

# Trinity House To-day

By Morrys Rodney

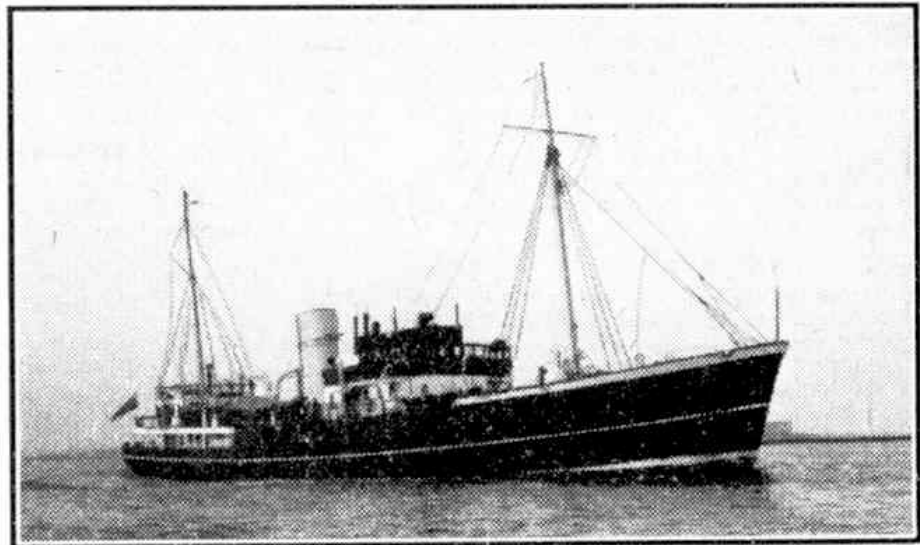
**A**LTHOUGH well known by name, the Corporation of Trinity House carries out its work with a minimum of publicity. Most people have a general impression that it deals with lights and pilotage, without any clear idea of the duties involved or how they are undertaken. Confusion also often arises over the terms Elder Brethren and Younger Brethren. Photographs of Mr. Winston Churchill in a nautical style of dress are explained by referring to him as an Elder Brother of Trinity House. Yet, despite his versatility, one is left to guess exactly where Mr. Churchill fits into the picture when it comes to controlling lights and pilots.

That Trinity House is a very ancient body goes without saying. Nobody has discovered exactly when it started, mainly because so many early records have been lost by fire. Certainly there was a guild of mariners back in the Middle Ages, gathered together mainly for religious and charitable activities; but not until 1514, when Henry VIII granted them a charter of incorporation, did they get any official recognition. The charter decreed that they should be styled the Guild or Fraternity of the Most Glorious and Undividable Trinity of St. Clement. That indeed is the full title of the Corporation to-day, with the motto *Trinitas in Unitate*. St. Clement, the third Bishop of Rome, was regarded as the patron saint of seafaring men.

The first charter empowered the Corporation to carry out a number of duties in providing ships and competent mariners, although it was so vaguely worded that there must have been many arguments between Trinity House and rival bodies. At one period the Trinity Brethren had considerable influence on naval affairs, but it waned when the Admiralty came into being on modern lines. Similarly they examined men in the art and science of navigation long before that important

duty was taken over by the present authorities. They also punished offenders against sea laws, especially deserters and mutineers, a power now wielded by other hands under the terms of the Merchant Shipping Acts.

King Henry's charter laid down certain rules for the government of Trinity House, as did the charters granted by his successors. The Corporation was to be headed by a Master, who gave orders to officials known as Wardens and Assistants. All of these were elected by the Brethren. In early times one only had to be a seafarer to qualify as a Brother of Trinity House, while even this elementary test was not always observed. As the rules were tightened up in stages the ranks of the Brethren were thinned out and only properly qualified men admitted to the Corporation, but a number of honorary



The famous Trinity House yacht "Patricia," which leads the Royal Yacht at naval reviews and carries Elder Brethren on tours of inspection. Photograph by courtesy of Smith's Dock Company Ltd.

positions were retained for the benefit of distinguished persons in public life.

Trinity House now operates under the charter granted by James II in 1685, with minor amendments by means of supplementary charters up to 1939. This is the authority for its present constitution. Although the Master is still head of the Corporation, a post now held by the Duke of Gloucester, the actual duties are delegated to a Deputy Master with professional qualifications. He supervises all the activities of Trinity House, with two



A close-up of the lantern in a modern lightship. Photograph by courtesy of Philip and Son Ltd.

Wardens and seven Assistants as his executive officers. These ten men are collectively known as the active Elder Brethren. Mr. Churchill and other notabilities, including soldiers and sailors, are honorary Elder Brethren. Of these there are 13, because Trinity House is not superstitious, and they are not required to undertake any duties.

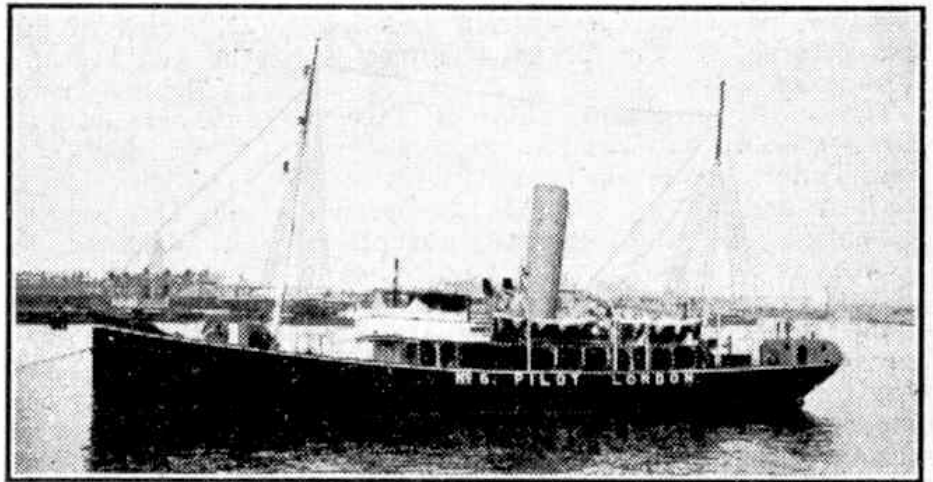
The Elder Brethren on the active list have a full-time job and are paid accordingly. Normally they are elected from the much larger body of Younger Brethren, each of whom must either be a master mariner or have served in the Navy with a rank not below that of Lieutenant Commander. These Younger Brethren total about 300 and form a reserve from which any vacancies are filled. But they are not elected just because their names happen to be at the top of the list. With so many on the waiting list the active Brothers can afford to

pick the most suitable man. Moreover, they have to consider age when making the choice. Since active Elder Brethren must retire at 70, it would be no use electing a man who is already near that age. So most of the Younger Brethren are doomed to remain on the list for the rest of their days.

In special cases, where it is desired to secure a naval officer to fill a vacancy—at least one of the active Brothers is always supplied by the Navy—Trinity House might go outside the list altogether. In such an event the procedure is first to swear in the choice as a Younger Brother, and to follow this by electing him an Elder Brother. The Younger Brethren have no duties to perform, apart from attending at headquarters to re-elect the senior officers once a year; but their position, although unpaid, is one of great prestige in shipping circles. It also carries the doubtful privilege of claiming exemption from serving on a jury.

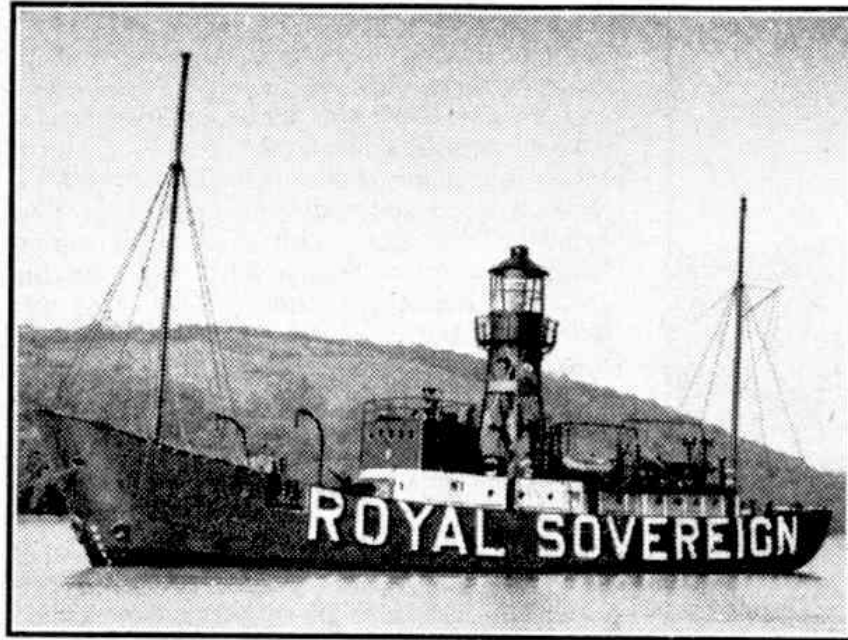
The duties of Trinity House, as undertaken by the active Elder Brethren, are partly laid down in the charter, but mainly authorised by various Acts of Parliament. By means of ancient funds it carries out a vast amount of charitable work among seafarers and their dependents. Two of the Elder Brethren attend at the Admiralty Court during its sittings to serve as nautical assessors. Their task is to study the evidence and advise the judge on any technical point. As disinterested parties, fully qualified to detect any fault in navigation, their presence ensures a just decision, fair to all concerned. When serving in this capacity they are officially known as Trinity Masters.

So far as pilotage is concerned, Trinity



The pilot cutter "Pioneer," one of the fleet which supplies ships with pilots licensed by Trinity House. Photograph by courtesy of John I. Thornycroft and Co. Ltd.

House is responsible for the examination and licensing of all pilots in the London District, which extends from London Bridge to the Sunk Sand off Felixstowe in the North, and to Dungeness in the South. In addition, pilots in many other ports



The "Royal Sovereign" Lightship, one of the latest to enter service. Photograph by courtesy of Philip and Son Ltd.

are examined and licensed. Altogether, nearly 600 pilots are at work under the authority of Trinity House, but they are not servants of the Corporation once they have obtained their licences. Each is employed by the master of the ship, acting on behalf of his owner. Pilotage may either be compulsory, as required by law for certain areas, or it may be voluntary, as a safety precaution. Trinity House is mainly concerned with selecting qualified men to do the work. During the late war its licensed pilots rendered valuable services, especially in handling the passage of the invasion forces to Normandy.

The most important duty of Trinity House concerns lights and buoys. Although from Tudor days it was charged with such work it had a long struggle to become recognised as the general authority. Strange as it seems, private persons were allowed to erect lighthouses by permission of the Crown. Often they were speculators hoping to make a steady income from their outlay by levying charges on passing ships. These private lights varied in efficiency according to the people who owned them, yet the unsatisfactory system was not finally ended until 1836. In that year Trinity House was empowered to buy

out the surviving private lights in England and Wales. Some of them were hard bargains; one lighthouse which had cost only £3,000 to erect in 1708 realised £450,000 for its owner, while another was reckoned to be worth £300,000. Trinity House secured these and others with borrowed money, which had to be paid off from subsequent revenue.

Since that time the Corporation has been the General Lighthouse Authority for England and Wales, including the Channel Islands. Similar powers are wielded in Ireland by the Commissioners of Irish Lights, and in Scotland and the Isle of Man by the Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses. Both of these bodies, although working independently of Trinity House, are subject to its approval when it comes to erecting new lights or altering existing ones. All three derive their incomes from

the light dues, which must be paid by all ships, British and foreign, visiting our shores. The payment is based on the size of the ship, with limits on the number of voyages for which the dues can be demanded. The money is paid into the General Lighthouse Fund, controlled by the Ministry of Transport, and shared out between Trinity House and its contemporary bodies according to their needs. The total sum raised by light dues was £2,212,824 for the last year recorded.

For its lighthouse work—a term covering all forms of navigation marks, including the buoying of dangerous wrecks, as well as lights—Trinity House divides its area into six districts, each with a shore depot. These depots are at Great Yarmouth, Harwich, East Cowes, Penzance, Swansea and Holyhead. There is also a sub-depot at Blackwall, on the Thames. Until a recent decision, all repair and maintenance on lighting and fog signal equipment for lighthouse and light vessels, the overhauling of buoys and similar work, was concentrated at Blackwall, employing a staff of about 150 skilled hands. In future these activities will be based on Harwich, with the existing depot there enlarged for the purpose. Blackwall is being retained as a site for stores. (Continued on page 94)