

THE GLENLEE (EX-GALATEA)



Around the world and the return to Glasgow

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TEXT: Jack Tar

FOTO: Leslie Barrie / Wikimedia Commons

The *Glenlee*, which for many is still the *Galatea*, was made in 1896 in a shipyard in Glasgow and you can currently see it in that same port. For more than a century it was a merchant ship, a training ship, a living dead; now it is a museum ship. But, above all, it is one of the most beautiful ships in the world. For almost 60 years it was a training ship for the Spanish Navy, overshadowed by the *Juan Sebastián de Elcano*, which

replaced the Galatea while it was still alive. However, this boat has a before and an after that need to be explained.

The perseverance of naval sailing

The *Glenlee* was built in 1896 at the Bay Yard in Port Glasgow as a three-masted corvette or barque. A few years before the end of the 19th century when mechanical propulsion was already victorious, the construction of iron sailing ships was the response to a technological challenge. It represented a history of sailing that dates back more than 5,000 years of sailing fighting back against the steam engine: wind, cleanliness and silence against coal, grease and noise. In a way, it was the final battle put up by iron sailing ships that refused to disappear. Ever since its construction, this iron-hulled ship sailed carrying goods, persevering against the pressure of steam, a technology that put an end to thousands of years of sailing.

Her life as a merchant ship was typical of vessels that were contemptuously called windbreakers. She was the *Glenlee* and *Islamount* under the British flag until 1919. Then she passed to the Italian flag with the name *Clarastella* and enjoyed a second life, now as a motorsailer with two diesel engines. A series of circumstances brought her to Spain to serve in the Navy as a training ship. She was to be accompanied by another Italian sailboat, but her poor condition discouraged this and, in the following years, she would be replaced by the *Juan Sebastián de Elcano*.

Sailing on training boats

We should recall that in the past, and in fact still today, there was the idea that sailing ships were the true school for seafarers, especially for officers, even for those who would never sail. The philosophy holds that sailing was the ultimate battle area, the place where a man (and now a woman) was forged in the fight against the elements. Values such as responsibility, teamwork, improvisation, and camaraderie, among others, were acquired at all costs. This idea is still alive and that is why many navies around the world still keep their training ships. Even some merchant navies also adopt this philosophy.

Thus, from 1925 (after the relevant repairs and transformations were made) the old *Glenlee* entered into service for the Spanish Navy under the name *Galatea*, serving as a training vessel for different generations of cadets. Before serving on modern ships, the cadets went through the experience of sailing, thus forging an old-fashioned *esprit de corps*. Yet her life in this role was cut short, since in 1928 she was replaced by *Juan Sebastián de Elcano* as the main ship for training officers. The *Galatea* remained as a kind of second course, active but on a secondary level. She continued to sail, survived the Spanish Civil War, and even a storm on 3 October 1946 that almost sank her off the Azores. The wind tried again in 1954 near New York, but once again she survived.

On 15 December 1959, the Navy withdrew it from active service, and it was moored at the Ferrol arsenal as a manoeuvring school, but it no longer set sail, and it gradually aged until it was definitively decommissioned in 1982. However the Navy did not decide to give the order to scrap it due to vocal protests and fearing that it would give the navy a bad image. The ship was plundered day by day, devoured little by little by scrap metal or souvenir seekers. Many materials are surely in private homes today. A worthy future was sought for it as a museum or floating exhibition and it was taken to Seville, anchored in the Guadalquivir, and finally moored awaiting its end. However, when a decision was made to sell it at auction, salvation arrived. A British institution, the Clyde Maritime Trust in Glasgow, purchased the ship.

Resurrection beyond the sea

In 1993 she was towed to Greenock and later to Glasgow. There, the *Glenlee* was restored and converted into a floating museum. After some preliminary work in dry dock, a six-year restoration process began. Some elements were brought from Spain, such as the original masts. The new owners tried to recover the original figurehead, which remains on display in La Graña, Ferrol (A Coruña). Having failed in their mission, they commissioned a replica. Rumour has it that the Spanish Navy said that the figurehead would not be returned until the British returned Gibraltar. Whether fact or fiction, it's certainly believable. On 6 July 1993, she was christened again with her original name, *Glenlee*, in a highly emotional ceremony. Now the sailboat is a true Scottish monument and a tourist attraction on the Riverside in Glasgow.

At the time of writing, the ship is undergoing restoration work on the equipment. If you want to go and see it, it may be worth waiting a while for the work to be finished and the ship to regain its splendour. You can find more information on the [website](#).

As a curiosity, the Museu Marítim de Barcelona preserves some of the furniture from the commander's room. The pieces likely date back to the 1940s or 1950s and were added to the Museum's collection in 1983. Of course, in the Museum Library you can find some fascinating [publications about this vessel and the people](#) who sailed on it.



The Glenlee towed to Greenock. 1993. Photo: Hamish Hardie, Manager of Tall Ship Glenlee.

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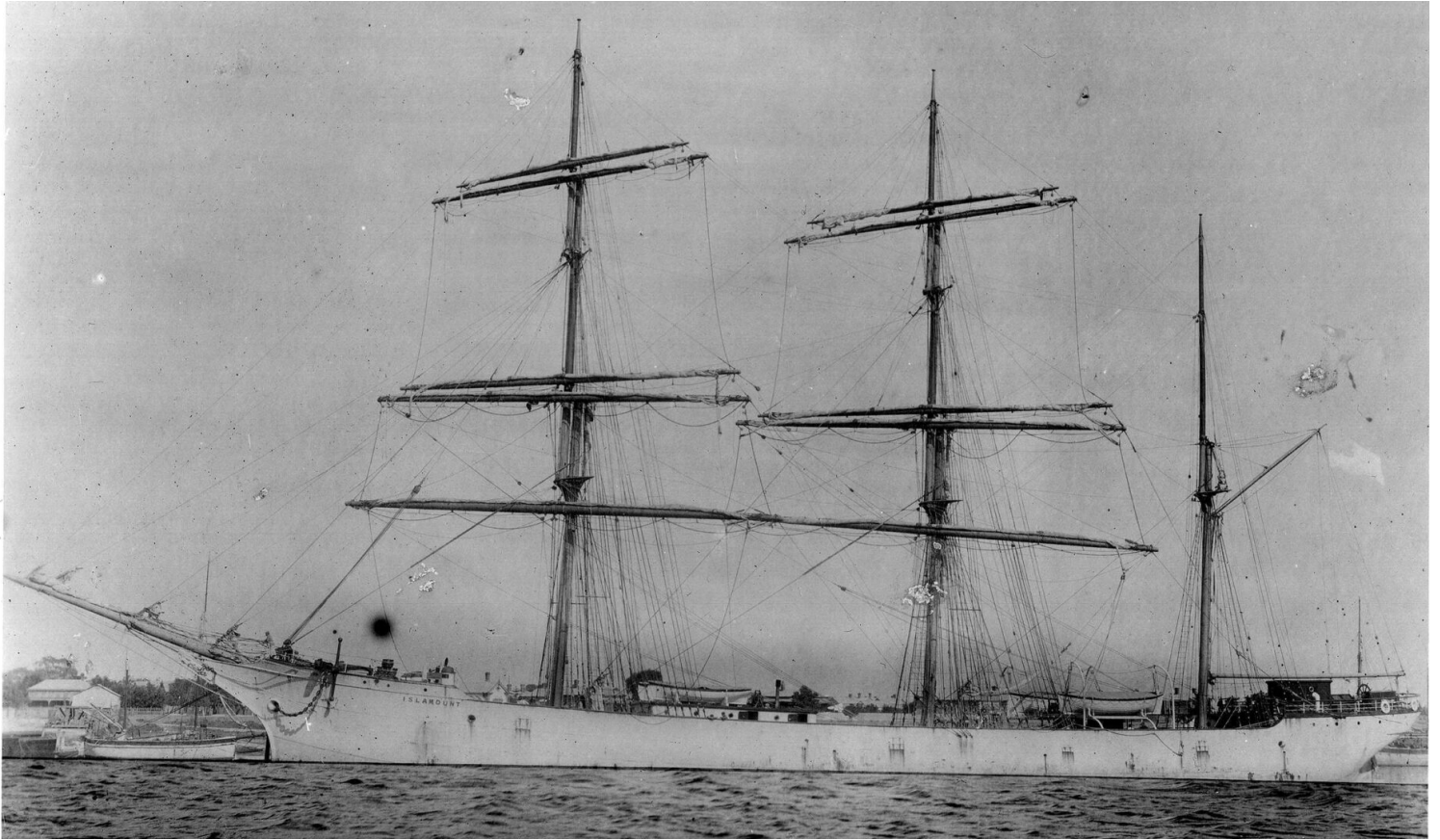
The Glenlee creeping into Greenock. 1993. Photo: Hamish Hardie, Manager of Tall Ship Glenlee.

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The *Glenlee* when sailing as *Islamount*, under the British flag, between 1898 and 1919. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

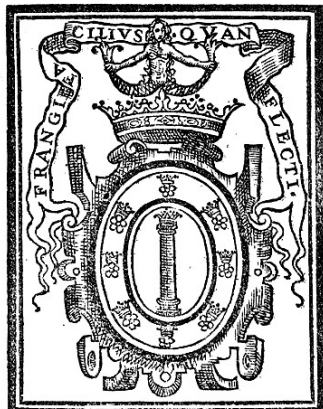
A work by Cervantes

Galatea is a novel by Miguel de Cervantes published in 1585. It is the first part of an unfinished work, since the author died before he could finish it, hence why the plot of the novel is abruptly cut short. It is a work in a pastoral style, very fashionable at the time, with several plots. In the main one there are two shepherds, Elicio and Erastro, in love with Galatea, a very beautiful, yet highly virtuous, intelligent and generous shepherdess. She has a free spirit and avoids her suitors. It must be remembered that Cervantes was a lover and admirer of women, and he created his female characters with a modern mindset in our eyes, active, readers, with their own personality, who exude, in a certain way, freedom and independence. These active women have good character and good judgement. We could say that they were empowered women *avant la lettre*.

By the way, the ship's figurehead does not represent the shepherdess; it is a replica of the original figurehead and shows a Scottish girl, Mary Doll. The original figurehead is in the Naval Museum of Ferrol.

PRIMERA PARTE
DE LA GALATEA,
DIVIDIDA EN SEYS LIBROS.
Cópuesta por Miguel de Ceruantes.

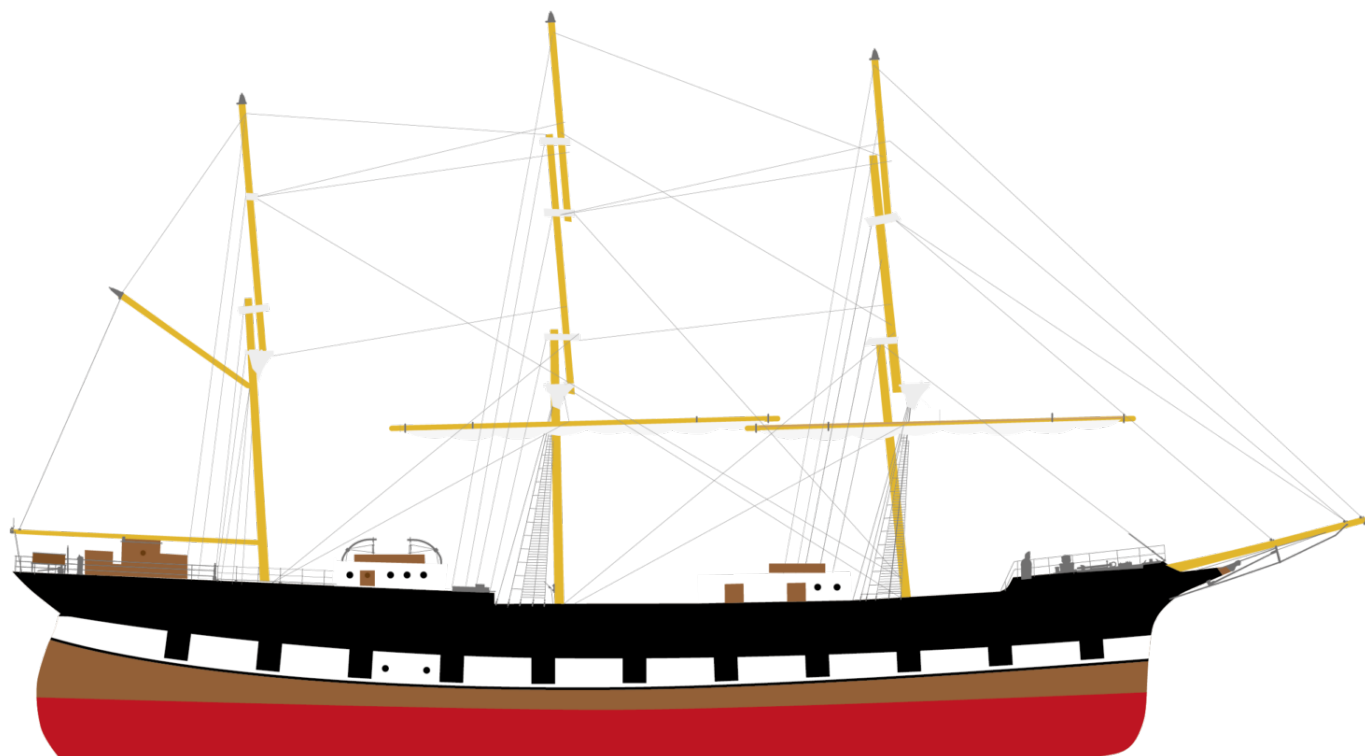
*Dirigida al Illustrisísi. señor Ascanio Colona Abad de
sancta Sofia.*



CON PRIVILEGIO.
Impressa en Alcalá por Iuan Graçian.

Año de 1585.

A costa de Blas de Robles mercader de libros.



Lateral section of the *Glenlee*. Infographic: Carles Javierre.

Fact sheet

GENERAL INFORMATION

Type: three-masted steel ship

Builder: Anderson Rodger, Bay Yard, Port Glasgow, Scotland

Original owner: Archibald Sterling & Company of Glasgow

Keel laid: June 1896 (estimated)

Launch: 3 December 1896

DIMENSIONS

Overall length: 94.7 m

Beam: 11.43 m

Maximum draught: 6,337 m

TONNAGE AND WEIGHT

Loaded displacement: 3,367 tonnes (3,421 metric tonnes)

Gross tonnage: 1,613 tonnes

MASTS

Foremast: 52.3 m

Main mast: 52.5 m

Main beam: 25.5 m

Mizzenmast: 44.5 m