
The Cutty Sark

Overview

The Cutty Sark is a clipper ship. Built in 1869 for the Jock Willis shipping line, she was one of the last tea clippers to be built and one of the fastest, coming at the end of a long period of design development which halted as sailing ships gave way to steam propulsion. This type of ship was named 'clipper', due to their narrow hull and for being the fastest sailing ships of their day.

Cutty Sark was destined for the tea trade, then an intensely competitive race across the globe from China to London, with a substantial bonus to the ship that arrived with the first tea of the year. Clipper ships became increasingly redundant with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 which created a much shorter route to China through Egypt, allowing steam engine boats to travel in around the same amount of time as the clippers but with increased loads and more reliability. As a result of this, the Cutty Sark spent only a few years on the tea trade before turning to the trade in wool from Australia, where she held the record time to Britain for ten years.

The ship was named after Cutty Sark, the nickname of the witch Nannie Dee in Robert Burns' 1791 poem Tam o' Shanter. The ship's figurehead, the original carved by Robert Hellyer of Blackwall, shows Nannie Dee in a stark white carving of a bare-breasted woman with long black hair holding a grey horse's tail in her hand. In the poem she wore a linen sark (Scots: a short chemise or undergarment), that she had been given as a child, which explains why it was cutty, or in other words far too short.

History

- 1869: The Cutty Sark was built as a tea clipper for the trade route between Britain and China.
 - The Suez Canal was opened which made many tea clippers redundant in favour of steam vessels.
- 1870: Maiden voyage to Shanghai, China carrying wines, spirits and beers
 - Return journey carrying 1450 tonnes of tea via the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa.
- 1872: Cutty Sark's most famous race against Thermopylae, both ships leaving Shanghai on the same day.
 - Cutty Sark lead by 400 miles but broke a rudder and made repairs resulting in a lost race.
- 1877: Cutty Sark made its first trip to Sydney, Australia, via dropping coal in Shanghai.
 - The Cutty could not find any tea for the return trip to London, signalling the end of the tea clippers.
 - Thereafter the Cutty Sark was primarily used in the wool trade between London and Australia.
- 1883: Departed NSW, Australia with 4,289 bales of wool for return to London.
 - Arrived back to London in 73 days which was a record held for over 10 years. To make this time, the Cutty travelled a new, more southerly route using the roaring forties winds which is now the favoured route for round the world yacht races.
- 1895: Steam engine boats had overtaken clipper in the wool trade and the Cutty was sold to Portuguese firm Ferreira, which the Cutty was then renamed after.
 - The ship traded various cargoes between Portugal, Rio, New Orleans, Mozambique, Angola, and Britain over the next 20 years.
- 1922: The Cutty was the last remaining operating clipper in the world and was sold back to a retired British Sea captain - Wilfred Dowman. The Cutty has remained in British hand ever since.
- 1936: Following Wilfred Dowman's death, the Cutty was bought by Thames Nautical Training College and used as a training ship.
- 1938: The Cutty Sark's last sailed voyage was from Falmouth to the Thames where it continued as a training vessel, albeit stationary.
- 1951: The Cutty Sark was entrusted to the care of the newly formed Cutty Sark Society, headed by The Duke of Edinburgh who was instrumental in ensuring its preservation.
- 1954: The Cutty Sark was moved to a custom-built dry-dock at Greenwich where the ship was restored in preparation for public exhibition at a cost of £250,000. The Cutty Sark has remained an exhibition ship ever since.

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- 2007: Having been partly dismantled for restoration work, the Cutty Sark caught fire and burned for several hours and causing extensive damage before the fire brigade were able to bring the fire under control. The fire was deemed accidental but resulted in a restoration cost of over \$50m.
- 2012: Following years of restoration, the ship was re-opened to the public by the queen on the 25th of April 2012. The ship has been elevated, allowing visitors to see underneath the ship as well as go aboard to see an interactive exhibition.



Cutty Sark in February 2012 with repairs almost complete

Career (UK)	
Name:	Cutty Sark (1869-95), (1922-date)
Namesake:	Cutty-sark
Owner:	John Willis (40/64 share) Robert Dunbar Willis (24/64 share)
Ordered:	1 February 1869
Builder:	Scott & Linton
Cost:	£16,500
Laid down:	1869
Launched:	22 November 1869
Sponsored by:	Mrs. Moodie
Commissioned:	16 February 1870
Out of service:	December 1954
Homeport:	London (1870-1895) Falmouth (1923-38) London (1938-date)
Identification:	UK Official Number: 63557 ^[1]
Motto:	"Where there's a will is a way"
Status:	Museum ship

