

The Wellesley – Key Questions

What was the *Wellesley*?

The *Wellesley* was a training school opened in 1868. She was an old '74 gun' battleship donated by the Royal Navy. She looked similar to Admiral Nelson's flagship *HMS Victory*. Her weapons were stripped out and over £4000 spent turning her into a training ship for around 300 poor and homeless boys.

Who had the idea to put a training ship on the River Tyne?

James Hall of Tynemouth led the campaign to set up a sail training ship on the River Tyne. At a public meeting in 1868 he proposed:

That a Society be now formed for the purpose of establishing a School Ship...for the reception of boys, who, through poverty, parental neglect, or being orphans, or who from any other cause are left destitute and homeless and in danger of contamination...with vice and crime.

His appeal touched the hearts of rich and poor alike. Most felt it was their Christian duty to support causes that helped those less fortunate than themselves.

Who paid for the *Wellesley*?

Running a training ship was costly. The money came from public donations, a yearly government grant and institutions such as poor law unions who paid for pauper children to attend the *Wellesley*.

Why sort of boys were sent to train on the *Wellesley*?

Boys were admitted between the ages of 12 and 16. In 1907 a guide to the ship stressed:

It cannot be too clearly and too often stated that the boys trained on board are not criminals. But it has been considered best for themselves that they should be taken care off and given a chance for future usefulness.

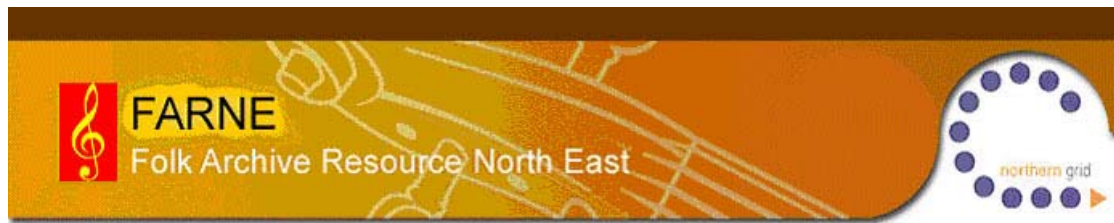
Boys were sent to the *Wellesley* by local magistrates under the terms of the 1866 Industrial Schools Act. This included:

Any boy...that's is found begging or receiving alms (money)...That's is found wandering, and not having any home...or proper guardianship. That is found destitute, either being an orphan or having a surviving parent (in prison)...That frequents the company of thieves.

What sort of training were *Wellesley* boys given?

The boys were trained for jobs in the Royal or merchant navies. Instead of classes the boys were divided into two *watches* of six *divisions* each. While one watch was at school *below deck*, the other was taught seamanship *on deck*.

The school timetable included Holy Scripture; reading, writing; arithmetic and practical geography.



Seamanship included compass and steering; sailmaking; knotting and splicing; clothes making in the tailors shop; boot making in the shoemakers shop; cooking; swimming and diving and cutlass and rifle drill. The school also had a band and a field gun crew; both popular at garden parties and bazaars.

Where was she berthed?

Off Liddell Street quays, North Shields.

Could the boys have visitors?

Yes, once they had been on board for two months. But all visitors had to be sober!