



# Watercraft Philately



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## Amphion's illustrious career as a ship-of-war



*A Florida-based treasure hunting company, Odyssey Marine, took on an epic battle in the courts to keep 17 tons of gold coins and artifacts it discovered off the coast of Portugal in 2007. They lost and the treasure was returned to Spain in April 2015 where it is now on display at the Archeological Museum of Alicante.*

*The ship in question was the **NUESTRA SENORA DE LAS MERCEDES**, which was one of the first casualties in a battle with the Royal Navy's **AMPHION**.*

*While searching for more information or a possible photo of this treasure ship, instead we found this un-named battle that pre-dates the Battle of Trafalgar. It's a long story but fascinating, so we've included it here, thanks to information in a new series of books (see Page 48.)*

**AMPHION, HMS** (5th rate 36 gun Frigate)  
Gibraltar # (2008) 49p

**1798 – Royal Navy; James Betts, Mistleythorn, U.K.; O. June 11/1796, K. July 1796, L. March 19/1798, C. July 6/1798; 909 ton (bm); 43.89m x 11.46m x 3.84m., length of keel 37.09m; Armament: Upper deck 26 – 18pdrs., quarter deck 4 – 6pdrs. and 4 – 24pdrs., fore-castle 2 – 6pdrs. and 2 – 24pdrs. Carronades;**

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**HMS AMPHION** was a fifth-rate 36-gun wooden sailing vessel built by George Betts at Mistleythorn boat yard for the Royal Navy. She was ordered June 11, 1796, keel laid in July 1796, completed July 6, 1798 at Chatham and she was launched March 19, 1798 as the **HMS AMPHION**, the lead ship of her class. She had four sisters, all designed by Sir William Rule.

After completing, with first captain, John Bennett, she sailed for Africa and on Dec. 20, 1798, sailed for Jamaica.

On November 25, 1799, along with **HMS ALARM**, she captured the Spanish letter of marquee **ASTUZZANA** with a crew of 100 men, armed with 18 – 8pdrs., 2 – 12pdrs. guns and 4 – 32 pdrs howitzers. She was escorting a convoy of four vessels from Cadiz to Vera Cruz. On Dec. 23, the **ALARM** brought the prize into Port Royal, Jamaica.

After serving in the West Indies Station, she returned to England for a re-fit and was re-launched on Dec. 24, 1801 under the command of Captain Alexander Fraser.

In May 1802, she was hunting smugglers in British waters and conveyed the Duke of Cambridge and his suite to Cuxhaven.

On October 1, 1802 **AMPHION** was appointed to take Lord Fitzgerald as Ambassador to Portugal and she sailed for Lisbon on the 25th. Her passage out took 31 days, but she returned on Dec. 10 in only eight days together with the packet **PRINCE ADOLPHUS**, with Captain Jones.

On Jan. 23, 1803 she was ordered to be paid off with **ALCMENE**, and was re-commissioned sailing for Cork on March 11 to procure more seamen. On May 19, 1803, Lord Nelson hoisted his flag in **VICTORY** but was ordered to leave her so she could reinforce Admiral Cornwallis's squadron off Ushant. He transferred his flag to **AMPHION** on the 23rd for the passage to the Mediterranean where he had been appointed Commander-in-Chief.

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