

AN INVENTOR FOR THE CANVAS HOSE!

BY

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On the 15 July 1817 Captain William Fisher, in command of the 20 gun sloop *Cherub*, returned to Spithead. In fact, Fisher had been invalided home in the wake of a bout of fever contracted on the Guinea coast in West Africa. The following extract is taken from *De stemmate piscatoris*¹, an account of a Norfolk seafaring family:

On the 1st. August he wrote again to the Admiralty, proposing a plan for watering His Majesty's Ships, which consisted of pumping the fluid through canvas hose, which were joined by metal sockets of an ingenious pattern. This he revised and perfected while on half pay. It must, in these days of mechanical invention, seem incredible that until this time it was the practice to ship drinking water in casks.

William R. O'Byrne's *A naval biographical dictionary*² adds, on page 359:

Captain Fisher, while in the *Cherub*, suggested to the Admiralty the excellent plan, now in general adoption by our own and the French and Russian navies, of watering ships, for his subsequent completion of which, while on half pay, he received from the board its official thanks and a portion of his expenses.

together with this footnote:

when we reflect upon the enormous evil, both moral and physical, which was inseparable from the system of watering a fleet during the war, the calamitous and ever occurring effects of which must be so vividly present in the recollection of the senior members of the profession, and when we compare it with the simple, efficacious and inexpensive mode now in vogue, too much praise it must be owned cannot be awarded to the man who has been a happy instrument in a change so great. Captain Fisher has conferred a boon on the service and the country at large which cannot be overestimated.

References

1. F[isher], F.O. [1909]. *De stemmate piscatoris: a tale of sea toilers*. London, Jarrold.
2. O'Byrne, W. R. 1849. *A naval biographical dictionary, comprising the life and services of every living officer in Her Majesty's Navy* . . . London.

The editor is grateful to John Manson, former engineer officer and now of Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering Ltd., for drawing his attention to Captain Fisher's innovation.