

FROM THE ARCHIVES HMS STORK

► The arrival of an old ship at Hammersmith brought fears of young criminals housed on the river. But, as **Anne Wheeldon** reveals, the reality was very different

ON A quiet March Sunday in 1913, thousands of spectators lined the bridges and embankments of the Thames to watch the stately progress of *HMS Stork* as she was towed by two tugs up the river from Deptford to a permanent mooring off Upper Mall, Hammersmith.

The iron-framed, timber-clad, 450-ton ship, built at Poplar, east London, was launched in 1882 and first saw service as a gunboat and surveying vessel, mainly off the coast of Africa where she was the first ship flying the White Ensign to navigate the Zambesi river.

She later acted as a hospital ship at Chatham and eventually as a store ship at Dover.

In 1911, the Admiralty offered *HMS Stork* to the Kensington branch of the Navy League to be fitted out for use as a training ship at Hammersmith.

At first there was some ill-informed opposition to



IN THE DOCK: Misguided residents feared the *HMS Stork* as they believed the crew were boy convicts

the project from residents of The Mall who feared that the presence of 'convict boys out of the slums' would lead to the

devaluation of property and the loss of amenities.

In fact, the scheme was a new one and provided

instruction to working boys aged 12 to 17 who wished to join the Royal Navy or mercantile marine.

The older boys, who paid for board and lodging out of their wages, went ashore to jobs mainly in the West End and on their return came under naval control.

Cadets were required to be of good character and had to pass a standard of physical fitness including the ability to swim 50 yards in clothes.

Preference was given to sons of ex-servicemen.

There was accommodation for around 50 boys. The long upper deck of the *Stork* was devoted to drills.

The boys' hammocks and the officers' cabins were on the main deck, and a gymnasium was built in the stripped-out engine room and machinery space. Small cutters, on which the boys learned boat work, ferried passengers to and from the shore.

The routine on the *Stork* was designed to teach habits of loyalty, discipline and duty.

The cadets in their smart uniforms were a familiar sight to Hammersmith residents, especially during the annual regattas and the church parades at Holy Innocents, Paddenswick Road.

The vicar, Rev HC Eden, was instrumental in raising funds to set up and support the training ship.

Money came from subscriptions and fundraising as well

as from the Navy League and, later, the British Legion.

Having survived bombing and fire in the Second World War, the *Stork* was condemned by dry rot in her timbers.

The last cadet stepped ashore in December 1948 – and 18 months later the *Stork* left Hammersmith to be broken up.

For more than 35 years she had been one of the best-known



Residents of The Mall feared the convict boys would affect house prices

and loved landmarks in west London and had prepared hundreds of boys for a career at sea.

• Got a local history question? Email: handfnews@lbhf.gov.uk and we will consider it for our *From The Archives* series.

• The *H&F Archives and Local History Centre* is open to the public and located at *The Lilla Huset, 191 Talgarth Road, Hammersmith*. For more details, call 020 8741 5159.

Public Board Meeting

for NHS
Hammersmith
and Fulham

25 March 2009
at 2pm

Small Hall
Hammersmith
Town Hall, King St
London, W6

Members of the
public are
welcome to
attend

The agenda
will be available
one week before
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