

Admiral Lord Nelson, HMS Foudroyant, Nelson of the Nile Lodge, and the Barnard Castle Masonic Gavels

The Ship and Admiral Lord Nelson

The name Foudroyant is French for, broadly, “thunder and lightning” and came initially from a French battleship, captured in a single-ship action in 1758 by HMS *Monmouth*.

This 'Foudroyant' was a large and new 80-gun French flagship of a squadron under Admiral Duquesne. On 28 February 1758 she was on her way to relieve the French Commodore, de la Clue, at Cartagena when she was intercepted by Admiral Osborn with three British ships of the line, the 'Monmouth' and 'Hampton Court', both 64 guns, and the 'Swiftsure', 70 guns. The 'Monmouth' was the first of the separated British squadron to engage the 'Foudroyant', despite the disparity in force between the ships. The action began at 8.00 pm and at about 9.30 pm, the 'Monmouth's' commander, Captain Arthur Gardiner, was hit in the forehead by a piece of grape-shot. He was carried below and Lieutenant Robert Carkett assumed command. Shortly afterwards, the 'Monmouth' lost her mizzen, followed by the 'Foudroyant', which also lost her mainmast. By midnight, the Frenchman's fire had almost ceased and, on the arrival of the 'Swiftsure', which fired one broadside into her, she struck. The 'Monmouth' was unable to take possession of the 'Foudroyant' herself, since none of her boats would float and Captain Gardiner subsequently died from his wounds. 'Foudroyant' was taken into the Royal Navy after capture and during her working life was considered to be its finest two-decker.

She remained in the Royal Navy's possession until broken up in 1787.

Eleven ships of the French Navy have borne the name *Le Foudroyant* ("Thunderbolt"):

- *Le Foudroyant* (1668), a 70-gun ship of the line
- *Le Foudroyant* (1691), a 82-gun ship of the line
- *Le Foudroyant*, renamed *Soleil-Royal* in 1693
- *Le Foudroyant* (1693), a 104-gun ship of the line
- *Le Foudroyant* (1724), a 110-gun ship of the line
- *Le Foudroyant* (1751), a 80-gun ship of the line
- *Le Foudroyant* (1799), a 80-gun ship of the line
- *Le Foudroyant* (1885), a central battery and barbette battleship of *Redoutable* type
- *Le Foudroyant* (44), a *L'Adroit* class destroyer
- *Fleuret*, a *Le Hardi* class destroyer later renamed to *Foudroyant*
- *Le Foudroyant* (S610), a ballistic missile submarine of the *Le Redoutable* type.
Also, HMS *Implacable*, originally French ship *Duguay-Trouin*, was renamed *Foudroyant* before being scuttled.

The second British HMS Foudroyant, and the ship with which we are particularly concerned, was launched in Plymouth Royal Dockyard in 1798, having been designed by Sir John Henslow (Surveyor of the Navy) using the old French ship's design, as a second rate battleship of the line with 80 guns (variable throughout her career). Her measurements

were 2,062 tons, 184ft x 51ft. Her usual armament included 30x 32pdrs, 32x 24pdrs, 14x 12pdrs and 12 caronades.

Foudroyant was first commissioned on 25 May 1798, under the command of Captain Thomas Byard. His command of the ship lasted only until 31 October when, after bringing the ship back to Plymouth, he died. In this first commission, she took part in Warren's action off Donegal on 12 October 1798. Captain William Butterfield temporarily took command of the ship after Byard's death, before being transferred to HMS Hazard just twelve days later.

Captain John Elphinstone took up command of the ship on 26 November 1798, in Cawsand Bay. Lord Keith hoisted his flag in her on 28 November, and Foudroyant departed to join the Mediterranean Squadron on 5 December. After arriving at Gibraltar, Keith shifted his flag to Barfleur on 31 December, and Captain Elphinstone left the ship the following day, being replaced by Captain James Richard Dacres. Dacres' command lasted for four months, before he was replaced on 22 March 1799 by Captain William Brown. Foudroyant sailed from Gibraltar on 11 May, calling at Port Mahon before arriving at Palermo on 7 June. At this time, Brown transferred to Vanguard, and Captain Thomas Hardy took over the command. The following day, Lord Nelson hoisted his flag in Foudroyant.

The Foudroyant had been intended for Nelson's flag when he first went to sea after the loss of his arm but, the ship not being quite ready, he was given HMS Vanguard instead. When Admiral Nelson eventually transferred his flag to HMS Foudroyant she remained his flagship until he quitted the Mediterranean the following year. She was then being described as a 3rd rate battleship, and was used during the campaign to recapture Naples from the French, the recapture of Malta and the taking of several French vessels.

The portrait of Admiral Lord Nelson by Beechey, part of the collection in the National Portrait Gallery, can be viewed by clicking the hyperlink below

[http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/largerimage.php?
firstRun=true&sText=5798&search=sp&rNo=0](http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/largerimage.php?firstRun=true&sText=5798&search=sp&rNo=0)

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In 1801, after a refit, HMS Foudroyant was Admiral Lord Keith's flagship in the Egyptian campaign. In 1803, she joined the Channel fleet after an extensive refit at Plymouth. In 1808 she was Admiral Sir Sydney Smith's flagship for his expedition to South America. She was finally paid off in Plymouth on November 30th 1812 and remained in harbour service.

Foudroyant lay at her anchor until 26 January 1815, when she was taken into dock for a large repair that lasted 4 years. When Foudroyant came out of dock in 1819, she took up her role as guard ship in Plymouth until about 1860. Throughout this period she was in and out of dock on several occasions for repairs. In 1862 she was converted into a gunnery training vessel and served the Plymouth gunnery school, HMS Cambridge.

Thereafter stationed at Devonport on dockyard duties, she was finally placed on the Sales List in 1891 and sold out of the service the following January for £2,350. Bought by J.Read of Portsmouth, she was promptly resold to German Shipbreakers for £1,000. Because of her association with Admiral Nelson, there was a public outcry, including a Punch cartoon by Linley Sambourne, together with a specially written poem by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – reproduced below:-

H.M.S. FOUDROYANT, By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. [Being an humble address to Her Majesty's Naval advisers, who sold Nelson's old flagship to the Germans for a thousand pounds.]

Who says the Nation's purse is lean,
Who fears for claim or bond or debt,
When all the glories that have been
Are scheduled as a cash asset?
If times are bleak and trade is slack,
If coal and cotton fail at last,
We've something left to barter yet
Our glorious past.

There's many a crypt in which lies hid
The dust of statesman or of king;
There's Shakespeare's home to raise a bid,
And Milton's house its price would bring.
What for the sword that Cromwell drew?
What for Prince Edward's coat of mail?
What for our Saxon Alfred's tomb?
They're all for sale!

And stone and marble may be sold
Which serve no present daily need;
There's Edward's Windsor, labelled old,
And Wolsey's palace, guaranteed.
St. Clement Danes and fifty fanes,
The Tower and the Temple grounds;
How much for these? Just price them, please,
In British pounds.

You hucksters, have you still to learn,
The things which money will not buy?
Can you not read that, cold and stern
As we may be, there still does lie
Deep in our hearts a hungry love
For what concerns our island story?
We sell our work perchance our lives,

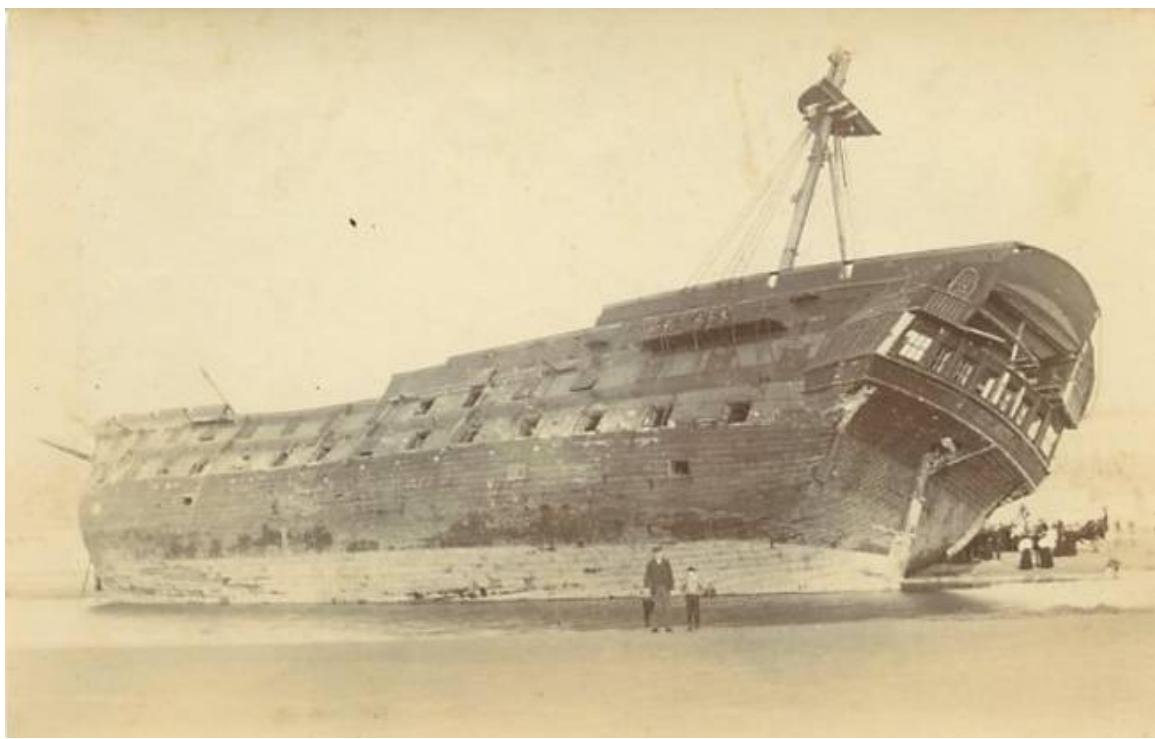
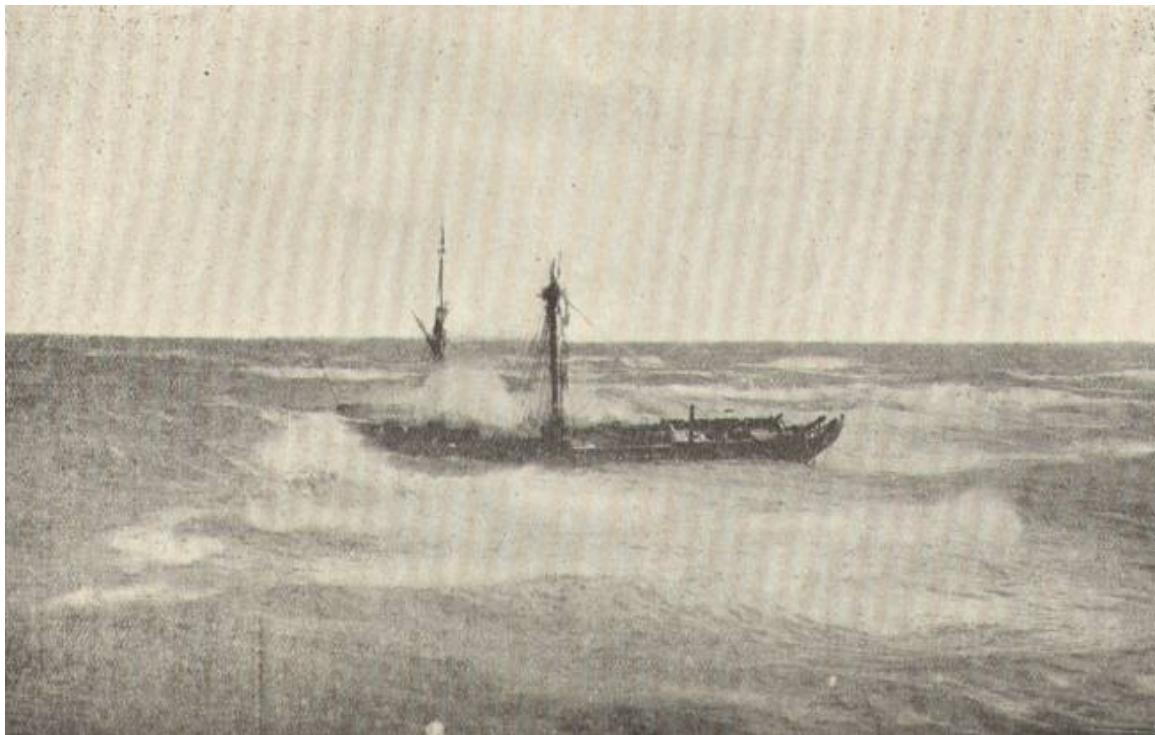
But not our glory.

Go barter to the knacker's yard
The steed that has outlived its time!
Send hungry to the pauper ward
The man who served you in his prime!
But when you touch the Nation's store,
Be broad your mind and tight your grip.
Take heed! And bring us back once more
Our Nelson's ship.

And if no mooring can be found
In all our harbours near or far,
Then tow the old three-decker round
To where the deep-sea soundings are;
There, with her pennon flying clear,
And with her ensign lashed peak high,
Sink her a thousand fathoms sheer.
There let her lie!

She was then purchased by George Wheatley Cobb, who wished to save her for the nation, with a view to display at various ports and as a sail training ship. To offset the restoration costs of £20,000, it was then decided to exhibit her at various seaside resorts and, in June 1897, she was towed to Blackpool and was moored in a dangerous place in open sea. On 16 June 1897 during a violent storm, she was wrecked on Blackpool Sands, damaging Blackpool North Pier in the process. The crew were all successfully rescued by local Lifeboats. Images of the ship afloat and aground are set out below, with thanks to Phil at Rossallbeach.co.uk for the use of those images:-





The salvage terms were that the company involved received two thousand pounds only if they re-floated her. If they failed, they could buy the wreck for ten pounds. The ship proved unsalvageable and the company recovered some of their expenses by making souvenirs from the timber and copper and selling them. Hundreds of different varieties were sold,

including medallions, coins, items of furniture and walking sticks – and the Barnard Castle Masonic Gavels.

A poster advertising the various wares appears below:-

WRECKED AT BLACKPOOL.
(See Page 47.)

The Old Flagship, "FOUDROYANT."



Fletcher's Antique Furniture and
The "Foudroyant" Company, Ltd.,

HAVING Purchased the whole of the Timber (upwards of One Thousand Tons), and Copper (about Forty Tons), are now making the above material into all kinds of Useful and Ornamental Articles, viz., Copper Goods, as follows:—

Plant Vases, 3in. to 8in. diameter, 3/8 to 40/-; Flower Vases from 3/- each; Card Trays, from 6/- each; Match and Ash Trays, 2/6 and 3/- each; Ash Trays (various), 1/- to 3/- each; Match Boxes, 2/- to 5/6 each; Gold Cased Alberts, 8/6 and 12/6; Watch Pendants, 6d. to 4/- each; Bangles, gold cased, 7/6 each; Brooches, 1/- to 2/6 each; Breast Pins, 1/- each; Charms, 6d. each; Oak Walking Sticks, with copper mount, Nelson's head and ship, with full particulars in relief, 3s. each. Thousands of these Sticks have been sold.

CALL AND INSPECT THEIR STOCK AT . . .

The "Foudroyant" Depot, Talbot Road, Blackpool.

Examples of the artefacts produced included:-

The Nelson Foudroyant Medal, struck in 1897, being made from copper recovered from the hull sheathing. The obverse bears his portrait and dates of birth and death together with the registration No 311490 of 1897. The reverse shows finely detailed 3/4 rear view of the ship at sea but with some sails furled. The diameter is 38mm (1 1/2"). This rare item is normally housed in a red box with a stamp in the lining 'The British and Foreign Sailors' Society Prince Edward lunch at St James' Palace'. Weight 28g.



A pair of copper napkin rings with a fine beaded edge and an applied HMS Foudroyant badge.

Well made vesta box made of copper. Height 55mm (2 1/8") Weight 40g. (See: 'Vesta Boxes', R Fresco-Corbu, 1983).

HMS Foudroyant was considered to be the second most famous ship in British Naval History - the most important being HMS Victory.

A local link between HMS Foudroyant and the preserved vessel HMS Trincomalee.

The Trincomalee was laid down at Wadia shipyard in Bombay in 1816, built mainly with Malabar teak, and launched on 12 October 1817 equipped with 38-guns. The ship reached Portsmouth harbour in 1819. In 1845 she was commissioned for service as a coal transporter, then modified and reclassified as a 26-gun Corvette, serving in the West Indies in 1847. She also served as a Drill Ship for Royal Naval Volunteers.

Between 1860 and 1897 she was moored, mast-less, in Sunderland, then West Hartlepool and finally in Southampton. The philanthropist G Wheatley Cobb bought HMS Trincomalee and renamed it HMS Foudroyant after Vice Admiral Lord Nelson's famous ship – it is assumed that this took place shortly after the wreck of the second

HMS Foudroyant at Blackpool.

The Trincomalee was moored in Falmouth, and later at Portsmouth. In 1932 she was managed by the Implacable Committee of the Society for Nautical Research. She was then returned to the Royal Navy and became an adventure training base for Sea Cadets and other youth groups. The Trincomalee was moved north during the Second World War to prevent her from being attacked by submarines.

In 1987 the Trincomalee was transferred to Hartlepool. Her restoration started in 1990 and the ship is currently open for daily visits by the public at the Hartlepool Historic Quay.

The Barnard Castle Gavels

These are three in number and are intended for the use of the Master of the Lodge and the Senior and Junior Wardens. The gavels and plates are all of the same design but the latter two each bear a simple silver shield with the legend HMS Foudroyant. The Master's Gavel, however, bears a slightly larger silver shield with the following inscription:-

This set of Gavels

Made from the timbers of

HMS Foudroyant

Was presented

To the

Barnard Lodge No 1230

By Bro Bond

Of Blackpool 1898

This raises the immediate question as to the identity of Brother Bond of Blackpool, and why he should make such a presentation to the Barnard Lodge.

Nelson of the Nile Lodge, Batley

Nelson of the Nile Lodge was consecrated on 27th May 1801, by the Worshipful Master of the Lodge of Fidelity, Leeds, Br. Francis Maguire – the Lodge warrant having been obtained from the then defunct Lodge of Honour and Perseverance, No 436, of Cockermouth, Cumberland. The event caused a great stir in the small town of Batley.

At the Bicentenary Celebration in 2001 the Author of the Lodge History, Worshipful Brother Withey, gave a brief history of the Lodge and this was followed by an oration from the Provincial Chaplain, Worshipful Brother Frank A. Chappell, from which the following paragraphs are taken:-

“The Battle of the Nile was fought on August 1st 1798 and this Lodge, Nelson of the Nile, was formed three years later in 1801 on May 27th. It is worth considering some of the significant events surrounding the Battle of the Nile, since there are parallels with Freemasonry. For 3 months the British Fleet had been searching for their enemies. The fleet was under the command of Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson, 39 years old, popular with the crews of his ships, but distrusted by some powerful figures in the naval establishment who were jealous of his preferment.

There was growing exasperation at home because the young Admiral had failed to find and engage Napoleon’s powerful fleet, which was probably somewhere in the Mediterranean, but might equally have slipped away and be making for India.

Several weeks were spent in fruitless search.

Nelson had sailed to Alexandria in Egypt, on a tip-off, to find nothing there. He scoured the Eastern Mediterranean, to no avail. Later he discovered that at one point, in thick fog, his fleet had passed so close to the enemy that the French sailors had heard the British fleet firing signal guns to maintain their station.

Throughout this frustrating time, Nelson stuck to his conviction that the French fleet’s aim was to conquer Egypt and turned back to the South and there was excitement when the search was rewarded and the enemy sighted in the Bay of Abu Quir at anchor, late in the day.

Important decisions had to be made. Should an attack be mounted immediately? It would mean fighting on the sea at night. The British fleet had no charts, nothing to guide them in what might be treacherous or shallow waters. On the other hand the French fleet was at anchor, many of the French sailors were ashore, provisioning their boats, digging for fresh water and many French Marines were with them guarding them from attack from Bedouin Arabs. Nelson, on his ship the Vanguard, was in no doubt, the attack was launched. One of his ships did, indeed, run aground, but by expert and accomplished seamanship they engaged the enemy and won a famous victory.”

Nelson’s biographer, Christopher Hibbert, recorded the tumultuous reaction in Britain once news of the victory reached shore. This included the production of a wide range of souvenirs of all types – perhaps a precursor of the eventual fate of HMS Foudroyant?

“What Christopher Hibbert does not record is that a small band of Freemasons were seeking at this time to extend their craft and, inspired by his famous victory, of light over darkness, good over evil, had no doubt that they would commemorate this famous Admiral,

especially when, later that year, on 6th November 1798, Horatio Nelson was created a Baron, Lord Nelson, Lord Nelson of the Nile".

Bringing all the elements together.

At the May 2009 meeting of the Strathmore Lodge, No 6229, we were privileged to host a visit from our Batley brethren, who gave an excellent demonstration of several sections of the Lecture associated with the First Degree, to unanimous acclamation.

To record that event we are pleased to include a photograph of Worshipful Brother Ron Drake and several of his Past Master colleagues on that occasion, holding the Foudroyant Gavels.



Acknowledgements are hereby gratefully made for the use of research material and images used in this article to:-

Nelson of the Nile Lodge, Batley

love-poems.me. website.

Oldcopper.org website

www.rossallbeach.co.uk - Fylde Post Card History.

Royal Naval Museum website

Wikipedia

John L Dixon
Worshipful Master 2008-2009