

HMS SERAPIS

History of HMS "Serapis" (44 guns):

Built at Rotherhithe 1778-9; launched 4.3.1779; Battle off Flamborough Head 23/24.9.1779; Captured by John Paul Jones 24.9.1779; Sold at L'Orient, eventually being bought and refitted for the French Navy and sent to the Indian Ocean; Accidentally burnt at St.Marie de Madagascar July 1781, when an open light was dropped into a tub of brandy; See "Ships of the Old Navy" by Michael Phillips at <http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk/maritim.htm>

THE BATTLE

late afternoon of 23.9.1779 James Blennerhassett's ship HMS "Serapis" (a new vessel of 44 guns) under Captain Richard Pearson, with the hired armed vessel Countess of Scarborough (20 guns), were in the North Sea off Flamborough Head, South of Scarborough, Yorkshire, escorting a convoy of 41 merchant ships from the Baltic; There they encountered an American squadron, the "Bonhomme Richard" (commanded by John Paul Jones), "Pallas" & the corvette "Alliance";

The duel that followed was the most notable naval battle of the revolutionary war; Jones engaged HMS Serapis by moonlight, manuevering "Bonhomme Richard" alongside the larger vessel & lashing the two ships together; With the muzzles of their guns touching, the warships fired into each other's insides; Jones' smaller & older ship was badly battered, repeatedly set on fire & rapidly filling with water, when the Captain Richard Pearson of HMS "Serapis" enquired of Jones if he was ready to surrender, saying "Has your ship struck?" (sometimes quoted as "Do you ask for quarter?") which offer Jones famously rejected with, "Sir, I have not yet begun to fight"; After more than three hours of fierce & bloody battle, HMS "Serapis", being on fire, struck her colours & surrendered. Jones transferring his crew to the British ship & taking command;

"Bon Homme Richard" was badly damaged and sank the following morning; the "Countess of Scarborough" was taken by the American ship "Pallas"; The American squadron, now including the captured HMS "Serapis" rigged with jury masts, sailed for the Texel in Holland for repairs, taking ten days to get there; Jones later wrote: "...No action before was ever, in all respects, so bloody, so severe and so lasting..."; The carnage was so great that neither Jones or his opponent, Capt. Richard Pearson, ever issued a complete casualty list, however one of Jones' officers estimated the killed and wounded on "Bonhomme Richard" at 302; Capt. Pearson was knighted for his gallantry in this action

NOTE: John Paul Jones was in Britain at the time known as "Paul Jones"

NOTE: John Paul Jones' refusal to surrender to HMS "Serapis" and going on to victory, is still used in the USA to illustrate the intent of Article II of "The Code of Conduct" for US forces, which states:- I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command I will never surrender my men while they still have the means to resist"

Blennerhassett was heir to Flimby Hall (the principal seat of Blennerhassett family in Cumberland) and that after uncle James' death William Wynne's own father Robert would become heir, which does imply that James was known to be alive...
"...I have often heard when a child that Flimby Hall belonged to my Uncle James..."

and
"...I have always heard from uncles, aunts, etc that Flimby Hall belongs to us..."
 However, James did marry and leave descendants, and in any case Flimby Hall was inherited by another branch of the family (C 7) who in 1772 sold the property to Sir James Lowther, Bart. of Whitehaven (cr. 1st Earl of Lonsdale on 11.5.1784) for £6450

m.11/13.1.1781 Holy Trinity Church, Gosport, nr Portsmouth, Hampshire;
Isabella Primrose b.c1764/6;
 dau. of James Primrose of Alverstoke, Hampshire; married as "...a minor, with the consent of her father"

d.26.11.1809 (not 10.12.09) at Maker, Cornwall (near Plymouth, Devon ("Clare Journal" of 14.12.1809 has her aged 43, but the Gentleman's Magazine for Dec.1809 has her aged 45)

Similar death notices in these two journals relate that that she was closely related to Irish playwright & poet Dr.Oliver Goldsmith, and that her mother had been the model for his character Mrs. Primrose in the novel "The Vicar of Wakefield";

[GM December 1809 vol.79, part 2, p.1180] :
"Obituary; with anecdotes, of remarkable Persons. DEATHS. Nov. 26. At Maker, in Plymouth, aged 45, Mrs Blennerhassett, a near relative of the celebrated Dr. Oliver Goldsmith, and daughter of Mrs. Primrose, one of the heroines mentioned in The Vicar of Wakefield."

[Clare Journal, Ireland, Thursday 14-Dec-1809] :
"On Sunday at Maker in England aged 43 years, Mrs Blennerhassett a near relation of the celebrated Dr. GOLDSMITH & daughter of Mrs PRIMROSE, one of the heroines mentioned in the Vicar of Wakefield."

Maker is a village at the extreme S.E. corner of Cornwall, on the English Channel coast, separated from the City of Plymouth in Devon by the stretch of water known as Plymouth Sound; Maker was part of Devon until 1844, when it became part of Cornwall; It contains Maker Heights, also Mount Edgcumbe House, built in the 16th Century and famous since the 18th Century for its landscape and gardens

for OLIVER GOLDSMITH CONNECTION see (W 6)

Midshipman on HMS "Tonnant" (80 guns + 10) 19.3.1803 - March 1807; in 1803-4 "Tonnant" was commanded by Capt. Sir Edward Pellew, who on 7.1.1804 reported to the Admiralty on growing French activity at Ferrol and Corunna in supposedly neutral Spain; in 1804-5 commanded by Capt. William Henry Jervis, Channel Fleet; Capt. Jervis drowned off Brest when going in his gig from "Tonnant" to "San Joseph" on 26.1.1805; in 1805 commanded by Capt. Charles Tyler, off Cadiz; In March 1805 "Dreadnought", "Tonnant", "Mars", "Illustrious" & "Minotaur" were detached from the blockade off Brittany & formed into a new squadron under Vice-Admiral Collingwood;

"TRAFALGAR 1805"

James Primrose Blennerhassett, on HMS "Tonnant" under Capt. Charles Tyler, was present at the battle of Trafalgar 21.10.1805; he afterwards received the *Trafalgar Roll* medal, awarded to 1636 men (although the Admiralty official number was only 1627)

"Tonnant" at Trafalgar was the 4th vessel in line in the lee division; She came to the aid of "Mars" which was exposed to heavy fire from "Fougeaux" and Pluton and steered for the bow of the "Algesiras" which lay on the lee quarter of "Monarca"; Capt. Tyler raked "Monarca" then hauled alongside; the Spaniard struck her colours but then rehoisted them; "Tonnant" then ran "Algesiras" on board, at the same time firing her larboard guns at "Pluton" and "San Juan"; Just before 2 o'clock Capt. Tyler was taken below with a severe wound and Lt. John Bedford took command; By this time the "Tonnant" had lost all her top masts; Attempts by "Algesiras" to board were repulsed by Tonnant's marines; shortly afterwards the French ship struck & Lt. Charles Bennett with Lt. Arthur Ball of the marines boarded her with 50 men to take possession; Lt. Benjamin Clement was sent with two men in the only remaining jolly boat, to take possession of the San Juan, which had sailed to say that she had struck, but the boat was swamped before they got half-way & the Lieutenant, who could not swim, had to be rescued by one of the seamen who swam to the "Tonnant" for a rope; William Brown - midshipman, 16 seamen & nine marines were killed; Capt. Tyler, Richard Little - Boatswain, William Allen - Clerk, Henry Ready - Master's Mate, 30 seamen & 16 marines were wounded

from 5.4.1807 acted as Lt. of HMS "Confiance" (20 guns) off the coast of Portugal under Capt. James Lucas Yeo, until his official promotion to Lt. on 29.7.1807, when he joined HMS "Bedford" (74 guns) as 1st Lt. under Capt. James Walker, commissioned to join Rear-Admiral Sir Sidney Smith in escorting Portuguese Royal family from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where they were under the protection of the British squadron; HMS "Marborough", "London", "Monarch" and "Bedford", with eight Portuguese ships of the line, four frigates, two brigs and a schooner, accompanied by a large fleet of merchant vessels, reached Rio on 7 March 1808 after a passage of 14 weeks; Sir Sidney SMITH had a pleasant house beside the river called Chacra Braganca but on the ships at Rio they complained of prickly heat and were glad to cruise off Cape Frio or down to the river Plate; While in Brazil "Bedford" was commanded for a short time in 1808-9 by Capt. Adam Mackenzie of HMS "President"; James P. Blennerhassett was on "Bedford" with the squadron at the Blockade of Flushing 1811, then at the Jamaica Station; in 1812 "Bedford" was off the Texel. Holland

The Caird Library in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich has a "marked-up" copy of "The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660-1815"; this has James Primrose Blennerhassett serving on sloop HMS "Coquette" 1807 before HMS "Bedford" 1808, but I am unsure if Coquette is correct...

James Primrose Blennerhassett was on half pay Oct.1813; retired as Commander 3.9.1844 under H.M.Order in Council 1.11.1830; Greenwich Hospital Pensioner 1844-1868; Attended the annual "Trafalgar Dinner" held in 1859 at the "Thatched House Tavern" [TIMES 22.10.1859]; of Holcombe Rogus, Devon 1825-29; Kingswood Cottage, near Calstock, Cornwall 1831-32; St.Dominick, Cornwall 1835-39; of Eastborne, Sussex 1868;

In 1831 granted a license to dig for silver, tin, copper, lead etc in part of the Manor of Tinnell (Tinnel) (CY/3806); He was an officer of the "New South Hooe Mining Company", formed in 1832; New South Hooe Mine was at Landulph, N.N.W. of Cargreen (Carngreen) & N. of Tinnel Farm, Cornwall (grid ref. SX 423 644); At meeting in Torpoint 27-Sept-1835, J.P.Blennerhassett reported to the committee:-
 "...In the expectation that a few days will enable me to communicate the cutting of the New South Hooe lode, I have desired Mr.Hitchins to draw out a plan for future operations, which I will transmit for approval of the committee. I have now only to state, that we consider the shallow level driven west from the shaft to extend now within a few fathoms of South Hooe Lode. At the point where the lode meets the level will be at a depth of 15 fathoms, & another level 10 fathoms deeper can be immediately driven from the shaft, which we have already commenced, it exhibits a very promising appearance, the lode containing spar with lead, and if not a lead lode itself evidently proving its proximity with one..." (http://www.tmmrg.plus.com/mines/cornwall/hooes/nshooe.htm)

m.est.c1824 Christiana Bluett

b.c1806/7 Holcombe Court, Wellington, Somerset; with her daughter Christiana, a lodger at Willingdon, Sussex in 1871; dau. of E.M. Bluett; she inherited the mining interest in Cornwall from Bluett family (see papers of the Coryton family of Pentillie, Pillaton, Cornwall at Cornwall Record Office, Truro)

Additional history of HMS "TONNANT" (80 guns; she carried an extra 10 guns)

Captured from the French by Rear Admiral Nelson in Aboukir Bay on 1.8.1798; commanded by Capt. Loftus Otway Bland January 1799; by Capt. Robert Lewis FitzGerald February 1799 at Gibraltar; in ordinary at Plymouth 1800; at the end of the year she was waiting to go into dock for repair; Commanded by Capt. Sir John Gore 1810-11, conveying troops to Lisbon Sept.1810; by Capt. Wainright 1814; Flagship of Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, with Captain of the Fleet Rear-Admiral Edward Codrington; then Capt. Alexander Skene; by April 1815 Capt. Charles Kerr, North America; Capt. Wainright arrived at the Admiralty on 27.9.1814 with an account of the capture & destruction of Washington, on 24.8.1814, by the army under Major-Gen. Ross; During the attack on Baltimore on 12.8.1814 "Tonnant" had the following wounded while serving with the army ashore: Severely: Charles Ogle - Midshipman, Matthew Hamsted - OS, Daniel Ross - OS, James MacQuire - OS; Slightly: William Johnson - OS, John Wilson - OS, John Redmonds - OS; Following the peace with America, Sir Alex Cochrane sailed for Bermuda in "Tonnant" and she returned to England in the spring of 1815; 1816-17 Capt. John Tailour, 11/15; Flagship of Rear-Admiral Sir Benjamin Hallowel, Cork station; "Tonnant" was broken-up in 1821

HMS "Tonnant" subsequently flag-ship of Rear-Admiral Eliab Harvey and flag-ship of Rear-Admiral Hon. Michael de Courcy K.T.S. (Admiral of the Blue 1821; who m.24.10.1786 Anne Blennerhassett of Castle Conway, Killorglin, Co.Kerry - p.K 6)

See "Ships of the Old Navy" by Michael Phillips at <http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk/maritim.htm>
"The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660-1815" 1994; & "Naval Biographical Dictionary" by William R.O'Byrne 1849

