

## Bone Ship Model of HMS *Bellerophon* in National War Museum, Edinburgh

**HMS *Bellerophon***, known to sailors as the "Billy Ruffian", was a ship of the line of the Royal Navy. A third-rate of 74 guns, she was launched in 1786<sup>1</sup>. *Bellerophon* served during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, mostly on blockades or convoy escort duties. She fought in three fleet actions: the Glorious First of June (1794), the Battle of the Nile (1798) and the Battle of Trafalgar (1805). While the ship was on blockade duty in 1815, Napoleon boarded *Bellerophon* so he could surrender to the ship's captain, ending 22 years of almost continuous war between Britain and France.

In German literature (Sievert, 1961; mentioned in Stein, 2015) it reads: „After his defeat at Waterloo, Napoleon withdrew to Rochefort (south of La Rochelle, France) to embark on a ship to America. *“Besson described his plan as follow: ... In the hold between two rows of brandy casks, five empty barrels were stored which had been upholstered inside. In the event of an inspection five persons could hide in these barrels. ... Fresh air came into the barrels through concealed tubes, ...”* However, Napoleon changed his plans. When Victor Besson was summoned to Napoleon, he thought that the operation, the escape to New York, was due to start the next day. However, Napoleon disclosed to him *“I have decided to go to England, and tomorrow I will board the BELLEROPHON (British man-of-war).”*

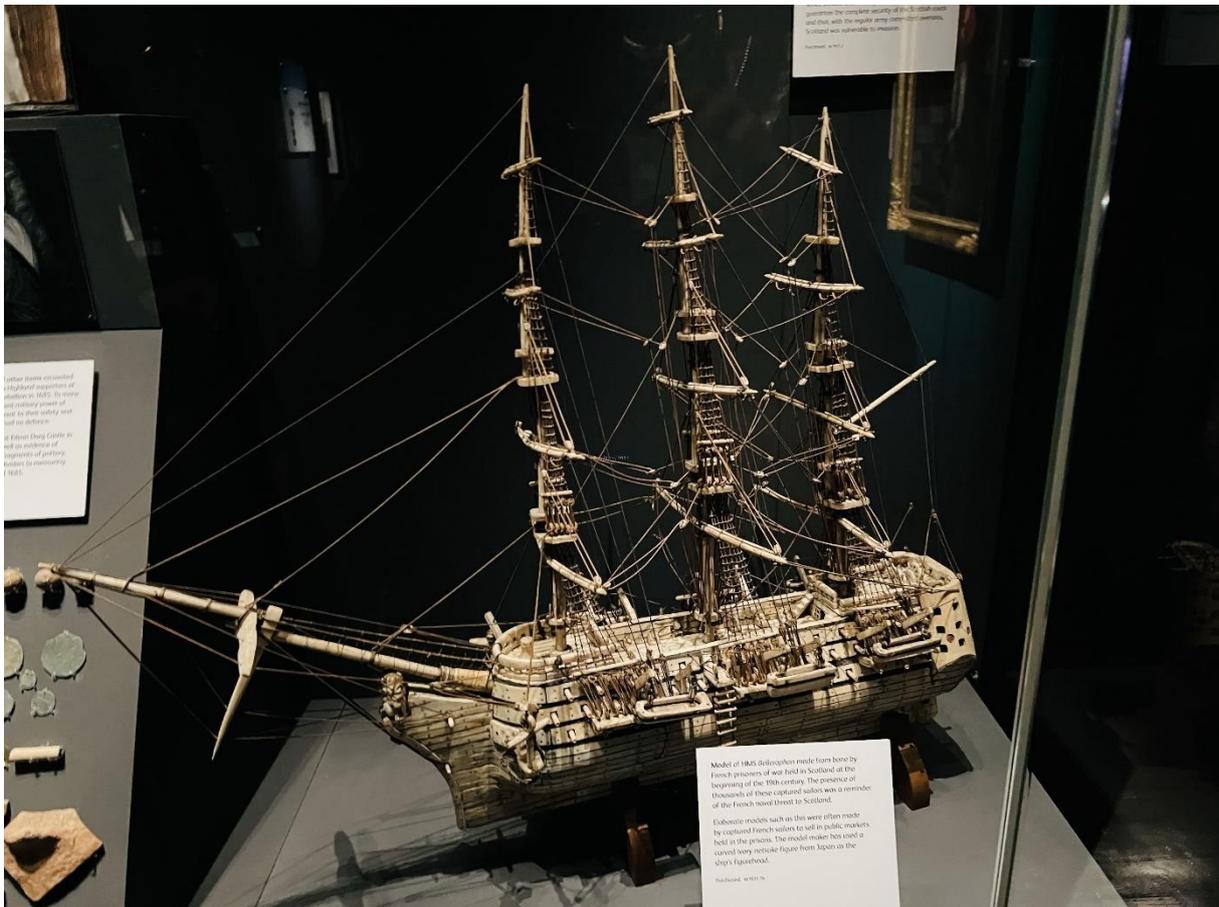
The Bone Ship Model of HMS *Bellerophon* displayed in the National War Museum, Edinburgh, was possibly built in Edinburgh Castle.

Until 1810, there was only one depot for such prisoners in Scotland, when 'new arrangements' (as an Admiralty letter in 1810 put it) had to be made, owing to increased quantities of prisoners requiring detention. Between 1810 and 1814 there were to be several new sites of imprisonment, including

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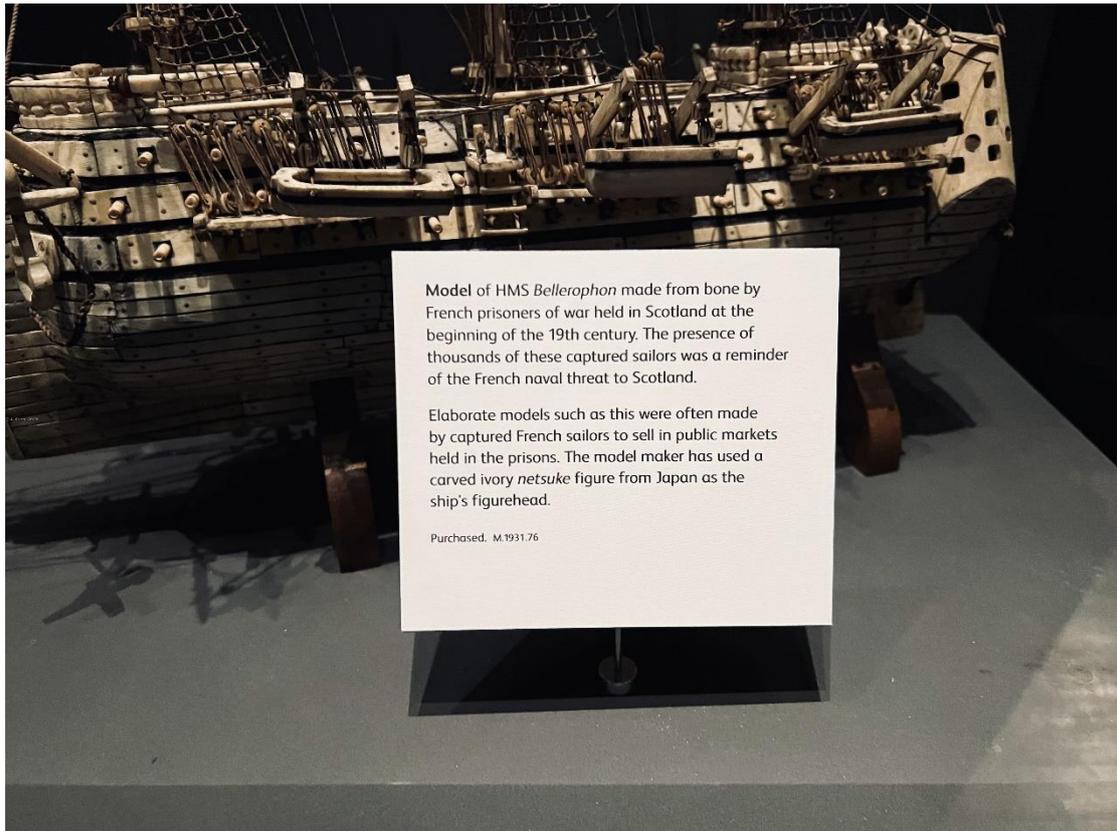
<sup>1</sup> [HMS Bellerophon \(1786\) - Wikipedia](#)

Edinburgh Castle<sup>2</sup>. The Castle was initially used only as an overnight temporary holding area for prisoners being transferred to the main depots, or as a place of punishment, where prisoners who had misbehaved badly were sent for confinement. It initially was not used as a prison. This was to change however in March 1811, when an escape crisis at the Esk Mills depot led to its closure, and 450 of its prisoners were transferred for permanent internment in the Castle.



A roughly worked model of HMS *Bellerophon*

<sup>2</sup> [Napoleonic Prisoners and Edinburgh Castle: A Brief Examination – Retrospect Journal](#)



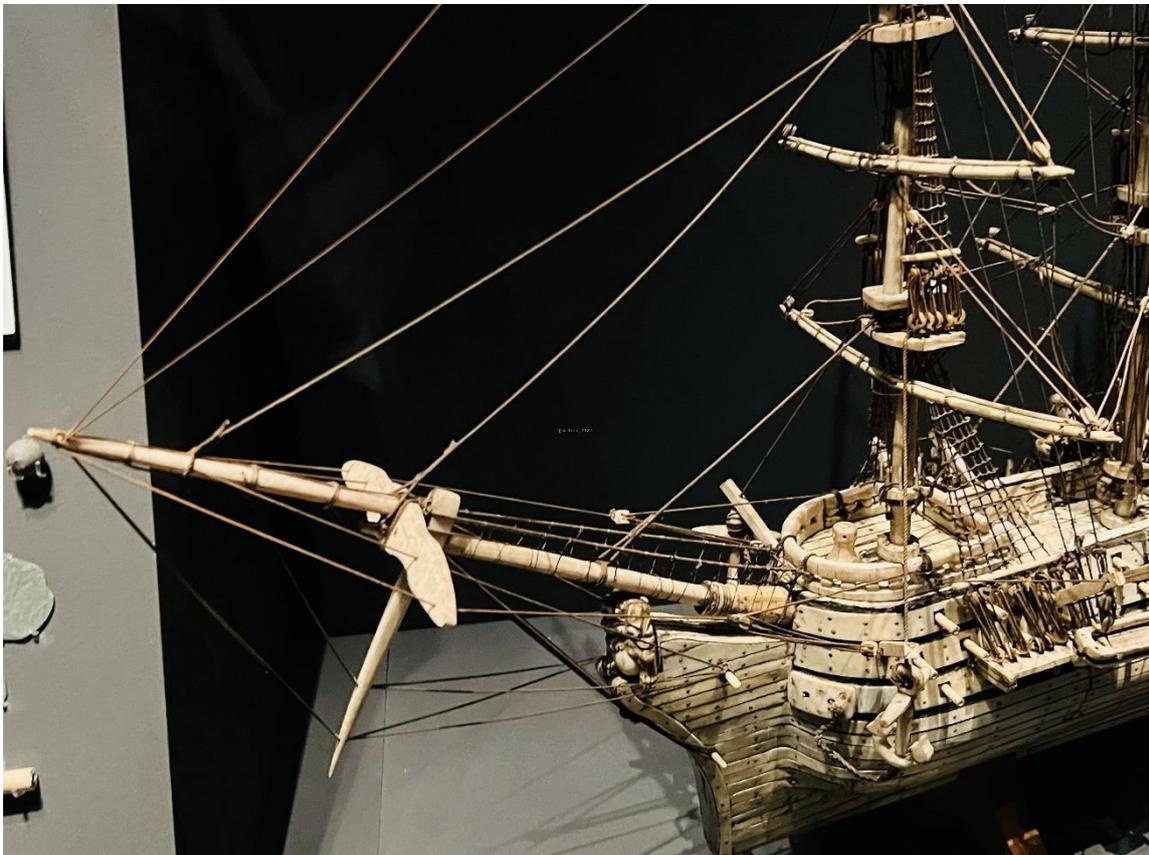
Obviously, the model was purchased in 1931



Strange presentation of long-boats hoisted in davits



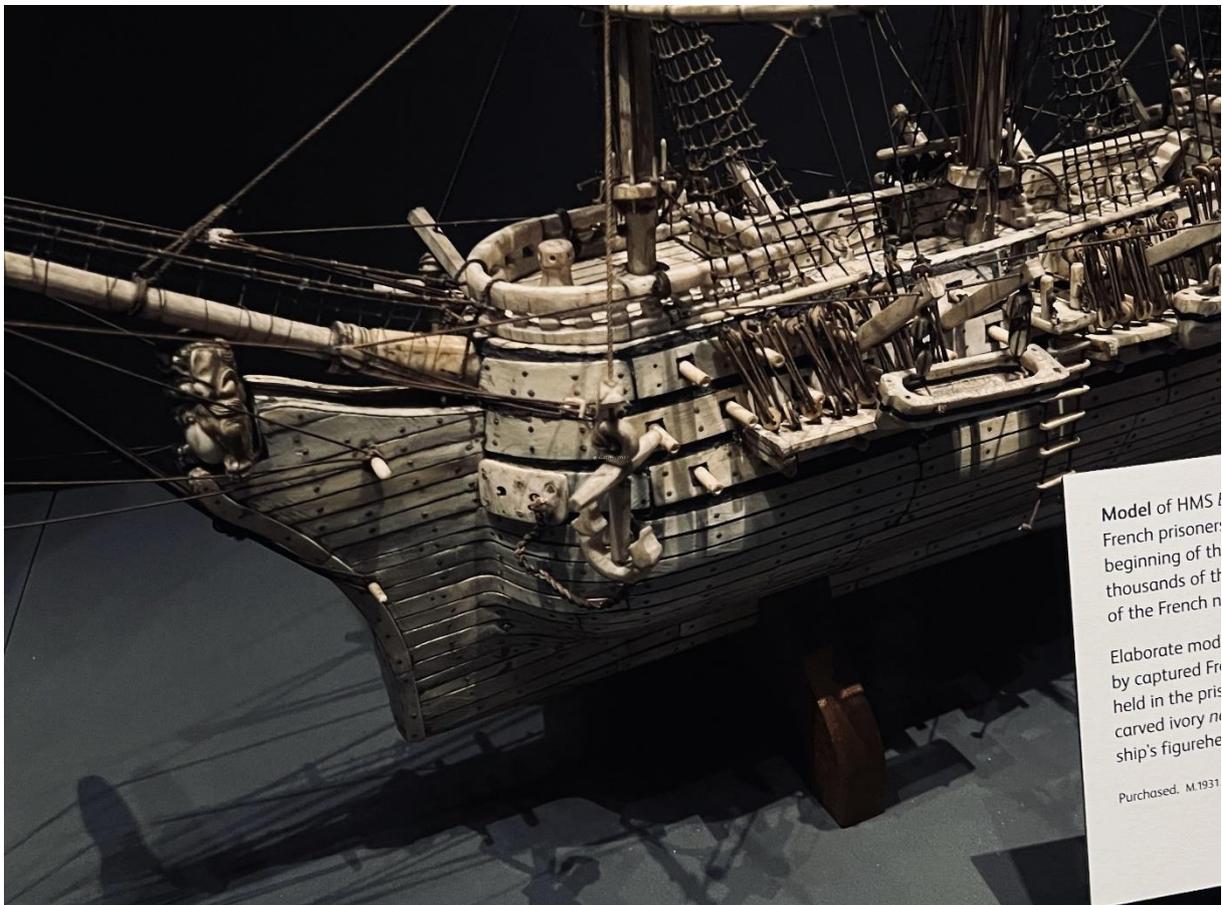
Roughly worked side galleries



Figurehead made of Netsuke from Japan



Figurehead, detail



Port side gallion and figurehead



... and threatened Leith. This raised  
urgent new concerns about national defence and led  
to calls for the people to be armed, particularly in  
coastal areas.

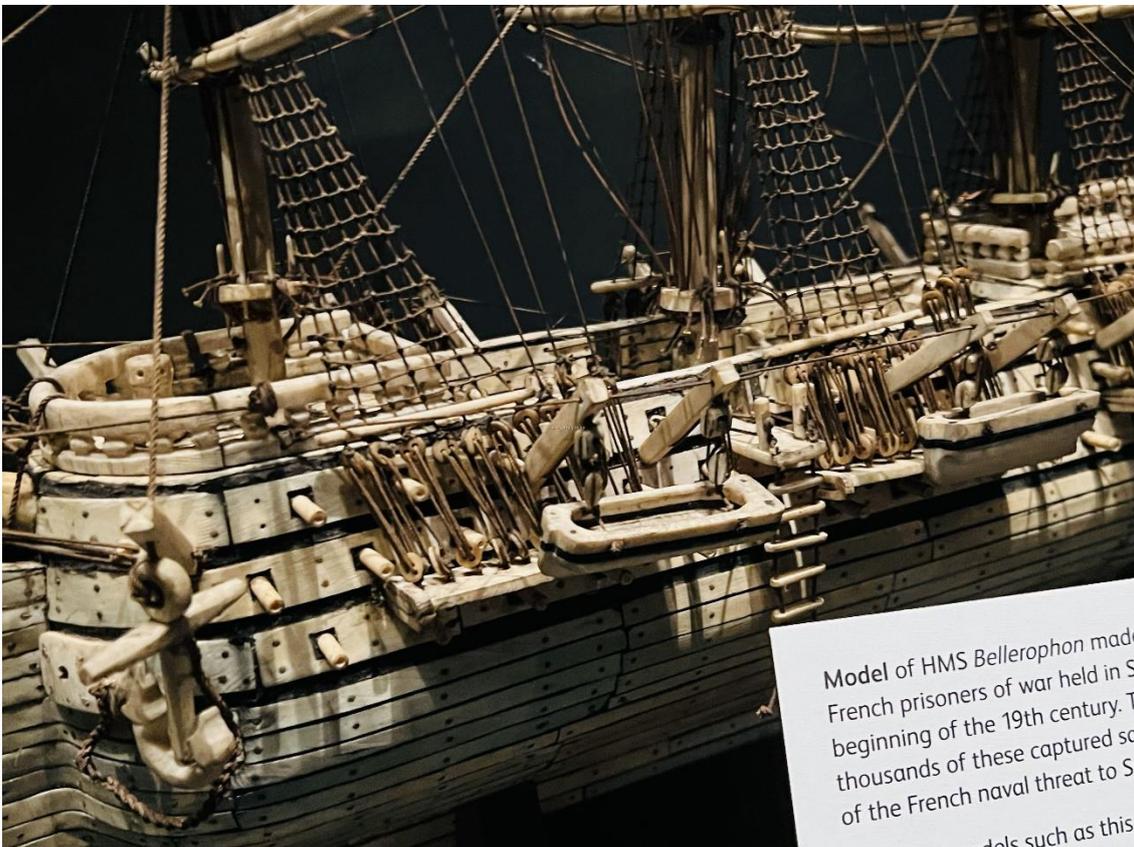
Jones showed that the Royal Navy could not  
guarantee the complete security of the Scottish coast  
and that, with the regular army committed overseas,  
Scotland was vulnerable to invasion.

Purchased M.1811.2

Studding sail booms on all yards



Strange presentation of long-boats hoisted in davits



Model of HMS Bellerophon made of French prisoners of war held in Scotland at the beginning of the 19th century. Thousands of these captured sailors were used to build the ship, a symbol of the French naval threat to Scotland. Models such as this



View on deck; six long-boats hoisted in davits; Jacob's ladder

## Literature

Sievert, Hedwig, 1961. Eine Kielerin am Schicksalsweg Napoleons. Walter G. Mühlau Verlag, Kiel, 71 p.

Stein, Manfred 2015. PRISONER OF WAR BONE SHIP MODELS - Treasures from the age of the Napoleonic Wars, Hamburg, Koehler, ISBN 978-3-7822-1205-2. [published 2015](#)