Fire” was raised on board, and from the lamp room the devastating element raged over the doomed vessel, extending with inconceivable rapidity until she was reduced to a mass of charred ruins on the water line, with contents destroyed and a number of lives lost. To the ordinary newspaper reader, the event had probably died out of mind until a few years ago, when one of the grandest and most striking incidents in connection with the catastrophe was revived in pictorial form in graphic and well executed representation of the Captain and one of the ship boys who, momentarily forgetting discipline for love of his captain, urges the latter to save himself by leaving the ship. The general appearance of wreck and ruin, the awful nearness of the flames, crashing timbers, and the gale tossing the rescue boats hither and thither on the waves, were faithfully reproduced and add significance to the lesson intended to be conveyed by the captain's words of reproof in reply, “No, no, my boy. I must be last ; that's the way at sea”.



A lesson which has found its way into every quarter of the British dominions, if only by means of this picture, a great favourite in the Navy, and to be found in the forecabin of many a British man of war, where its glorious lesson is not lost upon the raw recruit, who early learns the high traditions and prestige he is expected to uphold in the service.

Another quarter of a century has passed away, and now that same Captain – the hero of the fire –

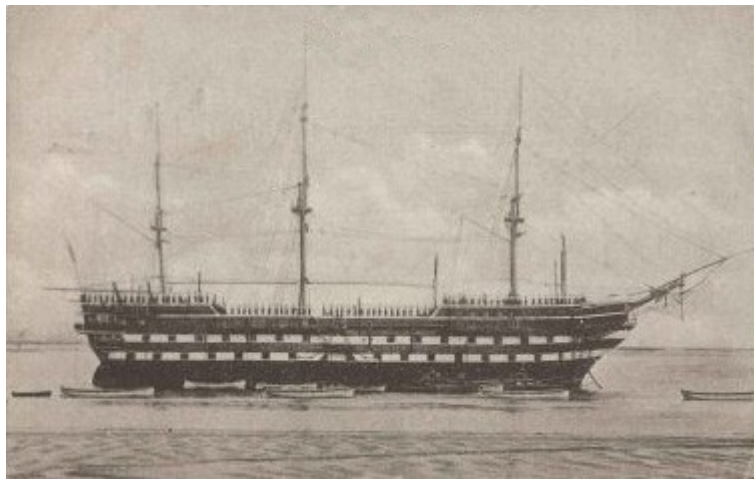
keen eyed and (to use the words of Rear Admiral Sir Gerard H Noel KCMG, Admiral Superintendent of Naval Reserves) “full of zeal and work” as ever, has silvern hair and reluctantly relinquishes the government of the ship to other hands. On January 17th next, he enters upon a period of well earned rest from the great and arduous work to which the major portion of his life has been devoted.

A few words concerning his career may not be out of place here. Captain Bouchier was destined for a life upon the waters from early years. He comes of stock well known in the Navy, and first entered the merchant service, concerning which he says :-

In those days there was a particular class of officers who got into the service by having served four years in the merchant service. I had served three years and three months when my step-father – himself an officer in the Navy – said, “Will, you must join the service as an able seaman”. I did too ; and had to rise from that. He recalls – with pride in the memory – the work and exposure to weather which the position entailed, and remarks parenthetically : I have many times banged my fingers against the shrouds when I have been heaving the lead, through the cold. He has seen service in the Mediterranean ; then on the flagship *Impregnable*, getting steady promotion until he was dispatched to South Africa chasing slavers, and recalls, among other exciting adventures of that rough and ready time, the capture of one of the craft and the drowning of every mother's son of the crew. He went in the *Zebra* to the West Coast of Africa, where he saw more active service, and altogether was the very type of man, on appointment to the *Goliath* on March 31st 1870, to fittingly impress those under his charge with a proper reverence for and pride in “the service”.

The *Goliath* was an Admiralty vessel dating from 1833, intended originally as a sailing vessel, but was converted into a screw steamer during the Crimean War, and afterwards formed one of the steam reserve, lying in the Medway, until lent by the Admiralty to the managers of the Forest Gate District School as a training ship for boys from district and workhouse schools. She was first moored off Grays, under Captain Bouchier, early in November 1870 ; the initial instalment of her youthful crew (38) having joined her on the 19th October at Sheerness. From that time, the number of boys gradually increased, until in September 1875 the number was 520. The demand in the sea service for trained boys had reduced the crew to 185, the complement on the fatal 22nd December. During the five years of her career, 1645 boys were entered on the books, of whom 1100 were placed out in various ways, chiefly in the mercantile marine, the Royal Navy and Regimental bands. The work was felt to be so good that, after the fire, no time was lost in getting another similar ship for Captain Bouchier – who explained to our representative the reasons for the transfer of management to the Metropolitan Asylums Board from the other authority, and on the following February 24th, a subcommittee, accompanied by Captain Bouchier, went down to Plymouth and inspected four ships ; the *Exmouth*, a three decker of the old “wooden walls” type, pierced for 91 guns, 220 feet long and 60 feet beam, of 3100 tons, being selected and almost immediately dispatched to be fitted up in the river. This fitting out was done almost entirely at Captain Bouchier's direction. His is the general arrangement of the decks, and the method on board is also his initiation ; while he ascribes the phenomenally good results which have been achieved to the fact that she is fitted out in a different manner entirely to any other training ship. “During the last ten years,” he remarks, “We have been sending more boys into the Navy than all the other training ships put together”, - and smiles at the recollection of one journey in particular of the training brigantine *Steadfast* to Devonport, when all the crew were accepted in the Navy and a fresh crew had to be sent from the parent ship to man the brig for the return home! In the old ship for over a quarter of a century, Captain Bouchier has carried on the work, mainly upon his own lines, including the management of the infirmary on shore and the shipping home at Limehouse, where a small number of lads live while employment is being found for them. During the period, no fewer than 8029 boys have passed through the ship, and the low number of deaths throughout the period, 39, speaks volumes for the care which has been bestowed upon them at the hands of the nursing staff ; whilst the almost constant presence on board of “old boys”, mostly soldiers or sailors, is convincing proof of the kindness and consideration they received as inmates. There was in fact a tall bluff soldier on board on the day of our visit.

All kinds of preliminary naval and military work and drills are here practised, and Captain Bouchier is fully entitled to the credit he claims for the boys' smartness in these respects. "As a matter of fact", says he, "in field gun drill we beat the Bluejackets. It ought to be explained, perhaps, how I show that a lot of little boys can beat the handy men, but I asked one of the old boys one day when he was here how long they had allowed them in the Navy now for dismounting a field gun. He said, "Fourteen seconds". "And how long to remount it?" "Nineteen seconds", was the reply." "Now", said the captain, "Our boys can and do finish the two in eight seconds and eleven seconds respectively. This is done every Wednesday afternoon". That Captain Bouchier loves the work is evidenced by the fact that he has not been ashore sometimes for as much as a year at a time, and on several occasions has taken only half the month's vacation to which he is entitled. His recollection of the start of the work include the purchase of the (?*Adiona*), a schooner, from which he lifted the foremast and made her a brig in which, under officers, crews of the boys fetched water from Sheerness and the whole of the ship's stores from London. By the bye, when this vessel was at last sold to make room for the *Steadfast* and broken up, she was found to have been built of



cedar.

Today the *Exmouth* is lit by electricity, replete with any and every requisite for the peculiar and efficient training which turns London gutter children into smart soldiers and sailors, and in every respect worthy of the grey and gallant gentleman whose work and example have brought it to such a condition of perfection. In every corner of the ship are pictures of the ship's history, and other reminders of its and his connection. Here a life sized photo of a boy who was presented for saving life with a medal on *HMS Impregnable*, to which he had just been drafted from the *Exmouth*, there a particularly good piece of drawing or sail making or something of the kind by one of the boys, and even to the drop curtain of the stage – where Dan Leno, Madame Rose, John le Hay, Marie Lloyd and others have trod the boards for the boys' entertainment – everything is redolent of salt water and suggestive of the freedom and happiness of the Jack Tar afloat or ashore.

In the old days, it was necessary to put every energy into the work of perfecting arrangements to turn out so large a number of boys successfully. For the system was not one of red tape. The Captain had pretty much of his own way, with the result that the splendid system at present in force has been built up from small regulations added to from time to time as circumstances suggested the advisability. Now, however, the Captain is able, under the evident state of discipline to which the system has been brought, to relegate most of the harder work into the trustworthy hands of "as fine a set of officers as it is possible for any man to have" - to again use Captain Bouchier's words.

Captain Bouchier is intending on leaving the ship to take up his residence at Belmont Castle, we hope for many years to continue to take an interest in the welfare of his old ship and her great and noble work of reclamation.

Naturally one turned in conversation to the burning of the *Goliath*, and on this subject the Captain is very modest. The very centre piece of the whole occurrence was the scene where the captain and boy stood together on the burning ship. But of that he is reluctant to speak, although admitting its truth, and adds a fact not generally known at the time – that almost as the boy stepped under orders

into the boat, a red hot funnel fell from the ship into the boat and literally scalped him. The Captain stooped at once, and as the boys were bailing water on to the red hot funnel to prevent the boat catching fire, he turned up the boy's scalp and bound it with a handkerchief until they got ashore and he could be seen by a doctor. The boy recovered, and has many times visited the Captain on the Exmouth to show the old scars left by the terrible wound.

The following is the simple story of the catastrophe from the pen of an eye witness, Mr R J Fenn, at the time schoolmaster on the Goliath :-

On the ringing of the fire bell, the various officers who were on board made an attempt to rush to their several stations, which were as follows :- Captain Bouchier and Mr Hall at the fire ; myself with the Captain's family ; Mr A Thompson, assistant schoolmaster, with me, to assist in saving the ship's books ; Mr Norris at the foremost lower deck pump ; Mr Gunton at the after lower deck pump; Mr May at the hand pump at the extreme fore part of the lower deck ; Mr G Thompson at the pumps generally ; Mr Hurley on the main deck, and other officers at various stations ; Mr Wheeler, upper deck.

So rapid, however, was the progress of the fire that it was impossible for some of these officers to reach their stations. Mr A Thompson was unable, from the flames having taken possession of the after ladder, to come to my assistance in saving any of the ship's books.

In consequence of the fury of the gale, it very soon became apparent to all that no hope could be entertained of saving the ship, or any of the property, and life became the only consideration.

After working at the pumps till the hose was burnt through, the brave boys, seeing their efforts fruitless, made their way to the ports and clambered into the boats. The flames having taken



possession of the upper deck, it became impossible to lower the boats in the ordinary way. The captain and a boy made an attempt to clear the falls of one, and succeeded in lowering her partially, but were forced to desist from the violence of the flames. It was necessary, therefore, to cut the falls, but before that could be done, many of them burnt through and precipitated the boys into the water.

Mr Hurley, on leaving the cabin to make his way along the main deck to his station, was compelled to beat a hasty retreat, in consequence of that deck being one mass of flame, and this within a few minutes of the outbreak of the fire. He was forced to effect his escape through a port in the cabin next to his own and on reaching the forecabin, which was immediately over his cabin, he found the smoke and flame so overpowering that he was compelled, with a number of boys who had found their way to that part of the ship, to drop down on to the mooring cable ; here he and the boys with him remained for some minutes, holding on for their lives until taken off by a barge's boat. One poor little fellow, one of the smallest boys in the ship, named Young, could not be persuaded for some time to quit the forecabin. It was a pitiful sight to see the poor child with the flames every minute approaching nearer and nearer to him, looking down on the master of a steam tug whose open arms were ready to receive him, and to observe the terror with which the boy regarded the fearful gulf between him and his delivery. At last he made a jump, but only just in time, as the tug was in the act of steaming away, being unable to remain near the burning vessel any longer.

Mr G Thompson, the head carpenter, after seeing the pumps manned, endeavoured to make his way to the store room below the orlop deck, where he hoped to be able to break a large pipe which communicated with the sea cock. Had he been successful, a quantity of water would have rushed in and might have been the means of arresting the progress of the fire in that direction. Dense volumes of smoke, however, prevented him affecting his purpose.

On reaching the orlop deck he found a number of boys there, unable to make their escape. With great presence of mind, he knocked away the iron bars from the ports and released them from their perilous position. It was their only means of escape, as the fire by this time had completely enveloped the lower deck, immediately above them.

Mr Thompson then broke the hot water pipes on both lower and main decks, thereby admitting a large quantity of water on both these decks. Then, having done all he could inside the ship, he made his way to one of the davits on the starboard side, where a boat was hanging by one fall, cut the fall through and released the boat. It fell into the water and instantly filled, and it was only by taking off his boots and bailing her out that he and about 10 boys who managed to scramble into the boat were enabled to keep her afloat until they drifted on shore.

Just as the fire broke out, four officers, Messrs White, Murphy, Wanstell and Kingdom, were making their way from the shore to the ship. After vainly endeavouring, in consequence of the violence of the gale, to man one of the launches which was lying a short distance from the ship, they came to the gangway, where there were about 25 boys and the captain. The mizzen mast at this time was tottering over their heads. As they were approaching, they picked up Mr May, who was nearly exhausted, having jumped overboard some minutes before. Arriving at the gangway, they took into their boat the captain and the boys. Scarcely had they done so when a large funnel, red hot, fell over the ship's side from the upper deck into the boat, severely wounding two boys on the head and knocking Mr Kingdom overboard. It fell in such a manner that those in the boat were unable to remove it, and were compelled to throw cold water over it, to prevent it burning the boat through.

This is one little incident showing the imminent peril in which many were placed during their escape from the burning ship.

The fate of the unfortunate Mr Wheeler, assistant schoolmaster, was a sad one. He had been with us but ten days, having come directly from Winchester Training College, where he had just completed his two years' training as a schoolmaster. Previously to this, he had been a pupil teacher at Brighton, having spent his first three years as such, under my tuition. I had known him, therefore, from his boyhood and had kept up a continual correspondence with him. He had distinguished himself at College and was a most promising teacher, a good musician, a good athlete, and in the

short space of time he had been with us had become a general favourite with all.

I had been in conversation with him only a few minutes before the fire. The captain and Mr Hall were standing on the gangway ; a boat was hanging by one of the falls ; the captain ordered Mr Hall, chief officer, to make an attempt to release it. Mr Wheeler being unable to swim, thinking he would be safe with such a good sailor, made a leap for the boat and clung to it. There were two boys with them. The boat, however, was swamped and carried by the tide far astern. The swell from two or three steamers that were passing caused the boat to turn over and over. Mr Hall and one of the boys managed with great difficulty to keep their hold, but poor Wheeler and the other boy succumbed ; just before he disappeared, he called out, "Oh, Mr Hall, pray help me, I cannot hold on much longer". It was in vain however. Mr Hall himself was exhausted and was afterwards picked up in a most helpless condition and carried home and put to bed.

The escape of ladies was most remarkable. It was my duty to assist them. On reaching the upper deck, after the alarm of fire, I met Miss Ethel, the captain's youngest daughter, and persuaded her to make for a pinnace, which was still hanging from the davits.

I then met Messrs Gunton and Norris, who had just left their station at the pumps below, and we made an attempt to lower the galley. The flames, however, prevented the possibility of our doing so. Mr Gunton then cut the galley's falls and I was precipitated into the water, the friction of one of the ropes lacerating my hands ; the galley was swamped and floated away. Mr Norris having got into the pinnace and taken turns round the thwarts with the life lines, Mr Gunton cut the falls and the boat was lowered successfully. Had it failed, the probability is that the ladies would have been burnt to death and I should have lost my life. Of course, the boat came down with great force and within a very few inches of my head as I was struggling in the water. Miss Ethel, with great presence of mind, threw a rope to me as I was swimming, by means of which I was enabled to reach the pinnace and managed to get into it, and then our next care was directed to Mrs Bouchier. Before leaving the poop I had thrown a rope to her, which reached below her window, and also one to Miss Florence, her daughter. They were however of no avail, as they had burnt through before they could be of any service. The only alternative was for them to jump into the water. After many vain endeavours on the part of Mr Norris to throw Mrs Bouchier a rope, she was at last persuaded to leap from her window from a height of about 25 feet, and we got her into the boat in a most exhausted condition.

Miss Florence was next. She had managed to secure a rope which had fallen over her head. Down this she made her way, and held on, dangling in mid air until we could get the boat close enough to rescue her. This was no easy task, as the wind freshened, and we could with difficulty keep the boat clear of the cables of the after moorings. Quite exhausted, Miss Florence at last dropped just clear of the cable, and we dragged her into the boat. Her hands were much injured from the friction of the rope and were some days healing.

The captain's cook and housemaid were rescued in a similar manner.

Too much praise cannot be bestowed on Messrs Gunton and Norris for the skilful manner in which they lowered the heavy boat, and coolness and intrepidity they showed in rescuing the women. I was an eye witness of all, and can speak in the highest terms of their noble conduct on the occasion. After landing Mrs Bouchier and the rest on the mud, they went back twice to the burning vessel and saved a great many boys who were struggling in the water. While this was going on, Captain Bouchier was on the gangway, surrounded by 30 or 40 boys, among whom he found many of our best swimmers. Two of them especially deserve notice for their cool and heroic behaviour – James Longhurst (since gone to sea) and William Murphy. Captain Bouchier appealed to the boys as to whether any of them were able to swim to the "Launch", a large boat which was moored between the ship and the shore, and would have accommodated 150 boys. Longhurst and Murphy (being special swimmers, boys who could swim 20 lengths of our bath, 60 feet long) immediately put up their hands to signify their readiness to make the attempt. "Very well," said the Captain, "Strip". No sooner said than done, and off they started. Dense volumes of smoke soon hid them from view. They reached the launch, however, but being unable to get into her, from her height out of the water, they swam ashore. Soon after, the flames burst out from the lower deck ports, so close to this little

group on the gangway that it became necessary by some means to reduce the numbers there. The captain, finding no launch or other boat arrive, happened to see some large bread boxes just behind him, threw them overboard, and told the boys that the boxes would drift on shore with them, provided that they did not get into them. Two or three boys availed themselves of the opportunity, and reached the shore in that way. Others took to the water and were picked up by various boats, and many swam ashore. This brought the number to about five and twenty.

In the midst of these trying circumstances, the Captain's anxiety increased as to the possibility of saving the remainder of the boys, feeling it was his duty to remain on the ship till the very last. The boys' terror increased ; so, in order to divert their thoughts, the captain endeavoured to cheer them. "Now, boys", said he, "when I say three, sing out as loudly as you can, "Bring the launch"".

Through the fire and smoke came out a ring of children's voices, "Bring the launch". No launch, however, came, but the Whaler, in which were Messrs Kingdom, Wanstell, Murphy, White and May, dashed through the cloud and came to the rescue as before mentioned. Not a moment was to be lost; the boys were hurried into the boat. It was at this time that a little episode occurred, well worth mentioning. A boy named Mudkin, crying, clung to the captain, entreating him to save himself. "Do go, sir, do go first, or you will be burnt ; if you go, we will follow".

"No, my boy", says the captain, "I must be last ; that's the way at sea".

It was but a few minutes after that the red hot funnel fell on the same poor lad and wounded him severely in the head.

Before this, the water tank had left the ship's side. She was an ordinary barge, decked over and fitted with tanks for bringing water from the shore. She was moored alongside in her usual place, close to the ship.

About twenty boys got into her, and were just about to cast her off and make for the shore. One boy, however, named William Bolton, rushed forward and exclaimed, "If you cast off, I'll knock you down ; we can take more boys yet". So, about 120 boys crowded into her, and she drifted to the shore, under the direction of Mr Tye.

This brave little fellow is only 13 years of age. He had been in the ship a little more than two years ; and though so young, had distinguished himself so much by his good behaviour as to be made a first class "petty officer". He has, since the fire, received the Bramley Moore Silver Medal from the Royal Humane Society of Liverpool, a silver watch from the President of the LGB, a book from Lady Bouchier and other presents.

Many of the boys who escaped on this water tank, fearing they would lose their lives, knelt down and said their prayers ; and one of them, when he arrived on shore, said to an officer with great satisfaction, "Never mind, sir, if I had been drowned, I had said my prayers".

Among those not belonging to the ship who rendered valuable assistance must be mentioned **Mr Coppen**, who was in charge of the barge *Forest* (belonging to Mr Landfield), which was lying at the time close to the shore. Although a gale of wind was blowing, Mr Coppen got under weigh and beat to windward till he came to the weather, or port side, of the ship. Here he dropped anchor, bringing his vessel as close as the flames would permit, and saved a number of boys who were struggling in the water. These, with others picked up by his boat, numbering in all 65, were conveyed safely on shore.

Owing to the strength of wind and tide, Mr Coppen would have been quite unable to leave his anchorage had it not been for the timely assistance of the tug *Milton*, which arrived at this opportune moment, having steamed from Gravesend directly the fire broke out.

The tug towed the barge clear of the ship, and her boat also saved a number of boys who had jumped overboard from the lower deck ports. This was the tug to which the little boy Young, above mentioned, owes his wonderful escape.

Our master tailor, Mr White, who was in the water in a most exhausted condition, was saved by two fine stout lads, well known in Grays, named C Beale and James Callendar. Poor Mr White, a middle aged man, was unable to get into their boat, and was obliged to be towed on shore by these two lads.

Our cook did not leave the ship until his apron began to catch fire. Having made his way down the

“boom topping lift”, he was taken off by a young man named Fox, also well known in Grays. The last boat at the burning vessel was that commanded by Captain Walter RN of the training ship *Arethuan*. This gallant officer, who saw our upper deck in flames exactly at eight o'clock, made all possible speed to man his boats, and hastened to our assistance. That he must have used the most strenuous exertions in the matter is seen from the fact that he was close by the ship at about twenty minutes past eight.

After, Captain Bouchier was taken from the gangway and was received by Captain Walter into his galley. Just at this moment, the foremost mooring cables were parting from the intensity of the heat. Seeing a poor little fellow named Naylor, still clinging on to a large piece of timber called a fender, hanging from the ship's side under the starboard bow, Captain Bouchier begged of Captain Walters to make an attempt to save this boy. The situation was a most perilous one. The foremast was one mass of flames, and was threatening to fall, and the smoke almost hid the boy from view. With true sailor courage, however, Captain Walter and his noble crew dashed to the spot and rescued the terrified lad from his perilous position. A burst of cheers arose from the lookers-on, in praise of this noble deed of daring. So close were the flames that Captain Walter's flannel shirt was singed, and the whiskers of those in the boat burned. Captain Walter and his boats remained on the spot, as long as they could be of any assistance.

There was a little soldier named Clement Harris, of the 3rd Buffs at Mullingar, on a visit to the ship. He was a very quiet, steady and well conducted lad. He was with the Captain on the gangway till nearly the last moment. He is lost.

Among the many references to the sad occurrence in the Press of the time, the following lines appeared in “Punch” :-

THE BURNING OF THE GOLIATH

(As told by an old Gravesend Salt to a Mess mate in Greenwich Hospital)

A dirty, foggy morning 'twas
Grays loomed large, close a-lee:
The watch was holy stoning decks
As white as white could be.
There were five hundred workhouse lads
A training for the sea.

“*Goliath*” was a giant hulk
Built in the days of yore:
And more than one small David
Upon her books she bore.
No iron in her ; knees of oak,
And oak heart at the core.

The bell had just struck half past seven,
As broke the winter's day -
On the main deck 'twas dousing glims
And stowing them away.
Darn that new fangled paraffin! -
Whale oil's the stuff I say.

Young Loeben had the lamps in charge -
A steady boy, I'm told -
One of 'em burnt his fingers, till
He couldn't keep his hold.

Down fell the lamp ; along the decks
The blazing oil it rolled.

“Fire!” “Beat o'quarters!” “Man the pumps!”
I could cry like a fool
To read how them lads mustered all,
As if for morning school.
In their skylarking at Christmas
They wasn't half as cool.

I've heer'd of Balaclava -
But those were bearded men,
And these were little fellows
Most part twixt twelve and ten.
Some calls 'em gutter children -
God bless our gutters, then!

The Capt'n he was at his post,
A smile upon his face ;
And not one officer or lad
But knew and kept his place,
Though soon 'twas plain as plain could be,
The fire must win the race.

Most of the little chaps could swim ;
But, swim or not, they made
And kept their lines as regular
As soldiers on parade.
Bourchier had wife and girls aboard -
But by them lads he stayed.

Till when the pump no longer sucked,
Boat tackles scorched, in board ;
Ship lost! No lowering the boats?
The captain gave the word.
“Leap from the ports ; swim, them that can ;
The rest trust in the Lord”.

One little chap hung round his neck
A blubb'ring, “burnt you'll be.
Jump over first – and then we'll jump”.
“No, no, my boy,” says he,
“The skipper's last to leave the ship -
That is our way at sea”.

So young and old their duty did,
Like sailors, and like men.
There was Hall and there was Norris,
And Gunton, Tye and Fenn -
Who swore he'd save the women,
And did it there and then.

The captain's wife jumped thirty feet -
Needs must, when Vulcan drives -
Hand over hand, in sailor style,
His daughters saved their lives ;
Brave girls you see, and well brought up,
The stuff for sailors' wives!

On the tank barge some twenty boys
Had climbed dear life to save ;
The flames flared out, the pitched top sides
Yawned like a fiery grave ;
And some set off the cry, "Shove off!" -
Lads will like lads behave.

But Billy Bolton's boyish voice
Was heard - "I'm mate in charge ;
There's room enough for plenty more.
Hold on there with that barge".
That Billy Bolton may run small
The heart in him looms large.

But I can't tell you half the tale -
How, when they got ashore,
The kind good woman kissed and hugged,
And stript the clothes they wore,
To wrap the boys, as mothers will -
Or what is mother for?

There was a little soldier lad,
His shipmates came to see.
He's gone, and some half dozen more
And Mr Wheeler, he
Is with them little lads in heaven
All rated there AB.

As long as English Workhouse lads
Work up to such good stuff
Britannia still will rule the waves
Though here and there a muff
At Whitehall or afloat may make
Old John Bull cut up rough.

Links

More details on the Training Ship Exmouth, together with some photographs from the early 20th century, are available on

www.childrenshomes.org.uk/TSExmouth.

1881 Census for the Training Ship Exmouth is available on

www.angelfire.com/de/BobSanders/TSExmouth81.html

Information on Sherfield House, which was located in Argent Street, is available at www.ezitis.myzen.co.uk/exmouth.html



The photograph is entitled : *Boys from the Exmouth at play at their land base in Grays Town.*