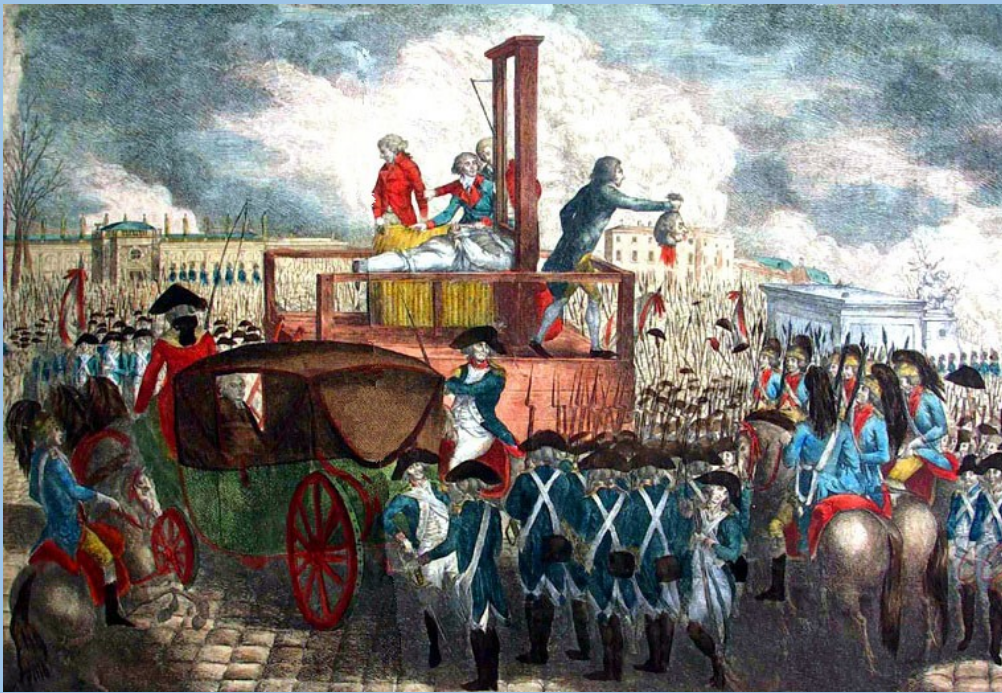


Salcombe and the Downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte 1793-1815



The French Revolutionary Wars 1793-1802

Eleven days after the execution of King Louis XVI on 21st January 1793 the French Republic declared war on Britain. Apart from a brief interlude between 1802-3, the wars with France were to continue until 1815. Salcombe was to play a small, but not insignificant, part in the long wars with the sea off Salcombe Harbour providing the stage for both the first and the last naval events in home waters.



The Execution of King Louis XVI of France, 1793

Salcombe at the commencement of the French Revolutionary Wars was little more than an obscure fishing port with an unsavoury reputation for smuggling. Although fishing and shipbuilding were the principal legitimate activities, far more profitable was the ‘free trade’ in contraband from Guernsey and Brittany. The sailing luggers and cutters used in the smuggling trade were built by local shipbuilders who had a reputation for building fast weatherly ships, such as the Post Office packet brig *Lord Hobart* (see picture below).



Market Street with the old chapel

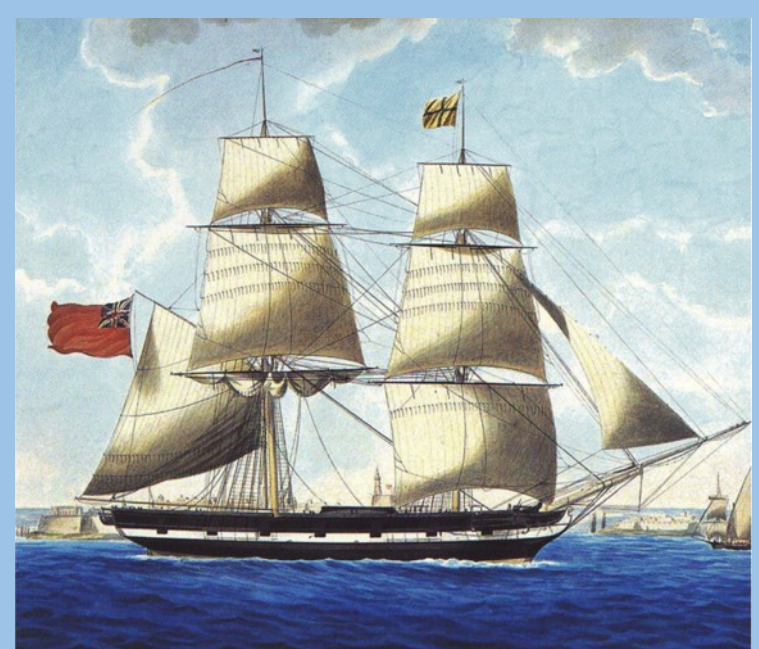


Seine netting in the Harbour

Salcombe in 1794. Two watercolours by Rev. John Swete



Smugglers: ‘To Save their Necks’
by Charles Napier Henny



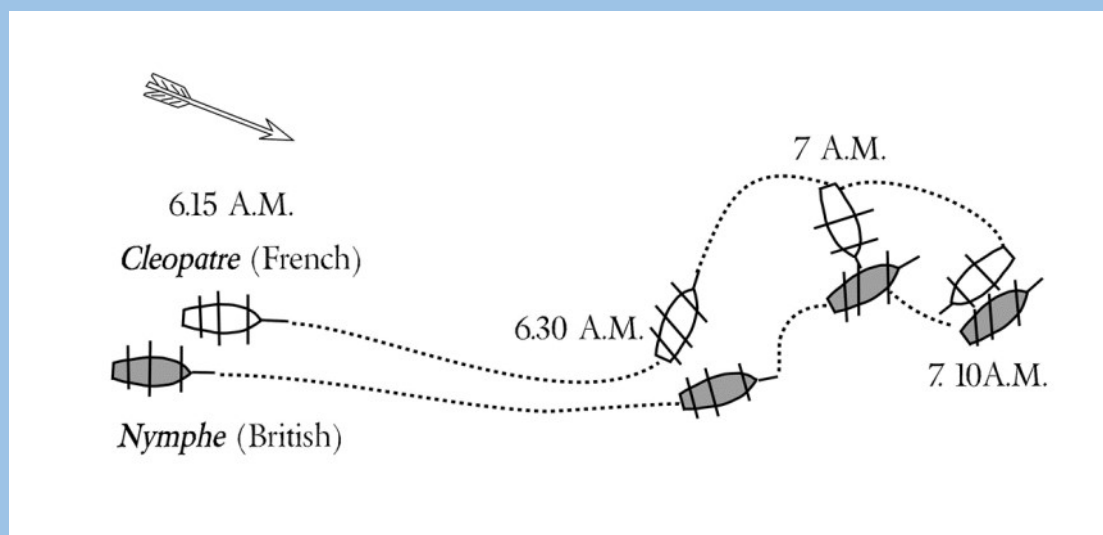
A Post Office Packet brig similar to the
Lord Hobart built in Salcombe in 1805

The Battle of Prawle Point 18th June 1793.

The First Naval Action of
the War in Home Waters



Roy Cross



In June 1793, the first naval action of the war in home waters, took place off Salcombe. The Battle of Prawle Point, as it was later dubbed, was between HMS *Nymphe*, commanded by Captain Edward Pellew, and the French National Frigate *Cleopatre*. According to the *Naval Chronicle*, ‘the capture of the *Cleopatre*, 40 guns, 320 men, by the *Nymphe*, 36 guns, 250 men, on the 18th of June 1793, was accomplished with a gallantry not to be paralleled in any country but our own, and vindicated the superiority of the British navy’

The action between Cleopatre and Nymphe has long been a popular subject for marine artists:



Geoffrey Hubbard



Donald Macleod



Montague Dawson



John Wilson Carmichael



Nicholas Pocock



Robert Dodd

The Battle of Prawle Point 1793 (*continued*)



Derek Gardner



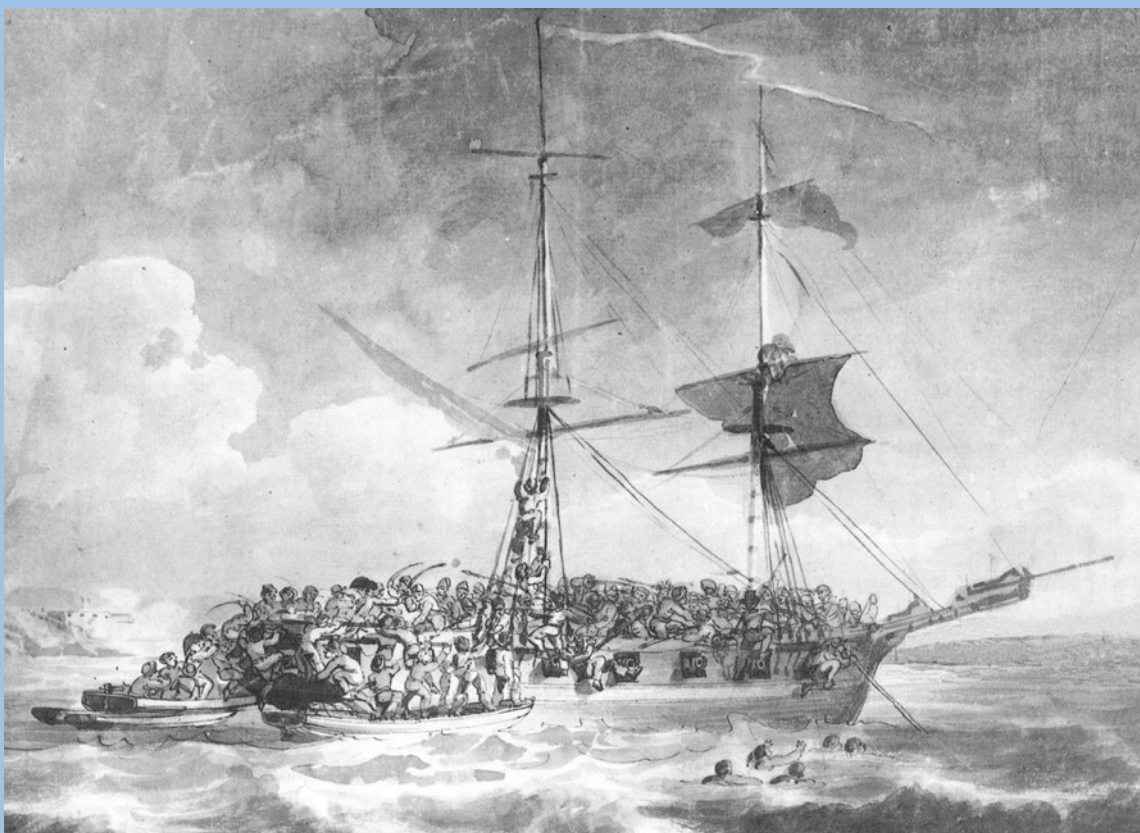
Mark Myers

‘At 6am the *Nymph* fell in with the French ship of war the *Cleopatre*. A furious cannonade followed, which was kept up until seven o'clock by both vessels....when the *Nymph* was skilfully laid alongside of her opponent; and in ten minutes every Frenchman was driven from the decks of the *Cleopatre* by the irresistible rush of the sailors of Pellew.’ Ellen Luscombe, *Myrtles and Alloes*, 1861

Pellew put a prize crew aboard the *Cleopatre* and HMS *Nymph* headed down wind to Portsmouth with the battered *Cleopatre* in her wake. When Pellew arrived on 21st June it was to a hero's welcome and a subsequent knighthood.

French Privateers off Salcombe

During the wars of 1793-1815, Salcombe was used as a haven for prizes taken by British ships or as a port of refuge for vessels chased in by French privateers.



Boarding boats seize a French Privateer

Chased into Salcombe by French Privateers:

1793: a Dartmouth sloop,

1794: *Nimble*, cutter

1801: crew from the *Grace*, a Plymouth brig

The Salcombe customs boat, under the command of Richard Valentine, made two successful recaptures of English ships taken as French prizes.

1794: *Two Friends*, brig

1799: *John and Grace*, schooner

The Admiralty Signal Stations

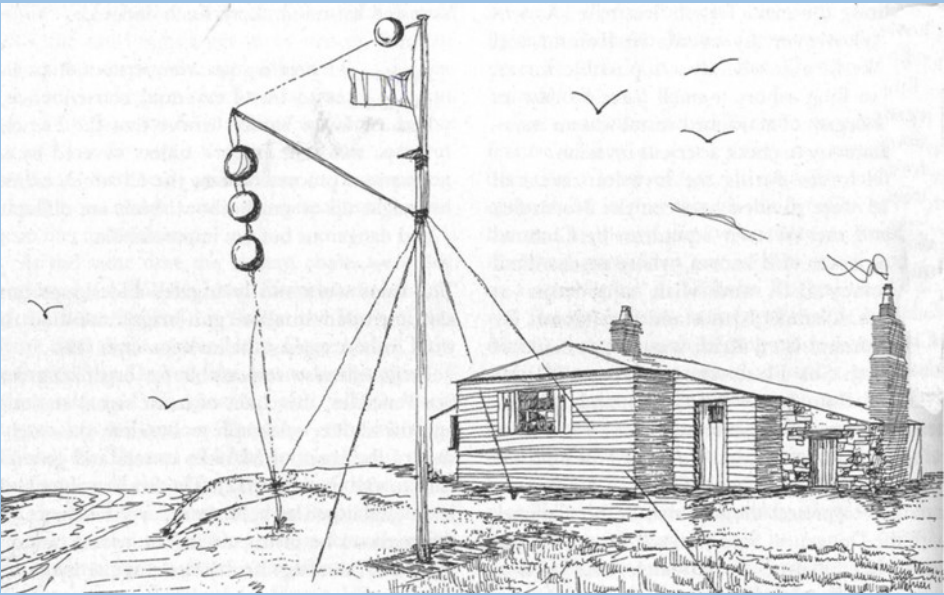


A chain of signal stations along the coast provided early warning of raids by French privateers and of possible invasion



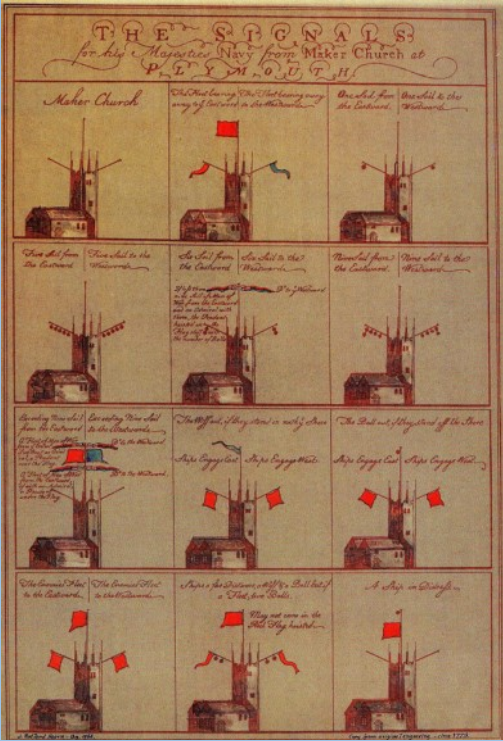
The old Admiralty Signal Station tower at West Soar

The remains of the Prawle Point Admiralty Signal Station



A typical Admiralty Signal Station.
The signal denotes ‘Enemy landing to the westward’

When war with France broke out in 1793, the Channel coast was threatened by commerce raiding privateers and also with invasion. To counter this, the Admiralty set up a chain of ‘early warning’ signal stations in prominent coastal locations. Coded messages were sent by various combinations of pennant, flag, or ball. After warnings had been passed along the chain to Maker Heights above Plymouth Dockyard, suspicious coastal shipping was investigated by fast naval sloops. The stations were commanded by a half-pay naval lieutenant, assisted by a petty officer or midshipman and two men – generally sailors who were considered too old or unfit for service at sea. After 1798 the men were drawn from the local corps of Sea Fencibles.



Maker Church Signals
Signals were relayed via Maker Church tower to the naval commander in Plymouth Dockyard



Plymouth Dockyard in the 1790s

The Salcombe Sea Fencibles : A Naval ‘Dad’s Army’



Salcombe Sea Fencibles									
Exercise Days 6, 13, 20, 27 January 1805									
No.	Name	Rank	Signature	No.	Name	Rank	Signature	No.	Name
1	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		10	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		19	Mr. Jarvis
2	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		11	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		20	Mr. Jarvis
3	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		12	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		21	Mr. Jarvis
4	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		13	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		22	Mr. Jarvis
5	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		14	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		23	Mr. Jarvis
6	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		15	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		24	Mr. Jarvis
7	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		16	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		25	Mr. Jarvis
8	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		17	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		26	Mr. Jarvis
9	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		18	Mr. Jarvis	P.O.		27	Mr. Jarvis

Salcombe Sea Fencibles, January 1805		
Adams, Thomas	Gill, James	Pepperell, Joshua
Algar, James	Gillard, Ambrose	Pepperell, Richard
Ash, James	Gillard, John	Pitts, Andrew
Ash, William	Grandison, Hugh	Prettyjohn, Roger
Ball, James (P.O.)	Harley, Philip	Putt, John
Bates, Richard	Harris, John	Putt, William
Bates, William	Harwood, Richard	Rider, George Jarvis
Bickford, Richard	Hext, Philip	Russell, James
Burner, Richard	Hurley, Nicholas	Salter, John
Chadder, William	Hurrell, Robert (P.O.)	Sheppard, John
Clark, Christopher	Jarvis, John	Sladen, Thomas
Clark, Jacob	Jarvis, William (P.O.)	Stone, Nicholas
Cole, Edward	Johns, Richard	Stumbles, George
Collings, Edward	Kelland, B...?	Stumbles, John
Cornish, William	Kelland, Richard	Taylor, William
Cove, John	Kennard, William	Thornhill, John
Cove, Philip	Knowles, Benjamin	Tolcher, Samuel
Crispin, Arthur	Laphorn, Edward	Tolcher, William
Crispin, George	Laphorn, William	Trinick, Richard
Culling, Richard	Maddack, James	Trute, John
Date, John	Moore, Samuel	Tucker, Thomas
Date, William	Moore, Stephen	Vivian, James
Eales, Robert	Murch, James	Vivian, William
Edwards, Richard	Nettle, John	White, Philip
Elliott, William	Osborn, John	Wills, George
Fairweather, John	Partridge, James	Wood, James
Fowles, Richard	Patey, James	Wood, William
Gardner, William	Penny, Robert	Yabsley, Thomas (P.O.)

The Corps of Sea Fencibles was a naval ‘home guard’ largely made up of fishermen and local mariners who, by volunteering, gained immunity from impressment into the Navy and from the ballot for the militia. Formed in 1798, the Sea Fencibles continued to operate until 1810. The Salcombe force numbered about 140 in 1799 but the strength was reduced in later years as the threat of invasion diminished – 100 men in 1805 and 62 in 1810. Payment was a shilling a day when on duty. The commanding officer received £42 a month.

Salcombe Sea Fencibles Pay List for Exercise Days in January 1805 with the men’s names transcribed on the right

Modbury & Totnes Cavalry Barracks



The cavalry barracks at Modbury and Totnes were built in 1794 as part of the defence of the South Devon coast. They accommodated about 6 Officers and 60 NCOs and Troopers. Squadrons stationed at Modbury include: The Greys (North British Dragoons), 6th Dragoons, East Devon Militia, Surrey Fencibles and the North Gloucester’s. Totnes Barracks were at Longcause House, Barracks Hill, Dartington. Two troops of the 6th Dragoons were stationed there.

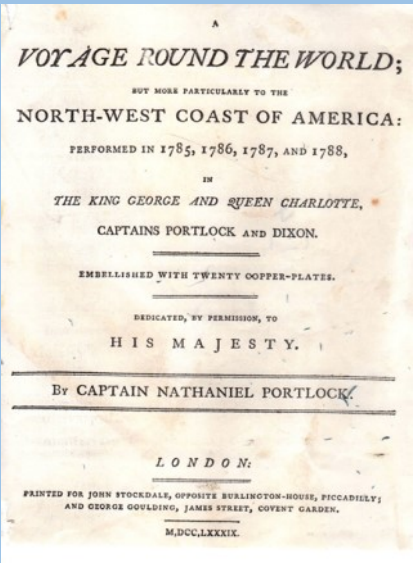
Modbury Cavalry Barracks, Barrack Road

The Daring Captain Portlock



Commander of the Salcombe Sea Fencibles 1804-1808

Between April 1804 and November 1808 the Salcombe District Sea Fencibles were commanded by Captain Nathaniel Portlock. The Salcombe District included units in Thurlestone and Start Bay.



Nathaniel Portlock (1748-1817), was an American who, in a long and illustrious naval career, sailed with both Captain Cook and Captain Bligh in the Pacific, commanded a three-year expedition to North West America and captured the Dutch frigate *Draak* while in command of the sloop HMS *Arrow*. He also carried out what must be one of the most remarkable feats of seamanship ever witnessed on the South Hams coast.

Captain Portlock’s Gamble

The Daring Rescue of the Danish Ship *De Lille Catherina* off Thurlestone in 1805

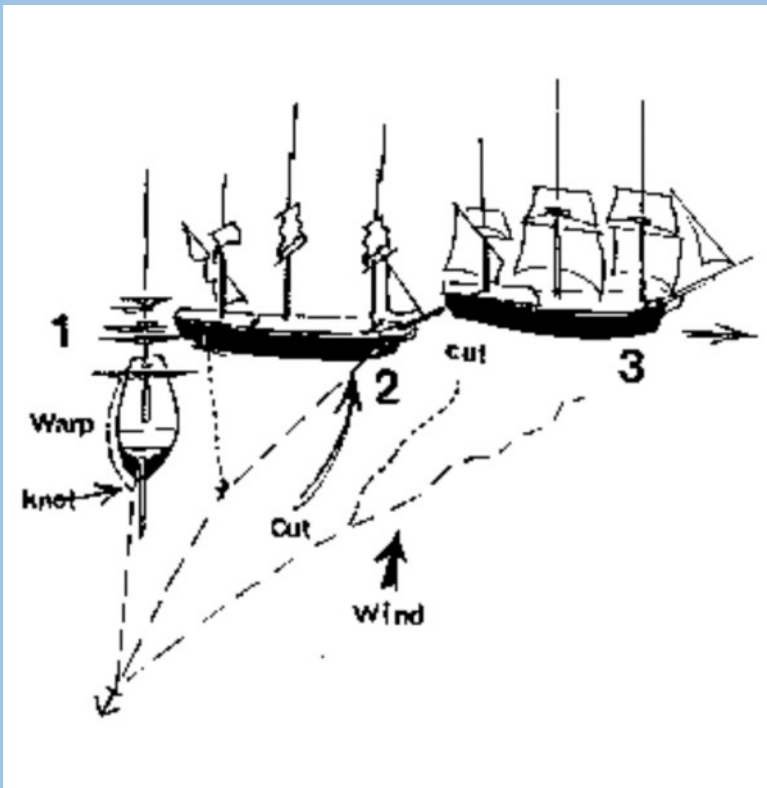
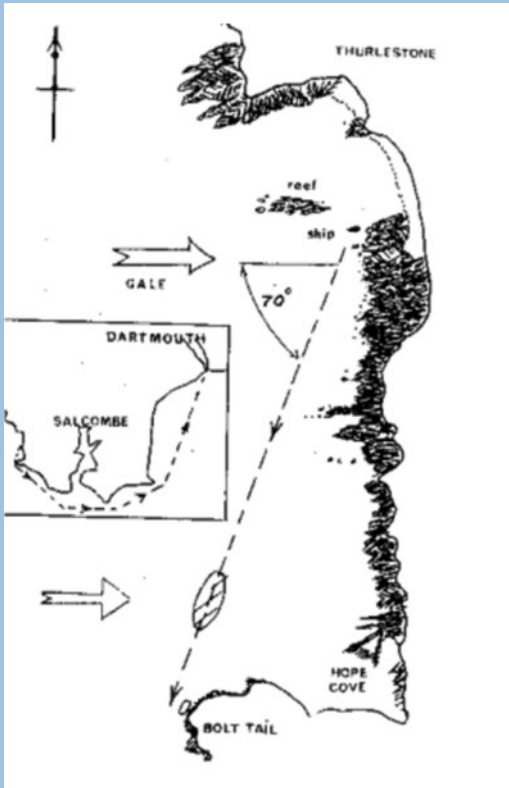
In 1805, the year of Trafalgar, Nathaniel Portlock accomplished an incredible feat of seamanship by saving the 300 ton Danish barque *De Lille Catherina* from destruction in Bigbury Bay. In a westerly storm the *De Lille Catherine* dragged her anchor until her stern was just yards from the towering Thurlestone Rock. Summoned to the scene, Portlock got on board her with a few local fishermen from Hope Cove. By swinging the ship on a stern spring, and with a split-second setting of sails and the cutting away of the anchor cable Portlock managed to sail clear of the rock, In recognition of his efforts, the owners of the ship presented him with a silver cup which later became part of the mess silver at the Royal Marines Commando Training Centre near Exmouth, Devon.



Captain Cook



Captain Bligh



The Napoleonic Wars 1803-15



Napoleon
Paul DeLaroche



Napoleon Crossing the Alps
Jacques-Louis David

Born on the island of Corsica, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), rapidly rose through the ranks during the French Revolution. After seizing political power in France in 1799, he crowned himself emperor in 1804. He successfully waged war against coalitions of European nations but, after a disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812, he abdicated the throne in 1814 and was exiled to the island of Elba. In 1815, he returned to power but after a crushing defeat at the Battle of Waterloo, he abdicated once again and was exiled to the remote island of Saint Helena,

Kingsbridge Barracks 1804-15

In 1804, when Napoleon threatened to invade Britain, wooden barracks for 25 officers and over 500 men were erected on the Warren at Kingsbridge. They were occupied by various regiments during the war including:

1804 & 1809: 1st (East) Devon Militia

1805: Montgomery Militia

1807: Dorset Regt. of Militia & Royal Lancashire Regt. of Militia

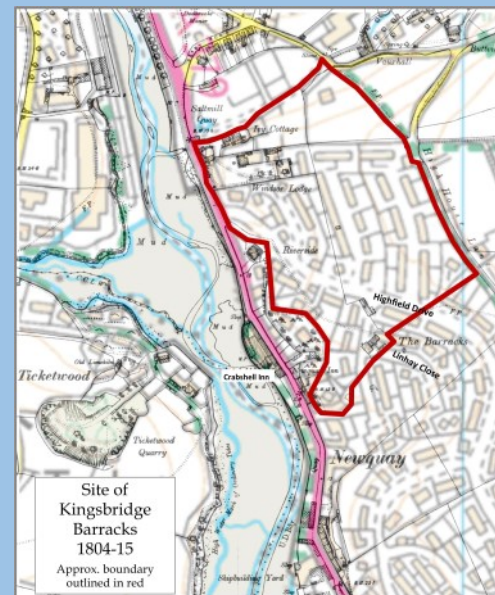
1809: 3rd Regt. Buffs & 51st Regt.

1810: South & North Hants Militia & 18th Royal Irish Regt.

1811: Royal Cornwall Regt.

1811-12: 46th Regt. (South Devonshire)

1812: 5th Regt. of Foot



Materials from the buildings on the site were sold by auction in the spring of 1815, but some, including the former hospital, were still standing in 1874.

Detering the Enemy: Salcombe's Mock Defences

In the 1790s some rather half-hearted attempts were made to defend the harbour by building a little fort on Limpyer Rocks upstream from Fort Charles. Little more than mock defences, its purpose was to convince the French that the harbour was well-fortified. Known as 'the battery' it was manned by local militia in 1802. Three small buildings nearby (The Tower in Newton Road, Stonehanger Court and Salcombe Harbour Hotel) have also been identified as possible lookout towers dating to around 1795.



Left: The mock fort at Limpyer Rocks below Cliff Road was manned by Militia in 1802

Right: The Tower in Newton Road



The Invasion Scare 1803-5



Left:
'French
Invasion'
Right:
'To War,'
both by
James
Gilray



Britain was threatened with a French invasion for much of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The threat was particularly acute from 1794–98 and 1800–1 and during the so-called 'Great Invasion Scare' from 1803–5 – periods when Britain had no significant allies on the continent to distract French attention.

Local militias – territorial-based infantry used only for home defence – were mobilised and volunteer regiments formed. The Kingsbridge Volunteers were commanded by Capt. Richard Hawkins and Lt. Roger Ilbert Prideaux. In May 1801, 37 of the 71 privates were 'dismissed from the Corps for refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance to his Majesty, and to Support the Civil Power'. They were publicly named and shamed'.

Napoleon's invasion threats and the 'Dad's Army' antics of the local militias and volunteers were a source of rich material for contemporary cartoonists such as James Gilray.



'Bonne Farte raising a Southerly Wind',
George Cruikshank



'Supplementary militia, turning-out for twenty
days amusement', James Gillray

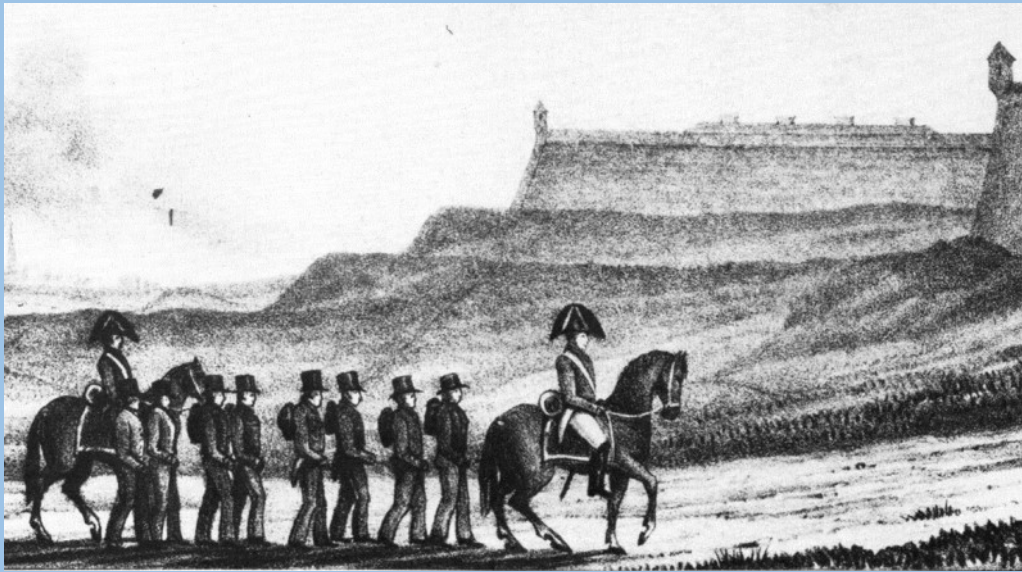


'Armed Heroes... on the Day of Defiance', James Gillray

Right:
'Bonaparte,
48 Hours after
Landing'
James Gillray



Napoleonic Prisoners of War



During the Napoleonic Wars prisoners were exchanged and brought home in Cartel ships. In 1800 nineteen released seamen on board the brig *Active* mutinied and landed at Salcombe to avoid being pressed back into service. In 1816 a number of French prisoners who were being returned home were shipwrecked at Thurlestone.

Nelson’s Victory at Trafalgar, 21st October 1805

Nelson’s defeat of the combined French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar ended Napoleon’s hopes of invading Britain. Many mariners from Salcombe and the Kingsbridge Estuary served in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars, either as volunteers or pressed men and at least eleven local men served in the British fleet at Trafalgar

Local Men who served at Trafalgar

Name	Age	Birthplace	Ship	Rank/rating
Richard Weeks	33	Salcombe	HMS Royal Sovereign	Boatswain's Mate
William Pope	30	Salcombe	HMS Dreadnought	Ordinary Seaman
Ian Goslin	27	Salcombe	HMS Leviathan	Ordinary Seaman
John Distin	23	Kingsbridge	HMS Belleisle	Ordinary Seaman
John Muchmore	27	Kingsbridge	HMS Belleisle	Ordinary Seaman
Thomas Rowe	20	Kingsbridge	HMS Prince	Landsman
Edward Stephens	28	Kingsbridge	HMS Euryalus	Able Seaman
John Prickard	20	Kingsbridge	HMS Dreadnought	Ordinary Seaman
Gilbert Kennicott	18	Dodbrooke	HMS Royal Sovereign	Midshipman
Thomas Marsh	26	Charleton	HMS Agamemnon	Able Seaman
William Stone	27	Chivelstone	HMS Colossus	Ordinary Seaman

Napoleon’s Defeat at Waterloo, 18th June 1815



Following his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo, Napoleon surrendered on 15 July 1815 to Captain Maitland of HMS *Bellerophon* (affectionately known as the ‘Billy Ruffian’) at Rochefort.

Awaiting Exile: Napoleon off the South Devon Coast

As well as being the scene of the first naval episode in home waters in the wars between 1793-1815, the sea off Salcombe was to provide the stage for the very last.



Napoleon taken aboard HMS *Bellerophon* off Rochefort



Napoleon in Plymouth Sound
by Sir Charles Lock Eastlake

With his prisoner on board Captain Maitland sailed from Rochefort first to Brixham and then to Plymouth. Besieged by sightseers in both ports, the *Bellerophon* was ordered to cruise off Start Point with the 80-gun ship *Tonnant* and escorting frigates and await the arrival of HMS *Northumberland*, which was to transport Bonaparte to exile on St Helena.



Top left: *Bellerophon* off Berry Head,
Torrey by Thomas Luny

Above: *Bellerophon* in Plymouth Sound by
John James Chalon

Left: *Bellerophon* in Plymouth Sound by
Jules Girardet



‘Boney’ Contemplates Suicide off Salcombe



Napoleon on board the *Bellerophon*

Sir William Quiller

For two days the ‘Billy Ruffian’, sailed up and down the short stretch of coast between Start Point and Bolt Head at the entrance to Salcombe Harbour. ‘The grey sea under the louring, grey sky seemed to reflect the air of gloom which had settled over the passengers on the Bellerophon. Napoleon became increasingly depressed. He no longer appeared on deck but remained shut in his cabin ... at one stage he talked about ending his life’ (*David Cordingly*). On 8th August Napoleon and his followers transferred to HMS *Northumberland* and then ‘vanished into exile over the horizon’



Napoleon, hoping for exile in England as a country gentleman. Instead he was banished to a rocky island in the South Atlantic: St. Helena where he ended his days in 1821



If only they'd let me settle in Salcombe. I'd have been happy there!

