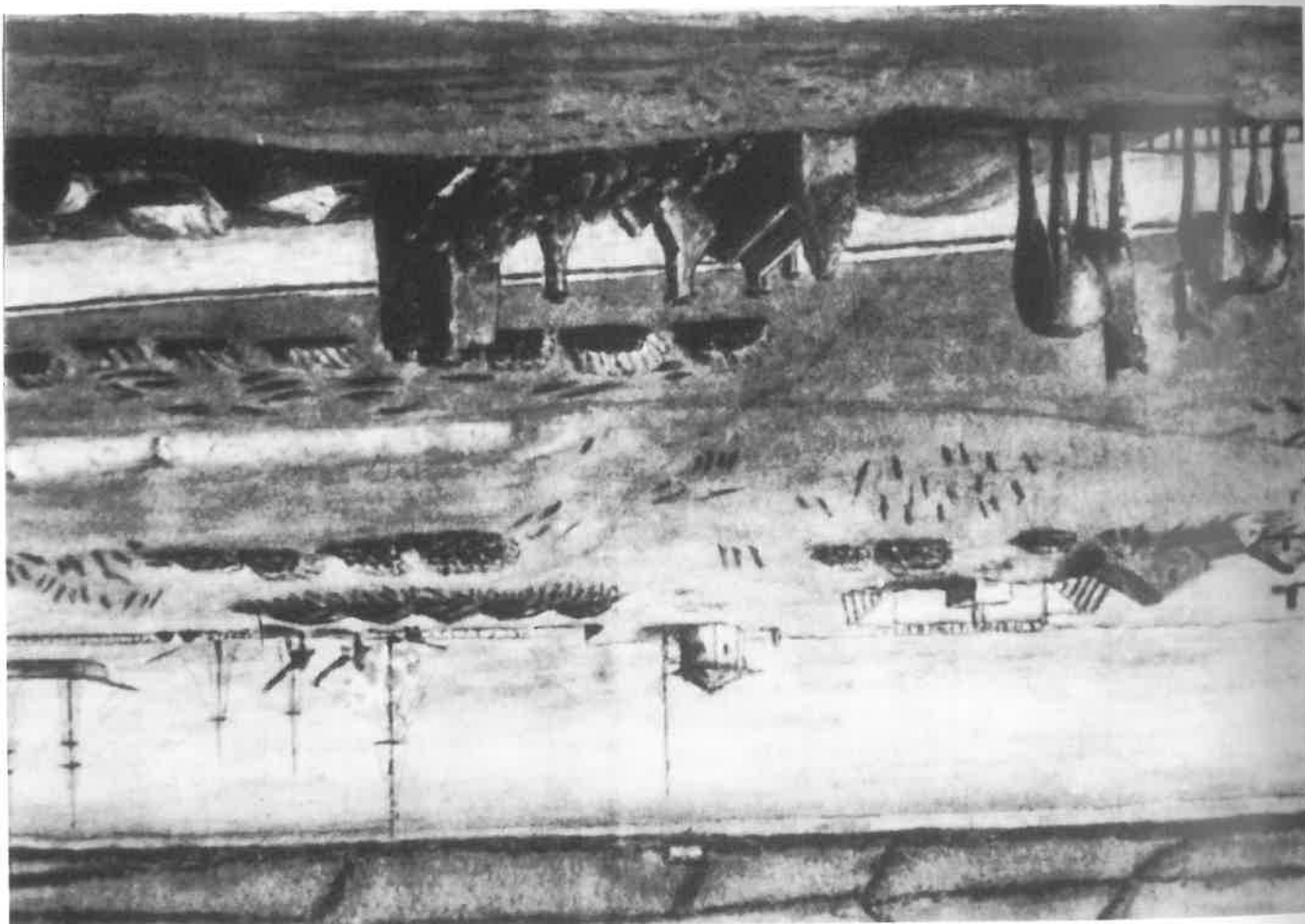


PEMBROKE DOCKYARD

by Phil Carradice



A view of Pembroke Dockyard, painted perhaps as early as 1815 by an unknown, primitive artist. There are, at this stage, no building sheds although the stacks of wood clearly show the purpose of the establishment. The building in the foreground is the ruined Paterchurch Mansion - unoccupied for many years. All that now remains of the mansion is the tower on the right, still to be seen inside the old dockyard walls.

The Pembroke Dock stands on a flat shelf of land south of the Cledau River, close to that vague and ill-defined spot where the river ends and the Milford Haven estuary begins. Two miles away from the ancient community of Pembroke with its huge medieval castle, Pembroke Dock was the nineteenth century equivalent of a 'new town'.

Quite simply, it did not exist until the

James Watt on 23 April 1853. This fanciful illustration shows the thousands of locals who flocked to witness every launching, whether big or small, can be clearly seen in the illustration. It was a popular day out - schools and businesses all closed so that people could witness a launch.

year 1814, then it burst into being with all the vigour and energy you would expect from a bawling, screaming infant. The whole purpose behind its existence was for much of the nineteenth century was, arguably, the first shipbuilding yard in the world. Without the yards there would have been no Pembroke Dock.

One of these new dockyards was new establishments came into existence. turn of the eighteenth century several such a navy and in the years around the navy. Dockyards were needed to build by the creation of a strong and efficient Kingdom's surest means of defence was the sudden realisation that the United had several important effects - not least this 'last invasion' of mainland Britain equipped and were soon rounded up but landed at Fishguard. They were poorly Napoleon Wars, French forces had In 1797, during the Republican/Napoleonic Wars, French forces had

Whatsoever lay behind the decision, by 1802 land had been leased and a dockyard established. The Chief Builder at the new yards was, surprisingly, a Frenchman by the name of Louis Barrallier and within a very short space of time several fine vessels were added to the British Fleet. By the year 1809, however, it was felt that the dockyard was too small and, consequently, negotiations were opened with Charles Greville - the nephew and heir of



The dockyard seen from the hill at Llanion, circa 1819. A single building shed dominates the scene and already houses are beginning to spring up alongside the yards. Those shown here are in Front Street, originally called Thomas Street, after Thomas Meyrick, one of the local landowners.

William Hamilton – with a view to obtaining more land. A purchase price of £4,455 was agreed and the Assistant to the Civil Architect & Engineer, Mr. E. Hall, had even surveyed the new enclosures. Then on 23rd April 1809 Charles Greville died. His estates passed to his brother, Robert Fulke Greville. As was customary at the time, negotiations regarding the purchase of land had to begin again.

The new owner began to make such exorbitant demands for the land in question that the Lords of the Admiralty decided to look elsewhere. The Master Shipwright of the Milford yards inspected the full length of Milford Haven and the Cleddau River and found what he was looking for on Paterchurch Point at the eastern end of the Haven. Surveyed between 24th and 29th September 1810, notice of moving was subsequently given to Greville on 2nd August 1811.

The British government already owned some land at Paterchurch Point, having intended to build a fort there in the 1750s, but considerably more space was needed before the proposed dockyard could begin to take shape. Therefore, on 10th March 1813 John Meyrick, the major landowner in the Pembroke area, agreed to sell the Admiralty an additional four fields which were located to the immediate east of the proposed yards. For this, Meyrick received £3,000. The following year even more land was bought from him and from his brother Thomas – the Meyrick's must have thought their boat had come in!

Unlike Milford, the new site had the

decided advantage of considerable areas of flat land alongside the waters edge and, more importantly, very deep water close inshore. Work commenced on marking out the new dockyard as early as 1812 although the move from Milford was delayed until April 1814 because the battleship *Rochefort* remained on the stocks. Once she was launched the establishment was quickly wound up and by 30th May Pembroke Dockyard (as the place soon became known) was up and running.

In the early days, much of the workforce continued to live at Milford as there was nothing at Paterchurch Point apart from one building ship and a few workman's sheds. These workmen rowed up the river every morning – over three miles, often against the run of the tide – and then back again each evening after a day spent hammering and sawing, sometimes up to their waists in mud and water. The first two ships, *Valorous* and *Ariadne*, 28 gunned frigates, were built in the open air and slipped quietly into the waters of Milford Haven on 10th February 1816. Pembroke Dock's 112 year history of shipbuilding had begun.

Over the next 20 years the dockyard expanded several times, land being bought from the Meyricks and the Owens (the other major landowners in the area). The town, which began to grow up around the yards, developed and mushroomed out of all proportion.

At first the dockyard was run by a Master Shipwright (engaged at a cost of £600 per annum), a Clerk (£240) and a

Surgeon (£400). The title Master Shipwright was soon replaced by that of Chief Constructor and, after the amalgamation of the Admiralty and Navy Boards in 1832, the yards were managed by a series of Captain Superintendents. These men were always serving naval officers, many of the early ones being veterans of Trafalgar and other Nelsonian campaigns.

The first Captain Superintendent was Sir Charles Bullen but the most famous of them all was Captain William Pryce Cumby CB. He had taken command of the *Bellerophon* at Trafalgar when her Captain, John Cooke, was killed by musket fire. Cumby saved the ship from destruction when he personally seized a smouldering grenade and threw it overboard. Another Captain Superintendent was the martinet Sir Watkin Owen Pell who had lost a leg in action. He rode everywhere on his pony, Jack, often appearing alongside workmen (on horse back) on the gantries and work platforms.

To begin with, most shipbuilding took place in the eastern part of the dockyard but, gradually, the building slips edged westwards. Sheds were erected over some of the slips, the cutter *Racer* being the first vessel built under cover in 1818. At its zenith Pembroke Dockyard was to have 13 covered buildings slips, more than any other dockyard in the country. Some of these sheds were built by Messrs., Fox and Henderson who were also contractors for the famous Crystal Palace in London.

The rationale behind such a large number of slips was quite simple. Timber

Some of the yard's launchings were
1st February 1901.

failure was laid at the door of a supposed local witch, Betty Foggy, who had been refused permission to watch the launch. When turned around at the gates she had wheeled away, angrily declaring "Then there'll be no launch today!" For 17 days workmen laboured, building huge wooden structures, known as caissons, under the keel of the *Caesar* and, finally on Sunday 7th August, the ship was launched. The Admiralty simply announced that Betty Foggy had lifted

In 1854 Brunel's wonderful railway

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reached Havertfordwest, in the centre of Pembrokeshire. By 15th April 1856 it had snaked southwards to Neyland, just half a mile across the river from the Dockyard

For the first time raw materials could be transported easily to the yards

Pembrokeshire did not have endless forests which could provide timber for

forests which could provide timber for the ships and all raw materials therefore had to be brought in. Sometimes the wood

had to be brought in, sometimes the wood came, laboriously, by road - more often it was brought in by sea (often from

was brought in by sea (often from Scandinavia) and the vagaries of weather

and shipwreck caused many problems in both supply and demand. Situated at the

furthest point in West Wales it was too easy to keep the place well provisioned

The yards themselves were finally connected to the railway system in August.

1864 when a branch line (built

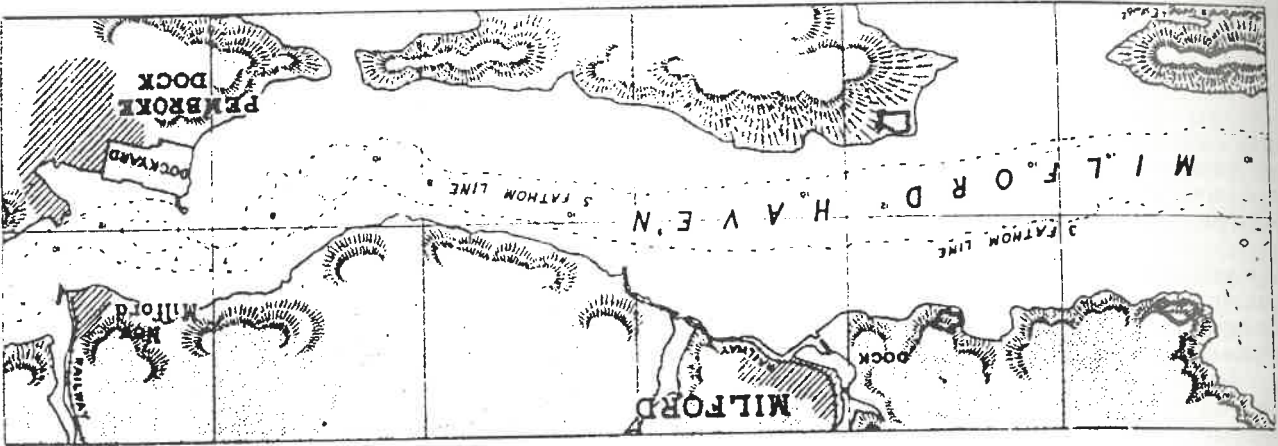
Some years were exceptionally busy. In 1833, for example Pembroke Dockyard produced the *Royal William* (at 120 guns, the first 100 gunned vessel launched from the yards), the *Rodney* of 90 guns, the *Fourth* (46 guns) and a tank vessel called *Foundation*. The year 1828 saw the launch

the town. Until 1860 the building programme in the dockyard was regular and well maintained. A large ship-of-the-line would be launched every three to four years while a frigate or some similar vessel came down the launching ways at least once a year. A steady stream of lighters, cutters and sloops filled in the periods in between.

while publicans happily provided beer and spirits for their thirsty off-duty hours. At one time there were upwards of 200 inns and pubs in the town. The only other public buildings which came close to these - in terms of quantity and also of use - were the numerous Non-conformist chapels which quickly sprang up around

major employer in the west Wales, comprising infrastructure having been created in order to support the establishment. Within the town of Pembroke Dock there were businesses such as ships chandlers, coal merchants, iron foundries and provisions merchants, all engaged in trade with the yards. Farmers from what was, really, an agricultural area sold produce to the dockyard workers and their families

which had been seasoned and shaped in the open air and in 'picking ponds', was used to build the great wooden wall separating actually took place during construction on the partially completed vessels - some ships were left for years, half built, on the stocks. The famous *Windsor Castle*, for example, was finally launched in 1858, fourteen years after she there was a partially completed ship on every single building slip in the dockyard! By 1855 Pembroke Dockyard employed the over 1000 men. It was undoubtedly the largest shipyard in the world at that time.



Map of Milford Haven showing the relative positions of Pembroke Dock, Milford Haven and Neyland (or New Milford as it was known then).



This view of dockyard workers at Hobbs Point was produced by the photographer Morgan (christian name unknown) who worked in the town for many years. Notice the huge sheer legs which were used to hoist heavy machinery into the newly launched ships.

incidentally by Davies the Ocean, Wales' first millionaire) was punched through from Whitland.

The advent of the railway could not have come at a more fortunate time for Pembroke Dock. The year 1860 saw the launch, from the yards of C. J. Mare & Co., on the Thames, of the iron warship *Warrior*. Overnight Pembroke Dockyard which, like all Admiralty yards, had been created to build wooden ships, was made obsolete. Many miles away from large ironworks, with a workforce

unskilled in building metal ships and a sudden surfeit of useless and unnecessary building ships, the possibility of closure was a very real option. In the end the Admiralty closed only the yards at Deptford and Woolwich. Pembroke Dock was saved by the coming of the railway link and by the advent of the composite warship.

The new railway meant that raw materials - the iron and steel which were now so vital in warship construction - could be easily brought to West Wales.

Supply and demand were no longer the major problems they had once been.

Composite ships, vessels which had iron frames with wood laid across them were the ideal medium for gunboats and small vessels. For the rest of its life Pembroke Dockyard specialised in such ships while its workforce trained and developed skills in the design and construction of true iron and steel vessels.

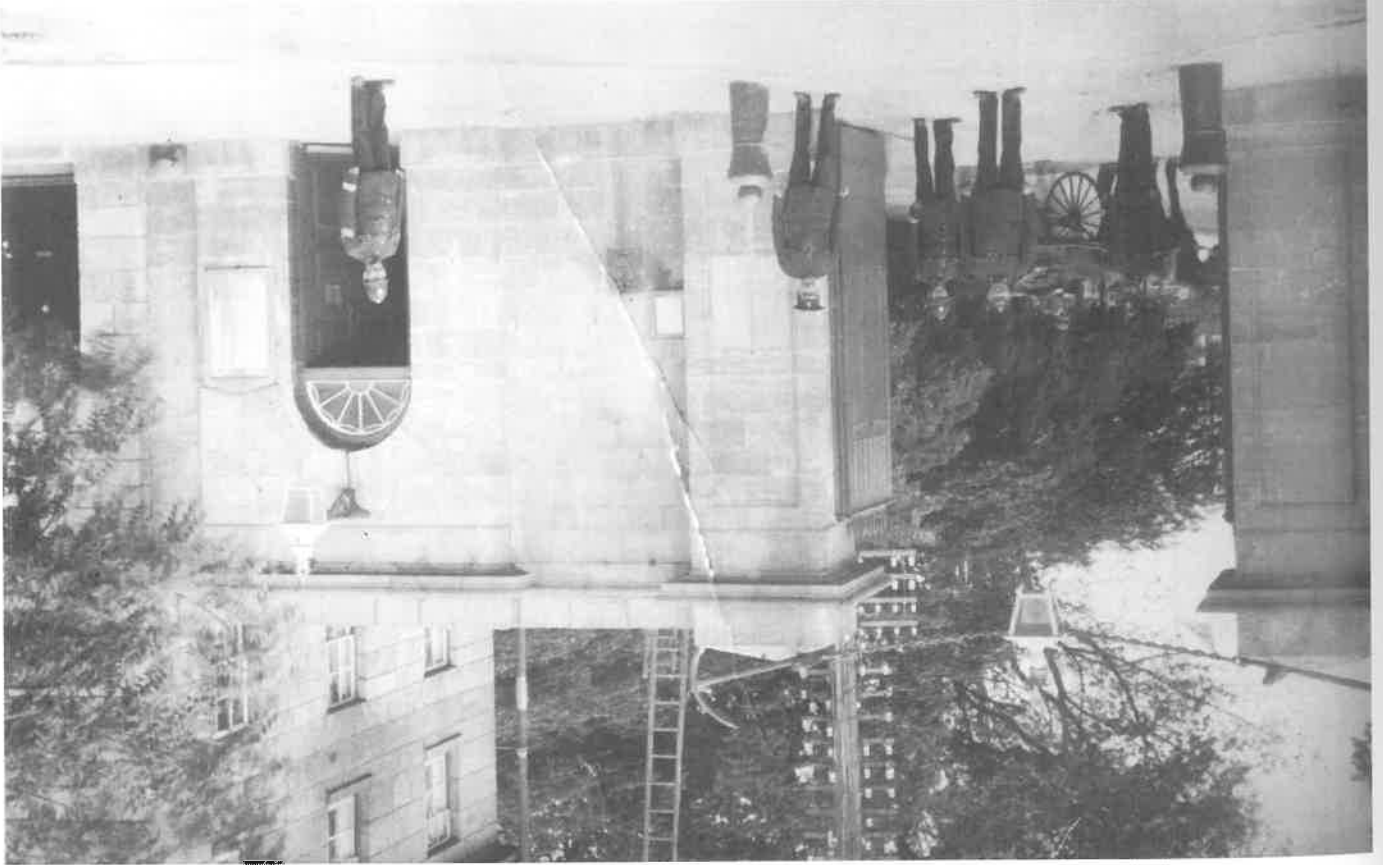
The dockyard and town of Pembroke Dock needed to be protected and so, almost from the beginning, the area had become familiar to soldiers. Initially, an old frigate, the *Dragon* was used as barracks for the Royal Marines sent to guard the yards but in 1844 work began on a huge barracks/fort on the hill overlooking the town. Known as the Defensible Barracks, they occupied 6,000 square yards and, apparently, the contractor Thomas Jackson completed his work in just twelve months. Other forts were created at Thorne Island and Stack Rock, further down the Haven, and between 1849 and 1857 two large martello towers were built at the S.W. and N.E. corners of the yards.

The population of Pembroke Dock increased steadily during the nineteenth century. The 1841 census returns give a total population for St. Mary's Parish (which included part of nearby Pembroke) as 5,441. By the mid 1870s that figure had risen to nearly 12,000. Schools were created in the town with the Dockyard Class of Albion Square School being the highest echelon, something at which every local boy aimed his sights. Competition for apprenticeships in the dockyard (and in every other RN Yard) was exceptionally high and only the most able were lucky enough to secure places.

By 1875 there were eleven building slips in use in the dockyard, several of them over 300 foot in length. This meant that ships could be launched at any state of the tide. On launch days the Metropolitan Police, a detachment of which manned the gates and patrolled the yards, threw open the entrance and thousands flocked in to watch the birth of another great warship. They picnicked on the grass verges, wandered between the workshops and sheds and sometimes rowed out onto the river in small boats in order to obtain a better view.

The building sheds rose majestically, barrier-like, along the water's edge. Writing in the 1875 Handbook on the town, James Anderson Findlay commented that:

'Workshops necessarily abound ... millwrights, blacksmiths, plumbers, coppersmiths, wheelwrights, painters, pattern makers and armoured plating shops. Over 200 hands work in the blacksmiths shop alone'.



Metropolitan police arrive to patrol the dockyard in 1861. This view shows them at the yard gates. Prior to their arrival security was very sloppy, not to say criminal. One famous story tells of an important visitor who was admitted to the yards one morning – two hours later he was approached by the same Dockyard Policeman offering him contraband goods for sale!

in the first few days of conflict. The *Nottingham*, *Hazzard* and submarine *L10* were also sunk but it was the Battle of Jutland which led to the biggest single loss of the dockyard's ships. When Sir Robert Arbuthnot's 1st Cruiser Squadron fell under the guns of Hipper's battlecruisers both *Defence* and *Warrior* (as well as the *Black Prince*) were sunk almost immediately.

In the days after the end of the war it was obvious that a drastic reduction in the fleet was taking place. Pembroke Dockyard, isolated in West Wales, was a luxury that a virtually bankrupt Britain could not afford. The yards had been unsuccessful during the nineteenth century when France had been Britain's main enemy. They had been situated well away from any possible foreign intervention. Now that Germany had been defeated there seemed to be no purpose in maintaining such a distant and, arguably, obsolete establishment.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker *Olander* was the last vessel to be built at Pembroke Dockyard, her launch taking place on 26th April 1922. For three years the people of Pembroke Dock waited for another order for another ship – it never came. The announcement of closure was given on Wednesday 2nd September 1925 and, despite the fears, despite the blank

cheaper and more efficient – rather than limit them to official establishments.

By 1907 it was obvious that Pembroke Dockyard was being underused and 700 men were laid off. Despite these problems the yards continued to build ships of quite stunning beauty and grace – vessels such as the cruisers *Warrior* (1905), *Boadicea* (1908) and *Amphion* (1911). Yet several of them suffered from the serious design flaws which seemed to haunt many Royal Naval ships of the time. The armoured cruiser *Duke of Edinburgh*, is a prime example. Launched in 1904 and completed two years later, her 6in. secondary battery was mounted too low to the waterline and, as a consequence, the guns were unworkable in anything even remotely like a heavy sea.

The trumpets of 1914 ensured that Pembroke Dockyard was well used during the four years of conflict, not only to build ships but also to repair those damaged in action. Five light cruisers were launched during this time and also the first submarines the yards had ever built, *J3* and *J4*, which slipped into the waters of Milford Haven in 1916. Three more submarines were laid down during the war years.

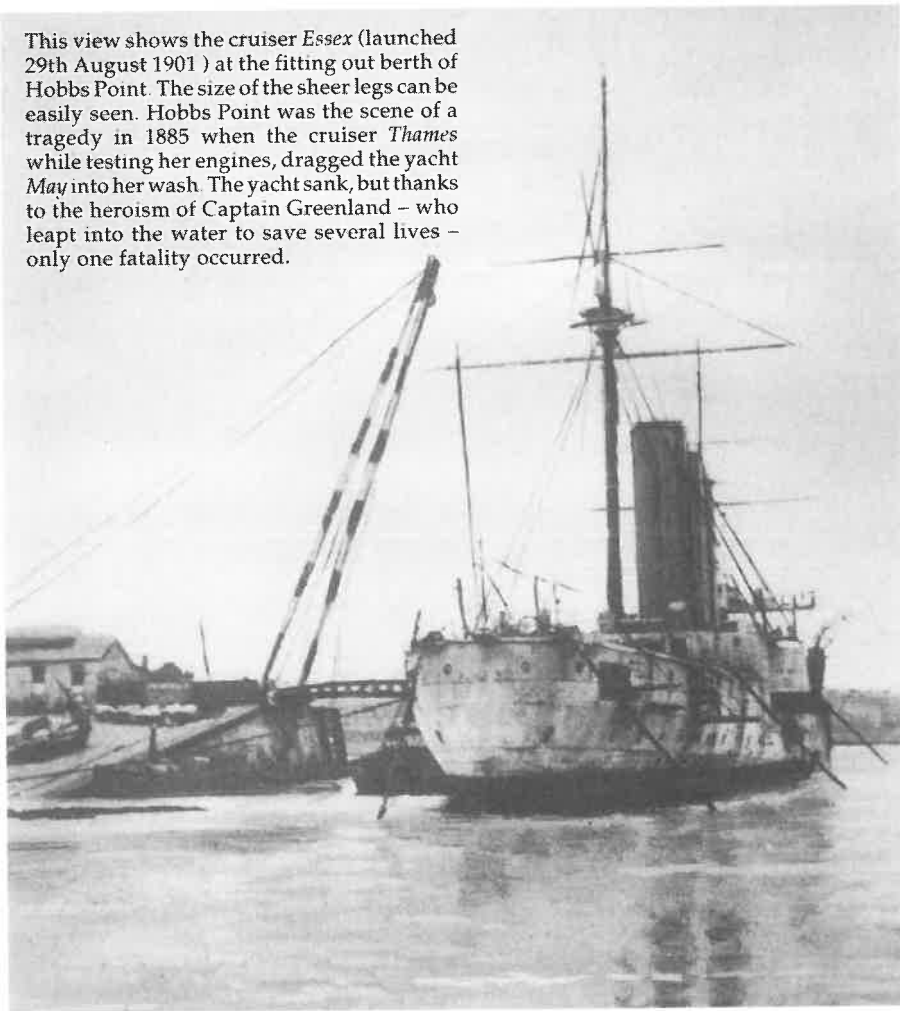
Many Pembroke Dock ships were lost during the war, the *Amphion* being mined

The crash of hammers and a constant hum of machinery pervaded the air. It was all energy, effort and creativity of the highest order.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close Pembroke Dockyard continued to turn out dozens of armoured cruisers, gunboats and the occasional pre-dreadnought battleship – *Empress of India*, *Renown* (favourite command of Jacky Fisher), *Repulse*, *Anson* and *Hannibal*, the names trip easily off the tongue. And yet it was not to last.

Jacky Fisher became First Sea Lord in 1904 and immediately set about ending the years of 'gunboat diplomacy'. Such vessels, he declared, were too weak to fight, too slow to run away. It was an ominous message for Pembroke Dockyard which had long specialised in such minor vessels. Fisher introduced HMS *Dreadnought* in 1906, a revolution-ary new battleship which was turbine driven and armed with ten 12ins. guns, rather than the four which normally featured on capital vessels of the time. Very quickly *Dreadnought's* 12ins. guns evolved into the massive 15ins. weapons of the Queen Elizabeth class. Pembroke Dockyard simply could not cope and, anyway, it soon became policy to build many of the larger warships in private yards – a process which was often

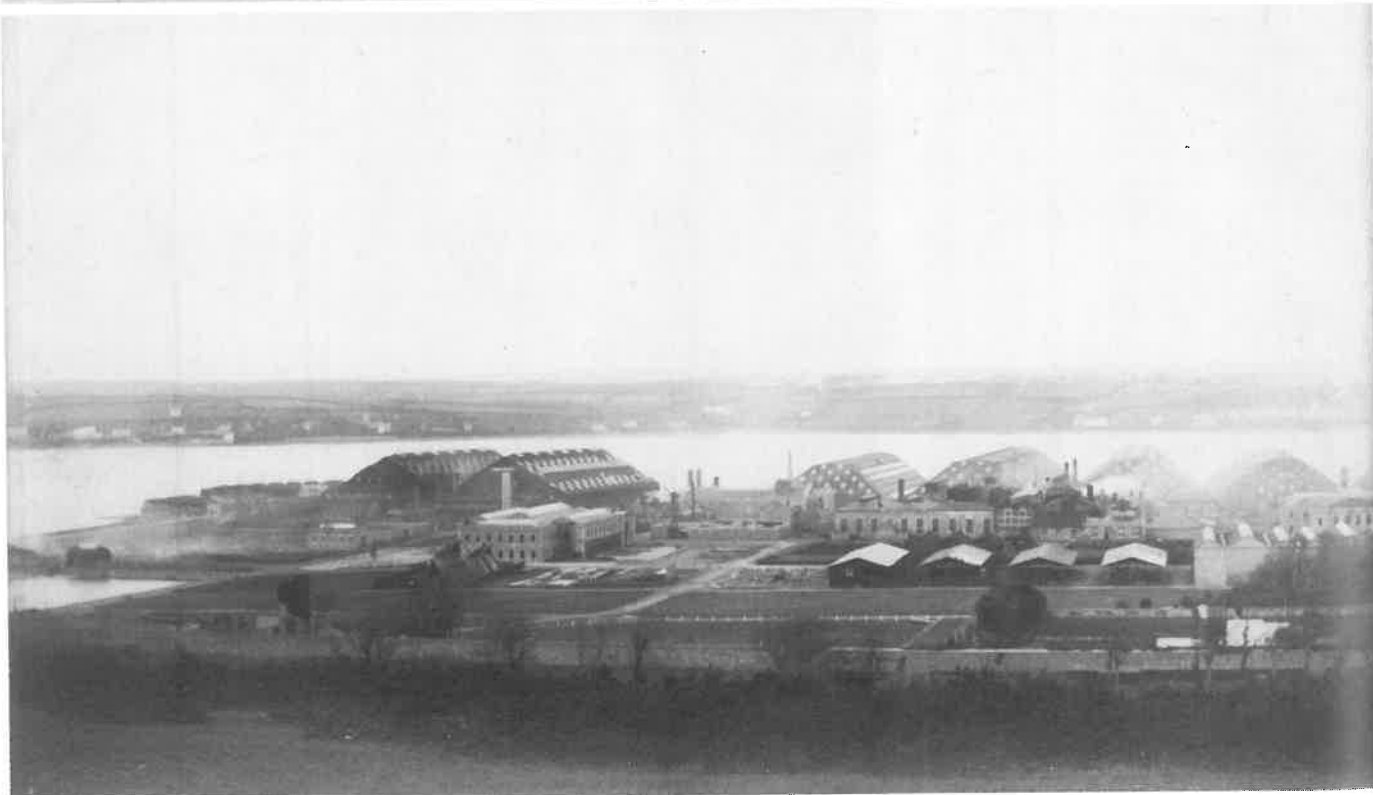
This view shows the cruiser *Essex* (launched 29th August 1901) at the fitting out berth of Hobbs Point. The size of the sheer legs can be easily seen. Hobbs Point was the scene of a tragedy in 1885 when the cruiser *Thames* while testing her engines, dragged the yacht *May* into her wash. The yacht sank, but thanks to the heroism of Captain Greenland – who leapt into the water to save several lives – only one fatality occurred.



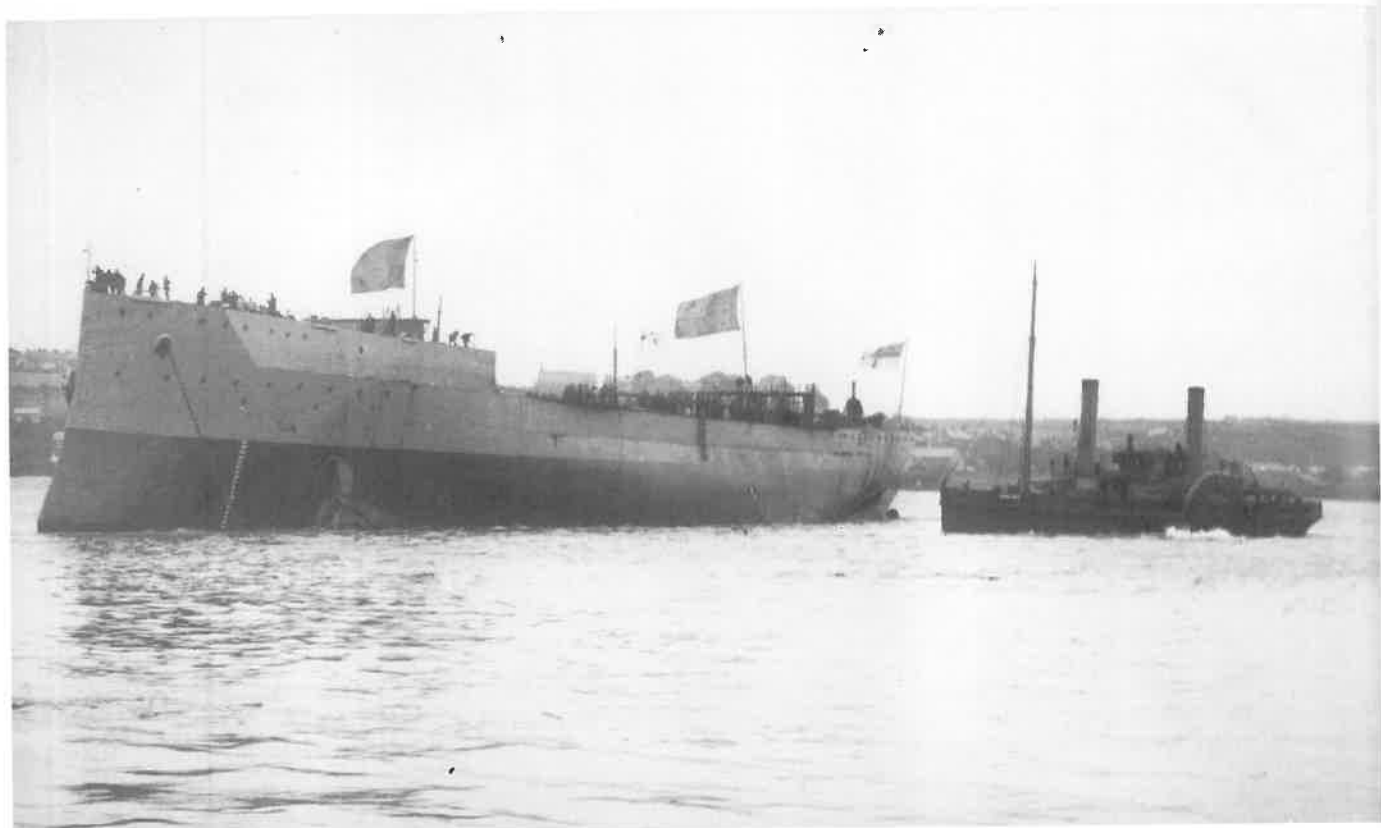
order books, the news was like a thunderbolt. Nobody had wanted to believe it would come to this.

Pembroke Dock had been created to build ships. There was virtually no other unconnected industry in the town. Thousands were thrown onto the dole, hundreds emigrated or trekked off looking for work in other towns or lands. Some respite came with the founding of an RAF flying boat base in the eastern part of the yards in 1930, but it was small comfort to a town which had had its reason for existence smashed away.

The place has never really recovered. Small shipbuilding establishments and some minor industries have come and gone. But really the town, now, lives on the glorious memories of its past. Those memories and that past are never very far away. The visitor has only to stand in the remains of the old dockyard, parts of which are still well preserved even today, preferably at dusk, when the light begins to fade and die. Half shut the eyes and squint towards the dying sun and it is possible to imagine, once again, the clang and clash of hammer on sheet metal, the cries and calls of the platers and shipwrights and foundry workers. The names of great ships live on - *Drake*, *Defence*, *Hannibal*, *Repulse* – evocative beyond belief. The dockyard may be gone but the memories remain.



This Cabinet photograph, taken by the well known Pembroke Dock photographer S. J. Allen, is from the Barrack Hill, to the south of the yards. It gives a good indication of the order and sense of purpose to the place in the late 1880s.



This S. J. Allen postcard shows the *Duke of Edinburgh* just after her launch in 1904. An Admiralty paddle tug is manoeuvring alongside in order to take the cruiser over to the fitting-out berth.



THE KING AND QUEEN LANDING AT PEMBROKE DOCK.

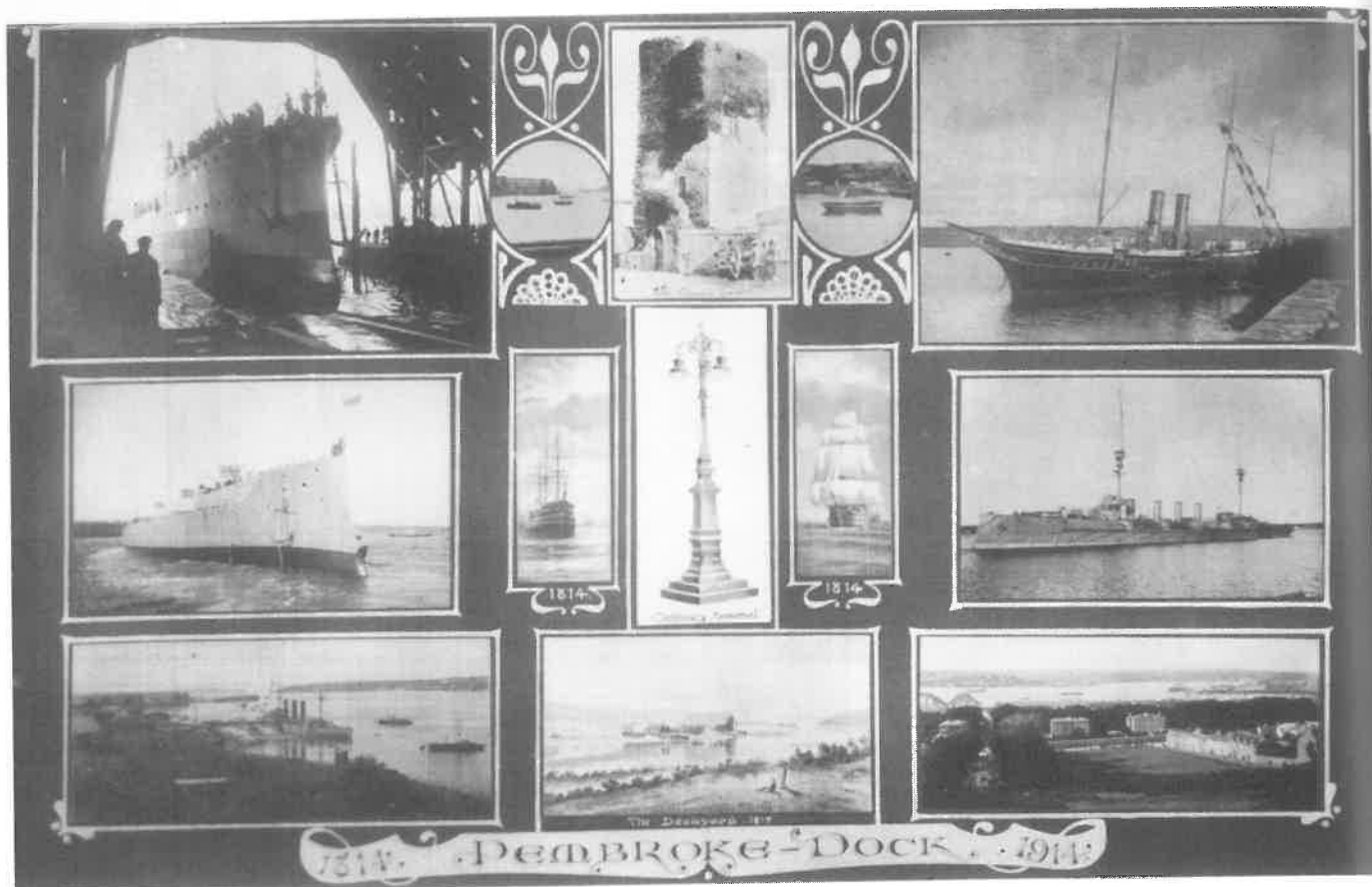
King Edward VII made a surprise visit to the dockyard on 29th August 1902. He brought with him his daughter, the Princess Victoria and Queen Alexandra. His visit was unexpected and an urgent call was sent out to Pembroke Dock butcher Jack Elliot to provide his horse and cart for use by the King.



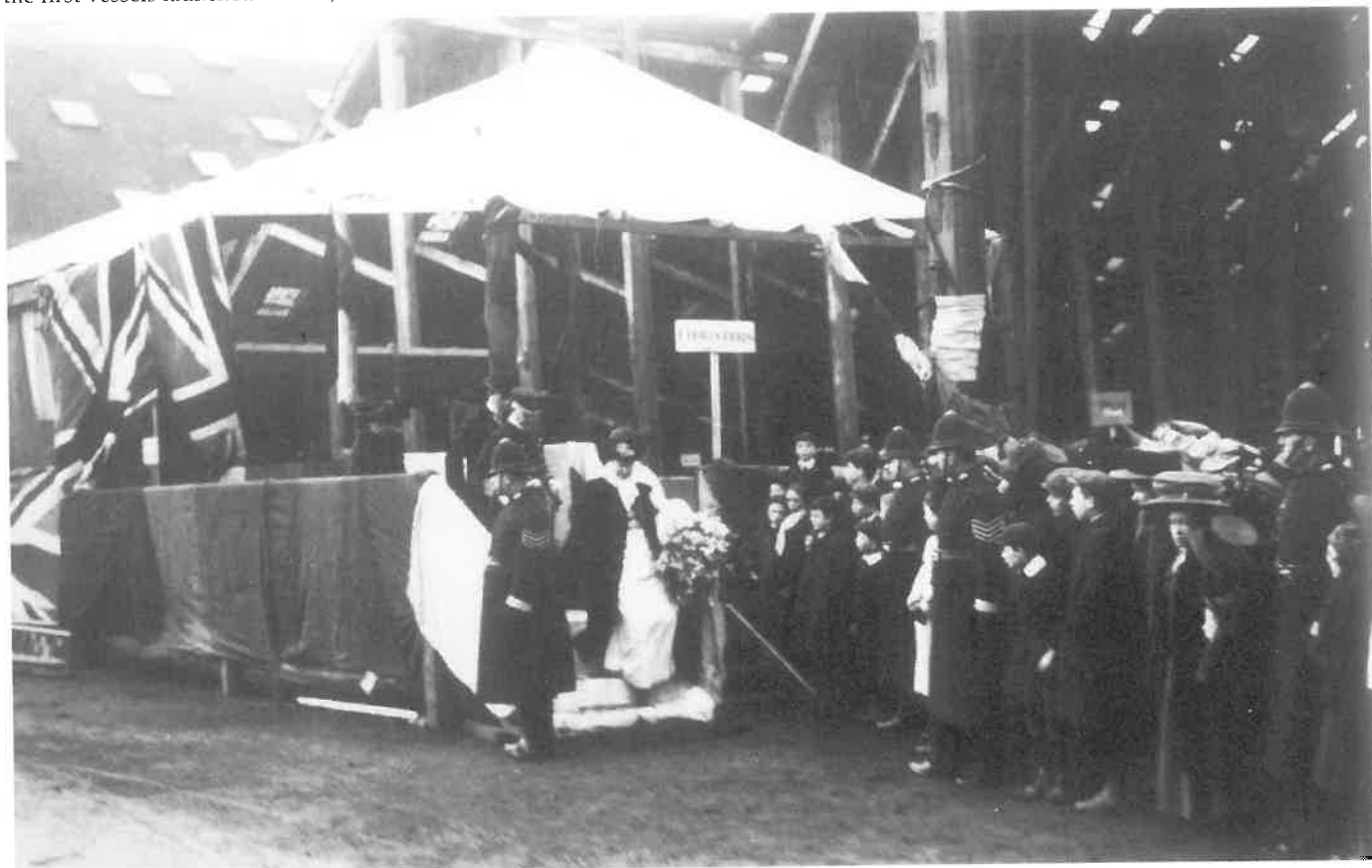
The town of Pembroke Dockyard grew rapidly around the Royal Naval Dockyard. This S. J. Allen view shows Bush Street in the year 1920. Bush Street was once known as 'Pigs Parade' because of the temporary, tin and stick houses the dockyard workers erected. By the time this photograph was taken it was the main thoroughfare in the town.

Pembroke Dock celebrated its centenary on 15th August 1914. A memorial was unveiled in Albion Square and a complete programme of events, ranging from sports and dances to a confetti battle, were held. At that time the dockyard had only ten years of life left to it - perhaps it was just as well the celebrating town did not realise.

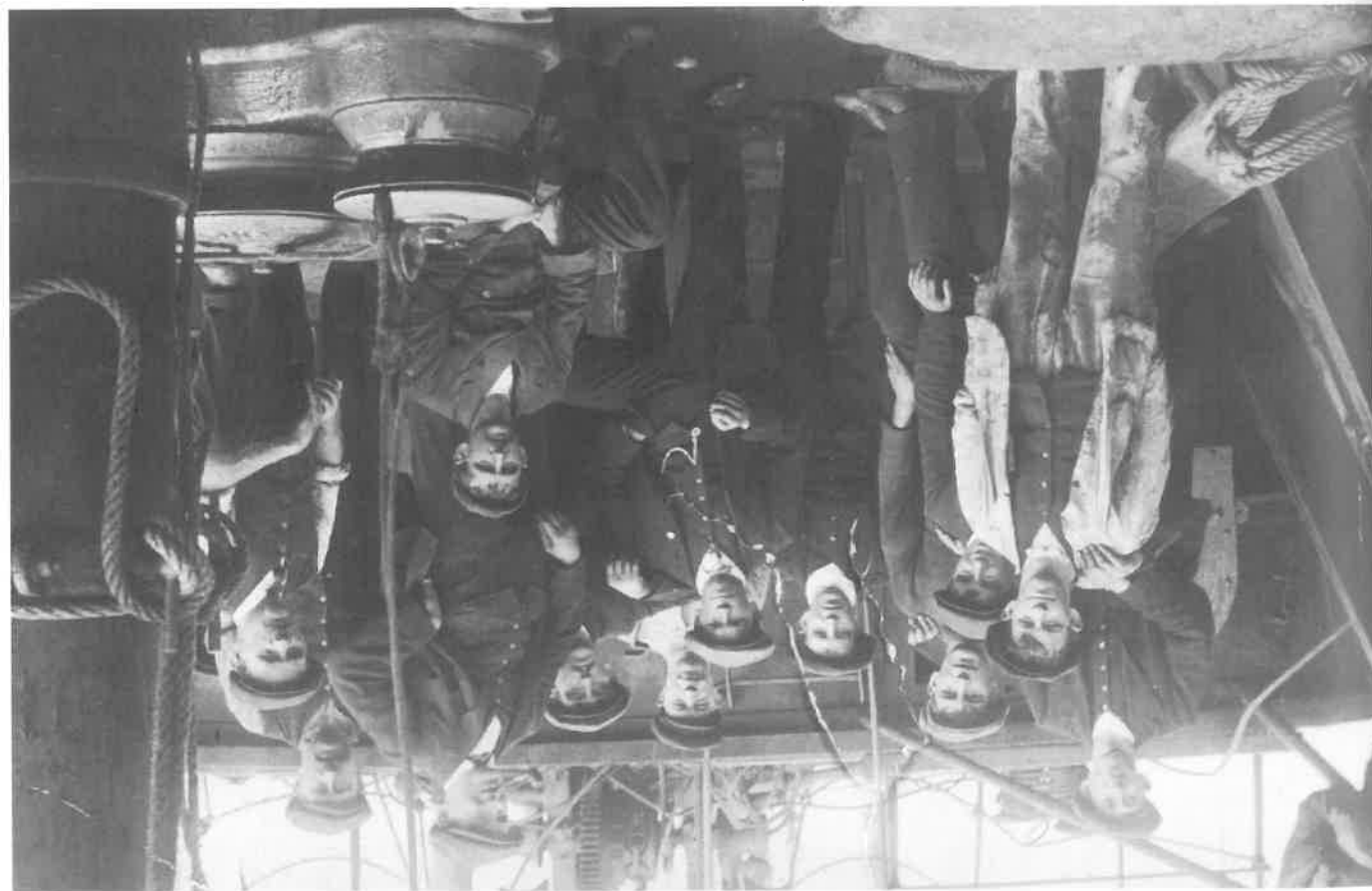




A composite postcard published to commemorate the centenary of the dockyard and town in 1914. The two sailing ships in the centre are the first vessels launched in 1816, the *Valorous* and *Ariadne*.



Dignitaries descending from the podium during a launch at Pembroke Dockyard, circa 1905. Lots of policemen on duty and lots of locals – all in their Sunday best – have turned up to witness the launch.



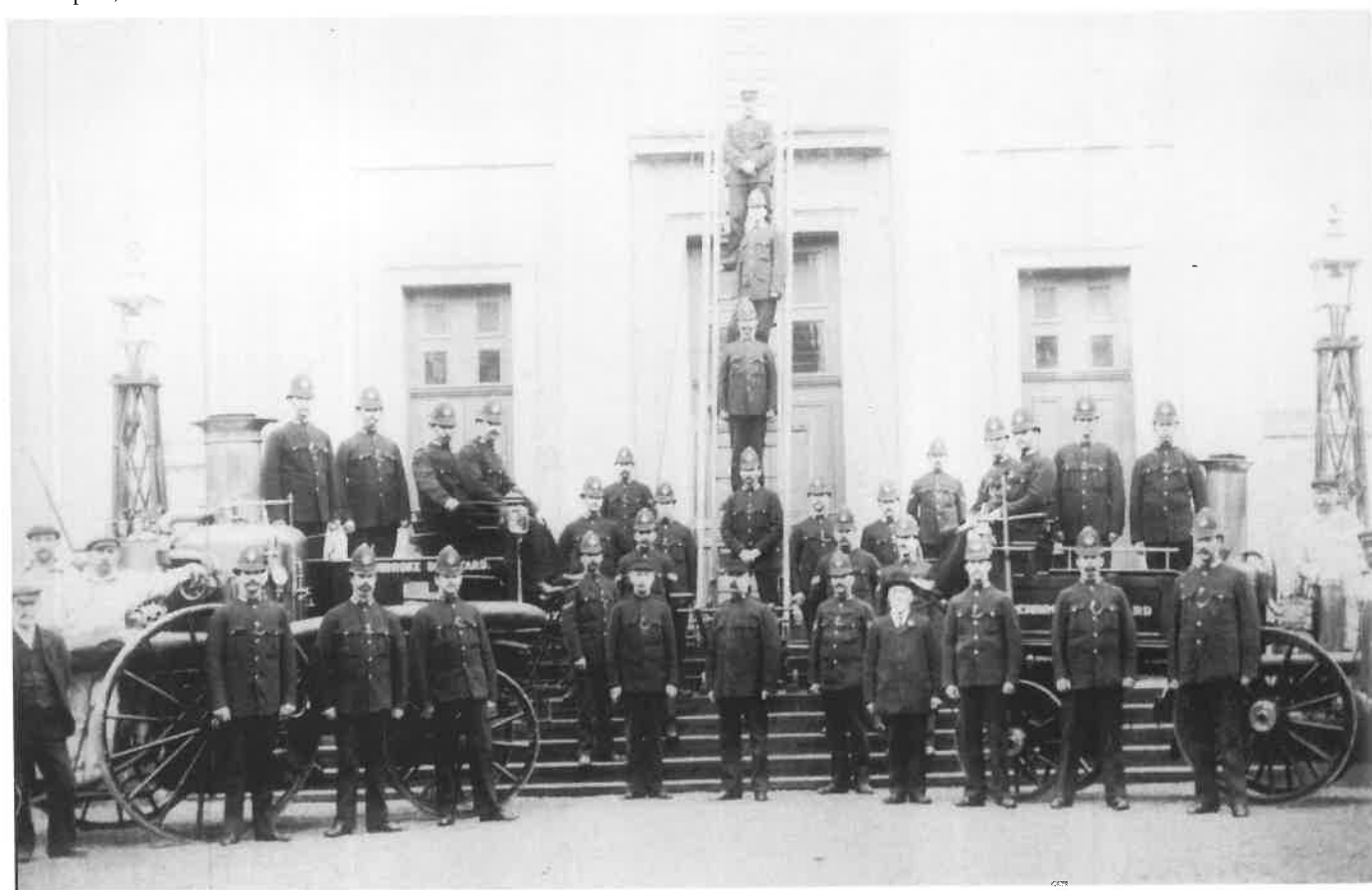
A group of workmen gather on board one of the supply ships in the dockyard, circa 1903.



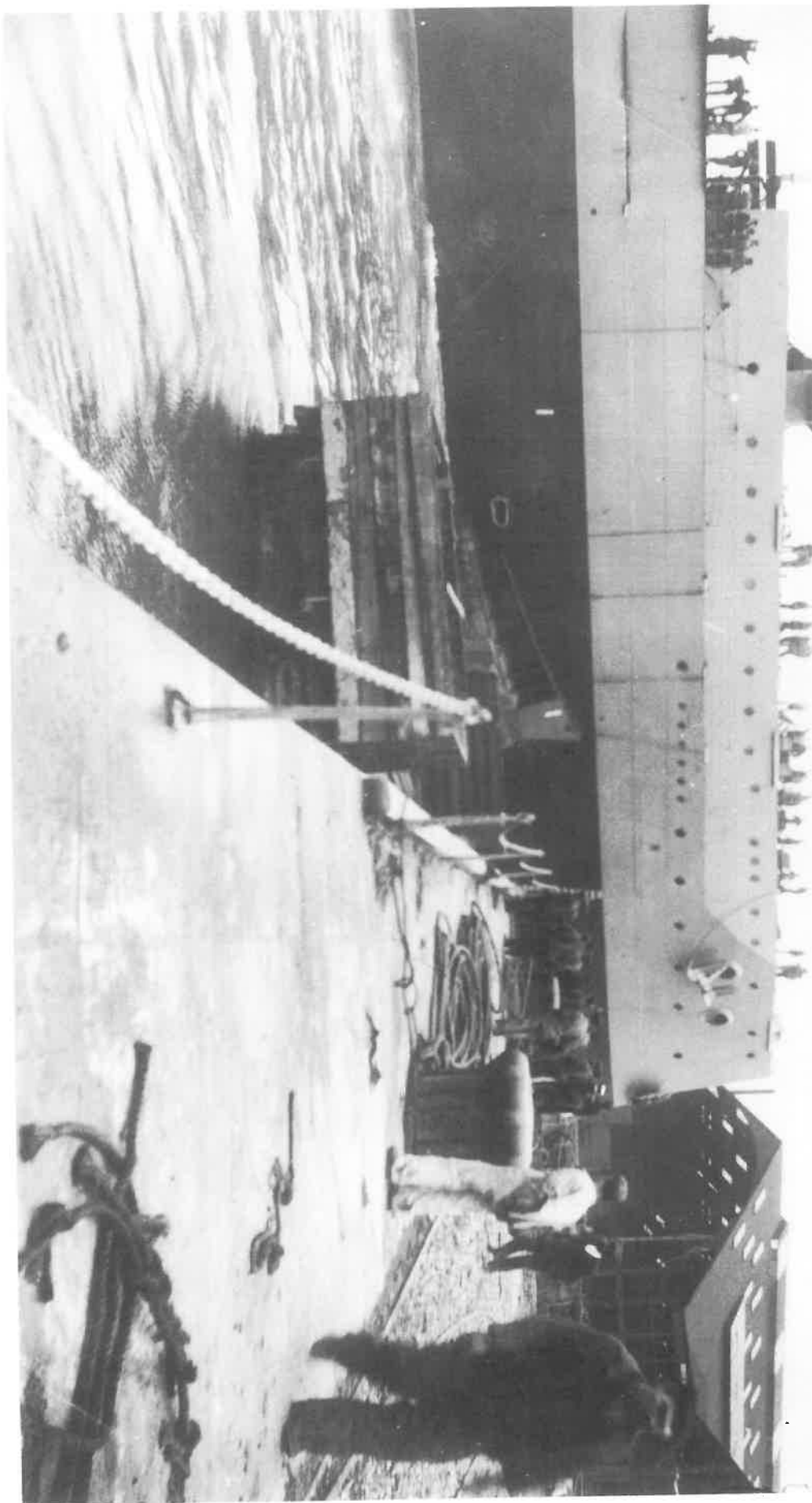
This view was taken from a set of army barracks established during the Crimean War at Llanion and shows a torpedo boat squadron anchored off Pembroke Dock. The larger vessel is their escorting destroyer. The sheer legs at Hobbs Point can be seen in the foreground as can the *Alligator*, moored against the jetty – she was an Admiralty tug. In the background, at Carr Jetty, can be seen another set of sheer legs and the partially completed cruiser *HMS Warrior*.



The Defensible Barracks stood – and still stand – on a hill to the south of the town and dockyard. Disused for many years they have, in the recent past, served as a base for the Rural District Council and as the base for the South Pembrokeshire Golf Club.



The Dockyard Fire Brigade line up in front of their engines in this wonderful S. J. Allen postcard, circa 1904. The vast majority of the Brigade were serving policemen – although supposed only to deal with fires inside the yards there were several instances when the policemen/firemen took their engines out into the town to help quell blazes there.



The launch of HMS *Defence* on 27th April 1907. Later lost at Jutland the *Defence* was an armoured cruiser, a style of warship already made obsolete by the advent of the battlecruiser concept.