

Corney and Carver's Shipyard

John Corney and Robert Carver's Littlehampton shipyard was one of many small yards in the British Isles in the early 1800s. The 'bread and butter' work of such yards consisted of the construction and repair of merchant ships. In the years 1790-91, for example, the south coast yards constructed 341 vessels, the largest number of any single region in England and Wales, but these were mostly small ships, with an average size of less than 50 tons. The majority of the country's large merchantmen were constructed on the Thames or in the north-east, regions which were then the powerhouses of the nation's shipbuilding industry (Friel 2003, pp.172-73). The great wars with France of 1793-1802 and 1803-1815 provided a boost to the shipbuilding industry because the Navy had insufficient capacity in its own dockyards, and had to call on private builders to meet the demand for warships. In this period, some 670 naval vessels went down the slips in private yards, contributing about two-thirds of the total tonnage built for the Navy in this period. About 110 British yards were involved, but only eight of these ships were constructed in Sussex. Two of these came from Littlehampton builders:

Ship - HMS	Tons	Rate	Type	Guns	Builder	Date keel laid	Date launched
<i>Herald</i>	423	(6th)	Ship sloop, <i>Cormorant</i> Class	24	Carver & Corney	Dec 1805	27 Dec 1806
<i>Tweed</i>	423	(6th)	Ship sloop, <i>Cormorant</i> Class	24	Isemonger	March 1806	10 Jan 1807

Source: Lyon 1993, pp.129-30.

Corney and Carver's yard was already in operation by 1803, one of three shipyards in the port (the others belonged, respectively, to Olliver Chapman and Thomas Isemonger; Chapman's yard ceased to trade by 1806) (WSRO PAR 127/30/2).

Corney and Carver employed 36 people in 1804 (information from Lucy Ashby, Littlehampton Museum). Very little is known about their merchant shipbuilding work, but the fact that they were selected to build a warship suggests that they had a certain level of competence. It also shows that they, or at least someone in their employ, was able to understand the complexities of an Admiralty ship's plan, which by the early 1800s was a highly technical document.