

## The Battle Of The Nile

*1st. August 1798*



**The French Flagship "L'Orient" explodes at the height of the battle**

### The Captains and their Ships

<b>Thomas Foley</b>	<i>Goliath</i>
<b>James Saumarez</b>	<i>Orion</i>
<b>Thomas Gould</b>	<i>Audacious</i>
<b>Thomas Louis</b>	<i>Minotaur</i>
<b>Henry Darby</b>	<i>Bellerophon</i>
<b>Thomas Thompson</b>	<i>Leander</i>
<b>Thomas Hardy</b>	<i>Mutine ***</i>
<b>Benjamin Hallowell</b>	<i>Swiftsure</i>
<b>Samuel Hood</b>	<i>Zealous</i>
<b>Ralph Miller</b>	<i>Theseus</i>
<b>Edward Berry</b>	<i>Vanguard *</i>
<b>John Peyton</b>	<i>Defence</i>
<b>George Westcott</b>	<i>Majestic</i>
<b>Thomas Troubridge</b>	<i>Culloden **</i>
<b>Alexander Ball</b>	<i>Alexander</i>

\* Nelson's flagship.

\*\* *Culloden* ran aground and did not take part in the action.

\*\*\* *Mutine* was a brig, too small for direct engagement.

## The Commander

**Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson KB, RN.**

Commanding a Squadron of the Mediterranean Fleet

HMS *Vanguard* Captain Edward Berry



The Battle of the Nile sent shockwaves through Europe. It was Nelson's first demonstration that he would, given the chance, *annihilate* opposition rather than simply defeat it. He captured or destroyed *eleven* of the fifteen enemy ships. The Royal Navy suddenly realised that they had found in Nelson a tactician, a planner and, above all, a leader and opportunist against whom a single mistake was enough to guarantee defeat. He was created Baron Nelson of The Nile and Burnham Thorpe and became a national hero. Lord Nelson had claimed his place in history.

## The British Chase

Early in 1798 Napoleon visited the Channel ports of France and lent weight to the rumours of an invasion of England. It was also rumoured there would be an expedition to the East, and the capture of a French corvette, on the 17th May 1798, confirmed that an armada was being fitted out in Toulon consisting of 3,000 transports, 50 warships, and 40,000 troops. If Egypt was the target, it would be likely to affect England's trade links, making it imperative that the British fleet re-enter the Mediterranean. The Commander-in-Chief Earl St. Vincent, blockading off Cadiz, showed his pleasure at the arrival of Nelson writing, 'The arrival of Admiral Nelson has given me new life'.

Nelson relished the task of seeking the French Fleet but the search had an uncertain start when on the 20th May 1798 the *Vanguard* was partially dismasted in heavy weather killing two of her crew and was only saved by the exertions of Captain Ball and the crew of the *Alexander*. A consequence of the severe storm was that Nelson lost the use of his frigates which ran for shelter. At the same time, just a few miles away and unknown to Nelson, the French fleet was leaving from Toulon. As the shipwrights toiled to repair the *Vanguard*, on the Isle of Sardinia, Nelson confided in a letter to his wife that the storm was a check on his vanity. Within a few days repairs were effected and Nelson was so impressed he wrote a letter to his Commander in Chief commending by name Mr Morrison the carpenter of the *Alexander*. On the 7th June 1798 the squadron of seventy-four gun ships of the line was split into two columns and without frigates the search began.

Ship	Men	Captain
<b>Starboard</b>		
Culloden	590	Troubridge
Theseus	590	Miller
Alexander	590	Ball

Vanguard	595	Berry
Minotaur	640	Louis
Swiftsure	590	Hallowell
Audacious	590	Gould
<b>Larboard</b>		
Defence	590	Peyton
Zealous	590	Hood
Orion	590	Saumarez
Goliath	590	Foley
Majestic	590	Westcott
Bellerophon	590	Darby

Napoleon may have thought there could be something prophetic, had he been aware that one of the ships in the fleet so desperate to engage with him, was the *Alexander*; named after his idol, Alexander the Third who became Alexander the Great, one the greatest generals in history. And the final landfall would be off Alexandria founded by the same Alexander the Great in 332 B.C!

As Nelson sailed off the coast of Italy, calling at Naples, the French fleet made slower progress off the east coast of Corsica and Sardinia, and indeed, on one evening during the voyage, heard the sound of a signal gun from the British squadron. In his letters Nelson lamented, 'My distress from want of frigates is extreme'. As the French occupied and garrisoned Malta, the British squadron eagerly pushed south through the Straits of Messina, off the toe of Italy, directly to Alexandria. They arrived there on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1798 to find only Turkish vessels. In his eagerness, and without the 'eyes' of the frigates he so craved, Nelson had arrived too soon and promptly left on the 29<sup>th</sup> June, to continue the search to the North, just as the French were approaching from the West. The French landed at Marabout near Alexandria on the 1<sup>st</sup> July., Napoleon took Alexandria on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July and Cairo on the 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1798.

As the British replenished their water and provisions in Syracuse under arrangements facilitated by Lady Hamilton with the Queen of Naples (and referred to in the 'last' codicil to Nelson's will) he received confirmation of the path of the French and determined, with his captains, to return to Alexandria. By this time Napoleon had already seized Alexandria and was preparing to march for Cairo and oust the Mameluke Army. Throughout the voyage back to Alexandria, whenever the weather and circumstances permitted, Nelson had his captains on board the *Vanguard* where he would develop his ideas of the different and best methods of attack, whatever the position might be day or night. Every captain was thoroughly acquainted with the position their commander would adopt upon sighting the enemy, minimising the requirement for signalling detailed instructions. Gun crews were practised daily to sharpen their skills in handling the armaments. On the afternoon of the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1798, a masthead lookout on the *Zealous* sighted the enemy in Aboukir Bay off the western mouth of the Nile. Thirteen French ships-of-the-line were anchored in a curve running to the northwest and guns had been landed on an island near the lead ship to seek to deter an assault. Although late in the day Nelson signalled 'Prepare for Battle'. Nelson's plan was to concentrate the attack on the van and centre. Ships were to anchor by the stern, with ropes attached to their anchor cables to keep them at the right angle for firing most effectively. And having destroyed one of the enemy's ships from that position, they would, if need be, move down the line to the next sitting stationary target. As dusk was approaching distinctive lights were to be shown at their mizzenmasts to identify them as British ships, an obviously practical precaution given the failing light. (A curious coincidence with *Leander* whose name stems from Greek mythology when Leander died through the absence of a light from Hero's tower). Captains were also

required to keep measuring the depth as they entered the bay to avoid grounding. As the British line gradually took shape Nelson, with some satisfaction, ordered dinner to be served.

## **The Battle of the Nile**

The Commander of the French fleet did not survive the Battle and may have felt confident in his position, with considerable advantage in firepower. The L'Orient of 120 guns was at the heart of the line of 13 ships, which included three sail-of-the line of 80 guns, and from this stable position they were able to deliver a substantial response to any assault. However the British squadron of thirteen 74 gun ships and one of 50 guns led by Nelson and his 'Band of Brothers' were formidable opponents, having spent frustrating weeks blockading and then searching across many hundreds of miles of a bare ocean. Nelson dreamed of glory and his sailors of prizes but they were all fired by a determination to destroy the French. At about 6.30pm 1st August 1798 Captain Foley in the Goliath led the line and as he approached he spotted the opportunity to ease through the shallows on the landward side, which he did with care and skill, to place himself against his enemy. He sent a broadside into the first ship the Le Guerrier before anchoring against the inside of the Le Conquérant, which was the second French ship in the van. His initiative was followed by Hood in the Zealous, Gould in the Audacious, Miller in the Theseus, and Sir James Saumarez, Nelson's second-in-command, in the Orion. The van could then be attacked on two sides and was crushed before any support could be rallied. The Vanguard with Nelson was the first to attack the Le Conquerant from the seaward side as Miller attacked from the landward side at precisely sunset. As planned the Defence, Minotaur, Bellerophon, Majestic, Swiftsure, Alexander, and Leander followed and took position against targets in the French line. Much to the disgust of Captain Troubridge the Culloden was the only ship-of-the-line not to engage the enemy having grounded on the shoals in the approach to the battle. (The Battle of Culloden 1746, after which the ship was named, is reported to have only lasted some forty minutes but poor Troubridge was thwarted from even so brief a contribution to the engagement) Nelson on the Vanguard, which came under heavy fire early in the action, was hit in the head by a piece of iron. Blood streamed down on his good eye at such a rate that he thought it must be the end and he was led below where the surgeon was attending the injured.

As Doctor Jefferson became aware of his presence he moved to attend to the Admiral but Nelson said, "No. I will wait my turn with my brave fellows." Nelson was sure death was near, called for the chaplain, and saw to it that messages were prepared for Lady Nelson, and for Captain Louis of the Minotaur to thank him for the support his vessel had given the flagship. In fact Nelson's wound, though messy, was not dangerous and, after being stitched up by the surgeon, he returned to the upper deck and saw the last moments of the L'Orient. The battle was furious but the initiative by the British was never lost, though exhaustion slowed the action during the course of the evening. At about 10 o'clock in the evening the L'Orient was seen to be on fire, largely as a result of the bravery and skill of the Bellerophon and her crew who suffered grievously in the effort. As some French sailors were ashore creating wells and replenishing stores, the opportunity had been taken for routine maintenance on the L'Orient and paint, tar and barrels of pitch left on deck accelerated the demise of the 120-gun flagship. After blazing for some time the L'Orient blew up with a detonation heard thirteen miles away in Alexandria by French troops. Most of her company, were killed. Also believed lost was treasure looted by Napoleon from Malta. A midshipman on the Swiftsure heard from survivors of the bravery of de Brueys, who having lost both legs, was seated, with tourniquets on the stumps, in an armchair facing his enemies until he was killed by a cannonball.

Nelson ordered the Vanguard's only undamaged boat to pick up some of L'Orient's crew he could see struggling in the water. Before the battle was over he sent for his secretary to begin a dispatch but neither the Secretary nor the Chaplain was able to write. Nelson himself, with guns thundering and the night sky bright with explosions, sat down and wrote to Lord St. Vincent. "My Lord, Almighty God has blessed His Majesty's Arms in the late Battle by a great Victory over the Fleet of the Enemy, who I attacked at sunset on the 1st August, off the mouth of the Nile." He went on to commend his officers and men, lamenting the loss of Captain Westcott of the Majestic who had been hit in the throat by a musket ball. Fighting continued according to Poussielgue, Bonaparte's Controller General of Finances until 3 o'clock in the morning. It then

"ceased almost until 5 o'clock: then it continued with as much fury as ever". Another French ship of the line Le Timoleon was set on fire by her crew and blew up. Poussielgue reported, "Firing continued until about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and then we saw two of the line and two frigates under a press of sail on a wind, standing towards the eastward: we make out that all were under French colours. No other ships made any movement and firing ceased entirely." The Battle of the Nile was over. The area was a scene of devastation about which Nelson said, "Victory is not a name strong enough for such a scene." Of the thirteen French ships of the line and the four frigates, which had opposed him, all but four were either smoking hulks, sunk, held as prizes or helplessly grounded. Of the four ships that escaped, two were mere frigates. The survivors were led away by Rear Admiral Villeneuve, unpursued, since no British ship was in a condition to chase them, though Miller in the Theseus, the least damaged, pursued them until recalled by signal. Of the Vanguard officers Captain William Faddy, Marines, Midshipmen Thomas Seymour and John G Taylor were killed; Lieutenant Nathaniel Vassal and John M. Adye, John Campbell, Admiral's Secretary, Boatswain Michael Austin and midshipmen John Weatherstone and George Antrim were injured. The immediacy of electronic communications in 1998 would have astounded sailors at the Nile and been viewed with envy by the politicians who had months to wait before the dispatches arrived with the momentous news from the Mediterranean. We have the benefit of being able to read their letters as they passed information and formal reports, and can only marvel at their courage and grace under testing circumstances. The mutual respect and regard they had for each other shines across the centuries through the correspondence.

## **TO THE CAPTAINS OF THE SHIPS OF THE SQUADRON**

Vanguard, of the Mouth of the Nile 2nd August, 1798

"The Admiral most heartily congratulates the Captains, Officers, Seamen and Marines of the Squadron he has the honour to Command, on the event of the late Action; and he desires they will accept his sincere and cordial Thanks for their gallant behaviour in the glorious Battle....HORATIO NELSON"

### **Background to the Battle**

With the ease and comfort of a view from twenty decades, many features of the Battle of the Nile at Aboukir Bay off Alexandria, Egypt, on the 1st & 2nd August 1798, may be described as spectacular. The catastrophic loss of the Flagship L'Orient at the heart of the French fleet, whose detonation momentarily stilled the tumult of battle and consider also the effect of a bejewelled 'Plume of Triumph', the chelengk, presented by the Sultan of Turkey to Nelson with thirteen rays representing the French vessels destroyed or taken. Turkey feared the further encroachment east of the French Army following their defeat in the spring of 1798 and thought a fatal blow had been delivered by the British fleet, but Napoleon's influence continued to stalk the land for many years hence. These spectacular features mask the continuing fear across Europe which, following the Revolution in France in 1789; the death by guillotine of Louis XVI in 1793 did not subside until the final defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Contemptuous of his opponents, Napoleon had described the modern Turkish army as a thing of little importance! The Moors of Spain as likely to submit to anything; and for Britain said 'Should a victorious army ever enter London the world would be astonished at the trifling resistance that would be offered by the English' Over twenty years of the threat of republicanism and the brutality which attended their rapacious exploits across Europe; carrying with it for the British, uncomfortable echoes of their own civil war and the execution of Charles I. The destruction of the French fleet was a significant reverse, which continued to inhibit the territorial ambitions of Napoleon for years to come, not least by the example, and encouragement it gave to others.

### **The French Perspective**

France in 1798 was a self-confident power, which could afford to undertake overseas ventures. This had not been the case when she had gone to war in 1792. Known as the war of the First Coalition, France, in the throes of revolution, had been faced by a coalition of the powers of Spain, Holland, Austria, Prussia, Great Britain and Sardinia. Within five years, French forces administered knock out blows to their enemies removing the threat of invasion to France and extending her frontiers to the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees with client republics in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Northern Italy and Rome and overseas possessions in the Ionian Isles. By 1797 only Austria and Great Britain still opposed her. Austria was forced to make peace as a result of the double threat posed by a French army crossing the Rhine and General Bonaparte's army being 75 miles from Vienna. This left Great Britain isolated. It was clearly in the French interest to force Britain to make peace for as Bonaparte himself wrote, "Our Government must destroy the English monarch". Let us concert all our activity on the navy and destroy England. That done Europe is at our feet." The overseas venture being considered in 1798 was the invasion of Great Britain, not an expedition to the East.

Like most great historical events the change in the plan from an invasion of Great Britain to an invasion of Egypt was due to many factors. The most important was the relationship between France's newest military star Napoleon Bonaparte and the French Government.

French politics of the period are complicated but basically there was an executive body known as the Directory comprising five directors and two elected chambers. 1797 had seen the Directors divided amongst themselves and the two elected chambers, following elections, wishing to pursue more pro royalist policies than the dominant directors. The leading three directors called on the dependable generals such as Bonaparte for support. In the coup d'etat of Fructidor, which followed, the opposition to the Directors was crushed and the Directors became more beholden to Bonaparte than previously. War might have finished outside the French frontiers; there was however the question of what the unpopular Directors were to do with the successful generals and their armies who, given the peace, might themselves be tempted to seize power in France.

Of the generals the Directors had expected more of Hoche, Jourdan and Moreau than of Bonaparte and yet his achievements had been more than expected whilst the others had been disappointing. He had shown an ability to act independently of the French government compared to the other generals. In addition he also had more influence with the Directors as he had married a former mistress of one of them. All of this made him a danger and yet ensured him the top military appointment. On 26 October 1797 the Directors decided to form an army of England under Bonaparte's command comprising 120,000 men. Bonaparte returned from his Italian campaign to Paris in December and in January 1798 made a rapid tour of the proposed invasion embarkation points along the northern coast of France. His report was not what the Directors wanted but they could not ignore it. Bonaparte was convinced that the operation would be wholly impracticable until the French navy secured undisputed control of the Channel. Even if that was achieved the cost would be prohibitive, particularly as the Directory was faced with an inherited financial crisis which it was striving ably to resolve. With the invasion of England impractical, the possibility of a dangerous general being unemployed and new elections looming the Directors needed to send Bonaparte as far from France as possible, but without causing a resumption of hostilities with the European powers, and with as little impact on French finances as possible. Given this scenario they were willing to accept any suggestion from Bonaparte. In his report Bonaparte offered them three suggestions: - peace with England, war against Hanover (of which George III was King) and, thirdly, a threat to England's rich commerce with India by way of invasion of Egypt. The first two options were non-starters. The Directors could not make peace with such an ideologically opposed nation as England without defeating it first. An invasion of Hanover would provoke war on the continent. An invasion of Egypt was more suitable. It had after all been considered during the time of the French monarchy and there was still a belief in government circles in the need to

expand the French colonies. All Napoleon had to do was sell the advantages of this concept in a pragmatic way and this is what he did, abetted by that master of intrigue, the French Foreign Minister Talleyrand.

The concept was sold on the basis that an invasion of Egypt was an economical means of forcing England to make peace as well as compensating France for the loss of her West Indian possessions. There was the possibility of a lucrative domination of the ancient trade routes to Arabia and India and perhaps a canal could be dug through the Suez isthmus. Rapid and decisive action by France might also thwart British diplomatic endeavours to persuade the Ottoman empire to conclude an anti French alliance. A French army in Egypt could be presented as France trying to bringing a recalcitrant province back under the Ottoman rule and therefore present the French Government favourably in Istanbul. The occupation of Egypt would offer an opportunity of establishing contact with anti British forces in India which had stopped following the British seizure of the Cape of Good Hope. Finally, why should not the most advanced and progressive society on Earth return some measure of prosperity to the people inhabiting one of the original cradles of civilisation?

How much of the above Bonaparte actually believed at the time we shall never know. He always rewrote accounts of his actions to portray himself in the most favourable light. We know he had spoken in the spring of 1797 of the need to secure Egypt and Malta as a way of making of the Mediterranean a French controlled lake as well as hurting England. He was also fascinated by the lure of the East with its apparently limitless opportunities for military glory. Certainly we know that he expected the expedition to be a short term affair. No more than six months was his first estimate. It was not yet time to overthrow the Directory and seize power but in six months the situation might be more favourable.

The Directory approved his plan in March and on April 12 1798 issued its orders. Bonaparte was instructed to capture Malta and Egypt, ordered to dislodge the English from the Orient, build a canal through the Isthmus of Suez, improve the situation of the local population and keep on good terms with the Sultan. There was no mention of an attack on India. The new republics in Switzerland and Rome would provide the finances and a diversionary attack prepared against Ireland. At the end of six months Bonaparte would return to France and take command of the postponed invasion of England.

Once the decision was made the whole expedition was prepared in ten weeks (five weeks from the formal issuing of the orders!). The organisation was complicated: -

- There were to be five embarkation ports (Toulon, Marseilles, Genoa, Ajaccio and Civita Vecchia)
- Nearly 37,500 troops (infantry, cavalry and artillerymen) were to be embarked along with 500 civilians (167 noted men of letters and science who were to study Egypt).
- 60 field and 40 siege guns were to be embarked along with hard rations for 100 days, fresh water for 40 days and a total of 1,200 horses.
- The troops and civilians were to be transported in a convoy of some 400 transports protected by a fleet of thirteen ships of the line and a similar number of frigates.
- Leading lights of the French navy were to serve in the expedition. Some, for example, Emeriau and du Petit Thouars had seen service during the American War. Commodore Ganteaume a future Admiral and commander at Brest, was the Chief of Staff. Rear Admiral Decres a future Minister of Marine commanded the convoy. Rear Admiral Blanquet de Chayla, a consummate seaman, with much experience of fighting the British, commanded part of the fleet, and Rear Admiral Villeneuve another part. Command of the fleet was entrusted to the most recent hero of the French navy, de Broueys, instead of the expected commander Blanquet du Chayla.

### **The French Commander**

## **Francois Paul Brueys d'Aigalliers, Comte de Brueys**

De Brueys was 45 years old and had joined the French navy as a volunteer at the age of 13. In the last few years he had experienced rapid promotion. In 1796 he had been promoted Rear Admiral and had reached Napoleon's notice by taking possession of the Ionian Islands and capturing a larger force of Venetian ships lying at Corfu. He was promoted to the rank of Vice Admiral for the expedition and had as his flagship the 120 gun L'Orient. This was his largest command to date and in a letter of his to the Minister of Marine in Paris we can perhaps detect a lack of confidence "Our crews are very weak both in numbers and the quality of the men: our ships are, in general, ill-armed, and I think that it requires considerable courage to undertake the command of ships so ill fitted." Although the strength of the fleet was impressive on paper it is estimated that the fleet was 2,000 sailors under strength and "composed of men picked up at hazard and almost at the moment of sailing." To add to de Brueys' problems, although supposedly in charge of the naval side of operation, he took orders from Bonaparte who, with his staff, installed himself on the flagship.

### **The French Sail**

Despite these problems everything went well. The various rendezvous were achieved allowing the convoy to increase in numbers. The only difficulty experienced was when General Desaix failed to make his rendezvous and the convoy lost three days although the final link-up was achieved at Malta. Malta was taken against only nominal opposition and General Vaubois and 4,000 men landed to garrison Valetta. De Brueys, no doubt in consultation with Bonaparte, set a course for Crete in order to deceive Nelson and then south to Egypt. On the night of June 22-23 the different courses of the two fleets crossed but the British were unaware of the enemy's proximity although some of the French sailors heard alien ships' bells. That the French fleet, slowed down by its large convoy, had managed to avoid Nelson was unbelievably lucky and on 1 July the French reached Alexandria. The landings took place at a village near Alexandria called Marabout. De Brueys was over ruled by Bonaparte and the landings, poorly co-ordinated, went on through the night resulting in the landing boats being overturned and men drowned. Alexandria was seized and by 10 July all the French troops had begun to advance into the interior. Admiral de Brueys had achieved all his objectives but he was to remain in Aboukir Bay for another three weeks.

### **Timetable of the French fleet**

#### ***19<sup>th</sup> May 1798***

Embarkation at Marseilles and Toulon of General Bonaparte Staff and escort: 500, Civilian contingent: 500, troops commanded by Generals Kleber, Bon and Reynier: : 16,000. Convoy escorted by 13 ships of the line and 13 frigates

#### ***21<sup>st</sup> May 1798***

Convoy rendezvous with subsidiary convoy from Genoa under Command of D'Hillis and Murat. Infantry and cavalry: 7,100.

#### ***23<sup>rd</sup> May 1798***

Convoy rendezvous off Sardinia with subsidiary convoy from Ajaccio under command of General Vaubois. Troops: 4,500

#### ***23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> May***



Convoy waits in vain for another subsidiary convoy commanded by General Desaix. Troops 8,200

**26<sup>th</sup> May 1798**

Desaix leaves Civita Vecchia and sails direct for Malta

**6<sup>th</sup> June 1798**

Desaix arrives at Malta

**9<sup>th</sup> June 1798**

Convoy arrives at Malta and joins with Desaix

**10-12<sup>th</sup> June**

French landings on Malta

**19<sup>th</sup> June 1798**

Convoy leaves Malta

**22-23<sup>rd</sup> June**

(Night) Convoy nearly runs into Nelson's fleet

**26<sup>th</sup> June 1798**

French fleet off Crete

**27<sup>th</sup> June 1798**

French fleet warned of Nelson's proximity by frigate

**1-3<sup>rd</sup> July 1798**

Main landing

### **The French Fleet at Aboukir**

Bonaparte subsequently blamed de Brueys for the disaster in terms of both tactical disposition and the very fact that the French fleet should have been at sea and not moored at Aboukir at all. Contemporary correspondence however reveals that the French fleet stayed at anchor on the direct orders of Bonaparte himself. The navy had wanted to sail for Corfu to pick up further ships of the line. Bonaparte however probably wanted the fleet to protect the transports in Alexandria harbour from attack. As there were doubts that the whole French fleet could safely enter Alexandria harbour the best option was to be positioned in Aboukir bay – 23 miles east. In addition stores still needed to be unloaded, wells were being dug, and this explains why many of the sailors were ashore when Nelson attacked, as does the fact that Bonaparte had ordered the sailors to fulfil quasi military duties. Given this, what was crucial was for the fleet to be positioned in a way which would repel attack. On first taking anchorage on 4 July, de Brueys held a council of flag officers and captains and, with the exception of Blanquet, all had agreed that in case of attack the fleet should engage at anchor and not under sail. Use was to be made of the geography of the bay. The western end of the semi circular bay was marked by Aboukir Point and Aboukir Island and shoals to seaward of it, with a connecting line of rocks and shoals narrowing the mouth of the bay. The island and the point were fortified. De Brueys' ships of the line were moored in a slightly bent line stretching south from the shallows just inside the island. Four frigates were anchored at intervals inside the line and the smaller ships in shallow water. The thirteen French ships of the line were anchored with *L'Orient* in the middle of the line and a concentration of powerful 80 gun ships at the rear where de Brueys expected the attack to come. Inexcusably de Brueys did not have his frigates at sea to warn him of Nelson's approach. Also the leading French ship *Le Guerrier* had not anchored close enough to the shoals and the ships were not close enough to give supporting fire to each other.

Nevertheless, to an admiral other than Nelson the prospect of attack might have proved daunting. De Brueys was certainly happy with his position. On the 13 July he wrote to Bonaparte "I have been taking up a strong position in case I am compelled to fight at anchor". The stage was now set for the battle.

## **The British Perspective**

In 1797 England was without allies in the struggle with France. Austria, beaten by the continuous attrition in Italy had made peace, conceding the Austrian Netherlands. It was the time of the American War of Independence. Holland, Switzerland and the Italian Republics were all occupied by French troops. Despite the continuing blockade off Cadiz reports were circulating of a gathering of a French fleet and troops, likely to disembark from Toulon, whose destination could be Ireland, the West Indies, Naples, Sicily or Portugal. On April 30th Lord Spencer, in Whitehall, wrote, "the appearance of a British squadron in the Mediterranean is a condition on which the fate of Europe may at this moment be stated to depend".

## **Nelson**

Following the amputation of part of his arm at Santa Cruz, Nelson spent seven uncomfortable months in England in 1797. Convalescing but also socialising, much to the pleasure of his wife Fanny née Nisbet, who daily dressed his wound and attended to his food until he mastered the task of cutting and eating with one hand. At that time in an unusual period of domesticity they agreed to purchase 'Roundwood' a substantial house of eleven rooms set in fifty acres of ground outside Ipswich though Nelson was never to reside there. Interestingly, one of the witnesses to the signing of the agreement to the purchase for £2000 was Captain Berry. As Nelson recovered his health there were delays in fitting his flagship the new Foudroyant and he was given the ten-year-old seventy-four gun Vanguard. Edward Berry took responsibility as Captain for fitting her out and working up the ships company for sea. Berry sailed her from Sheerness to Portsmouth where on 29th March, 1798, Nelson embarked in the roads off St Helens on the easterly tip of the Isle of Wight. Detained by contrary winds Nelson was also discomfited by failures in the packing of his luggage about which he complained with gusto to his wife. Finally on the 10th April 1798 the wind blew enabling the Vanguard and convoy to shed the constraints of anchor for Lisbon. The mouth of the Tagus offered a convenient base for the continuing blockade of Cadiz and Nelson received a warm welcome from St. Vincent, Commander-in-Chief of the British Fleet. Reports had been reaching London through the spring that a major expeditionary force, together with its fleet of transports and escorting fleet of warships, was preparing to leave Toulon and the ports of that coast, including Marseilles and Genoa. It was known Napoleon was in command but his destination was a mystery. He could be bound for any country bordering the Mediterranean - including the now neutral Kingdom of the Two Sicilies - or preparing to attack Portugal through Spain, or by breaking out into the Atlantic, for a descent upon Lisbon, or even upon Ireland which was now in open revolt against the British. Initially designated for reconnaissance with three sail-of-the-line and three frigates; under instruction from the Admiralty, Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson, KB. was finally placed in charge of a squadron with thirteen 74's, one 50 gun sail of the line, and the three frigates and it would be his task to find the French.

## **TO SIR HORATIO NELSON, K.B.**

### **Audacious, 1st August, 1798**

*I have the satisfaction to tell you the French Ship, Le Conquerant has struck to the Audacious and I have her in possession. The slaughter on board her is dreadful: her Captain is dying. We have but one killed, but a great many wounded. Our fore and mainmast are wounded, but I hope not very bad. They tell me the foremast is the worst. I give you joy. This is a glorious victory. I am, with the utmost respect, yours in haste.*

D. Gould.

### **From Captain Foley of the Goliath**

**2nd August, 1798**

*After congratulating you on the most signal Victory possible to be gained at sea, I take leave to inquire after your wound which I trust will not be of serious consequence. I should not have waited the message you sent to me to give assistance to the Theseus could I have secured my mainmast sooner. The dread of losing it and the appearance of so little defence on the side of the Enemy this morning induced me to be so late in heaving my anchor. The rigging more than the mast is the damaged part. I shall send a boat to sound towards the Ships which keep French colours up. As soon as I can get the soundings I will endeavour to get nearer them. As far as I can at present collect, the Killed on board the Goliath are seventeen with thirty-three wounded. I have the honour to be, dear Sir, your faithful and obedient Servant.*

*Th. Foley*

### **Two letters from Captain Berry (Nelson's Flag-Captain) to Captain Miller of the Theseus**

*Vanguard  
2nd August*

*My dear Miller*

*There is but one heart and one soul in this glorious Victory; your very handsome conduct we saw, and felt; the Admiral is conscious of your doing right, and leaves it to you to order. He congratulates and thanks you, - hopes your wounds are of no consequence, as you say; Sir Horatio, I believe, to be out of danger, though his wound is in the head, and he has been sick. Send a letter or a word to me for your wife as I may soon be off. God bless you, my dear friend. Ever yours most truly.*

*E. Berry*

*Vanguard,  
3rd August.*

*My dear Miller*

*I am desired by Sir Horatio to say, you are to take the whole charge of the dismasted Prize you are near - He knows she is badly off for ground tackling, and knows you will do all you can. He is now more easy than he was this morning, the rage being over. Your getting under weigh pleased him much. You know I am ever yours most truly,*

*E. Berry*

### **Establishment of the Egyptian Club**

*On the 3rd August the Captains of the Squadron met on board the Orion under Captain Sir James Saumarez the senior Captain and second in command in the Battle and formed a resolution testifying their admiration of their Chief: "...request (Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson K.B.) his acceptance of a Sword; and, as a further proof of their esteem and regard, hope that he will permit his Portrait to be taken, and hung up in the Room belonging to the Egyptian Club, now established in commemoration of that glorious day." To which resolution they all added their signatures.*

### **Nelson's Diplomacy**

*The following letters from Nelson also show the skills of diplomacy required in such circumstances being remote from the Admiralty and even his Commander in Chief.*

*Vanguard,  
Mouth of the Nile,  
8th August, 1798*

*TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON, K.B.*

*My Dear Sir*

*Almighty God has made me the happy instrument in destroy the Enemy's Fleet, which I hope will be a blessing to Europe. You will have the goodness to communicate this happy event to all the Courts in Italy,*

*Vanguard,  
Mouth of the Nile,  
9th August, 1798*

*TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF BOMBAY*

*Sir,  
Although I hope the Consuls who are, or ought to be resident in Egypt, have sent you an express of the situation of affairs here, yet, as I know Mr Baldwin has some months left Alexandria, it is possible you may not be regularly informed. I shall, therefore, relate to you, briefly, that a French Army of 40,000 men in 300 transports, with 13 Sail of the Line, 11 Frigates, Bomb Vessels, Gunboats, &c. arrived at Alexandria on the 1st July.*

*The letter continued to describe the outcome of the fleet battle and Nelson's intention to inhibit any further expansion east by Bonaparte, who Nelson believed was suffering from lack of stores and artillery as a result of intercepted dispatches.*

### **'Band of Brothers'**

*"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;"*

King Henry V Act IV Scene 3 William Shakespeare

Nelson's extraordinary influence over his fellow-men was as much responsible for his unique record of success in battle as his brilliant tactics. When he stepped on board ship some magnetic power radiated from him; morose men became cheerful, sluggards came alive; a motley collection of men with no common purpose became a well-knit, well disciplined ship's company.

This rare and wonderful power radiated far beyond his own ship and was felt in every officers' mess and on every lower deck in the fleets he commanded. He kept his fleet victualled and watered, his men in good health, and his ships in fighting trim throughout the long blockades.

He trained his captains, by example, persuasion and sometimes sterner measures, to consider it their duty to keep their ships seaworthy and never ask permission to go to a dockyard unless damaged beyond repair by their own resources.

His 'Dispatches and Letters' give an insight into his character and the enthusiasm he had for his men. The first reference in correspondence to the 'Band of Brothers' appeared after the Battle of the Nile:-

Extract from a letter including a favourable comment about Captain Ball

### **TO THE RIGHT HON. EARL SPENCER**

Naples September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1798

'...His activity and zeal are eminently conspicuous even amongst the Band of Brothers – each, as I may have occasion to mention them, must call forth my gratitude and admiration....' HORATIO NELSON

A measure of the magic he wrought over his men may be gained from the letter written before Trafalgar by Captain Duff of the *Mars* who was sadly killed in the first salvo.

'.....He is so good and pleasant a man that we all wish to do what he likes without any kind of orders.....!'

That he knew of the affect his presence had on the fleet is evident from an extract of his letter to "My Dearest Emma" written shortly before Trafalgar:-

'..I believe my arrival was most welcome...and, from the Admirals downwards ... 'You are, my Lord, surrounded by friends'.....!'

After his death at Trafalgar a sailor on the *Royal Sovereign* wrote to his family to tell them he was well and included:-...'..I never set eyes on him for which I am both sorry and glad; for to be sure I should like to have seen him, but then, all the men in our ship who have seen him are such soft toads, they have done nothing but Blast their Eyes and cry ever since he was killed. God bless you! Chaps that fought like the Devil, sit down and cry like a wench.' He also included the fact that he saw Vice Admiral Collingwood cry as soon as he was told that his commander-in-chief had been killed.

Subsequent to Trafalgar, the Commander-in-Chief of the combined fleets of France and Spain, Admiral Pierre Charles de Villeneuve (1763-1806) was heard to say:- 'To any other Nation the loss of a Nelson would have been irreparable, but in the British Fleet off Cadiz, every Captain was a Nelson.'

The convention of toasting 'The Immortal Memory' , (uniquely offered in silence) on the anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar, implicitly acknowledges all those who served and gave their lives. The Nelson Society

promotes interest in the life and times of the period and seek to acknowledge the contribution of all who served with Nelson by publicising biographical details as they are or become available.

## **The Captains**

[Sir Alexander John Ball](#)

[Sir Thomas Foley](#)

[Sir Thomas Troubridge](#)

[Davidge Gould](#)

[Sir Edward Berry](#)

[John Peyton](#)

[Thomas Thompson](#)

[Henry Darby](#)

[Sir Benjamin Hallowell](#)

[Sir Samuel Hood](#)

[Lord James de Saumarez](#)

[Ralph Willett Miller](#)

[Thomas Louis](#)

[George Westcott](#)

[Thomas Hardy](#)

## **Other Officers and Crew Members**

[Thomas Bladen Capel](#)

[Henry Compton](#)

[Stephen George Comyn](#)

[William Faddy](#)

[John Watherston](#)

[Edward Galway](#)

[Josiah Nisbet](#)

[William Standway Parkinson](#)

[Nathaniel Vassall](#)

[Thomas Allen](#)

## **Alexander John BALL (1757-1809)**

*Alexander*



British rear admiral, was one of the 'band of brothers' which Admiral Nelson formed around himself during the Mediterranean campaign of 1798-9. Ball was captain of the ship of the line *Alexander* in this campaign

and in May 1798 saved the fleet flagship *Vanguard* from almost certain destruction by towing her to safety after she had been dismasted in a heavy storm and was being forced by the wind on rocks off the coast of Sardinia.

During the battle of the Nile the *Alexander* engaged the 120-gun flagship *Orient*, and after that successful action Ball was sent by Nelson, with the *Audacious*, *Goliath*, and *Emerald* in company, to organize the blockade of Malta and its subsequent capture. After the surrender of Malta he served for a short period as a navy commissioner at Gibraltar, returning to Malta to become its first British governor, a post he held until his death eight years later

### **Thomas FOLEY (1757-1833)**

#### ***Goliath***

*'Above six feet in height, of a fine presence and figure, with light brown hair, blue eyes of a gentle expression, and a mouth combining firmness with good humour.'*

Born in 1757 of a Pembrokeshire family he entered the navy on board the *Otter* in 1770. After serving in her on the Newfoundland station for three years he was in 1774 appointed to the *Antelope*, going out in Jamaica as flagship of Rear-admiral Clark Gayton. While in her he was repeatedly lent to the small craft on the station, and saw a good deal of active cruising against the colonial privateers.

He returned to England in the *Antelope* in May 1778; on the 25<sup>th</sup> was promoted to the rank of lieutenant, and on the 28<sup>th</sup> was appointed to the *America*, with Lord Longford. In her, he took part in the operations of the fleet under Keppel in 1778, and Sir Charles Hardy in 1779. In October 1779 he was appointed to the *Prince George* with Rear-admiral Robert Digby in which he was present at the capture of the Spanish convoy off Cape Finisterre on 8 Jan 1780, the defeat of Langara off Cape St. Vincent on 16 Jan and the subsequent relief of Gibraltar.

Continuing in the *Prince George* when she went to North America in 1781, and afterwards to the West Indies with Sir Samuel Hood, Foley was present as a lieutenant in the attempted relief of St. Kitts, in the engagements to the leeward of Dominica on 9 and 12 April 1782. In the following October, on the invaliding of Captain Elphinstone, he was for a few weeks acting captain of the *Warwick* at New York, and on 1 December was confirmed in the rank of commander, and appointed to the *Britannia*, armed ship. In her he continued after the peace and till the beginning of 1785, when he brought her to England and paid her off.

From December 1787 to September 1790 he commanded the *Racehorse* sloop on the home station, and from her was advanced to post rank on 21 Sept. In April 1793 he was appointed to the *St. George* of 98 guns as flag-captain to Rear-admiral John Gell with whom he went to the Mediterranean, took part in the operations at Toulon and, when Gell invalided, continuing as flag-captain to Rear-admiral Sir Hyde Parker (1739-1807) assisted in driving the French squadron into Golfe Juan (11 June 1794) and in defeating the French fleet in the two engagements off Toulon (13 March, 13 July 1795).

In March 1796 he accompanied Parker to the *Britannia*, in which he remained with Vice-admiral Thompson, who relieved Sir Hyde towards the close of the year. As flag-captain to the commander in the second post, Foley thus held an important position in the battle of Cape St. Vincent on St. Valentine's day 1797. He was shortly afterwards appointed to command the *Goliath* of 74 guns, one of the ships sent into the Mediterranean under Captain Troubridge in May 1798 to reinforce Rear-admiral Sir Horatio Nelson. He thus shared in the operations of the squadron previous to the battle of the Nile, in which he had the distinguished good fortune to lead the English line into action. In doing so he passed round the van of the French line as it lay at anchor,

and engaged it on the inside; the ships immediately following did the same, and a part at least of the brilliant and decisive result of the battle has been commonly attributed to this manoeuvre.

The *Goliath* continued on the Mediterranean station, attached to the command of Lord Nelson, till towards the close of 1799, when she was sent home.

In the following January, Foley was appointed to the *Elephant* of 74 guns for service in the Channel fleet. In 1801 as noted herein she was sent to the Baltic, continuing attached to fleet until she returned to England in the autumn to be paid off. In September 1805, when Nelson was going out to resume the command of the fleet off Cadiz, he called on Foley and offered him the post of captain of the fleet. Foley's health, however, would not at that time permit him to serve afloat, and was obliged to refuse. On 28 April 1808 he was promoted to the rank of rear-admiral, and in 1811 was appointed commander-in-chief in the Downs, in which post he continued till the peace.

On 12 August 1812 he became a vice-admiral; was nominated a K.C.B. in January 1815, a G.C.B. on 6 May 1820, and attained the rank of admiral on 27 May 1825. In May 1830 he was appointed commander-in-chief at Portsmouth, where he died 9 Jan 1833. He was buried in the Garrison Chapel, in a coffin made of some fragments of oak kept from his old ship *Elephant* when she was broken up.

Foley married, in July 1802, Lady Lucy Fitzgerald, and lived for the most part at Abermarlais, Carmarthenshire. He died without issue.

### **Thomas TROUBRIDGE (1758-1807)**

#### *Culloden*

British rear admiral, was one of Lord Nelson's 'band of brothers' and greatly distinguished himself during the Revolutionary (1793-1801) and Napoleonic (1803-15) wars against France.

Born in London, he entered the navy in 1773 and, together with Nelson, served in the East Indies in the frigate *Seahorse*. In 1785 he returned to England in the *Sultan* as flag-captain to Admiral Sir Edward Hughes. Appointed to command the frigate *Castor* in May 1794, he and his ship were captured by the French while escorting a convoy, but he was liberated soon afterwards.

On his return he was appointed to command the *Culloden*, a 3<sup>rd</sup> rate ship-of-the-line, in which he led the line at the battle of Cape St. Vincent, being commended for his courage and initiative by Admiral Sir John Jervis. Subsequently he took part under Nelson's command in the abortive assault on Santa Cruz and, later, in the battle of the Nile, in which the *Culloden* unfortunately grounded on a shoal near the entrance to Aboukir Bay.

At Nelson's request, however, he was awarded the gold medal commemorating the victory. He was Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty from 1801 to 1804 in which year he was promoted rear admiral, and a year later was appointed to command the eastern half of the East Indies Station. He hoisted his flag in the *Blenheim*, but on arrival in the area of his command was changed to that of the Cape station. While on passage to take up his new appointment his ship was lost with all hands during a cyclone.

### **Davidge GOULD (1758-1847)**

#### *Audacious*



Born at Bridgewater, Somerset, the son of Richard Gould of Sharpham Park. Entered the Navy in May 1772, as a Volunteer, on board the *Alarm* stationed in the Mediterranean, where, and on the coast of North America, he afterwards served as Midshipman, until the date of his first promotion, 7 May 1779, in the *Winchelsea* and *Phoenix*.

During an attachment of four years to the latter ship Mr. Gould took an active part in the earlier operations of the enemy's batteries, cutting out their vessels, and contesting, not without loss, with their boats up the North River. He then joined the *Ulysses*, *Bristol*, and *Conqueror*. The following June after having further served as First of the *Formidable*, he was promoted to the command of the *Pachahunter* sloop, on leaving which vessel he successively joined, on the Home and Mediterranean stations, the *Pylades* (18g), and *Ferret*, another sloop-of-war.

The *Pylades*, during 13 months that she was commanded by Captain Gould appears to have won considerable reputation as an anti-smuggler. Acquiring Post-rank 23 March 1789, the subject of this sketch, who had been on half-pay for a period of four years, immediately obtained command of the *Brune* frigate, on the West India station. He subsequently commanded the *Cyclops* at the reduction of Corsica in 1794; the *Bedford* (74g) in the two actions of 14 March and the 13 July 1795, on the former of which occasions he came into close and severe contact with the *Censeur* (74g), and *Ca Ira* (80g), whose fire killed 9, and wounded 17 of his men; and the *Audacious* (74g), at the bombardment of Cadiz, the battle of the Nile, and the blockade of Malta and Genoa.

The latter ship being paid off on her return home with convoy towards the close of 1800, after having witnessed the capture of a French squadron under Rear-Admiral Perree. Captain Gould by whom she had been commanded seven years, was next, in the spring of 1801, appointed to the *Majestic* (74g), employed on the Home and West India stations.

He went on half-pay in 1801, and, with the exception of a brief command, in 1803-4, of the *Windsor Castle* (98g), attached to the fleet in the Channel, which his health obliged him to resign, did not again go afloat. He was created a Rear-Admiral 1807; a Vice-Admiral 1810; and a full Admiral 1825. He was honoured with a medal for his valour at the Nile; and in 1815 and 1833 successively invested of a KCB and GCB. He died 23 April 1847 at Hawkshead, Herts. (O'Byrne Vintage Naval Library)

### **Sir Edward BERRY (1768-1831)**

#### *Vanguard*



Sir Edward Berry was one of a large family left in straitened circumstances by the early death of his father, a merchant in London. Through Lord Mulgrave, the boy was, in 1779, appointed as a volunteer to the *Burford*, 70 guns, with Captain Rainier, then sailing for the East Indies, where she remained till after the conclusion of the war in 1783.

He was made lieutenant on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1794, as a reward it is said, for his gallantry in boarding a French ship of war. He is said also to have distinguished himself on the First of June; but the first distinct mention of him is on his appointment to the *Agamemnon* with Captain Nelson in May 1796. He quickly won Nelson's esteem (Nelson Despatches, ii. 175), followed him in the *Captain* (11 June), and whilst Nelson was on shore conducting the siege of Porto Ferrajo, Berry, commanded the ship in such a manner as to call forth an official expression of his captain's 'fullest approbation'.

The role of Captain Berry in the Battle of the Nile is outlined in the summary of the action and following his being knighted on the 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1798 he was presented with the freedom of the City. Early in the spring of 1799 he was appointed to the *Foudroyant*, and directed to assist in the blockade of Malta.

In this role Berry had the gratification of assisting in the capture of his former captor, the *Généreux* on the 18<sup>th</sup> February and the *Guillaume Tell* on the 31 March, the last of the French ships which had been at the Battle of the Nile. The following June the *Foudroyant* carried the Queen of Naples from Palermo to Leghorn but a few months later he returned to England.

In the summer of 1805 he was appointed to the *Agamemnon* and was present at Trafalgar but had no opportunity for special distinction. In 1806 he was made baronet and, after further service, in 1813 he was placed in charge of one of the royal yachts. Appointed rear-admiral in 1821 he never hoisted his flag, being in poor health and died on 13 February 1831 without issue – the baronetcy becoming extinct.

### **Thomas Boulden THOMPSON (1766-1828)**

#### *Leander*

Son of Mr Boulden, by his wife Sarah, sister of Captain Edward Thompson born in Kent. Borne on the books of different ships, he first went to sea in 1778 in the *Hyaena* with his Uncle. He served in the *Hyaena* throughout her commission, on the home station, in the Ester Indies, and on the coast of South America, and was promoted to be lieutenant on 14 Jan 1782.

In 1783 he was appointed again with his uncle, to the *Grampus* on the west coast of Africa; and, on his uncle's death, was promoted by the senior officer to be commander of the *Nautilus*, a promotion afterwards confirmed though dated 27 March 1786, two months later than the original commission. In 1787 he brought the *Nautilus* home and went on half-pay. He was advanced to post rank on 22 Nov 1790, but had no employment till the autumn of 1796. He was then appointed to the 50-gun ship *Leander*, in which in the spring of 1797 he joined Lord St. Vincent off Cadiz.

He was shortly afterwards detached with the squadron under Sir Horatio Nelson, against Teneriffe, being specially included on account of his 'local knowledge' gained, presumably, while in the *Grampus* or *Nautilus*. In the unfortunate attempt on Santa Cruz Thompson received a wound, not so severe, however, as to necessitate his going home. He remained with the fleet, and in the following summer was again detached with the squadron sent into the Mediterranean to reinforce Sir Horatio Nelson, and eventually to fight the battle of the Nile on 1-2 Aug.

The *Leander* could not be counted as a ship of the line; but by taking up a position between two of the French ships, she – while herself in comparative safety – raked two French ships and the ships beyond them with terrible effect, and had a disproportionate share in the success attained. He was afterwards ordered by Nelson to carry home Captain Edward Berry with his despatches; but falling in with the French 74-gun ship *Genereux*, near the west-end of Crete on 18 Aug., the *Leander*, after a brilliant defence, in which both Thompson and Berry were severely wounded, was captured and taken to Corfu.

Thence they were allowed to return overland to England; when Thompson, being tried by court-martial for the loss of his ship, was specially complimented as deserving of every praise his country and the court could give, for 'his gallant and almost unprecedented defence of the *Leander* against so superior a force as that of the *Genereux*'. On his acquittal Thompson was knighted and awarded a pension.

In the spring of 1799 he was appointed to the 74-gun ships *Bellona*, one of the fleet off Brest under Lord Bridport. He was shortly afterwards sent into the Mediterranean; but a few months later he returned to the Channel, and took part in the blockade of Brest, till in March 1801 the *Bellona* was attached to the fleet for the Baltic under Sir Hyde Parker. When it was determined that Nelson should attack the Danish fleet and the defences of Copenhagen, the *Bellona* was one of the ships selected for the work.

But in entering the channel on the morning of 2 April she unfortunately took the ground on the edge of shoal and stuck fast, helpless, but within long range of the Danish guns. She thus suffered severely, had eleven killed and sixty-three wounded; and among these latter was Thompson, who lost a leg. He was also appointed to the command of the *Mary* yacht.

On 11 Dec 1806 he was created a baronet. In 1806 he was appointed comptroller of the navy, an office which he held until 1816, when he was appointed treasurer of Greenwich Hospital and director of the chest. He became a Rear-Admiral on 25 Oct 1809, vice-admiral on 4 June 1814, was nominated a KCB on 2 Jan 1815, and GCB on 14 Sept 1811. He was Member of Parliament for Rochester from May 1807 to June 1818. He died at his house at Hartsbourne in Hertfordshire on 3 March 1828. He married in February 1799, Anne, eldest daughter of Robert Raikes of Gloucester.

**Henry D'Esterre DARBY (-----1823)**

*Bellerophon*



Nephew of Admiral George Darby, Henry became Lieutenant on 13 Nov 1776 and Commander in 1781, first coming to prominence in the fireship *Infernal* against Suffren off the Cape Verde Islands. Promoted to Post Captain in 1783 he quickly gained a reputation as a smart frigate captain. In 1796 he was appointed to command the 74 gun ship *Bellerophon*, a fifth of whose crew were Irish. The mutinies of 1797 did not affect the ship; her captain being Irish born knew how to handle the quirks of his crew and Admiral Jervis appreciated this and rewarded Darby by sending him with Nelson to the Mediterranean in pursuit of the French fleet, the result of which led to the Battle of the Nile 1 Aug 1798.

The *Bellerophon* opened fire at 6.45pm., at 7pm she anchored alongside the French flagship *L'Orient* (120) at 8pm her mizzen-mast was shot away and Capt Darby suffered a severe head wound, and Lieutenant Philip Launder was killed by the fall of the main mast and by 9pm the French flagship was on fire. The *Bellerophon* cut her cable and drifted away dismasted, and with casualties amounting to near a quarter of the British Fleet. At 10pm the *L'Orient* blew up, creating such a spectacle that fighting ceased for a number of minutes. By the end of the battle *Bellerophon* had lost 3 lieutenants, 1 Master's Mate, 32 seamen and 13 marines, Capt. Darby was wounded as well as the Master, Captain of marines, boatswain, and one midshipman. In all 49 killed and 148 wounded. Despite the heavy casualties it had been a most complete victory for the British Fleet and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug Nelson sent the following letter to the captain of the *Bellerophon*:-

"My Dear Darby,

I grieve for your heavy loss of brave fellows, but look at our glorious victory. We will give you every assistance as soon as you join us, till then God Bless You.

Ever yours faithfull, Horatio Nelson. We shall both I trust soon get well."

Capt Darby was very disappointed not to be sent home for repairs and was particularly blunt with Admiral St. Vincent whom he accused, at Gibraltar, as having a tongue like a cow's, with a smooth side as well as a rough one. He left the *Bellerophon* in 1799 and was made Rear Admiral in 1804.

Darby's home was the 14<sup>th</sup> century Leap Castle on the West Coast of Ireland, five miles north-west of Roscrea. The walls are very thick and honeycombed with many passages. There is a dungeon with entrance only by a trapdoor and when it was cleared out earlier this century three cart loads of bones were removed. The Castle was burnt down during the riots of 1922 and restoration was planned for many years though now it is owned by a Trust.

Henry D'Esterre Darby became Admiral of the Blue in 1819 and was knighted the following year. He died on the 30 Mar 1823 and was buried in Adhancon Churchyard, Offaly, Ireland. His nephew, John Nelson Darby was the founder of the Plymouth Brethren.

(Courtesy The Nelson Society – Nelson Dispatch Volume 6 page 305).

## **Benjamin HALLOWELL (1760-1834)**

### *Swiftsure*

British admiral, was with Horatio Nelson in Corsica in 1794, and was one of the famous 'band of brothers'. As captain of the *Swiftsure* he played a considerable part in the battle of the Nile in 1798 and it was he who, after the action, presented Nelson with a coffin made from the mainmast of the French flagship *L'Orient*, destroyed in the battle, in which in fact Nelson was buried in 1806. For the next two years he remained in command of the *Swiftsure* in the Mediterranean, but had the misfortune to be captured by a strong French squadron.

A few years later Hallowell again served with Nelson off Toulon and his ship was in the chase to the West Indies in 1805 to search for Admiral Villeneuve, later joining Cuthbert Collingwood in the watch on Cadiz where the French fleet under Villeneuve had taken shelter. His ship was detached to Gibraltar for stores and water just before the battle of Trafalgar, which he thus missed. He was promoted rear admiral in 1811 and vice admiral in 1819. In 1829, under the terms of a will, he assumed the name and arms of Carew, and for the rest of his life was know as Benjamin Hallowell-Carew. He reached the rank of admiral in 1831.



"Hallowell was indeed born in Canada in 1760 and his father was the Commissioner of the American Board of Customs. He joined the RN at an early age.... He was described as having a gigantic frame and vast courage.

"Extensive reference is made to Hallowell's exploits in the United Services Journal of 1834 Part III page 374, and 1835 Part I page 95."

*Tom Kuiper*

## **Samuel HOOD (1762-1814)**

### *Zealous*

Present at Rodney's victory at the Saints of 1782, he became a post-captain at the age of 26, and in 1793 was sent to the Mediterranean with Lord Hood's fleet. Later he became associated with Nelson. He was at Santa Cruz in the *Theseus* in 1797, and in the following year had a great part in the battle of the Nile, when he took his ship inshore of the French.

In 1803 Hood was given command of the Leeward Islands station in the rank of commodore, and he captured St. Lucia and Tobago from the French. In 1805 he lost an arm during an action in which he captured some French frigates. Two years later he was with Lord Gambier in operations against Copenhagen and also saw service in the Baltic as a rear admiral under Sir James Saumarez.

Hood was made baronet for his services off Corunna in 1809 during the withdrawal of Sir John Moore's army. As a vice admiral he went to the East Indies as commander-in-chief, and died of fever at Madras. Sir Samuel, with his notable service under Rodney, Nelson, Gambier, Saumarez, and others, probably ranks next to his cousin, Lord Hood, in the variety and success of his activities, and had he survived he would undoubtedly have reached the highest ranks in the navy.

### **Sir James SAUMAREZ (1757-1836)**

#### ***Orion***

Second in command of the British squadron at the Nile. As with all the ships in the squadron he carried a wide mixture of ages and nationalities but had the unique advantage of carrying over sixty crew from the Channel Islands including three Burgese brothers, John 20 years, Thomas 22 years and Nicholas 23 years. British admiral, who came of a well-known Guernsey family, saw more varied active service during the course of a long life than most offers of his own great era.

He was made lieutenant during the War of American Independence (1775-82); was present at the stubborn fight with the Dutch near the Dogger Bank in 1781; served under Richard Kempenfelt when he captured a French convoy later the same year, and was one of the captains at Sir George Rodney's great victory over de Grasse in the West Indies in April 1782, when he commanded the *Russell*.

At the beginning of the war with Republican France in 1793, Saumarez was knighted for his capture of the frigate *Reunion*, thirty-six guns, off Cherbourg, an encounter in which his own ship, the *Crescent*, suffered no casualties. He was commanding the 74-gun *Orion* when Lord Bridport defeated the French near Brest in 1795, and he received the King's gold medal, along with the other captains, for his brilliant part in Sir John Jervis's victory off Cape St. Vincent in February 1797.

Still in the *Orion* he took a leading part in the battle of the Nile on 1 August 1798, as Lord Nelson's second-in-command. He used his initiative in taking his ship inshore of the French line, as did certain other captains. He was sent to Gibraltar with the prizes, and in 1801, the year he received his flag, he was made a baronet. Saumarez soon had a chance to show his quality as a flag officer, for in July 1801, after suffering a repulse off Algeciras when he lost the *Hannibal* to the fire of shore batteries, he refitted his squadron so speedily at Gibraltar that he was able to enjoy revenge in a night action during the course of which he captured a French ship of the line and destroyed two Spanish three-deckers. The Spaniards, according to Captain Keats of the *Superb* actually blew one another up in the confusion of the action. Saumarez next commanded off Guernsey, and was later sent to the fleet blockading Brest.

An enlarged opportunity came in 1808, when he was made commander-in-chief of a force operating, during the ice-free months, in the Baltic, with his flag in the *Victory*. For five successive seasons his appearance in the northern area of war was of decisive consequence. He supported Sweden, who for much of the Napoleonic war was Britain's ally; he protected an enormous volume of trade; and he contained Denmark, which was within the French orbit.

Saumarez's services were as much diplomatic as naval, a fact which was handsomely acknowledged by von Platen, the Swedish Foreign Minister. In the winter months the ships returned home to refit, or were used in support of Lord Wellington's armies, then fighting in Portugal and Spain. After the war, Saumarez held the Plymouth command from 1824 to 1827. He was made a peer in 1831. A man of attractive qualities and admirable judgement, he was eminently brave in battle, and was always willing to take a risk if possible advantage could justify it. He was, wrote Sir William Hotham, 'in his person tall and having the remains of a handsome man rather formal and ceremonious in his manner, but without the least tincture of affectation or pride....more than ordinarily attentive to his duty to God; but, with the meekness of Christianity, having the boldness of a lion whenever a sense of duty brings it into action'. (Ships and the Sea. OUP)

### **Ralph Willett MILLER (1762-1799)**

#### *Theseus*

Born at New York on 24 Jan 1762. Willet was his mother's family name; his father, a loyalist, lost all his property in the American revolution. At an early age Miller was sent to England; he entered the navy, and in 1778 was serving in the *Ardent* with Rear-Admiral James Gambier. He is said to have been 'in all the actions fought by Admirals Barrington, Rodney, Hood, and Graves, and was three times wounded'. He must have gone to the West Indies in December 1778. In one of the ships under Commodore Hotham. On 25 May 1781, just after Hood's action with De Grasse, off Fort Royal of Martinique, he was promoted by Rodney to be lieutenant of the *Terrible*. In the action off Cape Henry on 5 Sept 1781, the *Terrible* received such damage that she had to be abandoned and burnt. Miller, it seems, joined one of the ships which went back to the West Indies with Hood, and returned to England towards the end of 1782. On 20 Dec., he was appointed to the *Fortitude*. In 1793 he was a lieutenant of the *Windsor Castle* in the Mediterranean, and at the evacuation of Toulon was placed, individually, under the orders of Sir W. Sidney Smith for the destruction of the French ships and arsenal. He was shortly afterwards moved by Hood into *Victory*, and was actively employed in the boats and on shore at the reduction of San Fiorenzo, Bastia and Calvi. In July 1794 he volunteered to set fire to the French squadron in Golfe Jouan, and was promoted on 1 July to the *Poulette*, with orders to fit her as a fireship, for that purpose. He made five successive attempts to take her in to the French anchorage, but calms and contrary winds prevented him. On 12 Jan 1796 he was posted to the command of the *Mignonne*, but was moved into the *Unite* by Sir John Jervis and sent to the *Adriatic*.

In August 1796, when Commodore Nelson hoisted his broad pennant in the *Captain*, Miller was selected to be his flag-captain, and was thus in command of the *Captain* in the battle of Cape St. Vincent. In May 1797 he moved with Nelson to the *Theseus*, was with him during his command of the inshore squadron off Cadiz through June, and in the disastrous attack on Santa Cruz on 20 July, when he was landed in command of the small-arm men of the *Theseus*. After Nelson returned to England, the *Theseus* remained with the fleet off Cadiz, but the next year was detached to join Nelson in the Mediterranean, and took an effective part in the battle of the Nile. Miller sent his wife a remarkably able description of the battle, finishing it in sight of Gibraltar, where he was sent with Sir James Saumarez, in charge of the prizes. Towards the end of December the *Theseus* was again sent to the Levant, and under the orders of Sir Sidney Smith took part in the operations on the coast of Egypt and Syria. Miller was killed on board his ship during the defence of St. Jean d'Acre, by the accidental explosion of some shells on 14 May 1799. 'He had long', wrote Smith to Lord St. Vincent, 'been in the practice of collecting such of the enemy's shells as fell on the town without bursting, and of sending them back to the enemy better prepared and with the evident effect. He had a deposit on board the *Theseus* ready for service, and more were preparing, when, by an accident for which nobody can account, they exploded at short intervals', killing and wounding nearly eighty men, wrecking the poop and the after part of the quarter-deck, and setting fire to the ship. The monument in St. Paul's, by Flaxman, was erected Miller's memory by subscription among his brother officers who fought with him at the Nile and St. Vincent. He left a widow and two daughters.

## Thomas LOUIS (1759-1807)

### *Minotaur*

Entered the Navy in 1770; was Lieutenant of the *Benfaisant* in Keppel's action with the Comte d'Orvilliers in 1778; and in 1780 fought in the same ship in the action with Don Juan de Langara, of whose flagship he was constituted Prize-Master. Obtaining Post-rank in 1783, and the command, subsequently, of the *Minotaur* (74g) it was his fortune to be present in that ship at the battle of the Nile 1 Aug 1798.

In 1804 he was advanced to the rank of Rear-Admiral; and in April, 1806, as a reward for his conduct under Sir John Duckworth in the action off St. Domingo, he was raised to the dignity of Baronet. He died 17 May 1807 on board the *Canopus* (80g) while in command of the naval portion of the Egyptian expedition.  
(O'Byrne Vintage Naval Library)

## George Blagdon WESTCOTT (1745-1798)

### *Majestic*

Said to have been the son of a baker in Honiton, joined the 28-gun frigate *Solebay*, as master's mate, under the command of Captain Lucius O'Bryen and George Vandeput. Afterwards he was for three years in the *Albion* as midshipman with Samuel Barrington and John Leveson-Gower, and passed his examination on 10 Jan 1776, when he was described as 'appearing' to be 'more or less twenty-two'. He can scarcely have been less than thirty at this time. On 6 Aug 1777 he was promoted to be lieutenant of the *Valiant*, still with Gower, and afterwards with Samuel Granston Goodall was in her in the action off Ushant on 27 July 1778 in the fleet under Sir Charles Hardy the younger in the summer of 1779 and under Vice-admiral George Darby at the relief of Gibraltar in April 1781. In November he was moved into the *Victory*, carrying the flag of Rear-admiral Richard Kempenfelt in his brilliant attack in the French convoy on 12 Dec., and of Richard Lord Howe in the relief of Gibraltar and the action off Cape Spartel in October 1782. In 1786-7 (after service in the Medway) he was first lieutenant of the *Salisbury*, carrying the broad pennant of Commodore John Elliot commander-in-chief in Newfoundland, and on 1 Dec., 1787 was promoted commander. In 1789-90 he commanded the *Fortune* sloop, and from her was promoted to be captain on 1 Oct., 1790, and he was appointed to the *London* as flag-captain to his old chief Goodall.

The *London* was paid off in the end of 1791, and Westcott remained on half-pay till September 1793, when he joined the *Impregnable* as flag-captain to Rear-admiral Benjamin Caldwell with whom he took part in the battle of 1 June 1794. Afterwards he followed Caldwell to the *Majestic*, went with him to the West Indies, and remained there with Sir John Laforey whom he brought to England in June 1796. As a private ship the *Majestic* then joined the Channel fleet, was with Colpoys off Brest in December, and with Bridport during the mutiny at Spithead. in April and May 1797. Towards the end of the year she joined the fleet off Cadiz under the Earl of St. Vincent, and in May 1798 was one of the ships sent up the Mediterranean to join Sir Horatio Nelson. In the battle of the Nile her position in the rear of the line made her rather late in coming into action, and in the darkness and smoke she ran her jibboom into the main-rigging of the French *Heureux*, in which position she remained caught for several minutes and suffered heavy loss. At this time Westcott was killed by a musket-ball in the throat, but the ship was gallantly fought through the battle by her first lieutenant, Cuthbert, who was promoted to the vacant command on the next day by Nelson.

It is as one of the celebrated 'band of brothers' and by his death in the hour of victory that Westcott is best known. Collingwood wrote of him: 'a good officer and a worthy man but, if it was a part of our condition to choose a day to die on, where could he have found one so memorable, so eminently distinguished among



great days?' And Goodall wrote; 'He sleeps in the bed of honour, and in all probability will be immortalised among the heroes in the Abbey. Never could he have died more honourably. I have him to lament among many deserving men whom I have patronised, that have passed away in the prime of their lives.' A monument to his memory was erected at public expense in St. Paul". At Honiton also a monument was erected by subscription.

Westcott left a widow and daughter. In January 1801, passing through Honiton, Nelson invited them to breakfast, and presented Mrs. Westcott with his own Nile medal, saying, 'You will not value it less because Nelson has worn it.' On 17 Jan 1801 he wrote to Lady Hamilton: ' At Honiton I visited Captain Westcott's mother – poor thing, except from the bounty of the government and Lloyd's, in very low circumstances. The brother is a tailor, but had they been chimney-sweepers it was my duty to show them proper respect.'(DNB)

### **Sir Thomas Masterman HARDY (1769-1839)**

#### *Mutine*



The second son of Joseph Hardy, of Portisham, Dorset, and Nanny, daughter of Thomas Masterman of Kingston Russel, in the same county. Born in 1769, and educated at Crewkerne school, he entered the service in 1781, but returned to school in the following year at Milton Abbas, his name being retained on the ship's books.

After a period in the merchant service, he re-entered the Navy as Midshipman in 1790. Was Midshipman of *Amphitrite* in operations before Marseilles and Toulon, 1793. Promoted Lieutenant in 1793 on the *Minerve* under Nelson he was taken prisoner in an encounter with the Spanish frigates *Sabina* and *Ceres* in 1796. Was present at the victory of St. Vincent, 1797.

Nelson had a great affection for Hardy, and the story is well known how, when he was hastening in the *Minerve* to join Jervis, just before the battle of St. Vincent, and hotly chased in the Straits by several Spanish men-of-war, a man fell overboard, and Hardy, then a lieutenant, was lowered in a boat to pick him up. The man, however, could not be found, nor could the boat be recovered unless the way of the frigate was checked.

The nearest Spaniard was almost within gunshot, and perhaps any other man than Nelson would have felt that the boat, even with Hardy in it, must be sacrificed to the safety of the frigate, and all that it meant to Jervis. But Nelson was not made in that mould. "By God, I'll not lose Hardy!" he exclaimed "Back the mizen-topsail." The boat was picked up, and Hardy was saved. He commanded the boats of the *Minerve* and *Lively*, and was wounded in the cutting out of the frigate *Mutine*, 1797, for which he was promoted Commander, and appointed by Nelson to command the *Mutine*.

He commanded the *Mutine* in Nelson's victory of the Nile, 1798, and for his services was promoted Captain in 1798, and appointed to command of the *Vanguard*. Served in her and the *Foudroyant* under Nelson in Naples and Sicily, 1798-99; and was present in his victory of Copenhagen in 1801. Flag-Captain of *Victory* during the blockade of Toulon, and the pursuit of the combined fleets to the West Indies and back; and Captain of the Fleet at Trafalgar, 1805.

Was a witness to Nelson's last will. Was with him when he received his mortal wound, and frequently in attendance during the hero's last hours, and at his funeral bore the "Banner of Emblems." For his services at Trafalgar he was created a baronet, received a gold medal, the thanks of Parliament, and swords of honour from the Patriotic Fund and City of London.

Was Commander-in-Chief at Lisbon 1809-12, and held the rank of Commodore of the Portuguese service; commanded a squadron on North American Station, 1812-1813; KCB 1815; commanded the yacht *Princess Augusta*, 1815-18; Commander-in-Chief, South American Station, 1819-24; during the War of Independence.

Colonel, Royal Marines, 1821; Rear Admiral, 1825; commanded an Experimental Squadron, 1827; First Sea Lord of Admiralty, 1830-34; GCB 1831; Governor of Greenwich Hospital, 1834; Vice-Admiral 1837; Elder Brother, Trinity House 1837; and died and was buried at Greenwich Hospital in 1839.

### **Hon Sir Thomas Bladen CAPEL CB GCB (1776-1853)**

The Honourable Thomas Capel entered the navy in 1792 aged 16 and in the following year became a midshipman in which capacity he served in *Sanspareil* (80) in Lord Bridport's action off l'Orient in 1795. He became a lieutenant in 1797 and was *Vanguard's* signal officer at the Battle of the Nile; after the battle Nelson entrusted him with a duplicate set of dispatches reporting the defeat of the French fleet. The original set sent via the *Leander* (50) was however lost when she was captured. Fortunately Lieutenant Capel successfully delivered his dispatches and was confirmed in the rank of commander on the 2 October 1798. Less than three months later he was a captain and commanded a number of ships – mostly frigates. In 1802 he was appointed to command another frigate, the *Phoebe* (36) and in this ship he was present at the ultimate sea battle of the time – Trafalgar.

Captain Capel distinguished himself in the aftermath of the battle by saving the French *Swiftsure* (74) and by helping to capture the Spanish *Bahama* (74). He sat on the court-martial of Sir Robert Calder and was with Duckworth in the Dardenelles in 1807. After many more years at sea he achieved flag-rank in 1825 and was Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth in 1848. He died in London in 1853 having received three clasps to his Naval General Service medal.

### **Henry COMPTON (1774-1847)**

Henry Compton was a native of Limerick, born in 1774 and received the naval part of his education at an academy near Deptford. He joined the navy as a midshipman in January 1789 on board the *Cumberland* (74) and first sent to sea in the *Actæon* (44) conveying troops to and from the West Indies. On the breaking out of the French revolutionary war, he joined the *Romulus* (36) in time to witness the occupation of Toulon. He next served with the Channel fleet on board the *Minotaur* (74), and subsequently returned to the Mediterranean, in the *Blonde* (32). Early in 1795 he transferred in *Britannia* (100) then *Victory* (100), flagships of Vice-Admiral Hotham and Sir John Jervis. It was probably through the latter connection that he came to the attention of Nelson. In March 1796 Compton was promoted to lieutenant having been drafted into *Agamemnon* (64) two months earlier. Thereafter he served with Nelson for three dramatic years seeing action in the Mediterranean, the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, at Tenerife and finally at the Battle of the Nile where he served in *Vanguard*.

A year after the Nile, Nelson shifted his flag into *Foudroyant* (80) and directed Compton to take command of the *Perseus* bomb vessel. A letter from Nelson to the Admiralty written on the first anniversary of the Nile commended Compton ... "I beg leave to recommend [him] as highly meriting promotion." He married, in 1807, Miss Molloy, niece to Edward Molloy, of Oporto, and had issue four sons and one daughter.

Commander Compton commanded ships at the blockades of Alexandria and Malta, and along the Italian coast. In 1840 he accepted the rank of Captain and died in 1847.

### **Stephen George COMYN (1766-1839)**

Born in 1766, Stephen Comyn gained his BA. in 1788 and at the age of 32 entered the *Vanguard* (74) as Nelson's chaplain on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1798. Not every ship in the Navy employed a chaplain, the seamen in their superstitious way being wary of them and many chaplains found themselves teaching the young midshipmen their three R's as well as administering the faith. Nelson seems to have had his share of clergy including his brother William in the *Boreas*, Robert Rolfe, *Agamemnon* and finally Alexander John Scott in the *Victory*, whose duties included linguist and secretary to the Admiral. There was possibly a family connection between Comyn and Scott as Comyn's surname was the same as Scott's mother's maiden name.

During the Battle of the Nile Comyn was summoned at the height of the conflict to find Nelson bloodied from a head wound and convinced he wasn't long for this world but the surgeon soon assured him all was well. Following the great victory Nelson issued a memorandum to his fleet, "Almighty God having blessed His Majesty's arms with victory, the Admiral intends returning public thanksgiving for the same at 2 o'clock this day and he recommends every ship doing the same as soon as convenient." The Reverend Comyn conducted the service from the quarterdeck of the *Vanguard* which greatly impressed a group of captured French officers.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1799 Comyn, in company with Hardy and the lieutenants of the *Vanguard*, joined Nelson in his new flagship *Foudroyant* (80) where they languished 'inactive at a foreign court'. One can only guess what Comyn thought of Nelson's behaviour at Naples during a period which even the most ardent of Nelson supporters have regarded as slightly decadent.

Christmas Eve, 1800, Comyn transferred to *San Josef* (112) Nelson's old prize from the Battle of St. Vincent. The Spring of 1801 found the British Fleet in the Baltic for the attack on the Danes at Copenhagen where Comyn now became chaplain of Nelson's ship, the *St. George* (98). As the *St. George* was too large for Nelson's needs in the shallow waters off Copenhagen he transferred to the *Elephant* (74); whether Comyn removed with him for the day is uncertain but now the chaplain was reaching the end of his service with the

Navy and he approached Nelson with a request for a living ashore. In June 1802 Nelson was able to write the following to Comyn:- "My dear Sir, I send you the Chancellor's letter, and most sincerely congratulate you on your preferment, which to a person who has conducted himself so prudently in pecuniary affairs will make you truly comfortable."

Stephen Comyn had two sons by his wife, Charlotte: the first, George Robert, joined the Royal Navy and died in 1816, the second he named after his Admiral, Horatio Nelson William Comyn. The preferment mentioned was St. Mary the Virgin, Bridgham, Norfolk, where the Reverend Comyn was to serve for the remaining 36 years of his life. He died on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1839 at the age of 73 and was buried near the altar of St. Mary's. A memorial to him reads:- (overleaf)

*Sacred*  
*To the memory of the*  
*Reverend Stephen George Comyn*  
*36 years Rector of this Parish*  
*who died*  
*17<sup>th</sup> of March 1839*  
*Aged 73 years*  
*Chaplain to Vice Admiral Lord Nelson*  
*Was with him in the Battle of the Nile*  
*And at Copenhagen*  
*And was presented to the Rectory of this Parish*  
*By the Chancellor through the intercession of Lord Nelson*

*During the space of 36 years he enjoyed an*  
*Unremitted state of good health till the last*  
*Fortnight when it pleased the Almighty to afflict*  
*Him with severe sufferings, which he bore with*  
*Great resignation, and may*  
*His soul rest in peace in hopes of joyful Resurrection*

### **William FADDY (....-1798)**

Little has been discovered to date of Captain of Marines, William Faddy killed in *Vanguard* at the Battle of the Nile. It is recorded that Nelson wrote of him as follows: -

*"To John Locker St. Helens 8<sup>th</sup> April 1798*

*Captain Faddy is embarked in the Ship, and assure your good father of my attention to whoever he recommends. Captain Faddy appears a very good kind of man. Captain Berry has taken his son on board. HORATIO NELSON"*

*Given the presence on board of his son, his death was all the more poignant. After his death, Nelson sought the assistance of Earl Spencer, writing: -*

*"Vanguard, at Sea 19<sup>th</sup> Sept 1798*

Captain Faddy, of the Marines who was killed on board the Vanguard has a family of small children: the eldest son is now on board this Ship, only fourteen years of age. I beg to solicit your Lordship for a Commission in the Marines for him. I understand it has been done and the youth permitted to remain at school, till of a proper age to join the Corps. If, however, this should, in the present instance, be thought wrong, may I request that his name may stand as an élève of the Admiralty, and Mrs Faddy acquainted with it, which must give her some relief under her great misfortune.

Ever your Lordship's most obedient Servant, HORATIO NELSON"

### **John WATHERSTON (1771-1804)**

Born in 1771 in Legerwood, Berwickshire, John was one of 10 children born to Peter and Katherine who farmed in the area. He joined the *Vanguard* (74) as Midshipman on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1798 and six days later was classed as Master's Mate. Following the Battle of the Nile John continued in service but in the winter of 1804, as Lieutenant, was lost at sea. In the Kirkyard of Legerwood, Berwickshire, his family erected a headstone to his memory which reads:-

*This stone is placed here  
In memory of  
John  
Son of Peter Watherston  
Tenant of East Moriston  
A Lieutenant of His Majesty's Fleet  
Who  
With all other officers  
And crew of a man of war  
Perished in the Atlantic Ocean  
by the tempestuous weather  
about the end of 1804  
in the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of his age.*

On the first of Aug. 1798 at the Battle of the Nile he served in the same ship and under the immediate eye and command of the great and gallant Nelson and from his conduct as an officer on the memorable occasion as well as in other times and days of trial, he gained the approbation and friendship and patronage of the immortal hero.

### **Edward GALWAY (???-1844)**

This officer became a lieutenant in June 1793; he served for a short time as *Vanguard's* first lieutenant in which time the Battle of the Nile took place. Lieutenant Galway played an active part in the battle. Two hours after *Vanguard* began an exchange of gunfire with the French *Spartiate* (74) the enemy ship struck her colours. Lieutenant Galway and a party of marines were sent to take possession of her which he successfully achieved. *Spartiate* was in time added to the British fleet and fought seven years later at Trafalgar. In recognition of Galway's contribution to the victory over the French, Nelson promoted him to Commander in October, 1798.

He was promoted to Captain in 1802 and was present in *Dryad* (36) at the Scheldt expedition in 1809. Five years later (still commanding *Dryad*) Captain Gallway further distinguished himself in the capture of the French *Clorinde* (40). He gained flag rank in 1837 and died in 1844 as a Rear-Admiral of the Red.

\*Spellings vary. This ship's muster list has him as **Galway** (to which we defer on this occasion), as does the *Commissioned Sea Officers* (Syrett & DiNardi) but the *Vanguard's* Master's log, the *Naval History of Great Britain* (James) and *Dispatches of Lord Nelson* (Nicolas) each have him as **Galwey**.

### **Josiah NISBET (1780-1838)**

#### *Stepson of Lord Nelson*

Josiah Nisbet was entered and appeared on the Muster List from the 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1798. Frances Nisbet, later to become Lady Nelson, had returned to Nevis with her infant son Josiah after the death in Salisbury of her husband Dr. Josiah Nisbet. In Nevis she was to manage the household of the President of Nevis, her uncle, Mr. Herbert and it was he who would find, to his amazement, Nelson playing on all fours under the dining room table with the young Josiah during a visit. Married in 1787 Nelson, Frances and the young Josiah returned to England for the 'five years on the beach' although Josiah attended a boarding school arranged by the Revd. William Nelson.

On Nelson's appointment to the *Agamemnon* in January 1793 Josiah joined him as a Midshipman and his subsequent meteoric rise in the Navy was not entirely due to patronage but to ability and demonstrated courage. With Nelson at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent he was a Lieutenant of the *Theseus* at the time of the failed Santa Cruz expedition but he was instrumental in saving his stepfather's life when he applied a tourniquet to the shattered right arm.

In the Mediterranean in 1797 he was Captain of the *Dolphin* (24) (hospital ship) and *La Bonne Citoyenne* (20) a sloop with a complement of 120, and *Buona Ventura* (hired brig). Josiah arrived at Aboukir Bay on the 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1798, on the same day the *Mutine* sailed carrying Nelson's dispatch to Naples. He had been sent by St. Vincent with a message for Nelson to return to Minorca if he had not made contact with the French fleet. He also carried a sealed letter for Nelson from the Commander-in-Chief to the effect that whilst he had met Nelson's request regarding his son-in-law. "It would be a breach of friendship to conceal from you that he loves drink and low company, is thoroughly ignorant of all forms of service, inattentive, obstinate, and wrong-headed beyond measure, and had he not been your son-in-law must have been annihilated months ago. With all this, he is honest and truth telling, and, I dare say, will, if you ask him, subscribe to every word I have written." After two weeks exhilarating activity with his 'band of brothers' the letter must have come as a great shock and hurt Nelson deeply.

Later Josiah sailed in the *Buona Ventura* to Naples and joined in the festivities orchestrated by the Ambassador's wife, Lady Hamilton. Josiah had met the Hamilton's in 1793 but he was to be affected by Emma's charms and to be well aware of the effect she was having on Nelson. In his cups he vented his feelings and relations between stepfather and son became strained. Nevertheless he was given command of the frigate *Thalia* (36) and sent on various missions but news of his unsatisfactory conduct became known. *Thalia* was ordered back to Portsmouth for a refit and was paid off on arrival in 1800. Nelson was to recommend to the Admiralty that he should not be given another ship and this terminated Josiah's naval career.

Ashore he partook of the fast life for a while but eventually settled with his mother in Exmouth. His joy there was his ownership of a gaff rigged yacht, an interest shared with Frances Evans, who became his wife at Littleham Church on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1819. Subsequently he moved to Paris, became a successful dealer in

Government Stocks and Bonds, and was joined by Lady Nelson. A chill, which turned to pleurisy, proved fatal and he died aged fifty. A tomb was arranged in Littleham, which contains his body, and family members and it is there that Lady Nelson lies.

Richard Kerr-Nesbitt in his monograph published by the Nesbitt/Nisbet Society summed up his career in the following words:- "Josiah did not achieve fame, but he certainly lived an eventful life to the full. He sailed 'close to the wind' - often lived dangerously". His continuing loyalty to his mother must have been a source of strength to her.

### **William Standway PARKINSON (????-1838)**

William Standway Parkinson gained his lieutenancy in May 1794 and served as a junior Lieutenant of the *Dido* (28), in her gallant action with *la Minerve* French frigate, 24 June 1795. He served with Nelson in *Vanguard* at the Battle of the Nile in 1798. He transferred with Nelson into *Foudroyant* (80) whilst in Naples following the battle and was for a while the ship's first lieutenant. It was during this period that the Caraccioli affair arose and Parkinson was fortunate enough not to have been court-martialled himself. Lieutenant Parkinson was given charge of Caraccioli before his court-martial and execution. According to James (Naval History of Great Britain, 1860 edition) Parkinson was asked to intercede with Nelson on Caraccioli's behalf as the latter feared hanging. Nelson in no uncertain terms informed Parkinson that the prisoner had been

"...fairly tried by the officers of his own country; I cannot interfere'. On being urged a second time by Lieutenant Parkinson, [Nelson] exclaimed with much agitation, 'Go, Sir, and attend to your duty!' Carraccioli then, as a last hope asked Lieutenant Parkinson whether he thought an application to Lady Hamilton would prove beneficial. Upon which that officer went to the quarter-deck, but, not being able to meet with her, he returned."

As history records, Caraccioli was duly hung as a traitor to the Kingdom of Naples within hours. Despite this episode and given Parkinson's obvious feelings, it did not seem to have damaged his career. Nelson sent him home two weeks later with his dispatches and a letter of commendation: 'I beg leave to recommend Lieutenant Parkinson.'

Promotion to Commander followed a few weeks later (October 1799) on his arrival in London. He married, in 1800, the only daughter of the Rev. Edward Clarke, of Uckfield, Sussex. He became a Captain in 1808 and died on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1838.

### **Nathaniel VASSALL ( -1832)**

Lieutenant Nathaniel Vassell gained his rank in 1790 and was appointed to the *Foudroyant* (80) as second lieutenant in January 1798. However by March we find him as second lieutenant in *Vanguard* (74) in which he served at the Battle of the Nile. During the battle Lieutenant Vassall was sent away with a boarding party of marines to take possession of a prize. He returned three and a half hours later with the news that the prize had got underway and escaped. Vassall was wounded at the battle but survived. He was made commander in 1814 and died in 1832.

### **Thomas ALLEN (1764-1835)**

Thomas Allen was born in the village of Sculthorpe, near Burnham Thorpe, Norfolk, in the year 1771. From the earliest years, Thomas was in the service of the Nelson family, and when Horatio took command of the *Agamemnon* (64), Tom Allen, with others from the area went along with the young captain to start his career in the Royal Navy. On board the *Agamemnon*, Tom was rated as Nelson's servant and accompanied him at all times. During the action he would be stationed at one of the upper deck guns close to his master; on more than one occasion, when under fire, he interposed his bulky form to shield the much smaller Nelson. It is said that once, during a desperate boat action, he actually placed his own head between Nelson and an attacker and received a severe wound in doing so.

Tom Allen was in charge of Nelson's personal effects, his jewels, plate, valuables, and all things belonging to him on board. He also acted as body servant, and as such, he often had to coax his little master from a wet deck and a raging storm. It has been said that he was too familiar with Nelson: on one occasion he told him off, in front of other officers, for taking an extra glass of wine, by saying, "no more now, you know it will only make you ill".

Tom was for some time at Nelson's home, Merton Place, but he did not go with the hero to Trafalgar; who knows, if he had, perhaps Nelson would have survived the battle. After Nelson's death, Tom returned to Burnham Thorpe, but without a pension of any sort he soon became very poor. He was saved from the workhouse only by the intervention of Sir Thomas Hardy, who was then governor of Greenwich Hospital. Hardy appointed him pewterer to the Hospital, and it was from this comfortable situation he was called by a very sudden death. He is buried in the old cemetery Greenwich, close to the grave of Captain Hardy. There is a fine memorial to him still standing above his grave and the inscription is as follows:-

*To the Memory  
of  
Thomas Allen  
The Faithful Servant  
of  
Admiral Lord Nelson  
Born at  
Burnham Thorpe  
in the  
County of Norfolk  
1764*

*and died at*

*the Royal Hospital*

*Greenwich*

*on the*

*23<sup>rd</sup> November*

*1838*



