

Nelson matters

My input comes from different sources.

My paternal family were primarily Naval, and living in Portsmouth, so I have had many chances to visit the Victory, over many years, before later restrictions and charging.

I lost my grandfather in WW1, and my stepgrandfather had been a gunner in Jellicoe's fleet, at the Battle of Jutland, so he fully illustrated those visits. We were even allowed, with care, to climb a little way up some rigging on Victory.

To know more about Nelson's life, we need to look at the situation at the time, and of his contemporaries.

Admiral Byng, and his execution.

Admiral Keppel, who sailed with Nelson, the accusations against him, and his exoneration.

Captain Thomas Blomfield, Royal Artillery and Ordnance

Horatio Nelson himself, with his upbringing, his injuries, his yellow fever, his personal contacts, his time off-duty, etc.

Also the overall situation in the developing colonies in America, with the American Revolutionary War, even brought to British shores, in the Far East especially India, and constant wars with France and Spain, and the slave trades.

I have been doing my family trees, and find connections with some significant figures. I am interested in achievements, not fame.

I come from a maternal family, eventually named Key, with variants, Keys, Keye, Keyes.

I also now live in Rotherham, where the main armaments for Nelson's fleet were made, the Walker Cannon. Most of the guns on the Victory were these, They are now found all over the world, although only manufactured in Rotherham, with its rich iron stone, water power and transport. from about 1730 to 1830.

See; Times of Malta, The Guns at the Saluting Battery, Valletta, Mario Farrugia, 2010.

Information can be found at Clifton Park Museum, Rotherham, They were also used, in a large British fleet, in the battles against the American Colonies, most notoriously at Fort McHenry, for the final massacres after the rockets and carronades had been used up. That led to Francis Scott Key, a relative of mine, writing the Star Spangled Banner, which then more or less completing the split with Britain. The carronades were made, with cooperation from Walkers, see “Carron Cannon factory in Scotland.”

The guns, also certainly with Nelson's involvement, were adapted to a far larger scale, and installed on the Martello Towers, especially around our Kent coasts. I climbed them when on National Service, in Kent. There are videos available of these in action.

India took a large number of Walker Cannon, for port and fort use. There was an attempt to transport them up the Khyber and other passes, to stem uprising in Kabul, and this was disastrous. They were not designed for such mobility. It cost the loss of many of the cannon, and of the camels initially used to pull them, until elephants were used instead.

See Victorian Web; “An Indelible Stigma of Disgrace”

Some of these cannon have recently been found in a scrap yard in Kabul.

This great immobility made manufacturers look again at cannon, and they elected to use the new Bessemer process, to use cast steel, rather than the cumbersome and weaker cast iron as used in the Walker Cannon.

See

Drachinifel on Youtube; Naval Guns, 1650-1820, Stop Blowing Holes in my Ship!”

They could then be made lighter and more mobile. Frequent rebellions in India also led to refinements in hand arms, changing from muzzle to breech loading, and to automatic weapons. This in turn led to the first “Modern War” in the Crimea, in which my

paternal grandfather served in the Royal Marine Horse Artillery.

My late wife was brought up in India with a British Army family. Her father was a Regimental Sergeant Major in a Bengal Cavalry Regiment, from about the 1890 until he retired, before Partition. In 1919, Brigadier Dyer massacred hundreds in a group of families in Amritsar, meeting peacefully for a religious ceremony.

This led to revolt among the Sepoys, Indian employed soldiers. As an example to all, 17 of them were sentenced to death. The preferred method by the British at the time was the brutal practice of cannon-blasting, in the presence of the next victims. and their weapons of choice, even a century later, were Walker Cannon.

My father in law was ordered to give the execution firing instructions, but he hesitated. He was then threatened with Court Martial, and the loss of pension. He had little choice but to obey.

For background to similar events

See Shashi Tharoor, at the Oxford Union, and his book, "The Inglorious Empire". He had been a candidate for the post of United Nations Secretary General.

Walker Cannon are still spread around the world, and many are in shipwrecks, like the Franklin expedition Erebus, which had been present at the attack on Fort McHenry.

I have seen them in China, around the military fortress at Penglai, in 2002. also at the Nanjing Zheng He museum, though nothing to do with Zheng He, the navigator.

I have been told of them being seen along the Cantonese ports.

Another of my late relatives, was known as "The Second Nelson". This was Admiral Roger Brownlow Keyes, of Tingewick, our original family home. He was the son of a general also born in India to a family serving the East India Company.

In the 1990's near Howden in East Yorkshire, there lived a farmer's wife who loved to dress up as Nelson, as her looks were very similar, and to go around the schools, giving talks, and

displays. I don't remember her name, but if still around, she might prove a helpful contact.

Nelson had a very varied life, in many different sections. His battles, and travels, far and wide, and experiences in Naples, and his romantic attachments, would fill a large volume. As also would those of his mentor Augustus Keppel. They both also ended up toothless!

Many of Nelson's other contacts seemed to have been in the Royal Academy rather than the War Office.

He had long contact with Admiral Keppel, at sea and at home, both of whom were painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and probably in the presence of Mallord Turner.

So why did Turner go out of his way, and out of his field, to paint the inside of the Walker Foundry in Rotherham? He certainly did Nelson justice for his death, and for the Fate of the Temeraire. It could only have been at the request of Nelson, and Blomfeld, and contacts in the Royal Academy with Joshua Reynolds, and Augustus Earle. but I accept correction. Nelson, during his time off duty, did sit for many portraits there, 1787-1792. After Nelson's death he did paint many of the Ports of Britain.

Walker cannon seem deeply involved in Nelson's successes. They were at the limit of technology at the time, but they were intended for use on ship, and not really for other uses, except perhaps the Martello Towers.

They were involved in the American Wars of Independence, and again I am thinking of Nelson's admiration for them, and how they affected the outcomes of battles far and wide. Including, crucially the maintenance of the conquest of India, leading to the wealth of Georgian England, and the typical crescents of Westminster, Buxton and Bath. The Walker family has left it's marks in Rotherham, even today.

See;-Bayliss, Industrial Archeology of South Yorkshire.

Rotherhams Cannon Heritage Society, yolasite.com Don Scott.

Memorials; Keppel's Monument, Rotherham
Nelson's Monument Trafalgar Square, but largely copied from the
Wilberforce Monument in Hull.

Drachinifel, Youtube, The Development of the Naval Shell, 2020
video, 47.40 mins.

Drachinifel, Youtube, H M S Victory, the Original Fast Battleship.
Guide to Warships, video, 57.24 Mins.

POTD, Ancient Naval Cannon, 2020, tfb newsletter,
thefirearmblog.com/blog.2020