HMS CLAVERHOUSE
FORTH DIVISION
ROYAL NAVAL RESERVE



To Commemorate the Centenary
of the Naming of HMS Claverhouse
on Saturday 16th December 1922

HMS Claverhouse - A brief history

Naval Reserve activity in the Edinburgh and Leith Area started in 1913, when a small outlying unit of the Clyde Division Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve was formed in Leith over eight years before HMS *Claverhouse* became a Royal Naval Reserve name. By the time of mobilisation in 1914 this Unit, known as the Edinburgh Companies RNVR, which trained in a warehouse in Leith, consisted of about eight officers and about 100 ratings. The instruction was limited, the equipment being sparse, and there were no social facilities. During the 1914-18 War, most of the officers and ratings were sent to the Royal Naval Division which served with distinction, from Gallipoli to Antwerp.

In 1921 the RNVR started afresh in Edinburgh as a sub-unit of the Clyde Division, in a shed on one of the RN Boom Defence Units in Granton. Initially, there were about four officers and about 30 ratings. In 1922 the monitor M23 was converted to a drill ship and towed to the West Old Dock, Leith, and in December of that year she was commissioned as "HMS *Claverhouse*", being given that name by the Marchioness of Graham, the wife of Commodore the Marquess of Graham, VD, RNVR (later the 6th Duke of Montrose), one of the founders of the RNVR in 1903. The naming ceremony took place on 16th December 1922. The drill ship HMS *Claverhouse* was to serve the Reserve until she was scrapped in 1959. Her name was a tribute to the Marquess of Graham's famous ancestor John Graham of Claverhouse, 1st Viscount Dundee, who lost his life leading the Highland clans loyal to the Jacobite cause to victory at the Battle of Killiecrankie.

M23 was built on the Clyde in 1915 as part of the Emergency War Programme. After service in the Mediterranean and the Dover Patrol, she served in the British intervention in Russia in 1919. Intended as a shore bombardment vessel, her primary armament was a 9.2 inch gun, but as this was required on the Western Front it was removed in 1917 and a 7.5 inch gun was fitted instead.

The Clyde Division was re-named the Scottish Division in 1922, and in 1926 the Scottish Division was divided on a geographical basis. *Claverhouse* then became part of the East Scottish Division, which had units in Dundee and Leith, the Headquarters being in Leith. The establishment there grew during the years 1921 to 1939, training facilities increased, and at mobilisation in 1939 there were about 33 officers and about 400 ratings available, of whom five officers and 30 ratings were killed during the War. The training of officers and ratings between the wars had been aimed at enabling them to bring the Reserve Fleet up to war complement, and those from *Claverhouse* were duly mobilised into almost every type of ship, from battleships to motor torpedo boats.

During the 1939-45 War the drill ship *Claverhouse* was used as the Headquarters of the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Leith and Granton, until the summer of 1940, and for the rest of the War as the Headquarters of the Merchant Navy Defence Organisation.

In April 1946 the first Commanding Officer of the post-war Division was appointed, and in August of that year the drill ship *Claverhouse* was returned to the RNVR. When the Division was re-formed in 1946 there was a major change. The pre-1939 East Scottish Division was abolished and the Forth and Tay Divisions became separate commands. In September 1946 the first post-war meeting of the officers on the permanent list in the area took place in the wardroom and after this meeting the officers began to meet fortnightly, and after some months weekly, for lectures. By December 1946 there were 12 officers



Mary Louise Douglas-Hamilton, 6th Duchess of Montrose (formerly the Marchioness of Graham) and James Graham, 6th Duke of Montrose, in his uniform as Commodore of the RNVR

and 16 ratings. Proper drill and routine were introduced in November 1947, and by June 1949 there were 46 officers and 145 ratings. Eventually, membership of the RNVR became the one certain way to ensure National Service in the RN and young men joined willingly, many of them returning to the Division after their National Service.

The allocation of Motor Minesweepers as Sea Tenders after



Above: The Monitor M23 (with 7.5 inch gun).
Jane's Fighting Ships 1919

HMS *Claverhouse* in West Old Dock, Leith.
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HMS *Killiecrankie* (the Motor Minesweeper MMS 1089). ***National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth***

the War to all the RNVR Divisions was also a revolutionary step for the Reserve as it was the first recognition of the fitness of Reserve Officers to take command of HM ships in peace time. *Claverhouse* received MMS 1089 in time for summer training in 1949. She was the first HMS *Killiecrankie,* and was so named after she was received. She brought another change, as officers and ratings were largely trained in her on fourteen-day deployments, initially one or two but latterly three or four annually, and accordingly they spent less time training in ships of the Fleet.

It soon became apparent that the space available in the drill ship was insufficient for the post-war pattern of training, and in April 1951 the Headquarters in Granton Square were opened, the bulk of the training and whole administration being transferred there then, though certain classes were still instructed in the old ship until extensions were made to Granton Square just before the ship was removed for scrapping in 1959.

The building in Granton Square was originally part of a development by the Duke of Buccleuch and was completed in 1838 to serve as a Railway Hotel. Rail passengers and freight were conveyed across the Forth from Granton to Burntisland, though long-distance rail traffic ceased with the opening of the Forth Bridge in 1890. The design is attributed to William Burn and the building is listed Category B.

In May 1952 a unit of the Women's Royal Naval Volunteer Reserves (WRNVR) was formed and added to the strength of *Claverhouse.* It started with four officers and ten ratings and grew rapidly. By October the strength was four officers and 51 ratings.

In the spring of 1954 the Sea Tender MMS 1089 was withdrawn from service and replaced with a newly constructed Coastal Minesweeper, HMS *Derriton* (M1128), which was duly renamed HMS *Killiecrankie.* Remarkably, 119 of these fine ships were built, between 1952 and 1959. They were equipped to tackle moored and influence (meaning magnetic and acoustic) mines and were largely constructed from aluminium and mahogany, with bronze anchors and cables. Sixteen of them were converted to minehunters by the fitting of active rudders and advanced sonar, their influence mine countermeasures equipment being removed. Others were converted into patrol vessels and survey ships. Propulsion was by Mirrlees and later by Napier Deltic diesel engines.

The arrival of the Coastal Minesweeper brought about a change in the purpose of the RNVR as the Coastal Minesweepers of all the Divisions were formed into the 101st Minesweeping Squadron, and over the next few years the emphasis of the training and purpose of the whole RNVR became the provision of trained minesweeping crews. M1128 served the Division until 1961, when she paid off into reserve and for the 1962 running season the Division was allocated HMS



HMS *Claverhouse* in Granton Square. © *Crown Copyright: HES*

Bickington (M1109) which had been converted to Deltic engines and was in turn renamed HMS *Killiecrankie*.

The later 1950s also brought in more active exercises with the Royal Navy and regular participation in NATO exercises. Mine Countermeasures, which had been the task of *Claverhouse* since the end of the War and of the whole of the Reserve for nearly 20 years could not apply to all, but it did apply to the majority – Seamen, Communications and Mechanical and Electrical Officers and Ratings in particular.

In November 1958 the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and the Royal Naval Reserve (comprising officers and seamen from the British Merchant Navy and fishing fleets) were amalgamated under the name of the older Reserve, the Royal Naval Reserve. For *Claverhouse,* this meant little more in practice than a change of name, for the purpose of Forth Division RNR continued – to train civilian volunteer officers and ratings to take their place in the Royal Navy in times of emergency. With the amalgamation of the Reserves, the RNVR became the RNR and the WRNVR also became the WRNR. As the purpose of the RNR continued, so too did the purpose of the WRNR, the provision of officers and ratings to provide shore support for the Royal Navy.


M1128



West Old Dock, Leith in the 1950s. HMS *Killiecrankie* (the Coastal Minesweeper HMS *Derriton*), HMS *Claverhouse*, and the Merchant Navy Training Ship *Dolphin*. Painting by Fred Jay Girling. *Christopher Hall*

In 1958 a small detachment of the Royal Marine Forces Volunteer Reserve (RMFVR) started in *Claverhouse.* This RMFVR (later RMR) Detachment was a sub-unit of the Royal Marines Reserve, Scotland, whose Headquarters were in Glasgow, and after about ten years the sub-unit's training function and members were transferred to the parent Headquarters, where training could be more efficiently maintained.

The Squadron was renamed the 10th Minesweeping Squadron (10th MCM) in October 1962. With good Headquarters accommodation and a CMS and at least one smaller sea-going training vessel in each Division, the RNR was thriving. Four ships of the Squadron visited the West Indies and British Guiana in 1965, accompanied by the RFA fleet support tanker Brown Ranger.

Quoting from "The Royal Navy's Reserves in War and Peace 1903-2003" by Stephen Howarth:

"There had never been more peacetime opportunities for the reserves to go to sea, and every chance was taken. Most Divisions were able to organise as many as four or even five fourteen-day training voyages in any given year, including NATO exercises in the Channel, North Sea, Atlantic and Mediterranean, as well as rigorous fortnights in HMS *Vernon,* the RN minesweeping school at Portsmouth. Local sea weekends were common, but the two annual exercises which gave this period its great glow in memory were ROCKHAUL to Gibraltar and MAINHAUL to North Africa. The exercises contributed very strongly to the Squadron's experience, camaraderie, cohesion and sense of self-identity, while simultaneously generating healthy competition between the Divisions".

Four ships of the Squadron visited Canadian east coast ports in 1973, again accompanied by RFA Brown Ranger, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve.

With the increased technical complexity of the RN, the size of the permanent staff increased over the years. In 1921 there were two senior ratings on the permanent staff, but by the 1970s there were over fifteen, with two officers.

In April 1974, HMS *Killiecrankie* having gone to Chatham



HMS *Killiecrankie* (the Coastal Minesweeper HMS *Bickington*). *TON Class Association*

Right: The minehunter HMS *Kedleston*. *TON Class Association*

for a refit, the minehunter HMS *Kirkliston* was allocated to *Claverhouse,* to evaluate the RNR's ability to man and maintain a modern minehunter. The trials were declared to be "a resounding success", holding out the possibility that all 11 Divisions might receive such ships, but in the meantime the Royal Naval Review Committee, known as the Mitchell Committee after its Chairman Rear Admiral G C Mitchell, had been established. It first met on 1st March 1974 and its remit was to analyse and recommend upon the RNR's roles in peace and war for the next twenty years, without limit to its questions. The Mitchell Committee's Report was signed on 1st December 1974, and 1974 was also the year of a general UK Defence Review. The combined effect of both was a substantially reshaped RNR, with the new policy of hull sharing being introduced from 1975. When that process was complete, only six Divisions had their own ships, and to share out their use the Divisions were formed into four groups. *Claverhouse* formed part of the North-East Group (Tyne, Forth and Tay), and any future allocations of ships would retain their RN names. There were many reductions on shore as well, notably in the Supply and Secretariat and Communications Branches.

HMS *Killiecrankie* returned from refit in March 1975, and was immediately deployed on Operation Grenada, the RN's standing patrol off the coast of Northern Ireland to stop arms smuggling to paramilitary groups during the Troubles. Hull sharing started in 1976, with HMS *Upton*, but in July *Claverhouse* was allocated the minehunter HMS *Kedleston* (M1153).

New skills were required. Before hunting could begin, the hard dome on the bottom of the ship, which had protected the sonar while on passage, had to be replaced with a soft dome into which the sonar transducer would be lowered, and a diver was required to free the active rudders. If a mine was detected, the RIB (rigid inflatable boat) was sent away and directed into position so that it could drop a demolition charge (MDW or



mine disposal weapon) and so dispose of the mine. To some extent, the hunters may have been less suitable than the sweepers for RNR training.

On 20th September 1976 came the tragic loss of the minesweeper HMS *Fittleton,* allocated under the policy of hull sharing to the Channel Group (London, Sussex and Solent Divisions). She was on passage with the 10th MCM Squadron across the North Sea for a visit to Hamburg after participating in Exercise Teamwork, involving about 275 vessels from all NATO navies. *Fittleton* approached the port side of the frigate HMS *Mermaid* for a heaving line transfer but during that manoeuvre she was drawn under the frigate's bow and rolled over. *Kedleston* first assisted in picking up survivors in her seaboat, then later took part in an unsuccessful attempt to buoy and hold up the overturned hull.

Fittleton was lost because of something little understood at that time by any navy, namely the interaction of forces between the hulls of a small ship and a large one under way in parallel and in close proximity, and her Commanding Officer was acquitted on all charges in the subsequent court martial.

Sea training in those years tended to comprise a NATO exercise or Grenada Patrol (seven days plus) followed by a three-day visit, some solo and others in company with two or three other ships. The sweepers and hunters operated together



The Fleet Minesweeper HMS *Spey*. ***Andrew Kerr***

except on exercise when they generally split up and either swept or hunted, but both were capable of sweeping moored mines. In 1977 and 1978 the 10th MCM successfully participated in deep armed team sweeping trials with RN sweepers and hunters.

In October 1986 *Kedleston* was replaced by the River-class Fleet Minesweeper HMS *Spey* (M2013). These ships were built with a traditional steel hull to a design based on a commercial offshore support vessel. They could operate as deep-sea team sweepers, to combat the threat posed to submarines by Soviet deep-water buoyant moored mines codenamed "Cluster Bay". Although they could be equipped to tackle influence mines, no attempt had been made to reduce their magnetic signature. Of the 12 ships built, 11 were assigned to the RNR Divisions, with one (HMS *Blackwater)* entering service with the RN. Now each Division had its own ship again.

Operating in pairs (or several pairs in formation), they towed an armed sweep which followed the profile of the bottom and cut the mooring wires of the mines, which could then be destroyed on the surface by gunfire. They were much roomier than the Ton-class ships which they had replaced and were good sea boats.

Although the River-class ships had been built specifically to safeguard the approaches to the British and American Polaris bases on the Clyde, sea training exercises were not confined to that area, the east coast being more usual, followed as before by visits to UK or North European ports. The ships were equipped to sweep to a depth of 200 metres, and *Spey* did so on exercise in the Straits of Gibraltar.

In the early 1990s all Britain's armed services suffered from the "peace dividend" which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, falling prey to the notorious Defence Review "Options for Change". A "Consultative Document" with proposals for the future of the RNR was circulated by the Ministry of Defence in 1993 and in the following year all the RNR's Fleet Minesweepers were either reallocated to the RN or sold to the navies of Bangladesh or Brazil. HMS *Claverhouse*



HMS *Claverhouse* Decommissioning on 26th March 1994. *Michael Simpson*

was formally decommissioned on 26th March 1994. Only two Headquarters establishments were retained in Scotland, namely HMS *Dalriada* in Greenock and HMS *Scotia* in Rosyth, absorbing the former personnel of HMSs *Claverhouse, Camperdown* (Tay Division) and *Graham* (Clyde Division).

The restructured RNR was designed "to provide an expanded pool of personnel to provide additional reinforcements for the Fleet", mainly in the roles of logistics and communications – specialist support roles the need for which would expand significantly in the event of a major deployment or extended conflict but which were not seen as viable to maintain within the regular RN's peacetime strength.

This left the mine-warfare, seaman and diving specialists "in limbo" until the Iraq War (second Gulf War), when the RN realised that it had a pool of reservists with no real sea post. Echoing the Royal Naval Division in the First World War, the Above-Water Force Protection Branch was formed "from RN reservists with no draft appointment at the outbreak of war". Because of a lack of full-time personnel mine-warfare and diving returned (in part) to the RNR.

The RNR Medical, Air and Media Ops Branches all supported military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (Operations Telic and Herrick).

Today, RNR officers and ratings serve ashore and afloat on active service in Full Time Reserve Service billets throughout the RN, as well as in mobilised posts in the UK and abroad. ●



Cover illustrations: The *Claverhouse* lifebelt and WW2 Memorial. *South Leith Parish Church.*
Forth Division and HMS *Killiecrankie* crests. *John McPhail*