1872 1972

H.M.S. VERNON

CENTENARY

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

HMS VERNON

1872 – 1972

EDITED BY

Instructor Lieutenant S Dicker, ACP, FRSA, FRGS, ROYAL NAVY

Admiral (later Admiral of the Fleet) Lord Fisher of Kilverstone OM, GCB.
As Commander J.A. Fisher he was the first Captain of HMS *Vernon* as the Torpedo Instructional Ship

PREFACE

This booklet was prepared with the object of combining some of the important, and in some cases amusing, events in *Vernon's* history into one publication. I hasten to add that this is by no means an original work. That was done by people long ago and much of the material has been extracted from two books published by the Wardroom Mess Committee – 'HMS *Vernon*, A History' compiled by Lt. G.B. Sayer, Royal Navy, and 'HMS *Vernon*, A Short History from 1930 to 1955' compiled by Commander E.D. Webb, Royal Navy.

My grateful thanks are due to the 'Evening News' offices for providing press cuttings for browsing, thereby enabling the story to be brought up to date. The great help given by Mr. A. Ellis, and Mr. J. Rose from the Illustrating Department, and Mr. S. Graham from the Photographic Department is also very much appreciated.

S. Dicker
Instructor Lieutenant, Royal Navy

Officers on Course – Class of 1888
R.K. Arbuthnot W.L. Grant D.R. De'Chair
H.A.S. Flyer W.C.M. Nicholson

INTRODUCTION

Although basically dealing with the 100 years of HMS *Vernon* since its establishment as a Torpedo Instructional Ship, no history could be really complete without a brief mention of the events leading up to September, 1872.

The controversial Admiral Vernon (born November 12th 1684) was the provider of a name to be made famous in the annals of the Royal Navy. Of the ships bearing the name, only the fourth actually belonged to the Royal Navy. The first three were privateers, ships privately owned, but employed by the Royal Navy for the sole purpose of being a nuisance to an enemy, and under an agreement that any prize taken was to be divided between the owners of the ship and the captors.

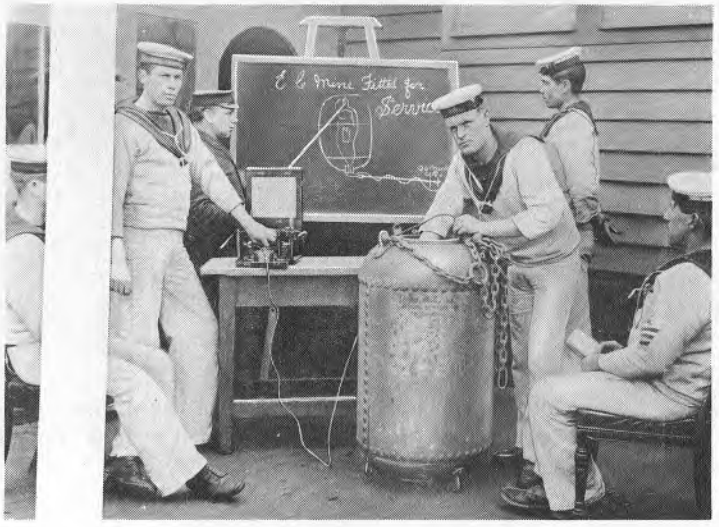
So the first of the *Vernon's* went to sea in 1740 and after an eventful period was listed as missing in 1744 and no further trace was found. By an unexplained coincidence, however, there appeared a second *Vernon* in 1741. The reason for the christening of yet another *Vernon,* indeed at the same port as the first one hailed from – Bristol – is a complete mystery. The second *Vernon* saw a similar lively period at sea, but in 1743 she was taken by the Spaniards and no doubt put to very good use.

It was the American War of Independence which saw the introduction of the third *Vernon.* Although there are no records of when she was built, and her length of service, her main periods of action were in 1781 in the Americas, and in 1782 against the Spaniards in European Waters.

In 1832 was launched the fourth, and the most famous of the *Vernons.* She was commissioned and saw service in home waters, the Americas, and West Indies Station, and her last tour of duty, in the East Indies preceded nineteen years of inaction in Chatham Dockyard.

Surprisingly when she emerged from obscurity in 1867, her first job was as a floating jetty for coaling, but the study of the torpedo was destined to bring *Vernon* back from ignominy. The ship was beginning to decline into a hulk but in 1872 it was decided to move her to Portsmouth as a tender to *Excellent* the Gunnery School, and there she was fitted up as a Torpedo Instructional Ship. At this transitional stage, the *Vernon* was commanded by one Commander J.A. Fisher, later Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Fisher.

Testing an early moored mine, circa 1880

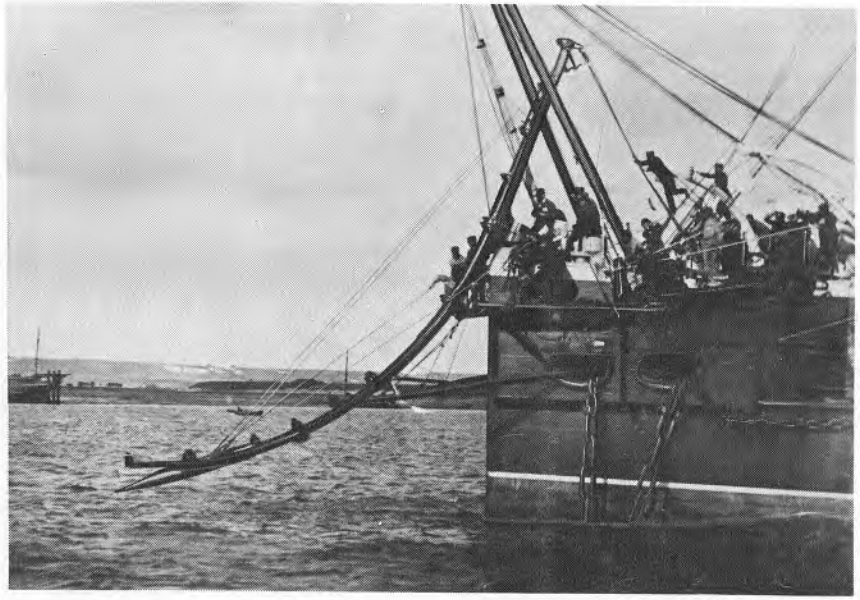


Wiring an electrical mine at the beginning of the Century

AN INDEPENDENT COMMAND

Torpedo warfare was growing rapidly to such a degree of importance that on April 26th 1876, *Vernon* broke away from *Excellent* to become an independent command. The hulk *Ariadne* was added to provide accommodation so that *Vernon* became entirely an instructional ship, and in addition, the hulk *Actaeon* was used as a workshop. Soon the name *Vernon* stood not only for the old frigate herself but for all the ships which were subsequently added to her. Amongst these other ships were *Donegal, Marlborough* and *Warrior* From 1874 to 1923, *Vernon* also had as Whitehead Experimental Tender (named after Mr. Robert Whitehead, the inventor of the locomotive torpedo) the *Vesuvius* a gunboat of 250 tons.

From being moored close to the Dockyard wall in Fountain Lake, *Vernon* was moved to a position in Portchester Creek in 1895 as the busy Fountain Lake was gradually becoming unsuitable. There she stayed until in 1923 *Vernon* was transferred ashore.



Early torpedo launching, circa 1890
Portsdown Hill can be seen in the background

HMS *Vernon* as she was in 1904

Early divers wearing cumbersome and uncomfortable suits

THE SHORE ESTABLISHMENT

Long before it actually took place, there was considerable thought given to the possibility of *Vernon* as a shore establishment. The ships were becoming leaky and insanitary and during the Great War, the Mining School, part of the *Vernon* complex, as a result of naval mining requirements outgrowing the capacity of the floating establishment, moved ashore to the south side of the Gunwharf.

Preparations to take over the whole of the Gunwharf (the other half being occupied by the Army) began in 1919. Considerable work was done on the buildings to make them ready to receive the Torpedo School, and, on October 1st 1923, the pennant of the Captain of HMS *Vernon* was hoisted on the Gunwharf, so marking the beginning of the shore establishment.

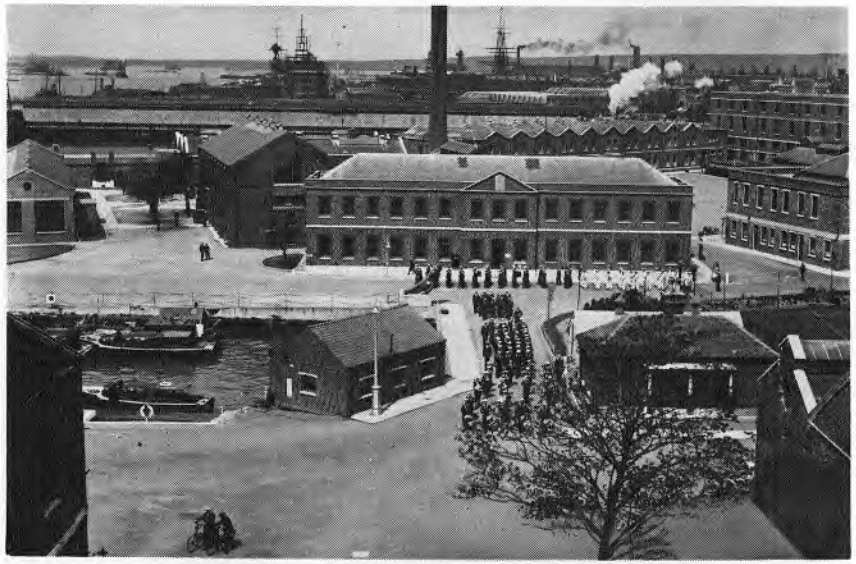
THE SETTLING IN PERIOD

Following the move ashore came the period of getting established as a shore base. Numerous events occurred, but it was mainly an unexciting routine. Basically, the establishment functioned around three experimental departments, Whitehead, Mining, and Electrical, and the *Vernon* Flotilla of five or six destroyers and a number of small mining tenders and trawlers. They were always fully employed.

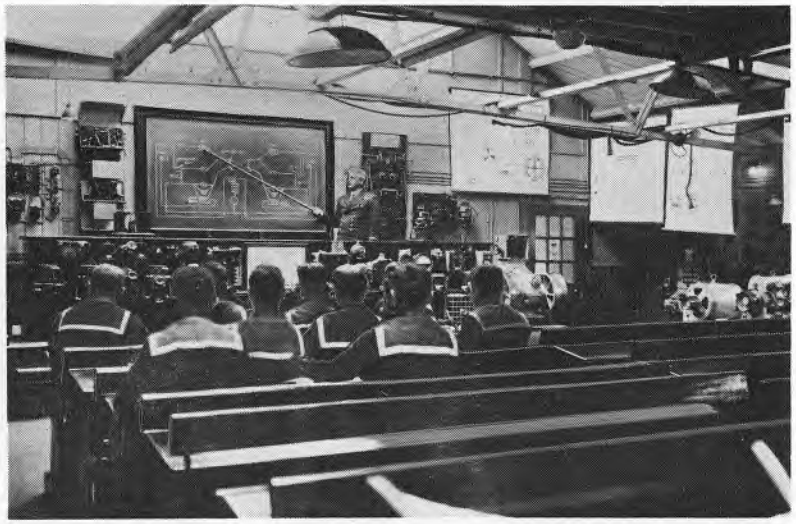
1924 saw the formation of a Bluejacket Band and a Sea Cadet Unit, but apart from the process of establishing *Vernon's* 'atmosphere' the most spectacular event didn't happen until 1935 with a premature bonfire to celebrate King George V's Jubilee.

The bonfire unfortunately happened to be in the shape of the Electrical Experimental Department and Instructional Mining. The sight and smell of smoke in the building was not unusual, so nobody bothered very much until the roof was blazing merrily. The City Fire Brigade and the newly formed R M Police Fire Brigade from the Dockyard arrived on the scene to put it out. The *Vernon* fire engine was held up for want of steam. Unfortunately the fire chose to occur on a Friday and the fire engine only raised steam on Thursdays.

After this *Vernon* played no special part in the Jubilee Review at Spithead, but gave a large party on Stoke's Bay Pier which caused such traffic jams that



Classes marching to instruction behind the Bluejacket Band, circa 1930



Instruction under way in Vesuvius Building, pre 1939

many people ran out of petrol from keeping their engines running.

With the onset of the Abyssinian War in 1935, the background to the build up to the Second World War unknowingly started. *Vernon* was asked to equip, urgently, a Controlled Mining Base Ship which duly sailed for the Middle East theatre.

Also in 1935 came the Motor Torpedo Boats. *Vernon* was responsible for the trials and training of this concept, and in 1936, M T B 01 was temporarily commissioned and with one other boat, took part in a special demonstration for King Edward VIII. M T B 01 was the first of H M Ships in which King Edward VIII embarked after his accession to the throne.

The Coronation Year of 1937 was a period of great activity for *Vernon* . A contingent was sent for street lining duty in London, and during the Spithead Review, *Vernon* staged all foreign libertymen, suitably staggering the times to avoid the Germans meeting the Russians, and the Russians meeting the Japanese.

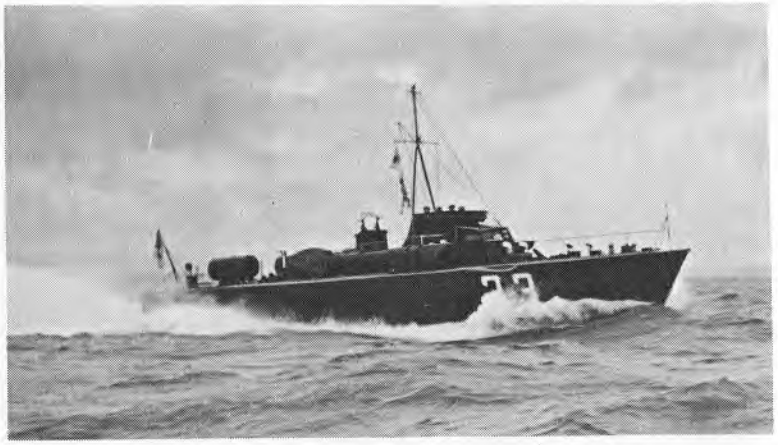
Whilst considerable interest was being shown in the development of the M T B 's much progress was being made with magnetic mines, and the first magnetic mine, suitable for laying from aircraft, was under development. Thought was also being given to countermeasures, and the cruiser *Curacoa* was fitted with coils designed to actuate our own magnetic mines at a safe distance from the ship.

In the autumn of 1938 came the Munich crisis, and everyone was employed, as if fatefully, in trench digging. An important outcome of the Munich crisis was the '*Vernon* Auxiliary Company'. The Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, recognised a distinct possibility, should war be declared, of the enemy mining the port, resulting in a two to three week closure before the minesweeping fleet worked up to full stride. Therefore, the idea was to establish a body of men preferably drawn from local yachtsmen who would engage themselves to answer a personal call from the C in C., independently of any order to mobilize. How they were to be collected and trained was left to the First Lieutenant, Lt. Cdr. J. Hext-Lewes. Seagoing training was started with picket boats and worked up to trawlers.

Indeed, the project was an enormous success. A few days before mobilization, the '*Vernon* Auxiliary Company' was called up as intended. They manned their four trawlers, and, being at sea before the outbreak of war, fully met all the requirements of the directive on which they were raised.

Pre-war HMS *Vernon*

Hecla Block is in the foreground and the diving tower dominates the background



Motor torpedo boat on patrol

WORLD WAR II

The War brought many physical changes to HMS *Vernon* and caused a considerable transformation of the whole Torpedo Branch. Also at this time, the coming of the Wrens added a little excitment to life. A fifty-strong party, under the command of one officer – Mrs. Brooking – arrived for duty, albeit in plain clothes.

The declaration of war saw hectic preparations – blackouts, shelters, fire-fighting drill, anti-aircraft defence, and the first impact was to fall on the Mining Department. Profiting from the Abyssinian experience, the Department was ready, but of vital importance was the recovery of a live enemy mine to discover the secrets of what was being used by the Germans. Luck evaded the 'mine hunters' until November 1939, when a live mine was reported to have been dropped in shallow water off Shoeburyness.

In fact, the subsequent examination of this mine confirmed that all the countermeasures being developed at *Vernon* were based on sound intelligence of the enemy's weapons.

During this initial period, *Vernon* lost her M T B commitment, passing to HMS *Hornet* at Gosport, and by March 1940, the numbers coming through for Seaman Torpedoman training were so great that within four months, the whole of the instruction of ST's was transferred to HMS *St. Vincent* at Gosport.

The Whitehead Department saw the destroyers of the Vernon Flotilla vanish overnight, but were able to carry on at Weymouth with the discharge trials of destroyers, submarines and coastal craft, as faster models of well-tried surface and submarine torpedoes were just coming into service.

The Electrical Department, meanwhile, was carrying out a thorough investigation of systems on board every accessible ship, where damage was reported through enemy action. The first anti-submarine instruction was also added in 1940 to *Vernon's* task with the installation of an anti-submarine attack teacher. The evacuation from Dunkirk featured in *Vernon's* initial activities, but then came the Blitz.

The 12th August 1940 saw the first serious raid on Portsmouth, but it wasn't until twelve days later that *Vernon* received the first bombs. In September, the threat of bombing resulted in the Degaussing Department moving to Ardencaple Castle, opposite Helensburg.

December saw a particularly nasty raid with high explosives and incendiaries. Damage and casualties were not particularly severe and in January came another

Wartime recruitment of Wrens

Preparations for the War – trench digging

heavy raid, again with high explosives and incendiaries. The majority of the high explosives fell on open ground, and apart from making rather large holes, failed to do much damage. However hundreds of incendiaries were dropped, and fire became a serious menace.

Other sections now started to move out of *Vernon*. The Controlled Mining section moved to Hillside House, Purbrook where they installed themselves for the remainder of the War. The Mine Design workshop moved to Hinxman's Garage, Fareham and the Electrical Department also 'packed their bags'. They housed themselves in West Leigh Cottage on the same estate as the Mine Design Department.

There then came a period of relative calm and advantage was taken of this to the full. To keep morale strong, sports events were held and even dances took place in the gym for Wrens and Ship's Company. But March 1941 brought two successive nights of very bad bombing. High explosives and incendiaries caused severe damage. The Captain was wounded, and fatal casualties resulted amongst the firefighters.

The second night, that of Monday 10th March, was the worst night *Vernon* was to endure. A large proportion of the instructional buildings were destroyed and with constant interruptions from air raid alarms, neither the Training nor the Trials Departments could do their job properly. It was decided then that *Vernon* must be completely evacuated of the principal occupations.

By April most of the Trials section was on the move. The Mining Department took over West Leigh Cottage from the Electrical Department and the latter moved to East Leigh House in the same neighbourhood. The Mining Department also set up trials parties based in Arrochar, Loch Long, for moored mines, and at Weston-super-Mare for ground mines.

The Whitehead Department, by a long-standing arrangement with the Superintendent of the RN Torpedo Factory moved to Alexandria in Dumbartonshire and after early leanings toward the west coast, it was decided that the Mine sweeping Department should move to the Firth of Forth area, where, for security reasons, their address took the highly original form of P O Box 10, Edinburgh.

Meanwhile, Instructional Book Production moved to 'Ryecroft' a large house at Ropley, near Alresford, from No. 5 South Parade, Southsea, where they had been working for nearly a year.

Even while the moves were in progress the Germans were gradually contributing to *Vernon's* changing face. Constant raiding produced even more damage, but all the while casualities were miraculously light. Morale was incredibly high, and to a great extent, the tone was set by the retired Warrant and pensioner Chief and Petty Officers.

One of the most interesting moves was that of the training and instructional side to Roedean School near Brighton. It was while on their way back from a discouraging inspection of Eastbourne College that a *Vernon* team singled out Roedean. One of the deciding factors in choosing the school was that parts of the Brighton area were fed with direct current which was essential for driving many of the machines invisaged being imported from *Vernon.*

On 3rd May 1941, the offical transfer to Roedean took place, but the initial obstacle was to persuade a small Army contingent, who moved in when the girls were evacuated to Keswick, to move out. This eventually came through a mixture of official and unofficial negotiating.

The incoming Navy much to the amazement of the outgoing Army, displayed a fine disregard of the Luftwaffe by flaunting a large White Ensign and insisting on holding regular Divisions. However Roedean was never seriously attacked from the air, even though occupying a most exposed position.

All the time, the number of ratings employed, and on course, at Roedean was steadily rising, but in August 1943, the congestion was somewhat relieved when Mining Instructional moved back to *Vernon*. However, life was still very busy at Roedean and numerous important visitors included the then Lt. General Montgomery and the Duchess of Kent. A most frequent and welcome visitor was of course the Headmistress, Miss Tanner.

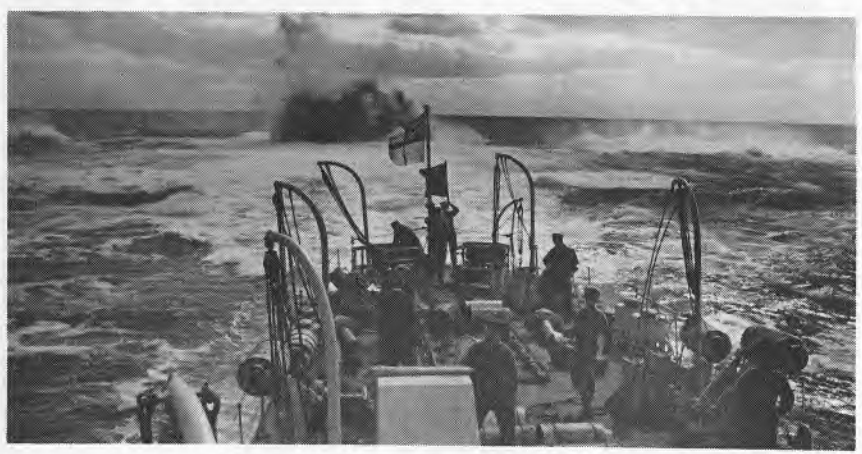
With the news of the D-Day invasion, a No. 1 Ensign was hoisted at colours, and subsequently presented to Roedean School, where it now hangs in the chapel.

Meanwhile at Portsmouth, *Vernon* was having an uphill struggle with a constantly changing and not over-occupied population. The Captain encouraged every morale boosting exercise that could be thought of. However, *Vernon* was not without some very busy moments, including in September 1941, a visit from a Russian military mission who came primarily to see the German mining exhibits.

Vernon's responsibilities, other than Torpedomen of whom until 1943 there were very few, included the command fire - fighting school and a mine-

disposal team. However, early in 1943, the Torpedomen began to come back. Before the end of the year, the Cadet Corps, which had been disbanded at the beginning of the War, was revived.. For two months before D-Day, *Vernon* accommodated as many as possible of Force S, under the command of Rear Admiral A.G. Talbot. After the landings the flying bombs made their debut, but fortunately for *Vernon* most generally sailed on over Portsdown Hill. Towards the end of the War, on 16th November, 1944, King George VI visited *Vernon* and took the salute at Divisions.

During the years following the Blitz, much thought was being given to the rebuilding programme for when the Exiles were ready to be received back. Just before the end of the War however, *Vernon* took on yet another responsibility, that of diving, which became a Torpedo Branch commitment. A diving school known as *Vernon* (D) was established at Brixham, South Devon in November 1944. The task was not only to train divers, but to be a 'home' for the 'P' parties, teams for divers trained to search captured ports and harbours for mines and booby traps. These teams had been established before *Vernon* (D) but had no definite base. They were largely responsible for the rendering safe of liberated ports after the D-Day landings, and in the final drive in the spring of 1945, diving and mining history was made when an officer made safe a German pressure mine for the first time underwater.



Anti-submarine attack using depth charges

A later anti-submarine warfare system -
'The Hedgehog'- which superseded the depth charge

THE TORPEDO AND ANTI-SUBMARINE BRANCH

Prior to the formation of the TAS Branch many of the Exiles started to return to *Vernon*. Roedean was vacated by mid-July 1945, and in August, the Whitehead Department moved to Alverstoke before finally re-appearing at *Vernon* in June 1946. *Vernon* (D) at Brixham closed down, and moved their administration to Portsmouth, although towards the end of 1946, they had moved, yet again, to *Lochinvar* to give birth in due course to 'Clearance Diving'. There they joined the Minesweeping Department, which had moved to Port Edgar from Fettes College, the latter ceasing to operate from *Vernon* for some years. April 1946 saw the return of the Book Production Department, but the Mining and Electrical Departments remained at Havant for the time being.

The job of welding the Torpedo and Anti-Submarine Branches into one fell upon Captain J. Hughes-Hallett. He arrived at *Vernon* in June 1946 and at once faced considerable problems, not the least being the congestion of personnel. With some effort this was gradually relieved and quite a burden was taken off *Vernon's* shoulders when the Electrical Trials Department moved to *Collingwood.*

A tremendous amount of thought and preparatory work was required before the TAS Branch could get under way. Many establishments besides *Vernon* were involved including *Osprey, Defiance, Collingwood* and *Lochinvar.* Admiralty departments, themselves affected in the change, had to be consulted about what was going on. Conditions for all the new TAS rates, numbers required, drafting, pay etc. had to be settled, syllabuses and qualifications made out and so on. A start had already been made on conversion courses to transform Torpedo, and Anti-Submarine officers and ratings, into 'TAS'. The future structure of the trials departments had to be considered, as well as the possible need for a unified maintenance branch.

In an effort to implement a smoothly running organization *Vernon* initiated a new departmental structure – Administration, Instructional, and Sea Trials and Development. So, with the latter department co-ordinating the Torpedo, Underwater Defence, Mining and Diving Sections, the Torpedo and Anti-Submarine Branch was born on 10 October 1946. Later, in 1948, the Control Section was added to cover all aspects of TAS Control problems.

At the time of the formation of the Branch it was clear that the approved re-building scheme for *Vernon* had given way to the Government's rehousing programme and it would be some time before any of the permanent buildings would be seen. Something fairly drastic had to be done if full TAS instruction

was to be going by April 1947 which was the directive. To meet the situation, Asdic sets were installed in *Ramillies*, one of two battleships allocated to *Vernon* to provide accommodation and instructional space, and the top floor of Warrior Block, the ratings accommodation, was converted for Anti-Submarine instruction.

Five large huts in *Hornet* were lent in August 1946 for the training of third class rates, and of all TAS ratings. On the reduction of *Hornet's* accommodation in the summer of 1947, alternative lecture rooms were found in Clarence Barracks, which were used until June 1948, when 'Pound' huts were completed in *Vernon.*

It was decided that all sea training, including torpedo running should be carried out off Portland. In January 1947, two 'Algerine' Class minesweepers, *Pluto* and *Fancy* arrived, and classes travelled between *Vernon* and *Osprey* in them, undertaking minesweeping training on the way.

By the end of 1947, the general run-down of numbers from the release of 'hostilities only' ratings, and the progress made in the installation of Anti-Submarine equipment ashore enabled the *Ramillies* to be dispensed with. At the same time, the conversion courses in *Vernon* and *Osprey* of Anti-Submarine and Torpedo officers into 'TAS' did much to blend the two branches into one. Torpedo officers began to feel at home in *Osprey* and Anti-Submarine officers in *Vernon.*

It was not to be expected, however, that all these changes and innovations and the drastic methods that were needed to carry some of them through would be beloved by all. Credit will always be due to the Commander, G.C. Blundell, for his splendid work in helping to achieve his Captain's aim of bringing *Vernon* to the highest pitch as the central TAS School, and by the summer of 1948 when Captain Hughes-Hallett left, it was clear that the TAS Branch was well established on firm foundations and that *Vernon* was fitted for her new role.

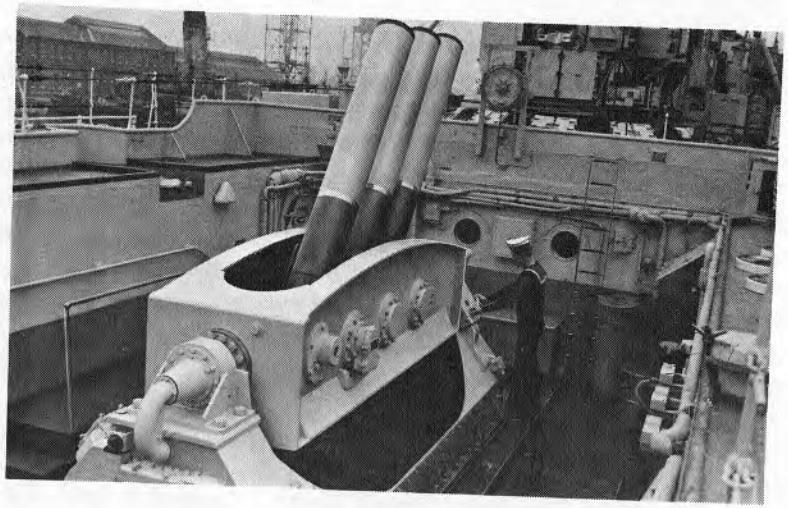
YEARS OF ADJUSTMENT

With the establishment of the TAS Branch, *Vernon* proceded to consolidate the new concept. The original idea of combining the specialist qualifications of the Torpedo Branch and Anti-Submarine Branch into that of 'Torpedo Detector' proved too difficult. Second and third class ratings were divided into Control Ratings (UC), Weapons Ratings (UW) and Minesweeping, Minelaying and Seaward Defence Ratings (MD). In 1952, this sub-specialization was extended to the first class rate, and it is now only the TAS instructor who is expected to know all about everything. Just before this last move, it was decided that all TAS ratings must be trained in mine countermeasures and seaward defence, so the (MD) sub-specialisation rate was abolished. The conversion of Torpedo, and Anti-Submarine officers into 'TAS' was completed by 1950, except for a small number of Gunners (T).

The mechanical maintenance of TAS weapons remained a problem for a year or two after the formation of the TAS Branch, but it was decided that the Ordnance side of the Engineering Branch should be trained to look after all weapons, TAS as well as Gunnery. The Instructional Torpedo Section was, therefore, gradually converted into an Ordnance Section.

During the last war, a great hazard with anti-submarine warfare was the inability of ships to be effective unless they were at very short range, and in the early stages of the war, whether a submarine was hit or not largely depended on luck. Successive improvements to the weapons system led eventually to the medium range sonar detection concept indicating the start of a great stride forward in anti-submarine warfare which was to bring about a greatly increased operational anti-submarine effectiveness. The initial medium range sonar trials were in fact carried out in HMS *Brocklesby* then commanded by Lt. Cdr. S. Farquharson-Roberts, now Captain S. Farquharson-Roberts, OBE, ADC, the present Captain of HMS *Vernon* .

In March 1951 the trials side of mine countermeasures was transferred from *Lochinvar* to *Vernon* and a new section was formed in the Trials Department to take on this commitment. The following year *Vernon* acquired two further responsibilities: in the summer, the training of clearance divers was transferred from *Lochinvar* and the material side of the seaward defence organisation (the mines, loops and laying) passed to *Vernon* . Also in 1952, the Trials Department took over responsibility for degaussing equipment trials in the United Kingdom, and a year later the responsibility for all degaussing ranges in Portsmouth.



The Mortar Mk. 10 anti-submarine warfare weapon

H.M.S. *Brocklesby*

This frigate undertook initial trials of the medium range sonar

In Coronation Year, *Vernon* was the centre of great activity, mainly connected with the Review. As the nearest establishment to Spithead, *Vernon* became the landing place for all foreign officers and ratings. Every important notice was translated into eleven languages, and a census showed that 45,000 libertymen landed in one week. On the day of the Review, one thousand VIP's were embarked from the quarterdeck in three hours. They included three royal families, all the ambassadors of the countries involved, and many public figures.

At this time, there was a great sense of 'picking-up steam'. Coronation Year saw the first of the 'Families Days' where families could come and see *Vernon* 'at home'. Welcome arrivals were the first - of - class minesweeper *Coniston* and the inshore minesweeper *Inglesham* who were subjected to thorough sea acceptance trials. As soon as more of these ships were available, *Vernon* was allotted two 'Coastals' and two 'Inshores' which greatly improved the scope of training. There was also a great wave of building activity, and in 1954, work was started on the long-term rebuilding plan. The introduction of the helicopter landing strip provided yet another step forward. Previously, helicopters had landed on the football pitch or on a blitzed area, neither of which were particularly satisfactory.

The Main Gate decorated for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation

Typical of a routine job – the disarming of a Mark 17 mine

Making way for new buildings in the mid 1950's

TO THE CENTENARY YEAR

With the long-term building programme a new name was to appear in the *Vernon* annals – that of Creasy. As part of the considerable new development plan, a brand new instructional block was to be name after the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral of the Fleet Sir George Creasy. Considerable modernization was also incorporated in this plan, and to date the South, East and West Wings have been completed and will be joined within a short time by the Central Block.

The Chief and Petty Officers benefitted from the new plans with new accommodation blocks, and gradually as the rebuilding plans materialized from the drawing boards, the ratings quarters of Warrior Block came under the painter's brush in 1959, and a 'face-lift' was implemented.

Whilst improvements were being made to the 'brickwork' the technical side of life was by no means forgotten. In 1960, trials were being held with a new underwater communicating system in which transistors allowed divers to talk continuously with their colleagues on the surface without the use of a conventional microphone before the mouth. Amongst other innovations were a new type of diving suit – eliminating the heavy and weighty equipment hitherto worn, as well as the surface pump teams – new lightweight under-garments of foam rubber composition, replacing the woollen underclothes worn by divers, and a headlight similar to that worn by coal miners, to take the place of a hand-torch.

A sad note for the many divers of this period was the farewell to the diving ship *Deepwater,* the jumping off platform for so many naval divers. *Deepwater* was the ex-German experimental torpedo boat *Walter Holzapfel.* brought from Hamburg in 1945. The ship had really ended her days being leaky and a great fire hazard. The divers had to take great care not to rasp their suits against the crustacea on the hull. Even the practice limpet mines would not stick.

A busy 1961 saw the transfer of one of the Navy's NATO commitments from *Osprey* to *Vernon* . Anti-submarine warfare instruction for NATO personnel was centralized as part of the medium-term policy for *Vernon* , but there was never any shortage of opportunities to practice the various roles that *Vernon* stood for. Minesweepers, part of the 5th Minesweeping Squadron, were to join the 2nd and 10th Minesweeping Squadrons, and together with ships of the West German and Danish Navies were to set about clearing two channels through a World War II mine area in the North Sea. This was to enable the Post Office's latest cable layer *Alert* to lay a submarine telephone cable from

Britain to Borkum in Germany, and to Fanu in Denmark. Indeed later, a new concept of 'crash helmets' was introduced for personnel involved in this exercise. The 'crash helmets' were to be worn in case a mine exploded and lifted a man against the deckhead.

Important visitors continued to pass through *Vernon's* hands. In 1964, the Prince of Wales, then aged fifteen, spent a week at *Vernon* with a party of Sea Cadets where an intensive sea training programme was followed with cadets of the Gordonstoun School Combined Cadet Force of which Prince Charles was then a member. In 1965 a party of six MP s and a peer embarked on a fact finding mission of deep-diving establishments in the Portsmouth Command, and *Vernon* , naturally, was a high priority.

Another sad day for *Vernon* occurred in January 1966, as the link with the sea was somewhat curtailed. The 1st Mine Counter Measures Squadron, based on *Vernon* sailed for Port Edgar, Scotland, where the Navy's minesweeping force was being concentrated. They sailed before the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Varyl Begg, and *Vernon's* officers and ratings lined the waterfront to see them off. Naval ships outside the harbour fired red rockets in salute, and *Dolphin's* band played them out.

The following month, a *Vernon* man was responsible for the closure of most of London's bridges and tunnels. He was Lieutenant Colin Churcher, who was called from a Spanish class at Highbury Technical College to travel to London to deal with a sensitive 550lb German bomb. The bomb, only a few yards from Blackfriars Bridge, was subsequently removed, taken down the Thames thereby causing the bridge and tunnels to be closed as it was taken past, and detonated at sea. This was just another of the near daily events which *Vernon's* experts were, and still are, called to deal with.

In September 1968 came a most interesting link. *Vernon* established a relationship with the French town of Vernon-sur-Seine, near Paris. This came about through a common interest in an 11th Century Crusader, who became St. Adjutor, the patron saint of swimmers and sailors. St. Adjutor was born in the town of Vernon towards the end of the 11th Century, and he fought for 17 years as a Crusader. Admiral Vernon, whose name the establishment carries, was descended from the same family as St. Adjutor.

At the end of 1968, yet another new building was completed at *Vernon* and named after the school's most famous graduate – Scott of the Antarctic The building provided up-to-date accommodation for 174 junior ratings and 17 Petty Officers.

The Ikara missile being launched from a Royal Australian Navy ship

Aerial view of HMS *Vernon* with heliport in foreground

But still the routine work went on, amongst the most spectacular being the detonation of a 1500 lb. bomb on the Channel bed, three miles south-east of Nab Tower in July 1971. In January 1972, a twelve-man team led by Lieutenant O'Driscoll recovered a ten ton Sea King helicopter from the bed of the Channel at a depth of 230 feet, for which the team was awarded the Commander-in-Chief's Commendation for particularly dangerous work. In March, when a hovercraft belonging to a local Company capsized whilst coming ashore in rough weather, the prompt action of the diving team from *Vernon* led to yet another Commander-in-Chief's Commendation.

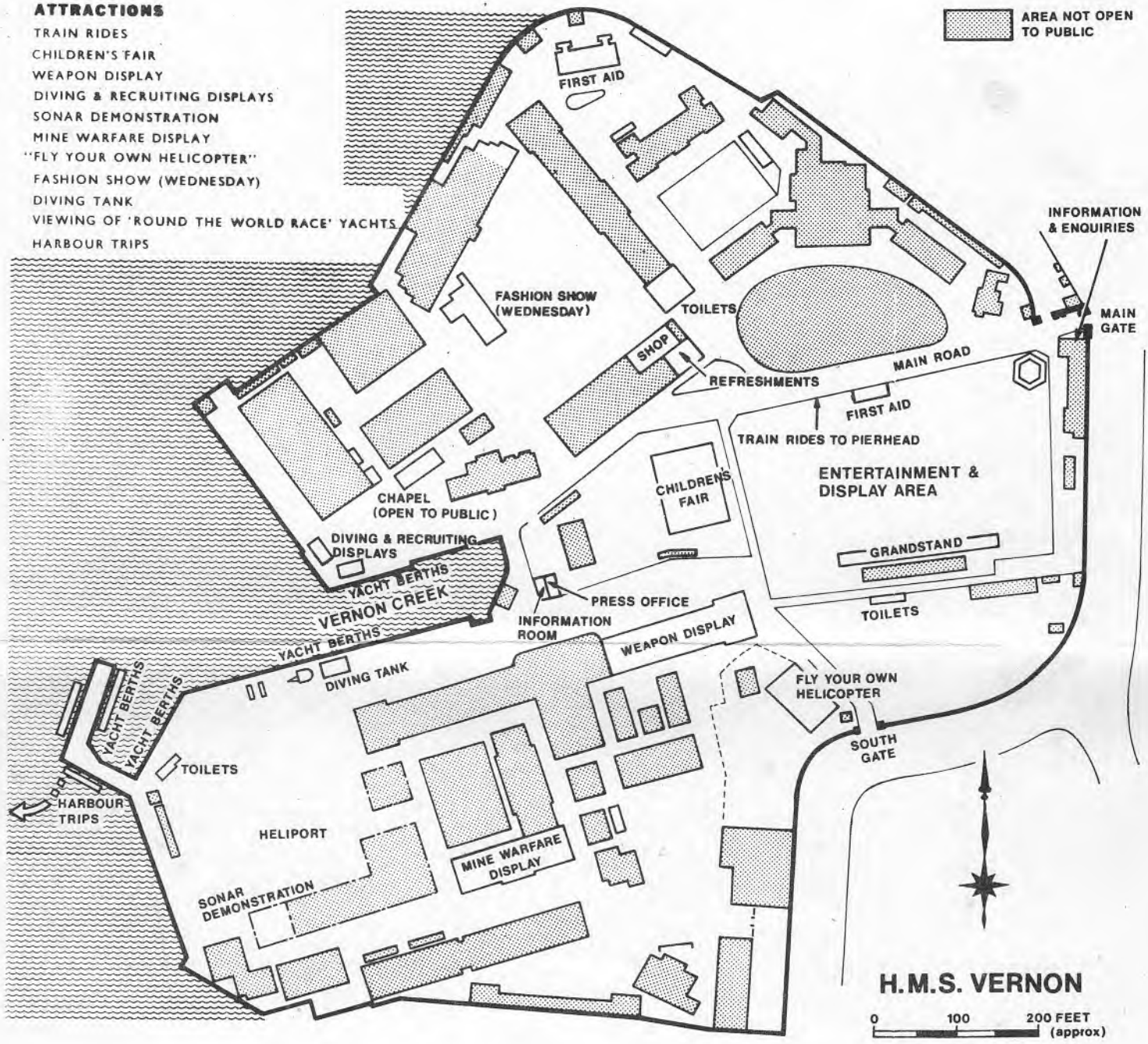
Just two months later *Vernon* resumed her old role of supporting mine-sweepers and the newer concept of minehunters. The establishment became the base for the newly formed 2nd Mine Counter Measures Squadron. This led to the enlargement of a section, known as the Portsmouth Craft Group,which had already been established to deal with the maintenance of all small ships, including Reserves, in the area.

For many years, the torpedo and anti-submarine warfare role had proceded undaunted. The generation of homing torpedoes was represented by a model of the Mark 30 situated at the Main Gate, and the latest torpedo, the Mark 24, is at present being used for training purposes at *Vernon*. To bring *Vernon* into the missile age, a new anti-submarine weapon, the Ikara, appeared, but in the overall picture of anti-submarine warfare, the greatest innovation has been with the rapidly growing awareness of the team concept which really stemmed from the development of the 'Match System' whereby ships operated, and still do, in conjunction with torpedo carrying helicopters. Modern electronic techniques now enable sonar information to be computerized and fed into the anti-submarine missile with the ultimate aim of developing into a completely automated information and weapons system. Close liaison with the Royal Air Force and their Nimrod aircraft provide yet another modern day concept.

And so history continues to be made. Recently a fond memory was brought back with the visit of Roedean School to *Vernon*, where the girls and staff spent the day, with the girls providing a challenge in the form of a lacrosse match. This was one occasion when *Vernon* had to concede a narrow defeat, but in the true spirit, a challenge has been put out for a return match.

ATTRACTIONS

TRAIN RIDES
CHILDREN'S FAIR
WEAPON DISPLAY
DIVING & RECRUITING DISPLAYS
SONAR DEMONSTRATION
MINE WARFARE DISPLAY
"FLY YOUR OWN HELICOPTER"
FASHION SHOW (WEDNESDAY)
DIVING TANK
VIEWING OF 'ROUND THE WORLD RACE' YACHTS
HARBOUR TRIPS



H.M.S. VERNON FAMILIES AND OPEN DAYS SEPT. 4th and 5th