



## Sandwich Guildhall Museum and Archives

### Volunteer Favourite: Fulton's Torpedo



For our first Volunteer pick we are taking a slight liberty and taking a knowledgeable guess. John May was our Honorary Curator for three years, he sadly passed away earlier this year after a short illness. His passion for the collection was immeasurable, however. One artefact he worked with specifically was Fulton's prototype of a torpedo which was an early subject of one of our temporary exhibitions. John loved this artefact so much he continued to ask me if it could go on permanent display long after the exhibition closed, as you may know we are only small so we can't display everything, but who knows there may be a place for the prototype to be on display in the future!

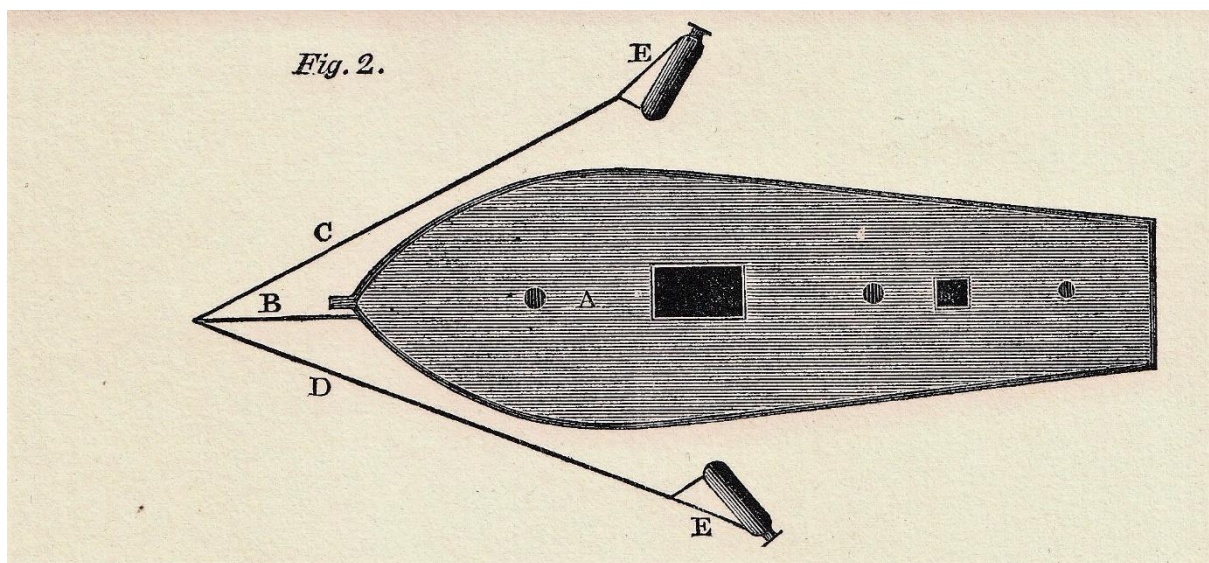
Robert Fulton was American. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1765, he was an artist and inventor and worked in Britain, France and America throughout his life. Whilst in England in the 1780s, Fulton worked on the Duke of Bridgewater's projects for a canal linking Birmingham to the sea. He also devised a dredging machine for cutting canal channels as well as several other waterway innovations, including a double-inclined plane that would transport canal boats by rail to replace the need for

a flight of locks. Fulton turned his ideas to boats time and time again including a submarine he built and trialled in France called Nautilus . He also ran the first commercial steam boat service from New York to Albany with his boat *Clermont*.

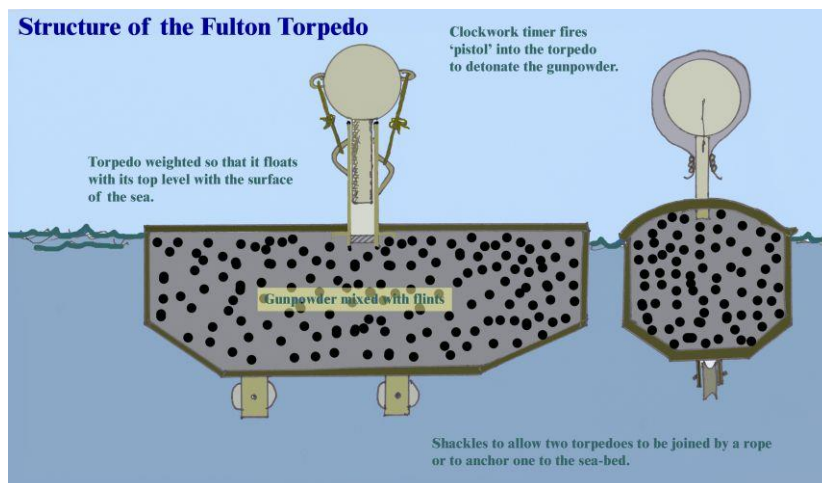
Robert Fulton then turned his talents to the invention of an underwater mine, he believed that the invention of a torpedo would have such an effect on warfare that its power would make war unnecessary. This is the concept of the Doomsday machine.

How it works

The ball at the top of the pipe contained a clockwork timer mechanism. When the clockwork stopped a charge would be ignited down the tube and set off the gunpowder in the main body of the torpedo.



The torpedoes were joined by a rope and with their timers set were launched from rowing boats each side of the target. The tide carried them downstream either side of the ship until the joining rope was snagged on the ships anchor chain. The tide would bring the loaded torpedoes next to and below the boat. The charge would explode when the timing mechanism ran out.



Why do we have it?

Fulton's model of the torpedo has been in the Sandwich Guildhall archives. It is thought that the model was used in a Naval Enquiry which was probably held in this Court Room certainly after the Battle of Trafalgar. The defeat of the French Navy at the Battle was a main reason for the Government not paying Fulton, after winning the war against the French it was no longer deemed necessary. Interestingly there was a great deal of concern about the use of a torpedo or mine in warfare as it was considered unchivalrous.

If you have any questions about this item or any others please email [museum@sandwichtowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:museum@sandwichtowncouncil.gov.uk)