

# A Right Pickle in the Port

Peter Sherred

Dover has welcomed all manner of vessels and seagoing craft over the years so when a small sailing vessel, sporting the name '*HMS Pickle*', made an appearance over an August weekend this year and berthed in Dover Marina Tidal Harbour, astern of the Dover lifeboat on Crosswall Quay, it represented nothing out of the ordinary. But this vessel gives rise to a question: When is a replica not a replica but a re-creation, a conversion, a reproduction or even a representation?

The question of the status of the '*HMS Pickle*' that moored in Dover harbour seems first to have originated when the vessel took part in the 2005 bicentenary celebrations for the Battle of Trafalgar, when it represented the smallest vessel in Admiral Lord Nelson's fleet present at the defining naval battle of the Napoleonic wars. But what is so important about the 1805 vessel, bearing the same name, such that it is remembered with affection even in today's Royal Navy, where Officers hold an annual Pickle Night dinner in memory of it?

The answer lies in the fact that it was the vessel that first carried the news of both the victory of Trafalgar and the death of Admiral Lord Nelson to England. Under the command of Captain John Lapenotière, the topsail schooner took nine days to reach the British Isles, having encountered on the way a fierce gale off Finisterre. The vessel made landfall in Falmouth on November 4th and the Captain made the overland journey from there to London in just 37 hours to give the Admiralty the mixed news from Trafalgar. Sadly, the 1805 vessel came to a sad end when, just three years later while carrying despatches to Admiral Lord Collingwood at Cadiz, she grounded at night nearby and her

bottom was caved in. Fortunately, there was no loss of life, but it is said a diver worked for three days to recover the despatches! A court martial found the then Commander guilty of seamanship errors and he was reprimanded.

'*HMS Pickle*' had, in fact, started life as a civilian vessel launched in 1799 in Bermuda under the name of '*Sting*' but she was purchased, on behalf of the navy, by Lord Hugh Seymour for use in the West Indies and specifically Jamaica. Later, armed with eight or ten guns, she became the fastest but smallest ship present at Trafalgar, where she took no part in the action.

The vessel that appeared in Dover in August was originally built in the mid-1960s in Russia, probably St Petersburg, as part of the celebrations commemorating the foundation of the Russian Navy by Peter the Great three hundred years earlier. Launched as a schooner, she was given the name of '*Alevtina Tuiy*' and was one of five other vessels built at the same time. In 2005 she took part in the bicentenary celebrations of the battle of



*HMS Pickle 2019*

Trafalgar as a representation of the original 'HMS Pickle'. Then, after some years, she ended up in Gibraltar for about two years, where she deteriorated into something akin to a wreck. Offered for sale on eBay, she was purchased in 2014 by a British businessman, Mr Nicholson of Lincolnshire, who managed to sail the barely seaworthy vessel from Gibraltar to a port in Portugal's Algarve, where he was introduced to a small family boat repair and construction business based in Quarteira. A substantial repair and refitting project was embarked upon. Mr Nicholson's recreation of the original 'HMS Pickle' was apparently based upon an exact copy of the plans drawn up by the Royal Navy when the original vessel arrived in England in 1802, with the exception of the inclusion of an engine and electronic navigation equipment and modification of the deck to provide for extra cabins. Following the lengthy refit in Portugal, undertaken by a team of Portuguese and

British shipbuilders, the vessel returned to the sea and to England in 2015.

Based on the River Humber, the present vessel sporting the name 'HMS Pickle' participates in many naval or maritime events and exhibitions around the country. In so doing, her presence keeps alive the memory and significance of the original 'HMS Pickle' with her historic role after the battle of Trafalgar. However, with her rigging placed on the hull of a vessel designed as a replica of a Russian or Baltic trading vessel and renamed, together with the modern additions, it raises the question - is she a replica, a re-creation, a conversion, a reproduction or even a representation of the original? Certainly she is not her historic namesake, wrecked beyond repair in 1808, but she bears its name and serves a useful purpose in maintaining a naval commemoration. Her current status, however, leaves us in a right Pickle!

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