



Fig 2: The ship's name is emblazoned on the black band of the gaucho's wide brimmed hat. This kind of identification on a carving is extremely rare. The fact that this figurehead had been removed from the vessel suggests that the ship's intent was well known at the time, and as such, was removed to protect the ship's identity. Image courtesy of Alan Granby and Janice Hyland.

# *Piratenim*

*The story of an Extraordinary  
Historic Ship's Figurehead*

*by Richard Hunter*

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n 1944, Britain was still very much at war. Vast areas of Europe lay in ruins, with even more destruction to follow before final victory. Despite this atmosphere of uncertainty, Vivian Collett, a local city councillor, enjoyed his walks around the cathedral city of Worcester, where he visited the many small antiquarian bookshops and antique shops dotted around the periphery of the city's center. One day, peering into the window of one such shop, he entered, and within moments, became the latest in a line of owners of a small but enchanting ship's figurehead. Carved in the form of a handsome young South American gaucho (Fig. 1), the figure was dressed in a jacket and white shirt with a red scarf, and held a set of *boleadoras*, a throwing weapon used to subjugate cattle or other animals. The word *Piratenim* was emblazoned on his wide-brimmed hat (Fig. 2). Age had patinated the surface of the carving with a rich crackalured texture (Fig. 3).

Together with the figurehead, Collett bought a small book entitled *H.M.S. Sharpshooter* (Fig. 4), which he soon discovered threw light on the figurehead's fascinating story. Additional history was provided a year later when, in January 1945, *The Mariners Mirror: House Journal of the British Society for Nautical Research* (vol. 31, no. 1) published "The last of the Brazilian Slavers 1851," by Averil Mackenzie-Grieve. Illustrated were two black-and-white images of the *Piratenim*'s figurehead, detailing its history and survival (Fig. 5).

*H.M.S. Sharpshooter*, written and privately published by Lieutenant John Crawshay Bailey, is a narrative of Bailey's early naval career and the exploits of his vessel, the *Sharpshooter*, while stationed off the east coast of South America with a mandate to stop the slave trade.<sup>1</sup> The United Kingdom had outlawed slaving some forty years previously, but it was still endemic. The sheer number of slaves transported to Brazil was a moral and financial



Fig 1: Side view of the *Piratenim* figurehead showing a South American gaucho getting ready to subjugate cattle or wild horses. Image courtesy of Alan Granby and Janice Hyland.

concern for England. Pressure from religious reformers against the continuing trade in Brazil was coupled with the negative effects the large number of slaves working in the Brazilian sugar industry were having on England's sugar profits in the West Indies. Together with three other ships, the *Cormorant*, *Plumper*, and *Locust*, Bailey's ship was authorised to seize any slave ships, free the slaves, apprehend the crew, and send the vessel to the nearest British port or destroy it.

Within a week of joining the squadron, the *Sharpshooter* had seized two slave ships, the *Malteza* and the *Conceicao*, and by September 1850, she had captured her fifth prize, a small cutter

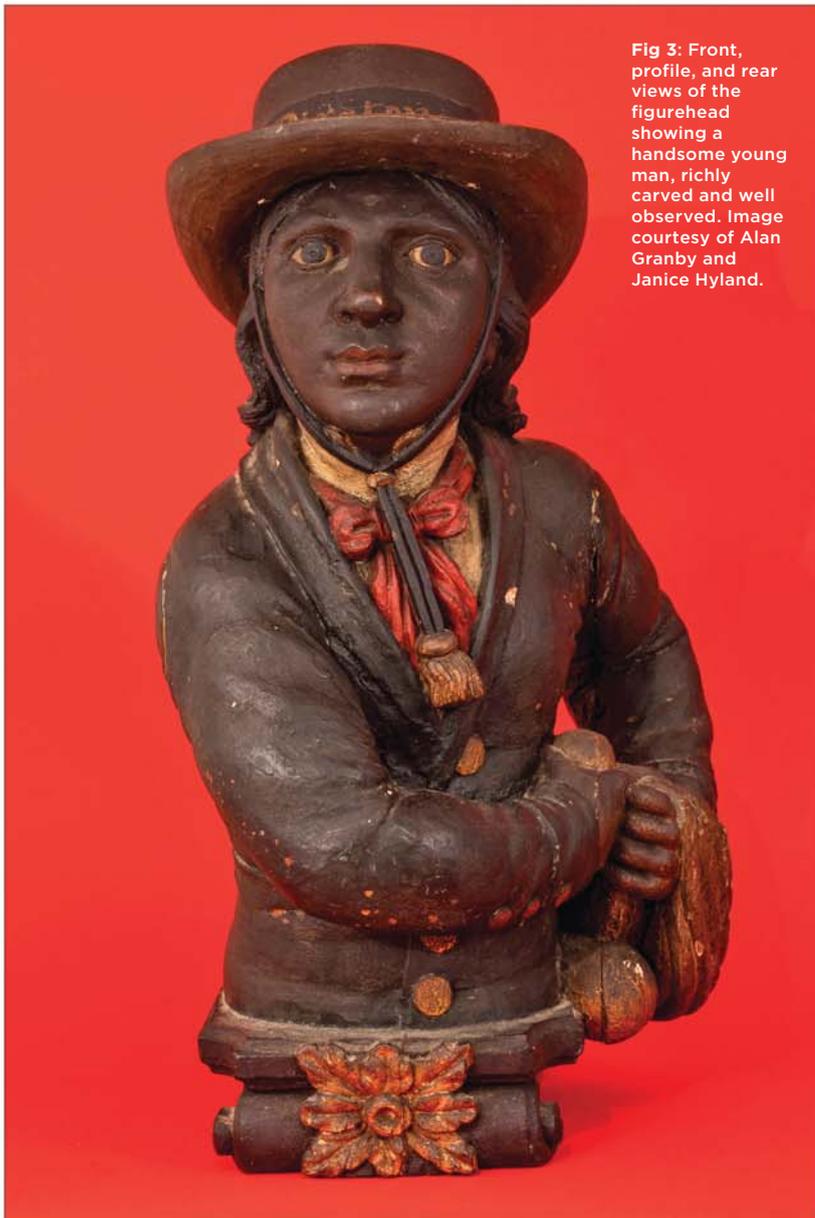


Fig 3: Front, profile, and rear views of the figurehead showing a handsome young man, richly carved and well observed. Image courtesy of Alan Granby and Janice Hyland.



called the *Amelia* carrying seventy-four slaves. By the end of the year, the *Sharpshooter* had made nine captures and freed many hundreds of slaves. It's safe to assume that each of these captured ships carried on its bow some kind of figurehead, a talisman of sorts offering security to its passengers and providing identification to other ships.

Toward the end of June 1851 after some time in port, Bailey and the *Sharpshooter* took up station off the coast of Brazil. It was here Bailey captured the *Piratenim*. Bailey describes in great detail the capture of the vessel and noted the figurehead was missing; he initially surmised it had been torn away at sea. Once on board, the crew, passengers, and slaves were sorted out and a full inspection of the vessel took place, with surprising results. Bailey recorded the following:

The brig was taken possession of, and in the course of her examination the missing figurehead was found stowed away in the hold. It was a peculiar one, and for that reason had been unshipped, lest it might lead to the vessel's identification. It represents a Gaucho, or Bolero who catch the wild cattle and horses of the Pampas by hurling a ball, attached to a long line [*boleadoras*], round the animal's horns or forelegs. Whereon the huntsman's horse, to whose saddle the other end of the line is secured, stops dead short, and so throws the pursued animal to the ground. This figurehead, together with some slave whips and drinking tubes found on board the *Piratenim*, are now in the possession of Sir Joseph Bailey.

Bailey's description of the *boleadoras* as carved into the figurehead is of note. It seems quite plausible that the roping tool represented cattle ranching, one of the several activities for which the large numbers of slaves brought to Brazil were used, along with sugar and coffee production and mining. The carved *boleadoras* further reinforce the nature of the symbolic identification of the *Piratenim* as a slave ship, and provides a reason for the captain and crew's interest in hiding the figurehead when entering waters they knew were patrolled by the English. Bailey's actions in seizing the ship and human cargo, however, were later challenged in court, as reported in the article "English Measures for Suppressing the Slave Trade" (*Daily News*, September 12th, 1851):

Our Rio correspondent writes as follows—Rio De Janeiro Aug 13: “The first case which I have to report is the capture and destruction of the brig Piratinim, and the facts of the case I will state in as few words as possible, leaving you to form your own opinion as to the legality of the capture. The Piratinim dailed from Bahia with a cargo of 4,000 alqueires of salt, 37 packages of earthenware and china, and a few barrels of sherry and Madeira wines, Her passengers were the Senhor Leitao, the owner of a large sugar estate near Cawpos, and 97 slaves belonging to the same gentleman, it is necessary here to remark, that about one-third of the number were mulattos, and that all the others were creoles, and speaking the Portuguese language. Each slave was provided with a passport from the police authorities of Bahia, had been duly despatched from that port, and had embarked publicly, and during the day time; in short, the cargo of the Piratinim was in all respects a legal one, and she pursued her voyage with all the confidence and fancies security of an honest trader.

The fact that the figurehead of the *Piratenim* had been removed from the bow and hidden is pivotal to its survival. Without this intentional action, like countless thousands of other figureheads, this historically significant object would have undoubtedly been destroyed with its host vessel or rotted away at the bottom of the ocean. The ability to link it to a specific vessel and know its associated provenance makes this figurehead an extraordinarily rare artifact of history.

John Bailey’s reason for seizing the figurehead was likely as a souvenir of his conquest, though he may also have appreciated the aesthetic and possible historic significance of this particular carving. Returning to the United Kingdom, he placed it in the care of his father, Sir Joseph Bailey, first Baron Glanusk, of Glanusk Park, Breconshire, Wales. For almost one hundred years it was kept safe at Glanusk Park. When Glanusk Park was requisition by the army during World War II, it can be assumed that its contents were sold to local dealers in Worcestershire, with the figurehead winding up in the city of Worcester, just fifty-eight miles north of the Park; the mansion house was demolished in

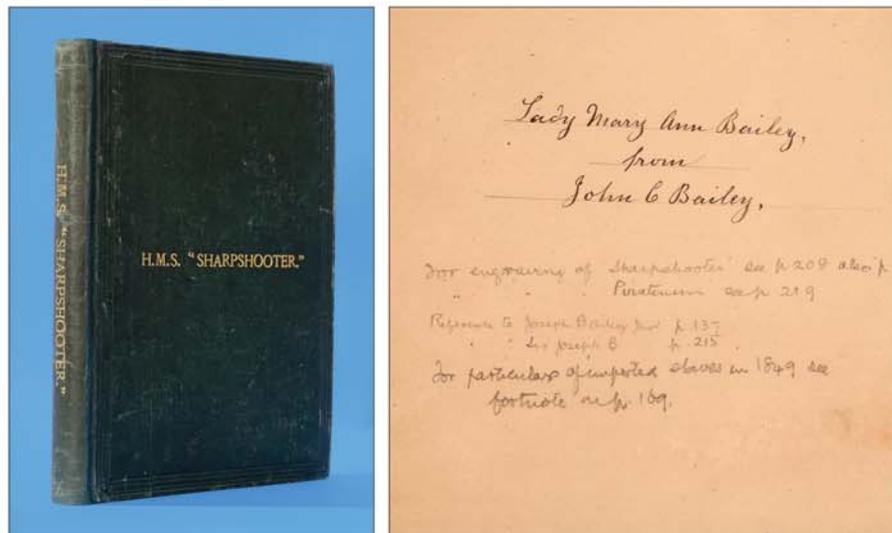


Fig 4: This book, written and published by Lieutenant John Crawshay Bailey, was personally inscribed to his mother, Lady Mary Ann Bailey. Image courtesy of Alan Granby and Janice Hyland.



Fig 5: Black and white photographs of the figurehead, originally published in the *Mariner's Mirror* in January 1945, shows the figurehead a year after its purchase by Vivian Collett in Worcester, England. Image courtesy of Alan Granby and Janice Hyland.

1952. After Vivian Collett bought the figurehead, it remained with his own family for seventy years, until Alan Granby and Janice Hyland became the most recent owners and custodians of this truly remarkable survivor from the history of slavery. [AFA](#)

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1. For an example of the difference such actions made, see *The Morning Post*, 13th August 1851 (British Newspaper Archives): “The success of the British vessels (and Brazilian government) in limiting the slave trade can be seen in the statistics for 1851. In the first 6 months of this year, there were an estimated 1,000 slaves brought to Brazil, compared with 20,000 for the corresponding period in 1850.” Though the Brazilian government did not outlaw slavery until the 1880s, advances toward that end were in process for several decades.