

Lt-Cdr Peter Whitlock

PETER WHITLOCK possessed two unusual qualifications which together gained him great distinction. One was an understanding of the construction and working of the ships of the old sailing navy, and the other a comprehensive historical knowledge of the officers and men who served in them.

Whitlock took full advantage of his training in the Navy to develop his expertise. Joining as a rating in 1940, he had already been subject to a taut discipline in C.B. Fry's training ship *Mercury* on the River Hamble. There he learned the fundamentals of his later in-depth knowledge of masts, sails and rigging. After a rigorous Second World War, in which he sailed on the dreaded Arctic convoys, he progressed in the Bosun branch of the Royal Navy, which was slowly losing its place in the order of things with the modernisation of ships. Taking full advantage of the few appointments available, he was the last to serve as Master

Rigger and Bosun of Portsmouth Dockyard.

As a Lieutenant-Commander, Whitlock was appointed in 1974 to command HMS *Victory*, restored to her Trafalgar condition, and still in full commission as the flag ship of the Commander-in-Chief Home Command.

The task was tailor-made for Whitlock and he made a complete success of its varied facets, which extended from a detailed knowledge of the ship down to the requirements of the half a million people who visited her annually.

So much were his endeavours appreciated that he ran a second term in command until his retirement in 1978. In four years he had become a walking encyclopaedia on all aspects of the "wooden walls". His opinion was law and even that eighteenth-century clas-



sic and lexicon, Steel's *The Elements of Mast Making, Sail Making and Rigging*, held no secrets for him.

Whitlock developed a reputation as a lecturer both nationally and internationally and he re-

mained active after his retirement. The Society for Nautical Research, which had been responsible for restoring *Victory* from 1922 onwards, made him their honorary treasurer. Although an appointment which was not entirely his *métier*, it reflected the wise advice he had been able to give the society in the spending of their "Save the *Victory* Fund" for improving technical aspects of the ship. Equally, his appointment as a member of the *Victory* Advisory Technical Committee provided evidence of the high esteem in which he was held.

The Mary Rose Trust likewise realised that, in Whitlock, they had on hand an expert who would interpret their marine archaeological find both in terms of the ship and its artefacts, and he gave

outstanding service to the trust for a decade.

Whitlock was a book reviewer in his particular field for a long time and in 1988 the Society for Nautical Research awarded him the signal honour of appointing him as a vice-president. Peter Whitlock was an institution. In recent years, no debatable matter on the sailing warship was ever resolved without his participation.

A. J. Pack

Peter Whitlock, naval officer and archaeologist, born 1925, died 21 October 1989.

Ermal Cleon Frazee, engineer, died 26 October Dayton Ohio. Invented the pull-tab opener for aluminium drink cans.

Cecil Benjamin Alsopp, physicist, died 16 October aged 85. Professor of Physics Applied to Medicine at Guy's Hospital Medical School from 1953 to 1970.