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Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

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BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR
OF
SIR JOHN JENNINGS,
REAR-ADMIRAL OF ENGLAND.

“Heav'n gave thee courage, not with impious rage
T' oppress thy friends, and civil combats wage;
But that thy soul with noble warmth might glow,
In fields of fight against the common foe.”

HOOKE'S Trans. of Tasso's *Jerusalem*.

OF the Family of this distinguished commander we have sought in vain for information; it was probably obscure, and himself the first member of it whose talents and character were to rescue it from the mass of those which pass down the stream of time unnoticed and unknown, but to the small circle which private interests bring round them.

We are equally unacquainted with the period of his birth, and that of his entrance into the navy. His first appointment as lieutenant was on the 12th of May, 1687, to the *Pearl*, from which ship he was, on the 27th August, 1688, removed to the *St. David*, and on the 22d December, of the same year, was commissioned by Lord Dartmouth to the *Swallow*.

His first appointment as a commander was to the *St. Paul* fire-ship, on the 16th November, 1689, and in the following year he was made captain of the *Experiment*, 32 guns, stationed as a cruiser off the coast of Ireland. In this ship he served the cause of the Revolution with considerable success, until the year 1693, when he was appointed, under Sir John Ashby, captain of the *Victory*, from which ship he was shortly afterwards removed to the *Winchester*, of 60 guns, attached to the grand fleet. He was next commissioned to the *Mary*, and joined Admiral Russel in his expedition to the Mediterranean, the last of that great commander's services. In 1696 he removed into the *Chichester*, of 80 guns, and in January of the succeeding year he took the command of the *Plymouth*, as a cruising ship.

Nav. Chron. Vol. XL.

B

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[More information](#)

He was now in a more active state of service, and he availed himself of the opportunities it afforded him to serve both himself and his country. On the 27th of the same month in which he received his new appointment, he captured *La Concorde*, a privateer of St. Maloes, pierced for 22 guns, but when taken mounted only 14. On the 5th of February, in company with the *Rye* frigate, he came in sight of three ships, two of which he suffered to come within gun-shot, pretending not to observe them, who on discovering the *Plymouth* to be a ship of war, bore away with all the sail they could croud. After about an hour's chase, the *Plymouth* came up with the largest of them, which having lost her main and fore-top-masts, by being thrown up into the wind, became an easy conquest—Captain Jennings fired one gun, and she struck. The ship mounted 36 guns, and had been built at Marseilles; she was called the *New Cherburg*.

The *Rye* having come up, Captain Jennings left her in charge of the prize, and continued in pursuit of the other ship, which he at length came up with, and after an obstinate contest of three hours, captured; the enemy had 36 killed and wounded during the action. This ship was called the *Dolphin*, mounting 28 guns, and manned with 196 men.

Having brought his prizes into port, Captain Jennings again sailed in company with the *Rye*, and soon after met the *Severn*, man of war, who joined them in the cruise; and on the 25th of February, they came in sight of a French convoy of twelve ships, off the coast of France, convoyed by two small ships belonging to Dunkirk, one mounting twelve and the other eight guns. The *Plymouth* having out-sailed her companions, came first up with the fleet, the sternmost of which she left to the *Rye*, and made up to the convoy, one of which, with two of the merchant ships, he captured, and four more were taken by his consorts.

The public services of Captain Jennings were shortly afterwards suspended by the Peace of Ryswick, and we have no farther account of him during the reign of William.

On the accession of Anne to the throne, she was induced, by the persuasions of Marlborough, to renew the war with France, and in a preparatory proclamation, the King of France was accused of having possessed himself of a great part of the Spanish dominions, with an intention to invade the liberties of Europe,

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[More information](#)

and obstruct the freedom of navigation and commerce; and with having insulted the Queen and her throne, by declaring the pretended Prince of Wales, King of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The war was re-commenced in 1702, and Captain Jennings was appointed to the *Kent*, of 70 guns, in which he joined Sir George Rooke in the expedition against Cadiz, a scheme that had been projected in the reign of William. Of this expedition we have already given an account, in our memoir of Sir George Rooke, to which we refer the reader.* In the return of Sir George to England, he was informed that some Spanish galleons from the West Indies had put into Vigo, and it was determined to attack them there. In this affair, Captain Jennings was attached to the division which led to the assault.

On his return to England he was promoted to the *St. George*, of 96 guns; and in the year 1703 sailed with Sir Cloudesley Shovel † to the Mediterranean. In the course of the following year, Captain Jennings assisted, under Sir George Rooke, in the capture of Gibraltar, and in the battle of Malaga was stationed as one of the seconds to the commander-in-chief. For his conduct in that action he received the honour of knighthood.

On the 24th of January, 1704-5, he was advanced to the rank of rear-admiral of the blue, and on the expedition to Barcelona taking place in the summer of that year, was appointed to a share in the command, with Sir Cloudesley Shovel and the Earl of Peterborough; and under his superintendance, the ships were collected at Spithead previously to the arrival of Sir Cloudesley. Before the departure of Sir Cloudesley Shovel, Admiral Jennings was attached to a division of the fleet under Sir George Byng, to reconnoitre the harbour of Brest, in order to ascertain whether the enemy had there any force ready for sea; and having information that eighteen ships of the line were in a state of complete equipment, on joining Sir Cloudesley Shovel at the place of rendezvous with that intelligence, a council of war was held, and it was resolved to leave Sir George Byng and Sir John Jennings with twelve ships, to watch the enemy, leaving it discretionary with Sir George Byng to despatch Sir John after the fleet, or to retain him, according to the information he might receive of the enemy's motions. The

* *Vide* vol. xxxiii. p. 451.

† For portrait and memoir of Sir Cloudesley Shovel, *vide* vol. xxxiii. p. 177.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

latter proceeding was adopted, and Sir John shifted his flag into the *Mary*. The enemy, however, did not come out, and the services of Sir John on this station were confined to the capture of some privateers which had much infested the coast of Ireland. On his return to port, he convoyed an East India fleet from Ireland, which concluded his services in the naval campaign of that year.

In the month of April, 1706, he sailed under Sir George Byng, with a reinforcement to Sir John Leake,* with whom they proceeded to the relief of Barcelona, and having with some of the ships outsailed the rest of the fleet, were very near surprising, and capturing, a part of the enemy's fleet which had quitted Barcelona road in great disorder.

The siege being raised, and the soldiers embarked, the fleet sailed for Valencia, where having landed the troops, it was resolved to proceed to Alicant, but on its way thither, putting into Altea Bay, notice was received by the admiral that Carthage was disposed to submit. The fleet accordingly proceeding thither, arrived on the 1st of June, and on the following day the terms of surrender were finally settled, and Sir John was left with four ships of the line to arrange measures for the future tranquillity of the city.

Having in less than a month executed his commission to the general satisfaction of the inhabitants, he sailed for Alicant, and joined Sir John Leake in the siege of that place, the governor having refused to surrender it.

The seamen had been landed from the fleet, and Sir George Byng had anchored with five ships so near the town, that he had dismantled the enemy's artillery, although the pieces pointed towards the sea amounted to one hundred and sixty.

On the 28th of June, a general attack was made. The marines brought from Carthage by Sir John Jennings were landed, and at nine in the morning the ships had made a breach in the round tower, at the west end of the town, and another in the middle of the curtain, between the mole and the easternmost bastion; when the land forces marching up towards the walls of the city, fifteen grenadiers, with an officer and serjeant, advancing without orders to the breach of the round tower, all the boats under the command

* In vol. xvi. p. 141, will be found a portrait and memoir of this distinguished admiral.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JENNINGS.

5

of Sir John Jennings went directly to sustain them, but before the men landed, the grenadiers were beaten back. The attack was renewed by the seamen, and Captain Evans, of the *Royal Oak*, was the first who mounted the breach; he was followed into the town by a few of the crew; Captain Passenger, of the *Royal Anne*, followed next; and after him Captain Watkins, of the *St. George*, with a party of seamen. The suburbs were already possessed by Sir John Jennings, with the rest of the forces, and they afterwards advanced toward the town, which having reached, the posts were secured, and the enemy retiring left them in complete possession. Notwithstanding the fire of the Spaniards from the houses, there were not more than thirty killed and eighty wounded in the whole. Colonel Petit was killed in the suburbs, while standing arm and arm with Sir John, by a small shot from a window, as they were viewing the ground for raising a battery against the walls of the town.

The next day the governor, Count Mahoni, was summoned to surrender, which he refused, and thereby only subjected the town to farther damage, by a renewed cannonade and bombardment, which in a short time after compelled him to give up the place, and the commander of the land forces, Brigadier Gorge, was appointed governor.

About the middle of August the fleet sailed for Altea bay, and arrived there on the 22d, whence Sir John was detached with ten ships of the line, two frigates, and a fire-ship, to Lisbon, where he was ordered to refit, and proceed to the West Indies.

Every exertion was made by him to put his ships in order, and on the 15th October he sailed; but contrary winds preventing his getting into Madeira, he bore away for Santa Cruz, where he found five ships close under the forts. These he attempted to destroy, but found it impracticable, without more risk than he considered the object would warrant.

On the 4th of November, Sir John touched at St. Jago, where he took in provisions and water, and on the 29th anchored in Carlisle bay, Barbadoes, whence on the 5th of December he sailed, in pursuance of his instructions, to Jamaica. The purpose of his expedition was, to induce the Spaniards in that quarter of the globe to declare for King Charles; in execution of which, Sir John despatched from Jamaica the *Mary* to Carthagena, with a

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

letter to the governor, in which he gave a florid account of the great successes of the allied powers in Europe, and especially in Spain, and earnestly advised him to place himself under his protection, and renounce the Duke of Anjou : offering to take the galleons under his convoy, and see them safe to Europe. But the governor having received prior advices from Spain, in which he was informed that the scale had turned again, and the fortunes of Philip were ascendant, being not only in possession of Madrid, but also of all the posts lately in the hands of his opponents, he declined accepting either the offer or advice of Sir John.

These means having failed, Sir John sailed with his fleet to Carthage, thinking its appearance might give more weight to his arguments ; but it was all in vain, and as he was not authorised to proceed to measures of force, he was at liberty to return to Europe, which, having taken in water and other supplies, he did, and arrived at Spithead on the 22d of April.

The object not having been obtained, might have warranted expectations of the usual popular clamour on the failure of any public measure, but the estimation in which his character was held saved him that mortification, and obtained the sympathy both of the Sovereign and the people in his disappointment.

Promotions now came thick upon him. On the 10th of December, 1707, he was made rear-admiral of the white ; and on the 8th of January following he was promoted to the rank of rear-admiral of the red ; and on the 26th of the same month he was farther advanced to the rank of vice-admiral of the red.

In the month of March that year a descent on Scotland was projected by the French, and Sir John was appointed commander-in-chief in the Thames and Medway, to superintend the equipment of the ships from Chatham and Woolwich. Towards the end of the year 1708, he was ordered again to Lisbon and the Mediterranean, under the orders of Sir George Byng.

In the beginning of the year 1711, he was made admiral of the white, and appointed commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean. On the 7th of January he sailed from St. Helen's, and arrived at Lisbon on the 23d, where having collected a convoy for the Mediterranean, he proceeded with them to Barcelona, which place he reached on the 20th March. The policy adopted by the French at this time in their naval tactics was, to annoy our coun-

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JENNINGS.

7

merce by small squadrons and single ships ; it therefore became the chief business of our commanders to protect the trade, and convoy reinforcements of troops, with their stores and provisions, to their respective places of destination. Having arranged and effected the departure of the convoys from Barcelona, Sir John sailed for Port Mahon, where, on the 19th of May, he was joined by Vice-admiral Baker, with several ships, and returned to Barcelona. Here he did not long remain, but sailed to the Levant, in the hope of intercepting the enemy's corn ships from thence.

The death of the Emperor Joseph happening at this time, King Charles became presumptive heir to the Imperial Crown. Of this event Sir John was informed on his return to Barcelona, and received orders to convoy the king to Genoa, if it was his wish to return to his hereditary dominions, where his presence might be necessary to preserve the tranquillity of Naples, which in the then situation of affairs might be otherwise disturbed. The king, however, as yet uncertain of his election, did not at first seem inclined to quit Catalonia, nor was he willing that the fleet should depart, which he considered necessary to the support of the Spanish cause. The state of the fleet, however, rendered the return of Sir John to Port Mahon indispensably necessary, in order to refit ; and the king acquiesced, on the promise of Sir John to return as speedily as possible to Barcelona. This Sir John effected on the 26th of July, bringing with him fourteen English and Dutch ships of the line—the remainder of the fleet being detached on different services, with orders to rendezvous at Barcelona, whence Sir John did not think proper to sail, till they had rejoined him.

By the beginning of September Sir John had completely collected his force, and on the 16th the king embarked with him, and after a passage of ten days, landed his Majesty at Genoa. He then sailed for Leghorn, to procure cables and other stores, which he stood in need of. These being obtained, he proceeded to Vado bay, where he superintended the embarkation of the troops destined for Catalonia, and put them under the protection of Captain Swanton, with five ships of the line and two fire-ships ; accompanying them himself as far as Cape Roses, whence he proceeded with the rest of the squadron to Minorca, and off that island had several of his ships damaged in a dreadful storm. The next day he got into Port Mahon, without farther injury.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

About Christmas, the admiral received intelligence that a French squadron, of eight ships of the line and four frigates, were in a state of equipment at Toulon, destined for the West Indies early in the spring. This was a force of too great consequence to be disregarded, and being unwilling to rely on his own judgment, called a council of war on the 22d of February; when an inquiry having been made into the state of the ships, it was found they could not proceed immediately to sea for the want of an adequate supply of provisions.

On the 11th of March, a second council of war was held, when the necessary supply of stores and provisions having been received, it was resolved to put to sea immediately with all the ships that were fit for service, which amounted to eleven ships of the line and four frigates. No certain advice had yet been received of the enemy, and the squadron stretched over to Cape Toulon, off which it was determined to cruise until information respecting the French squadron should be received.

A few days only had elapsed, when information was brought from Captain Walpole, of the *Lion*, that he had seen nine large ships to the north-west of Minorca, and it being resolved to intercept the enemy in their passage down the Straits, the fleet accordingly proceeded to the southward of Majorca and Yvica. This measure did not succeed; and on the 1st of April the admiral anchored off the island of Formentura, and after having despatched two frigates to look into the several ports and bays where it might be thought probable that the French ships had sheltered, he sailed to Barcelona to await their return.

This second measure succeeded no better than the first, and Sir John remained at Barcelona until the month of May, when he was joined by the Dutch vice-admiral, having under his convoy a fleet of transports, with six thousand troops on board. Having disembarked the troops, Sir John sailed to Vado to escort a body of cavalry, at the desire of the Emperor and Count Staremberg, from Italy to Catalonia; which having done, he returned on the 7th of August to Barcelona.

At this period, Lord Bolingbroke, with Mr. Prior, and the Abbe Gualtier, were sent to the Court of Versailles, to remove all existing obstructions to the treaty between England and France, and a suspension of arms by sea and land for four months, between the

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

crowns of France and England, was agreed to, and proclaimed at Paris and London. Of this suspension Sir John was informed about a month after his return to Barcelona, and with the information he received special instructions from Lord Bolingbroke to suffer a large corn-fleet bound from France to pass unmolested. For the capture of this fleet the admiral had made preparations that would have ensured it, but for the orders afterwards received.

This state of peace, however, did not afford to Sir John that relief from active service which might have been expected. The Salletine corsairs having committed acts of violence, Sir John not only took measures to repress them, but to prevent a repetition of them.

In the spring of the year 1713, he had the honour of convoying the Empress from Barcelona to Genoa, upon which occasion she presented him with her picture set with diamonds; and gave to his nephew a valuable diamond ring. In the same year he conveyed back to Italy the troops, amounting to thirty thousand, which had been employed in the service of the allies. He afterwards conducted the Duke and Duchess of Savoy from Villa Franca to Sicily, their new kingdom. His instructions being all fulfilled, he at length obtained permission to resign his command, and return home through France. On the 16th of November, he arrived at Paris, and in England a few days afterward.

After the arrival of George the First in England, a change in the naval department took place; and Sir John Jennings, high in royal favour, was appointed one of the commissioners of the Admiralty, an office in which he continued during the whole of the reign. Early in the year 1716, he was, as admiral of the white, appointed to command a squadron of ten ships of the line, sent to the Firth of Edinburgh in consequence of the Pretender having landed in Scotland a short time before.

On the 1st of February, Sir John having gone by land to Edinburgh, hoisted his flag on board the *Oxford*, and assumed the command, the first act of which was, to detach several ships to attend the motions of the king's forces, and render them every assistance in their power, where necessary or possible, and to distress the rebels, by harassing their posts near the coasts, and intercepting their supplies. Notwithstanding the zealous endeavours

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[More information](#)

of Sir John to aid the land forces in the suppression of the rebellion, he was subjected to party clamour, on the escape of the Pretender; but in an account of the several operations previous to the complete suppression of the rebellion, and in particular of such as the naval force was more immediately concerned in, published in the Gazette, the ungenerous and unjust calumnies with which he was aspersed were refuted by the Sovereign and his ministers.

From this it appeared that the Pretender put to sea in a clean tallowed French snow, with her sails furled; that she rowed close along shore till she had cleared all the British cruisers; that the night was so dark when this vessel escaped, that it was impossible to discern any object at the distance of a quarter of a mile; that the Royal Anne galley, the Port Mahon, the Pearl, the Deal Castle, and the Phoenix, were at the very time stationed off the harbour of Aberdeen, whence it got out; and that their commanders used every possible diligence and endeavour to intercept the Pretender, as well as on every occasion to promote the general service. In proof of this we find, in the Gazette alluded to, the following remarkable sentence:—"All the ships kept the sea diligently, when wind and weather would permit, and observed the motions of his Majesty's army so carefully, that the Duke of Argyle did not pass through any post town without finding some ship ready, to carry into execution any service he might have to propose."

On the 28th of August, 1720, Sir John was appointed ranger of Greenwich Park, and governor of the Hospital, of which noble institution he proved a most worthy ruler and protector. His appointment as successor to the good and worthy Lord Aylmer, was, perhaps, as great a compliment as could at that time have been paid him, and in justice to the memory of Sir John it must be asserted, that he did not derogate from the virtues of his predecessor.

In the month of November he was appointed to command the convoy which attended the king from Helvoetsluys to Margate; after which he does not appear to have been employed in active service till the year 1726, when he was appointed to command a squadron of nine ships of the line, which the intrigues of the