

H.M.S. 'THUNDERER'

LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE NEW WARDROOM MESS

The foundations of the new Wardroom Mess were completed in September, 1955, but plans for a suitable ceremony to mark the laying of the Foundation Stone could not be made until the decision to proceed with the building of the first stage was reached early in 1956. At first, it was hoped that this could be made a really large affair, and a Garden Party for about a thousand guests in the grounds of Manadon House was considered. However, on reflection, it was felt that such a scale of entertainment was out of place at a time when there is need for general economy, and a more modest function was plainly indicated. In the event, the day became divided into four parts—an address to all officers by the First Sea Lord, the laying of the Foundation Stone, a Luncheon Party and an Evening Ball.

The First Sea Lord's address was 'off the record' but there is one portion which should, here, be referred to, for he spoke of the great problems of human relationships between officers and ratings within the Royal Navy.

He mentioned the classic definition of an expert—X, the unknown quantity, and Spurt, a drip working under pressure. He asked his audience, however much technical knowledge they absorbed, never to allow themselves to qualify for the second half of the definition and he expressed the view in no uncertain terms, that the X portion of each officer's make-up should be devoted to gaining a knowledge of human beings, especially of the sailors with whom they work.

He suggested that young engineer officers could not do better than emulate the example of several senior engineer officers, who recently have given such a notable lead in seeking to grapple with this problem—a problem which bedevils recruiting and re-engagement and which, if it is not solved, could, despite all its wonderful fighting weapons, render the Royal Navy quite impotent.

The First Sea Lord spoke for half an hour and then left for a quick tour of the College, while a deeply stirred audience dispersed to cope with the flood of visitors, who, by then, were starting to arrive.

During the morning, and, indeed, for the preceding three days, the College had been anxiously watching the weather charts, as an anticyclone moved northwards over the British Isles, to be replaced by a depression moving in from Ireland. The weather, however, was kind, for, though it rained early in the morning and after lunch, the sun came out during the ceremony.

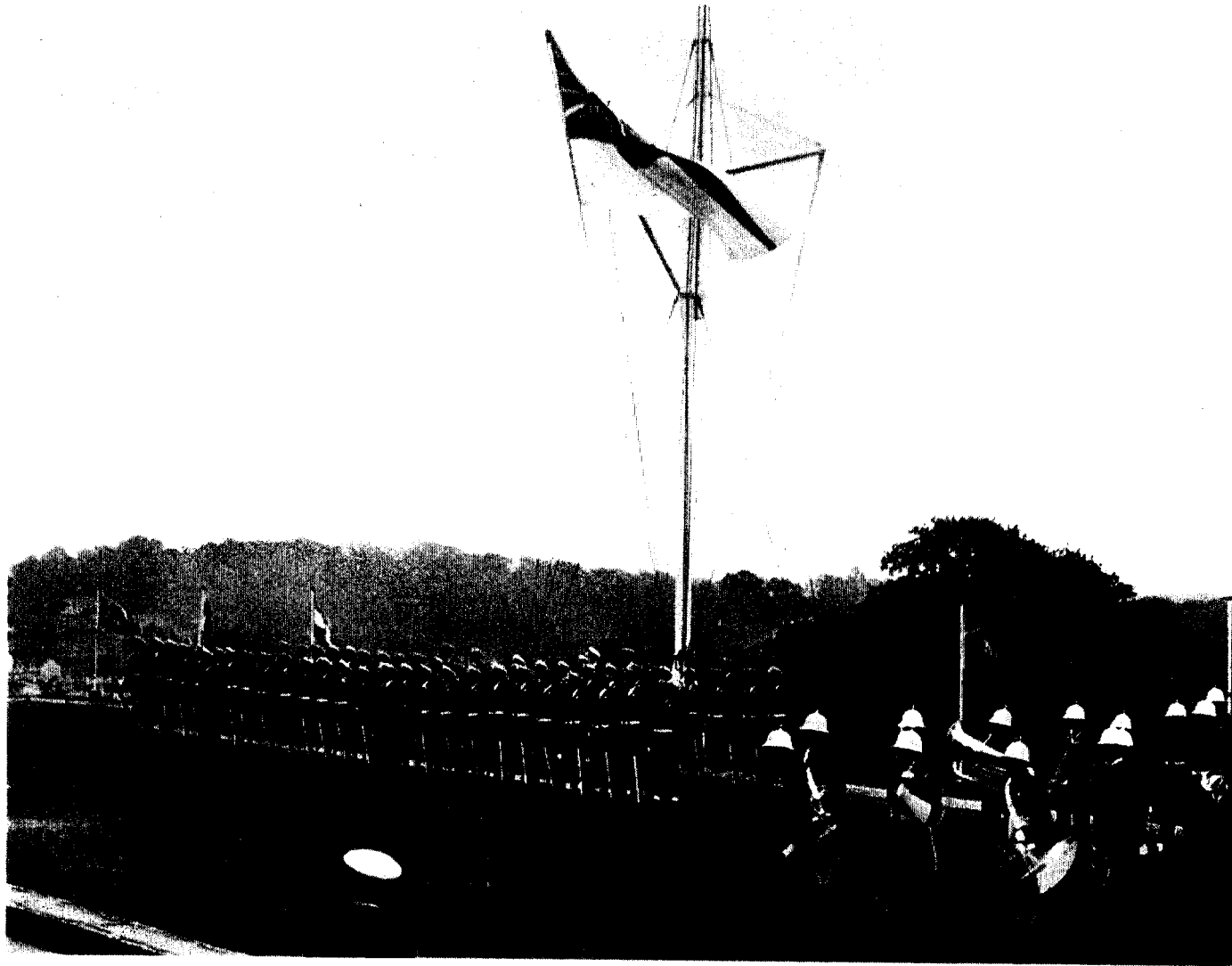
The printed time table reads as follows :—

- 1133 The Town Clerk arrives.
- 1135 The Admiral Superintendent, Devonport, arrives.
- 1136 The Engineer-in-Chief of the Fleet arrives.
- 1137 The Commander-in-Chief arrives.
- 1138 The Lord Mayor arrives.



THE FIRST SEA LORD LAYS THE FOUNDATION STONE

- 1140 The First Sea Lord arrives accompanied by The Countess Mountbatten and is greeted by a ' General Salute ' by the Guard and Band, which he then inspects. His flag is broken at the Masthead.
(*Circumstances permitting*) *Thunderer* Flight flies past, dipping in Salute.
- 1145 THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF (Admiral Sir Mark Pizey, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.) presents the Lord Mayor of Plymouth and the Lady Mayoress (Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Oats).
THE LORD MAYOR presents the Town Clerk and Mrs. Lloyd Jones, the Chief Constable and Mrs. Skittery, Miss Joan Vickers, M.P.
THE COMMANDING OFFICER, H.M.S. *Thunderer* (Captain Sir John Walsham, Bt., O.B.E.) presents :
- Sir Eric Seal (Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Works)
 - Mr. Bedford (Chief Architect, Ministry of Works)
 - Sir Richard Costain
 - Mr. Filer (Ministry of Works)
 - Mr. Turner (Assistant Chief Architect, Ministry of Works)
 - Mr. Furse (Architect, Ministry of Works).
- 1150 After the presentations, Captain Walsham invites the First Sea Lord on to the dais to address those present.
- 1200 At the conclusion of the First Sea Lord's address, Captain Walsham presents him with a glass container enclosing certain articles, and invites him to place it inside a lead casket which has already been placed in a cavity under the Stone.
Mr. Bedford, the Chief Architect, presents the Mason's Trowel and Gavel to the First Sea Lord.
The Chaplain then commences the Service, during which the First Sea Lord lays the Stone.
(*Caps and hats should be removed during the Service and replaced at the end of ' The Blessing '.*)
- 1215 Captain Walsham invites the First Sea Lord to sign the first page of the new Visitors Book, which, when the building is complete, will be kept in the Hall of the new Mess.
- 1217 The First Sea Lord descends from the dais and is conducted towards the East side of the New Building, where he is presented by the Executive Officer (Commander L. E. S. H. Le Bailly, O.B.E.) to The Clerk of Works (Mr. Rothwell), the Site Agent (Mr. Pearce, Messrs. Costains), Trades Union Officials, Instructional Officers, College Employees, and an old shipmate who served with him in H.M.S. *Lion*.
- 1220 The First Sea Lord descends the steps, accompanied by The Countess Mountbatten, and the Guard gives him a ' General Salute '. His car then draws forward and he and The Countess Mountbatten depart for Manadon House.
He is followed by :
The Lord Mayor
The Commander-in-Chief
The Engineer-in-Chief of the Fleet
The Admiral Superintendent
The Town Clerk
Mr. Bedford and Sir Richard Costain.
The Guard and Band then march off.



THE GUARD AND BAND

The Guard

The Guard of fifty midshipmen, drawn from officers of the Royal Navy, the Royal Australian Navy, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal New Zealand Navy, the South African Navy, the Indian Navy, the Pakistan Navy, the Burmese Navy and the Colombian Navy, was under the command of the senior officer under instruction—Lieutenant G. V. Buxton—with an officer of the Senior Basic Course as Guard Second in Command.

The Colour Party, fallen in behind the Guard, was under the command of an officer of the Ceylonese Navy. Behind the Guard and Colour Party, the flags of all the countries represented in them were flying.

After the Band had played the General Salute and the First Sea Lord's Flag had been broken at the masthead, the only hitch occurred, as the Captain's pennant could not be hauled down. The Commander's preoccupation during the remainder of the ceremony was rightly judged to be a mental struggle between the desire to send a midshipman to the masthead to clear the pennant, thereby drawing attention to it, or to endure, with such patience as he could muster, the subsequent ribald comments of his counterparts which, correctly, he anticipated would occur. As the mast had only just been erected and painted, he chose the latter course and contented himself by timing the interval between the departure of the last V.I.P. car and the first remark about the pennant. (Result—2 minutes 37 seconds.) His burden of depression, however, was lightened slightly by the following signal received at the end of the ceremony.

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| To : General | From : C-in-C. Plymouth |
| H.M.S. <i>Defiance</i> has a quantity of broad beans for sale. Ships requiring some should contact <i>Defiance</i> direct. | |

To the disappointment of the guests, the weather, which made flying at Roborough impossible, prevented the Fly Past of the *Thunderer* Flight, which was to have been 'talked in' to coincide exactly with the end of the General Salute. Though perhaps not as impressive as modern aircraft, the sight during the rehearsals of the Balliol and the Oxford flying wing-tip to wing-tip well below tree level, was something worth watching; though possibly some of the neighbours and the inhabitants of the 'Golden Hind' were rather relieved when the weather prevented further practice.

After the inspection of the Guard and the presentations, the First Sea Lord addressed the audience. Though space does not permit all his remarks to be recorded here, several paragraphs certainly cannot be omitted. The First Sea Lord said 'How proud and pleased I am to be given this opportunity of laying the Foundation Stone of the new Wardroom Mess. Indeed, it is more than a foundation stone—it is a milestone in the history of Manadon, in the history of the "E" Branch and in the history of the Royal Navy'. Continuing, he recalled that he had personal reasons for feeling pleased at coming to *Thunderer*. His father, when Second Sea Lord and Commander-in-Chief designate of the Grand Fleet if war had broken out, had flown his flag at sea for the last time in H.M.S. *Thunderer*, in command of the Blue Fleet in the summer manœuvres of 1912. Furthermore, as a boy of fifteen on leaving Osborne, he himself had done one term at Keyham before going to sea on his sixteenth birthday. He didn't know if it was that experience, but certainly a large number of excellent fellows in his term (the Exmouth Term) had gone in



GUESTS AT THE CEREMONY

for engineering, and the term had produced no less than three Rear Admirals (E). He continued ' As professional head of the Royal Navy, I would like to pay a tribute on behalf of the " Non-E.s " to the " E.s ". The Royal Naval Engineering College, as I've re-discovered going round Industry, has a reputation second to none in the world. I should say that it is the finest engineering college anywhere today. If proof were needed how highly it is thought of, you have only to look at the flags flying over there—more flags than N.A.T.O., and each representing a different nationality in the Guard. In laying this Foundation Stone on behalf of the Navy as a tribute to the Engineering Branch, it is, indeed, a proud moment for me.'

At the conclusion of the First Sea Lord's speech, Captain Sir John Walsham presented him with the container which the First Sea Lord placed inside the leaden casket, to be sealed beneath the Stone.

This container had within it :—

- A set of coins minted in 1956.
- A copy of *The Times* for 13th July, 1956.
- A list of officers serving in the College.
- A list of the Mess Committee.
- A copy of A.F.O. 1/56.
- The Form of Service and a programme of the Ceremony.
- A list of guests at the Ceremony.
- A copy of the College Magazine.
- The names of the Architect and Clerk of Works.
- A photograph of H.M.S. *Ark Royal*, probably the last big ship to be built.
- A photograph of the Commanding Officer.

After the container was placed in the cavity, Sir Richard Costain presented the First Sea Lord with a silver trowel and gavel as a memento of the occasion, and the Service started with the singing of the Hymn ' O God our Help in ages past '. After the Chaplain, the Reverend W. J. Marson, O.B.E., Th.L., had blessed the Stone and the congregation had said together part of Psalm 127, the First Sea Lord laid it, and then himself said the following prayer, written by the late Lieutenant-Commander Lord Hugh Beresford, his First Lieutenant in H.M.S. *Kelly*, who was killed, off Crete, in H.M.S. *Kipling*, while trying to save survivors from his own ship.

A Prayer for the Ship

' O God our Heavenly Father, bless our efforts to make this ship efficient in your service. Help us to keep in mind the real causes of war, dishonesty, greed, selfishness, and lack of love ; and to drive them out of this ship, so that she may be a pattern of the new world for which we are fighting.

Bless also our homes and families, give us the experience that there is no distance which cannot be bridged by your Holy Spirit, if we open our hearts to Him '.

This was followed by Drake's Prayer, Hymn 540 (Eternal Father, strong to save), the National Anthem and the Blessing.

When the Service had ended, the First Sea Lord signed his name on the first page of the new Visitors Book, which is to rest in the Hall of the New Mess, and also accepted an invitation to become the first Complimentary Life Member of the *Thunderer* Mess.

The Ceremony concluded with further presentations to the First Sea Lord and a final salute by the Guard.

The First Sea Lord and other distinguished guests then left for Manadon House to attend a luncheon party of sixty hosts and guests, after which the model and drawings of the new block were inspected, before the guests took their departure.

The College then relaxed for an hour or two, before welcoming nearly five hundred more guests to the biggest Ball for some years, but that, as they say, is another story.