

## Admiral Sir Eliab Harvey of Hempstead

The very interesting article in last quarter's AMBO, about the Master Gunner Jonas Watson of Great Sampford, has naturally aroused emulatory desires in other villages, including my own.

Prolonged and intensive research in the bar of the Bluebell produced only three known famous men with Hempstead connections — Dick Turpin, the famous but somewhat mythologised eighteenth century gangster, William Harvey the less well known but more respectable physician who propounded a new and unusually correct theory about the circulation of the blood, and Sean McCarthy, who happily is still with us, and therefore is not quite in the right category. Well, at least that is one better than Belgium.

However, a chance remark on this to a fellow villager provided another name, Admiral Sir Eliab Harvey which ought perhaps, at least locally, be better known, and although I cannot hope to approach the subject with the same detailed knowledge and expertise displayed in Mr Watson's article, I thought that the few facts I have been able to glean about him might be of interest to our readers.

The Harvey's were a well connected and tolerably well to-do family long before the famous doctor, tracing their right to bear arms back well into the 1530s. Eliab Harvey, the Doctor's brother, was a rich City merchant, trading in the Middle East, especially Constantinople. He bought considerable estates in Essex and elsewhere. Dr William, apart from his medical renown, had also been a kind of tutor/minder to the young Prince Charles (later Charles II) during the Civil War, so that the family were part of what would now be known as the great and the good (the second part by no means compulsory to earn favour in the Restoration Court), and they were allied by marriages to a good many of the even greater and gooder.

William, the younger Eliab's father, and grandson of the merchant Eliab, married an heiress Emma Seymour, who appeared to own a great deal of Walthamstow and Leytonstone, so Eliab was born, in 1758, unto very comfortable, indeed affluent surroundings. However, he was a younger son, and the English aristocracy's well founded belief in primogeniture meant that younger sons had, to great extent, to fend for themselves. Nevertheless it is perhaps a little surprising to find that he decided upon, or possibly had decided for him, a career in the Royal Navy. Although greatly admired (by those fortunate enough not to be compelled to serve in it), the eighteenth century Navy, though certainly offering considerable opportunities for promotion to the well connected young officer of sufficient (but not too much) intelligence, was certainly not a comfortable career. Quite apart from the routine dangers of drowning, scurvy, venereal disease and getting maimed or killed in battle, life on board, even for the officers, was cramped and restricted, and there were few of the chances of a comfortable billet in a garrison town, amid the amorous attentions of the local young ladies which attracted the young to a military life.

Sir Eliab entered the Navy at thirteen, not at all un-

sual, though it is not clear whether in fact he actually served at that age. At the time it was common practice for Captains to oblige their friends by entering young gentlemen onto the ship's books without their needing actually to set foot on board; the object was not so much to pocket their pay, as to enable them to clock up the years of service necessary to pass, in due course, as a lieutenant, and put their foot on the bottom of the ladder, or companionway, of promotion. Sleaze may be a twentieth century verb, but it is not a twentieth century concept.

For the next forty years or so, he served all over the world, even though the death of his father in 1763, when he was only five, and his older brother in 1779, meant that he inherited the family estate in 1779, and could presumably have retired to a life of comfort had he so wished. In 1784 he became a member of Parliament (for Malden), and in 1784 he married into the Nugent family, who appear to have been a pretty dubious lot even by the standards of the day, but wealthy. Whether or not the marriage was happy I do not know, but their family of three sons and six daughters suggests at least a certain robust intimacy, and presumably an occasional shore leave.

Sadly their three sons predeceased them, one dying at Burgos, in Spain, serving in the Coldstream Guards, and Eliab's younger brother, Stephen, had already been killed at the battle of Saratoga, in the American colonies (in 1779). Whatever their faults and limitations, the aristocracy were never afraid to do what they perceived as their duty to their country.

Eliab's great moment however did not come until 1805, when he was forty seven, and captain of the *Temeraire*, a line-of-battle ship serving in Nelson's fleet. On 21st October, *Temeraire* was immediately astern of *Victory*, Nelson's flagship, in the line which broke the line of the French and Spanish fleet at Trafalgar. Indeed, family tradition (which I have not been able to confirm), suggests that because *Temeraire* was a faster sailer than *Victory*, *Temeraire* was publicly reminded by a flag signal from Nelson as she was about to overhaul *Victory* at the moment of engagement, to "remember that her place is second in the line of battle". It seems a lengthy signal to have spelled out at that precise moment, and there is no mention of it that I recall in the log book of the signal frigate *Euryalus*, one of the proud possessions of Lloyd's of London, which I frequently showed to visitors. Certainly Eliab's letter to his wife, written only two days later, confirms that *Temeraire* took up position her position astern after a signal from Nelson countermanding a previous instruction to "lead and break through the enemy line".

Nelson, for all his genius and apparent loveability, was a relentless seeker after personal fame, and it is certainly in character that he would have been determined to have the glory for himself.

Whatever, the next couple of hours was murderous, with *Victory* and *Temeraire* in the thick of the fight, and at one point, *Temeraire* was engaged at point blank range

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with two French ships, on one on each side; she sunk one, and captured the other.

In his letter, Eliab writes "The state of *Temeraire* is so bad that we have been in constant apprehension for our lives (*the battle had been fought in a calm, but a storm blew up which lasted all the next day — Ed.*); every sail and yard having been destroyed, and nothing but the lower masts left standing; the rudder head almost shot off and is since quite gone, and lower masts shot through and through in many places".

However, Eliab and *Temeraire* survived, though forty three members of his crew did not, and a further 76 were wounded, many seriously, a total of 123 from a complement, probably, of between five and six hundred. Considering the severity of the engagement, it is lower than one might have expected, but a casualty rate of twenty-five percent is bad enough, in all conscience. As Nelson's great contemporary, Wellington, said after another military blood bath "the only thing worse than a battle won, is a battle lost".

Fame and promotion was now Sir Eliab's. Promotion, to the rank of rear Admiral of the Blue, and he was a pall bearer at Nelson's funeral at St Paul's. He continued to serve, though in 1809 an ill-tempered and unwise description, in public, of his senior officer Lord Gambier as a "canting old woman and a swindler of other old women", led to a court martial and dismissal from the Navy. Most historians would probably not disagree with the description, and in any event, Eliab was too well connected to be left in the cold for long; he was reinstated, and in 1810 promoted again to Vice Admiral, in 1819 to Admiral, and made KCB.

He died in 1830, survived, until 1843, by his wife, and is buried in the Harvey vault in Hempstead church, sadly the last male descendant of the Harvey line.

CHARLES FLAXMAN

## Uttlesford Mind Drop-In Centre Details

Great Dunmow, Pavilion, Recreation Ground  
Monday 7.30–9.30pm

Saffron Walden, United Reformed Church  
Tuesday 10.30am–12.30pm

Stansted, Friends Meeting House, Chapel Hill  
Tuesday 1.00–4.00pm

Great Dunmow, St Mary's Centre, Church End  
Wednesday 10.00am–1.00pm

Saffron Walden, Town Hall  
Thursday 7.30–9.30pm

Thaxted, Day Centre  
Saturday starts at 11am

## Poetry

### Bells! Bells! Bells!

Wednesday evening at eight, I listen very hard,  
All the noise and chatter, my ears do discard!  
For suddenly and softly, along with the breeze,  
I hear bells from St Mary's float through the trees.

How I love to hear those Church bells ringing!  
It must start all the Angels in heaven singing!  
As I stand here and listen, all daily cares unwind,  
How easy it is really, to find peace in your mind.


Irene

### Autumn

Summer has gone and as Winter draws near,  
Most birds fly South, the Winter they fear.  
Little birds everywhere, have learnt to fly,  
They fly away from Winter, for they fear they  
should die.

The leaves turn brown and fall from the trees,  
They are saying "Goodbye" in the blustery breeze.  
The mist in the morning, caresses the ground,  
The dew is like teardrops, all scattered around.  
For mother nature is crying "Goodbye" to us all,  
"Will see you next spring, when my flowers are tall!"

Irene



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