

Horatio Nelson, 1st Viscount Nelson

“Horatio Nelson” and “Lord Nelson” redirect here. For other uses, see [Horatio Nelson \(disambiguation\)](#) and [Lord Nelson \(disambiguation\)](#).

Horatio Nelson, 1st Viscount Nelson, 1st Duke of Bronté KB (29 September 1758 – 21 October 1805) was a British flag officer in the Royal Navy. He was noted for his inspirational leadership, superb grasp of strategy, and unconventional tactics, all of which resulted in a number of decisive naval victories, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars. He was wounded several times in combat, losing one arm in the unsuccessful attempt to conquer Santa Cruz de Tenerife and the sight in one eye in Corsica. He was shot and killed during his final victory at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Nelson was born into a moderately prosperous Norfolk family and joined the navy through the influence of his uncle, Maurice Suckling. He rose rapidly through the ranks and served with leading naval commanders of the period before obtaining his own command in 1778. He developed a reputation in the service through his personal valour and firm grasp of tactics but suffered periods of illness and unemployment after the end of the American War of Independence. The outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars allowed Nelson to return to service, where he was particularly active in the Mediterranean. He fought in several minor engagements off Toulon and was important in the capture of Corsica and subsequent diplomatic duties with the Italian states. In 1797, he distinguished himself while in command of HMS *Captain* at the Battle of Cape St Vincent.

Shortly after the battle, Nelson took part in the Battle of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, where his attack was defeated and he was badly wounded, losing his right arm, and was forced to return to England to recuperate. The following year, he won a decisive victory over the French at the Battle of the Nile and remained in the Mediterranean to support the Kingdom of Naples against a French invasion. In 1801, he was dispatched to the Baltic and won another victory, this time over the Danes at the Battle of Copenhagen. He subsequently commanded the blockade of the French and Spanish fleets at Toulon and, after their escape, chased them to the West Indies and back but failed to bring them to battle. After a brief return to England, he took over the Cádiz blockade in 1805. On 21 October 1805, the Franco-Spanish fleet came out of port, and Nelson's fleet engaged them at the Battle of Trafalgar. The battle was Britain's greatest naval victory, but during the action Nelson, aboard HMS *Victory*, was fatally wounded

by a French sharpshooter. His body was brought back to England where he was accorded a state funeral.

Nelson's death at Trafalgar secured his position as one of Britain's most heroic figures. The significance of the victory and his death during the battle led to his signal, "England expects that every man will do his duty", being regularly quoted, paraphrased and referenced up to the modern day. Numerous monuments, including Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square, London, and the Nelson Monument in Edinburgh, have been created in his memory and his legacy remains highly influential.

1 Early life



Captain Maurice Suckling

Horatio Nelson was born on 29 September 1758 in a rectory in Burnham Thorpe, Norfolk, England, the sixth of eleven children of the Reverend Edmund Nelson and his wife Catherine Suckling.^[1] He was named after his godfather Horatio Walpole (1723–1809) then 2nd Baron Walpole, of Wolterton.^[2] His mother, who died on 26 December 1767 when he was nine years old, was a granddaughter of Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford, the *de facto* first Prime Minister of Great Britain.^[3] She lived in

village of Barsham, Suffolk, and married the Reverend Edmund Nelson at Beccles church, Suffolk, in 1749. Nelson's aunt, Alice Nelson was the wife of Reverend Robert Rolfe, Rector of Hilborough, Norfolk and grandmother of Sir Robert Monsey Rolfe.^[4] Rolfe twice served as Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain.

Nelson attended Paston Grammar School, North Walsham, until he was 12 years old, and also attended King Edward VI's Grammar School in Norwich. His naval career began on 1 January 1771, when he reported to the third-rate HMS *Raisonnable* as an ordinary seaman and coxswain under his maternal uncle, Captain Maurice Suckling, who commanded the vessel. Shortly after reporting aboard, Nelson was appointed a midshipman and began officer training. Early in his service, Nelson discovered that he suffered from seasickness, a chronic complaint that dogged him for the rest of his life.^[5]

2 Early naval career

HMS *Raisonnable* had been commissioned during a period of tension with Spain, but when this passed, Suckling was transferred to the Nore guardship HMS *Triumph* and Nelson was dispatched to serve aboard the West Indiamen *Mary Ann* of the merchant shipping firm of Hibbert, Purrier and Horton, in order to gain experience at sea;^[6] he sailed from Medway, Kent, on 25 July 1771 sailing to Jamaica and Tobago, returning to Plymouth on 7 July 1772.^[7] He twice crossed the Atlantic, before returning to serve under his uncle as the commander of Suckling's longboat, which carried men and dispatches to and from the shore. Nelson then learned of a planned expedition under the command of Constantine Phipps, intended to survey a passage in the Arctic by which it was hoped that India could be reached: the fabled Northwest Passage. At his nephew's request, Suckling arranged for Nelson to join the expedition as coxswain^[8] to Commander Lutwidge aboard the converted bomb vessel HMS *Carcass*. The expedition reached within ten degrees of the North Pole, but, unable to find a way through the dense ice floes, was forced to turn back. By 1800 Lutwidge began to circulate a story that while the ship had been trapped in the ice, Nelson had seen and pursued a polar bear, before being ordered to return to the ship. Lutwidge's later version, in 1809, reported that Nelson and a companion had given chase to the bear, but on being questioned why, replied that "I wished, Sir, to get the skin for my father."^[9]

Nelson briefly returned to the *Triumph* after the expedition's return to Britain in September 1773. Suckling then arranged for his transfer to HMS *Seahorse*, one of two ships about to sail for the East Indies.^[10]

Nelson sailed for the East Indies on 19 November 1773 and arrived at the British outpost at Madras on 25 May 1774.^[12] Nelson and the *Seahorse* spent the rest of the year cruising off the coast and escorting merchantmen.



Captain Horatio Nelson, painted by John Francis Rigaud in 1781, with Fort San Juan—the scene of his most notable achievement to date—in the background. The painting itself was begun and nearly finished prior to the battle, when Nelson held the rank of lieutenant; when Nelson returned, the artist added the new captain's gold-braided sleeves.^[11]

With the outbreak of the First Anglo-Maratha War, the British fleet operated in support of the East India Company and in early 1775 the *Seahorse* was dispatched to carry a cargo of the company's money to Bombay. On 19 February two of Hyder Ali's ketches attacked the *Seahorse*, which drove them off after a brief exchange of fire. This was Nelson's first experience of battle.^[13] The rest of the year he spent escorting convoys, during which he continued to develop his navigation and ship handling skills. In early 1776 Nelson contracted malaria and became seriously ill. He was discharged from the *Seahorse* on 14 March and returned to England aboard HMS *Dolphin*.^[14] Nelson spent the six-month voyage recuperating and had almost recovered by the time he arrived in Britain in September 1776. His patron, Suckling, had risen to the post of Comptroller of the Navy in 1775, and used his influence to help Nelson gain further promotion.^{[3][15]} Nelson was appointed acting lieutenant aboard HMS *Worcester*, which was about to sail to Gibraltar.^[16]

The *Worcester*, under the command of Captain Mark Robinson, sailed as a convoy escort on 3 December and returned with another convoy in April 1777.^[17] Nelson then travelled to London to take his lieutenant's examination on 9 April; his examining board consisted of Captains John Campbell, Abraham North, and his uncle, Maurice Suckling. Nelson passed, and the next day received his commission and an appointment to HMS *Lowestoffe*, which was preparing to sail to Jamaica un-

der Captain William Locker.^[18] She sailed on 16 May, arrived on 19 July, and after reprovisioning, carried out several cruises in Caribbean waters. After the outbreak of the American War of Independence the *Lowestoffe* took several prizes, one of which was taken into Navy service as the tender *Little Lucy*. Nelson asked for and was given command of her, and took her on two cruises of his own.^[19] As well as giving him his first taste of command, it gave Nelson the opportunity to explore his fledgling interest in science. During his first cruise, Nelson led an expeditionary party to the Caicos Islands,^[20] where he made detailed notes of the wildlife and in particular a bird—now believed to be the white-necked jacobin.^[21] Locker, impressed by Nelson's abilities, recommended him to the new commander-in-chief at Jamaica, Sir Peter Parker. Parker duly took Nelson onto his flagship, HMS *Bristol*.^[22] The entry of the French into the war, in support of the Americans, meant further targets for Parker's fleet and it took many prizes towards the end of 1778, which brought Nelson an estimated £400 in prize money. Parker subsequently appointed him as Master and Commander of the brig HMS *Badger* on 8 December.^[23]

Nelson and the *Badger* spent most of 1779 cruising off the Central American coast, ranging as far as the British settlements at British Honduras and Nicaragua, but without much success at interception of enemy prizes.^[24] On his return to Port Royal he learned that Parker had promoted him to post-captain on 11 June, and intended to give him another command. Nelson handed over the *Badger* to Cuthbert Collingwood while he awaited the arrival of his new ship, the 28-gun frigate HMS *Hinchinbrook*,^[lower-alpha 1] newly captured from the French.^[25] While Nelson waited, news reached Parker that a French fleet under the command of Charles Hector, comte d'Estaing, was approaching Jamaica. Parker hastily organized his defences and placed Nelson in command of Fort Charles, which covered the approaches to Kingston.^[26] D'Estaing instead headed north, and the anticipated invasion never materialised. Nelson duly took command of the *Hinchinbrook* on 1 September.^[27]

The *Hinchinbrook* sailed from Port Royal on 5 October 1779 and, in company with other British ships, proceeded to capture a number of American prizes.^[28] On his return to Jamaica in December, Nelson began to be troubled by a recurrent attack of malaria, but remained in the West Indies in order to take part in Major-General John Dalling's attempt to capture the Spanish colonies in Central America, including an assault on the Fortress of the Immaculate Conception, also called Castillo Viejo, on the San Juan River in Nicaragua.^[29] The *Hinchinbrook* sailed from Jamaica in February 1780, as an escort for Dalling's invasion force. After sailing up the mouth of the San Juan River, Nelson with some one thousand men and four small four-pounder cannons, obtained the surrender of Castillo Viejo and its 160 Spanish defenders after a two-week siege.^[30] The British blew up the fort when they evacuated six months later after massive deaths

due to disease and Nelson was praised for his efforts.^[31] Parker recalled Nelson and gave him command of the 44-gun frigate HMS *Janus*.^[32] Nelson had however fallen seriously ill in the jungles of Costa Rica, probably from a recurrence of malaria, and was unable to take command. During his time of convalescence he was nursed by a black "doctoress" named Cubah Cornwallis, the mistress of a fellow captain, William Cornwallis.^[33] He was discharged in August and returned to Britain aboard HMS *Lion*,^[34] arriving in late November. Nelson gradually recovered over several months, and soon began agitating for a command. He was appointed to the frigate HMS *Albemarle* on 15 August 1781.^[35]

3 Command

3.1 Captain of the *Albemarle*

Nelson received orders on 23 October to take the newly refitted *Albemarle* to sea. He was instructed to collect an inbound convoy of the Russia Company at Elsinore, and escort them back to Britain. For this operation, the Admiralty placed the frigates HMS *Argo* and HMS *Enterprise* under his command.^[36] Nelson successfully organised the convoy and escorted it into British waters. He then left the convoy to return to port, but severe storms hampered him.^[37] Gales almost wrecked *Albemarle* as she was a poorly designed ship and an earlier accident had left her damaged, but Nelson eventually brought her into Portsmouth in February 1782.^[38] There the Admiralty ordered him to fit the *Albemarle* for sea and join the escort for a convoy collecting at Cork to sail for Quebec.^[39] Nelson arrived off Newfoundland with the convoy in late May, then detached on a cruise to hunt American privateers. Nelson was generally unsuccessful; he succeeded only in retaking several captured British merchant ships and capturing a number of small fishing boats and assorted craft.^[40]

In August he had a narrow escape from a far superior French force under Louis-Philippe de Vaudreuil, only evading them after a prolonged chase.^[41] Nelson arrived at Quebec on 18 September.^[42] He sailed again as part of the escort for a convoy to New York. He arrived in mid-November and reported to Admiral Samuel Hood, commander of the New York station.^[43] At Nelson's request, Hood transferred him to his fleet and *Albemarle* sailed in company with Hood, bound for the West Indies.^[44] On their arrival, the British fleet took up position off Jamaica to await the arrival of de Vaudreuil's force. Nelson and the *Albemarle* were ordered to scout the numerous passages for signs of the enemy, but it became clear by early 1783 that the French had eluded Hood.^[45] During his scouting operations, Nelson had developed a plan to assault the French garrison of the Turks Islands. Commanding a small flotilla of frigates and smaller vessels, he landed a force of 167 seamen and marines early on the morn-

ing of 8 March under a supporting bombardment.^[46] The French were found to be heavily entrenched and after several hours Nelson called off the assault. Several of the officers involved criticised Nelson, but Hood does not appear to have reprimanded him.^[47] Nelson spent the rest of the war cruising in the West Indies, where he captured a number of French and Spanish prizes.^[48] After news of the peace reached Hood, Nelson returned to Britain in late June 1783.^[49]

3.2 The island of Nevis and marriage



Lady Nelson, Nelson's wife, formerly Frances "Fanny" Nisbet of the island of Nevis, West Indies. A painting of the British school circa 1800, formerly attributed to Richard Cosway, from an earlier copy.

Nelson visited France in late 1783, stayed with acquaintances at Saint-Omer, and briefly attempted to learn French. He returned to England in January 1784, and attended court as part of Lord Hood's entourage.^[50] Influenced by the factional politics of the time, he contemplated standing for Parliament as a supporter of William Pitt, but was unable to find a seat.^[51]

In 1784 he received command of the frigate HMS *Boreas* with the assignment to enforce the Navigation Acts in the vicinity of Antigua.^[52] The Acts were unpopular with both the Americans and the colonies.^[53] Nelson served on the station under Admiral Sir Richard Hughes, and often came into conflict with his superior officer over their differing interpretation of the Acts.^[54] The captains of the American vessels Nelson had seized sued him for illegal seizure. Because the merchants of the nearby island of Nevis supported the American claim, Nelson was in peril of imprisonment; he remained sequestered on *Boreas* for eight months, until the courts ruled in his favour.^[55]

In the interim, Nelson met Frances "Fanny" Nisbet, a young widow from a Nevis plantation family.^[56] Nelson and Nisbet were married at Montpelier Estate on the island of Nevis on 11 March 1787, shortly before the end

of his tour of duty in the Caribbean.^[57] The marriage was registered at Fig Tree Church in St John's Parish on Nevis. Nelson returned to England in July, with Fanny following later.^[58]

3.3 During the peace

Nelson remained with *Boreas* until she was paid off in November that year.^[59] He and Fanny then divided their time between Bath and London, occasionally visiting Nelson's relations in Norfolk. In 1788, they settled at Nelson's childhood home at Burnham Thorpe.^[60] Now in reserve on half pay, he attempted to persuade the Admiralty and other senior figures he was acquainted with, such as Hood, to provide him with a command. He was unsuccessful as there were too few ships in the peacetime navy and Hood did not intercede on his behalf.^[61] Nelson spent his time trying to find employment for former crew members, attending to family affairs, and cajoling contacts in the navy for a posting. In 1792 the French revolutionary government annexed the Austrian Netherlands (modern Belgium), which were traditionally preserved as a buffer state. The Admiralty recalled Nelson to service and gave him command of the 64-gun HMS *Agamemnon* in January 1793. On 1 February France declared war.^[62]

3.4 Mediterranean service

In May 1793, Nelson sailed as part of a division under the command of Vice-Admiral William Hotham, joined later in the month by the rest of Lord Hood's fleet.^[63] The force initially sailed to Gibraltar and, with the intention of establishing naval superiority in the Mediterranean, made their way to Toulon, anchoring off the port in July.^[64] Toulon was largely under the control of moderate republicans and royalists, but was threatened by the forces of the National Convention, which were marching on the city. Short of supplies and doubting their ability to defend themselves, the city authorities requested that Hood take the city under his protection. Hood readily acquiesced and sent Nelson to carry dispatches to Sardinia and Naples requesting reinforcements.^[65] After delivering the dispatches to Sardinia, *Agamemnon* arrived at Naples in early September. There Nelson met Ferdinand IV, King of Naples,^[66] followed by the British ambassador to the kingdom, William Hamilton.^[67] At some point during the negotiations for reinforcements, Nelson was introduced to Hamilton's new wife, Emma Hamilton.^[68] The negotiations were successful, and 2,000 men and several ships were mustered by mid-September. Nelson put to sea in pursuit of a French frigate, but on failing to catch her, sailed for Leghorn, and then to Corsica.^[69] He arrived at Toulon on 5 October, where he found that a large French army had occupied the hills surrounding the city and was bombarding it. Hood still hoped the city could be held if more reinforcements arrived, and sent Nelson to join a squadron operating off Cagliari.^[70]

3.5 Corsica



Lord Horatio Nelson By John Hoppner

Early on the morning of 22 October 1793, the *Agamemnon* sighted five sails. Nelson closed with them, and discovered they were a French squadron. Nelson promptly gave chase, firing on the 40-gun *Melpomene*.^[71] He inflicted considerable damage but the remaining French ships turned to join the battle and, realising he was outnumbered, Nelson withdrew and continued to Cagliari, arriving on 24 October.^[71] After making repairs Nelson and the *Agamemnon* sailed again on 26 October, bound for Tunis with a squadron under Commodore Robert Linzee. On arrival, Nelson was given command of a small squadron consisting of the *Agamemnon*, three frigates and a sloop, and ordered to blockade the French garrison on Corsica.^[72] The fall of Toulon at the end of December 1793 severely damaged British fortunes in the Mediterranean. Hood had failed to make adequate provision for a withdrawal and 18 French ships-of-the-line fell into republican hands.^[73] Nelson's mission to Corsica took on added significance, as it could provide the British a naval base close to the French coast.^[73] Hood therefore reinforced Nelson with extra ships during January 1794.^[74]

A British assault force landed on the island on 7 February, after which Nelson moved to intensify the blockade off Bastia. For the rest of the month he carried out raids along the coast and intercepted enemy shipping. By late February St Fiorenzo had fallen and British troops under Lieutenant-General David Dundas entered the outskirts of Bastia.^[75] However, Dundas merely assessed the enemy positions and then withdrew, arguing the French were too well entrenched to risk an assault. Nelson convinced Hood otherwise, but a protracted de-

bate between the army and naval commanders meant that Nelson did not receive permission to proceed until late March. Nelson began to land guns from his ships and emplace them in the hills surrounding the town. On 11 April the British squadron entered the harbour and opened fire, whilst Nelson took command of the land forces and commenced bombardment.^[76] After 45 days, the town surrendered.^[77] Nelson subsequently prepared for an assault on Calvi, working in company with Lieutenant-General Charles Stuart.^[78]

British forces landed at Calvi on 19 June, and immediately began moving guns ashore to occupy the heights surrounding the town. While Nelson directed a continuous bombardment of the enemy positions, Stuart's men began to advance. On 12 July Nelson was at one of the forward batteries early in the morning when a shot struck one of the sandbags protecting the position, spraying stones and sand. Nelson was struck by debris in his right eye and was forced to retire from the position, although his wound was soon bandaged and he returned to action.^[79] By 18 July most of the enemy positions had been disabled, and that night Stuart, supported by Nelson, stormed the main defensive position and captured it. Repositioning their guns, the British brought Calvi under constant bombardment, and the town surrendered on 10 August.^[80] However, Nelson's right eye had been irreparably damaged and he eventually lost sight in it.^[81]

3.6 Genoa and the fight of the Ça Ira

Main article: Naval Battle of Genoa (1795)

After the occupation of Corsica, Hood ordered Nelson to



The fight of the Ça Ira

open diplomatic relations with the city-state of Genoa, a strategically important potential ally.^[82] Soon afterwards, Hood returned to England and was succeeded by Admiral William Hotham as commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean. Nelson put into Leghorn, and while the *Agamemnon* underwent repairs, met with other naval officers at the port and entertained a brief affair with a local woman, Adelaide Correglia.^[83] Hotham arrived with the rest of

the fleet in December; Nelson and the *Agamemnon* sailed on a number of cruises with them in late 1794 and early 1795.^[84]

On 8 March, news reached Hotham that the French fleet was at sea and heading for Corsica. He immediately set out to intercept them, and Nelson eagerly anticipated his first fleet action. The French were reluctant to engage and the two fleets shadowed each other throughout 12 March. The following day two of the French ships collided, allowing Nelson to engage the much larger 84-gun *Ça Ira* for two and a half hours until the arrival of two French ships forced Nelson to veer away, having inflicted heavy casualties and considerable damage.^[85] The fleets continued to shadow each other before making contact again, on 14 March, in the **Battle of Genoa**. Nelson joined the other British ships in attacking the battered *Ça Ira*, now under tow from the *Censeur*. Heavily damaged, the two French ships were forced to surrender and Nelson took possession of the *Censeur*. Defeated at sea, the French abandoned their plan to invade Corsica and returned to port.^[86]

3.7 Skirmishes and the retreat from Italy

Nelson and the fleet remained in the Mediterranean throughout the summer. On 4 July *Agamemnon* sailed from St Fiorenzo with a small force of frigates and sloops, bound for Genoa. On 6 July Nelson ran into the French fleet and found himself pursued by several much larger ships-of-the-line. He retreated to St Fiorenzo, arriving just ahead of the pursuing French, who broke off as Nelson's signal guns alerted the British fleet in the harbour.^[87] Hotham pursued the French to the **Hyères Islands**, but failed to bring them to a decisive action. A number of small engagements were fought but to Nelson's dismay, he saw little action.^[87]

Nelson returned to operate out of Genoa, intercepting and inspecting merchants and cutting-out suspicious vessels in both enemy and neutral harbours.^[88] Nelson formulated ambitious plans for amphibious landings and naval assaults to frustrate the progress of the French **Army of Italy** that was now advancing on Genoa, but could excite little interest in Hotham.^[89] In November Hotham was replaced by Sir Hyde Parker but the situation in Italy was rapidly deteriorating: the French were raiding around Genoa and strong Jacobin sentiment was rife within the city itself.^[90] A large French assault at the end of November broke the allied lines, forcing a general retreat towards Genoa. Nelson's forces were able to cover the withdrawing army and prevent them being surrounded, but he had too few ships and men to materially alter the strategic situation, and the British were forced to withdraw from the Italian ports. Nelson returned to Corsica on 30 November, angry and depressed at the British failure and questioning his future in the navy.^[91]

3.8 Jervis and the evacuation of the Mediterranean

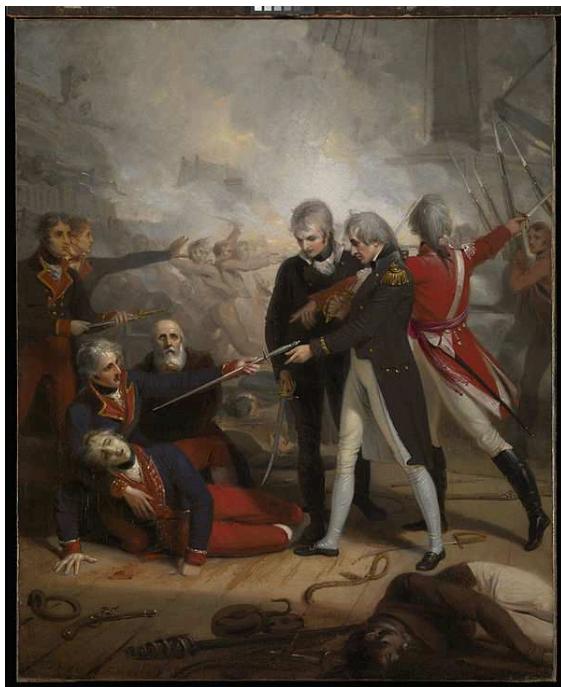
In January 1796 the position of commander-in-chief of the fleet in the Mediterranean passed to Sir John Jervis, who appointed Nelson to exercise independent command over the ships blockading the French coast as a commodore.^[92] Nelson spent the first half of the year conducting operations to frustrate French advances and bolster Britain's Italian allies. Despite some minor successes in intercepting small French warships (e.g., in the **action of 31 May 1796**), Nelson's squadron captured a convoy of seven small vessels), Nelson began to feel the British presence on the Italian peninsula was rapidly becoming useless.^[93] In June the *Agamemnon* was sent back to Britain for repairs, and Nelson was appointed to the 74-gun HMS *Captain*.^[93] In the same month, the French thrust towards Leghorn and were certain to capture the city. Nelson hurried there to oversee the evacuation of British nationals and transported them to Corsica, after which Jervis ordered him to blockade the newly captured French port.^[94] In July he oversaw the occupation of Elba, but by September the Genoese had broken their neutrality to declare in favour of the French.^[95] By October, the Genoese position and the continued French advances led the British to decide that the Mediterranean fleet could no longer be supplied; they ordered it to be evacuated to Gibraltar. Nelson helped oversee the withdrawal from Corsica, and by December 1796 was aboard the frigate HMS *Minerve*, covering the evacuation of the garrison at Elba. He then sailed for Gibraltar.^[96]

During the passage, Nelson captured the Spanish frigate *Santa Sabina* and placed Lieutenants Jonathan Culverhouse and Thomas Hardy in charge of the captured vessel, taking the Spanish captain on board *Minerve*. *Santa Sabina* was part of a larger Spanish force, and the following morning two Spanish ships-of-the-line and a frigate were sighted closing fast. Unable to outrun them Nelson initially determined to fight but Culverhouse and Hardy raised the British colours and sailed northeast, drawing the Spanish ships after them until being captured, giving Nelson the opportunity to escape.^[97] Nelson went on to rendezvous with the British fleet at Elba, where he spent Christmas.^[98] He sailed for Gibraltar in late January, and after learning that the Spanish fleet had sailed from Cartagena, stopped just long enough to collect Hardy, Culverhouse, and the rest of the prize crew captured with *Santa Sabina*, before pressing on through the straits to join Sir John Jervis off Cadiz.^[99]

4 Admiralty

4.1 Battle of Cape St Vincent

Main article: **Battle of Cape St Vincent (1797)**
Nelson joined Jervis's fleet off Cape St Vincent, and re-



Nelson receives the surrender of the San Nicholas, an 1806 portrait by Richard Westall

ported the Spanish movements.^[100] Jervis decided to give battle and the two fleets met on 14 February. Nelson found himself towards the rear of the British line and realised that it would be a long time before he could bring *Captain* into action.^[100] Instead of continuing to follow the line, Nelson disobeyed orders and *wore ship*, breaking from the line and heading to engage the Spanish van, which consisted of the 112-gun *San Josef*, the 80-gun *San Nicolas* and the 130-gun *Santísima Trinidad*. *Captain* engaged all three, assisted by HMS *Culloden* which had come to Nelson's aid. After an hour of exchanging broadsides which left both *Captain* and *Culloden* heavily damaged, Nelson found himself alongside the *San Nicolas*. He led a boarding party across, crying "Westminster Abbey! or, glorious victory!" and forced her surrender.^[101] *San Josef* attempted to come to the *San Nicolas*'s aid, but became entangled with her compatriot and was left immobile. Nelson led his party from the deck of the *San Nicolas* onto the *San Josef* and captured her as well.^[100] As night fell, the Spanish fleet broke off and sailed for Cadiz. Four ships had surrendered to the British and two of them were Nelson's captures.^[102]

Nelson was victorious, but had disobeyed direct orders. Jervis liked Nelson and so did not officially reprimand him,^[102] but did not mention Nelson's actions in his official report of the battle.^[103] He did write a private letter to George Spencer in which he said that Nelson "contributed very much to the fortune of the day".^[102] Nelson also wrote several letters about his victory, reporting that his action was being referred to amongst the fleet as "Nelson's Patent Bridge for boarding first rates".^[101] Nelson's account was later challenged by Rear-Admiral William

Parker, who had been aboard HMS *Prince George*. Parker claimed that Nelson had been supported by several more ships than he acknowledged, and that the *San Josef* had already struck her colours by the time Nelson boarded her.^[104] Nelson's account of his role prevailed, and the victory was well received in Britain: Jervis was made Earl St Vincent and Nelson was made a Knight of the Bath.^{[105][106]} On 20 February, in a standard promotion according to his seniority and unrelated to the battle, he was promoted to Rear-Admiral of the Blue.^[107]

4.2 Action off Cadiz

Main article: [Blockade of Cádiz \(1797\)](#)

Nelson was given HMS *Theseus* as his flagship, and on 27 May 1797 was ordered to lie off Cadiz, monitoring the Spanish fleet and awaiting the arrival of Spanish treasure ships from the American colonies.^[108] He carried out a bombardment and personally led an amphibious assault on 3 July. During the action Nelson's barge collided with that of the Spanish commander, and a hand-to-hand struggle ensued between the two crews. Twice Nelson was nearly cut down and both times his life was saved by a seaman named John Sykes who took the blows and was badly wounded. The British raiding force captured the Spanish boat and towed it back to the *Theseus*.^{[108][109]} During this period Nelson developed a scheme to capture *Santa Cruz de Tenerife*, aiming to seize a large quantity of specie from the treasure ship *Principe de Asturias*, which was reported to have recently arrived.^[110]

4.3 Battle of Santa Cruz de Tenerife

Main article: [Battle of Santa Cruz de Tenerife \(1797\)](#)

The battle plan called for a combination of naval bombardments and an amphibious landing. The initial attempt was called off after adverse currents hampered the assault and the element of surprise was lost.^[111] Nelson immediately ordered another assault but this was beaten back. He prepared for a third attempt, to take place during the night. Although he personally led one of the battalions, the operation ended in failure: the Spanish were better prepared than had been expected and had secured strong defensive positions.^[112] Several of the boats failed to land at the correct positions in the confusion, while those that did were swept by gunfire and grapeshot. Nelson's boat reached its intended landing point but as he stepped ashore he was hit in the right arm by a musketball, which fractured his humerus bone in multiple places.^[112] He was rowed back to the *Theseus* to be attended to by the surgeon, Thomas Eshelby.^[113] On arriving on his ship he refused to be helped aboard, declaring "Let me alone! I have got my legs left and one arm."^[112] He was taken to surgeon Eshelby, instructing him to prepare his instruments and "the sooner it was off the better".^[112] Most



Nelson wounded during the battle of Santa Cruz de Tenerife; 1806 painting by Richard Westall

of the right arm was amputated and within half an hour Nelson had returned to issuing orders to his captains.^[114] Years later he would excuse himself to Commodore John Thomas Duckworth for not writing longer letters due to not being naturally left-handed.^[115] He developed the sensation of **Phantom Limb** in his lost arm later on and declared that he had 'found the direct evidence of the existence of soul'.^[116]

Meanwhile, a force under Sir Thomas Troubridge had fought their way to the main square but could go no further. Unable to return to the fleet because their boats had been sunk, Troubridge was forced to enter into negotiations with the Spanish commander, and the British were subsequently allowed to withdraw.^[117] The expedition had failed to achieve any of its objectives and had left a quarter of the landing force dead or wounded.^{[117][118]} The squadron remained off Tenerife for a further three days and by 16 August had rejoined Jervis's fleet off Cadiz. Despondently Nelson wrote to Jervis: "A left-handed Admiral will never again be considered as useful, therefore the sooner I get to a very humble cottage the better, and make room for a better man to serve the state".^[119] He returned to England aboard HMS *Seahorse*, arriving at Spithead on 1 September. He was met with a hero's welcome: the British public had lionised Nelson after Cape St Vincent and his wound earned him sympathy.^[120] They refused to attribute the defeat at Tenerife to him, preferring instead to blame poor planning on the part of St Vincent, the Secretary at War or even William Pitt.^[120]

4.4 Return to England

Nelson returned to Bath with Fanny, before moving to London in October to seek expert medical attention concerning his amputated arm. Whilst in London news reached him that Admiral Duncan had defeated the Dutch fleet at the **Battle of Camperdown**.^[121] Nelson exclaimed that he would have given his other arm to have been present.^[121] He spent the last months of 1797 recuperating in London, during which he was awarded the Freedom of the City of London and an annual pension of £1,000 a year. He used the money to buy Round Wood Farm near Ipswich, and intended to retire there with Fanny.^[122] Despite his plans, Nelson was never to live there.^[122]

Although surgeons had been unable to remove the central ligature in his amputated arm, which had caused considerable inflammation and poisoning, in early December it came out of its own accord and Nelson rapidly began to recover. Eager to return to sea, he began agitating for a command and was promised the 80-gun HMS *Foudroyant*. As she was not yet ready for sea, Nelson was instead given command of the 74-gun HMS *Vanguard*, to which he appointed Edward Berry as his flag captain.^[123] French activities in the Mediterranean theatre were raising concern among the Admiralty: Napoleon was gathering forces in Southern France but the destination of his army was unknown. Nelson and the *Vanguard* were to be dispatched to Cadiz to reinforce the fleet. On 28 March 1798, Nelson hoisted his flag and sailed to join Earl St Vincent. St Vincent sent him on to Toulon with a small force to reconnoitre French activities.^[124]

4.5 Hunting the French

Main article: **Mediterranean campaign of 1798**

Nelson passed through the Straits of Gibraltar and took up position off Toulon by 17 May, but his squadron was dispersed and blown southwards by a strong gale that struck the area on 20 May.^[125] While the British were battling the storm, Napoleon had sailed with his invasion fleet under the command of Vice-Admiral François-Paul Brueys d'Aigalliers. Nelson, having been reinforced with a number of ships from St Vincent, went in pursuit.^[126] He began searching the Italian coast for Napoleon's fleet, but was hampered by a lack of frigates that could operate as fast scouts. Napoleon had already arrived at Malta and, after a show of force, secured the island's surrender.^[127] Nelson followed him there, but the French had already left. After a conference with his captains, he decided Egypt was Napoleon's most likely destination and headed for Alexandria. On his arrival on 28 June, though, he found no sign of the French; dismayed, he withdrew and began searching to the east of the port. While he was absent, Napoleon's fleet arrived on 1 July and landed their forces unopposed.^[128]

Brueys then anchored his fleet in Aboukir Bay, ready to support Napoleon if required.^[129] Nelson meanwhile had crossed the Mediterranean again in a fruitless attempt to locate the French and had returned to Naples to re-provision.^[130] He sailed again, intending to search the seas off Cyprus, but decided to pass Alexandria again for a final check. In doing so his force captured a French merchant, which provided the first news of the French fleet: they had passed south-east of Crete a month before, heading to Alexandria.^[131] Nelson hurried to the port but again found it empty of the French. Searching along the coast, he finally discovered the French fleet in Aboukir Bay on 1 August 1798.^[132]

4.6 The Battle of the Nile

Main article: Battle of the Nile

Nelson immediately prepared for battle, repeating a sentiment he had expressed at the battle of Cape St Vincent that “Before this time tomorrow, I shall have gained a peerage or Westminster Abbey.”^[133] It was late by the time the British arrived and the French, anchored in a strong position with a combined firepower greater than that of Nelson’s fleet, did not expect them to attack.^[134] Nelson however immediately ordered his ships to advance. The French line was anchored close to a line of shoals, in the belief that this would secure their port side from attack; Brueys had assumed the British would follow convention and attack his centre from the starboard side. However, Captain Thomas Foley aboard HMS *Goliath* discovered a gap between the shoals and the French ships, and took *Goliath* into the channel. The unprepared French found themselves attacked on both sides, the British fleet splitting, with some following Foley and others passing down the starboard side of the French line.^[135]



The Battle of the Nile, depicted in an 1801 painting by Thomas Luny

The British fleet was soon heavily engaged, passing down the French line and engaging their ships one by one. Nelson on *Vanguard* personally engaged *Spartiate*, also coming under fire from *Aquilon*. At about eight o’clock,

he was with Berry on the quarter-deck when a piece of French shot struck him in his forehead. He fell to the deck, a flap of torn skin obscuring his good eye. Blinded and half stunned, he felt sure he would die and cried out “I am killed. Remember me to my wife.” He was taken below to be seen by the surgeon.^[136] After examining Nelson, the surgeon pronounced the wound non-threatening and applied a temporary bandage.^[137]

The French van, pounded by British fire from both sides, had begun to surrender, and the victorious British ships continued to move down the line, bringing Brueys’s 118-gun flagship *Orient* under constant heavy fire. *Orient* caught fire under this bombardment, and later exploded. Nelson briefly came on deck to direct the battle, but returned to the surgeon after watching the destruction of *Orient*.^[138]

The Battle of the Nile was a major blow to Napoleon’s ambitions in the east. The fleet had been destroyed: *Orient*, another ship and two frigates had been burnt, seven 74-gun ships and two 80-gun ships had been captured, and only two ships-of-the-line and two frigates escaped,^[139] while the forces Napoleon had brought to Egypt were stranded.^[135] Napoleon attacked north along the Mediterranean coast, but Turkish defenders supported by Captain Sir Sidney Smith defeated his army at the Siege of Acre. Napoleon then left his army and sailed back to France, evading detection by British ships. Given its strategic importance, some historians regard Nelson’s achievement at the Nile as the most significant of his career, even greater than that at Trafalgar seven years later.^[140]

4.7 Rewards

Nelson wrote dispatches to the Admiralty and oversaw temporary repairs to the *Vanguard*, before sailing to Naples where he was met with enthusiastic celebrations.^[141] The King of Naples, in company with the Hamiltons, greeted him in person when he arrived at the port and William Hamilton invited Nelson to stay at their house.^[142] Celebrations were held in honour of Nelson’s birthday that September, and he attended a banquet at the Hamiltons’, where other officers had begun to notice his attention to Emma. Jervis himself had begun to grow concerned about reports of Nelson’s behaviour, but in early October word of Nelson’s victory had reached London. The First Lord of the Admiralty, Earl Spencer, fainted on hearing the news.^[143] Scenes of celebration erupted across the country, balls and victory feasts were held and church bells were rung. The City of London awarded Nelson and his captains with swords, whilst the King ordered them to be presented with special medals. The Tsar of Russia sent him a gift, and Selim III, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, awarded Nelson the Order of the Turkish Crescent for his role in restoring Ottoman rule in Egypt. Lord Hood, after a conversation with the Prime Minister, told Fanny that Nelson



Emma Hamilton, Nelson's mistress and mother of his daughter Horatia, in a 1782–84 portrait by George Romney, depicting Emma at the height of her beauty

would likely be given a Viscountcy, similar to Jervis's earldom after Cape St Vincent and Duncan's viscountcy after Camperdown.^[144] Earl Spencer however demurred, arguing that as Nelson had only been detached in command of a squadron, rather than being the commander in chief of the fleet, such an award would create an unwelcome precedent. Instead, Nelson received the title Baron Nelson of the Nile.^{[145][146]}

4.8 Neapolitan campaign

Nelson was dismayed by Spencer's decision, and declared that he would rather have received no title than that of a mere barony.^[146] He was however cheered by the attention showered on him by the citizens of Naples, the prestige accorded him by the kingdom's elite, and the comforts he received at the Hamiltons' residence. He made frequent visits to attend functions in his honour, or to tour nearby attractions with Emma, with whom he had by now fallen deeply in love, almost constantly at his side.^[147] Orders arrived from the Admiralty to blockade the French forces in Alexandria and Malta, a task Nelson delegated to his captains, Samuel Hood and Alexander Ball. Despite enjoying his lifestyle in Naples Nelson began to think of returning to England,^[147] but King Ferdinand of Naples, after a long period of pressure from his wife Maria Carolina of Austria and Sir William Hamilton, finally agreed to declare war on France. The Neapolitan army, led by the Austrian General Mack and supported by Nelson's fleet, retook Rome from the French in late November, but the French regrouped outside the city and,

after being reinforced, routed the Neapolitans. In disarray, the Neapolitan army fled back to Naples, with the pursuing French close behind.^[148] Nelson hastily organised the evacuation of the Royal Family, several nobles and the British nationals, including the Hamiltons. The evacuation got under way on 23 December and sailed through heavy gales before reaching the safety of Palermo on 26 December.^[149]

With the departure of the Royal Family, Naples descended into anarchy and news reached Palermo in January that the French had entered the city under General Championnet and proclaimed the Parthenopaean Republic.^[150] Nelson was promoted to Rear Admiral of the Red on 14 February 1799,^[151] and was occupied for several months in blockading Naples, while a popular counter-revolutionary force under Cardinal Ruffo known as the *Sanfedisti* marched to retake the city. In late June Ruffo's army entered Naples, forcing the French and their supporters to withdraw to the city's fortifications as rioting and looting broke out amongst the ill-disciplined Neapolitan troops.^[152] Dismayed by the bloodshed, Ruffo agreed to a general amnesty with the Jacobin forces that allowed them safe conduct to France. Nelson, now aboard the *Foudroyant*, was outraged, and backed by King Ferdinand he insisted that the rebels must surrender unconditionally.^[153] He took those who had surrendered under the amnesty under armed guard, including the former Admiral Francesco Caracciolo, who had commanded the Neapolitan navy under King Ferdinand but had changed sides during the brief Jacobin rule.^[154] Nelson ordered his trial by court-martial and refused Caracciolo's request that it be held by British officers, nor was Caracciolo allowed to summon witnesses in his defence. Caracciolo was tried by royalist Neapolitan officers and sentenced to death. He asked to be shot rather than hanged, but Nelson, following the wishes of Queen Maria Carolina (a close friend of his mistress, Lady Hamilton) also refused this request and even ignored the court's request to allow 24 hours for Caracciolo to prepare himself. Caracciolo was hanged aboard the Neapolitan frigate *Minerva* at 5 o'clock the same afternoon.^[155] Nelson kept the Jacobins imprisoned and approved of a wave of further executions, refusing to intervene despite pleas for clemency from the Hamiltons and the Queen of Naples.^[156] When transports were finally allowed to carry the Jacobins to France, less than a third were still alive.^[157] On 13 August 1799, King Ferdinand gave Nelson the newly created Dukedom of Bronté in the Kingdom of Sicily, in perpetual property, enclosing the Maniace Castle, the accompanying Abbey, and the land and the city of Bronte, this as a reward for his support of the monarchy.^[158]

Nelson returned to Palermo in August and in September became the senior officer in the Mediterranean after Jervis' successor Lord Keith left to chase the French and Spanish fleets into the Atlantic.^[159] Nelson spent the rest of 1799 at the Neapolitan court but put to sea again in

February 1800 after Lord Keith's return. On 18 February *Généreux*, a survivor of the Nile, was sighted and Nelson gave chase, capturing her after a short battle and winning Keith's approval.^[160] Nelson had a difficult relationship with his superior officer: he was gaining a reputation for insubordination, having initially refused to send ships when Keith requested them and on occasion returning to Palermo without orders, pleading poor health.^[161] Keith's reports, and rumours of Nelson's close relationship with Emma Hamilton, were also circulating in London, and Earl Spencer wrote a pointed letter suggesting that he return home:

You will be more likely to recover your health and strength in England than in any inactive situation at a foreign Court, however pleasing the respect and gratitude shown to you for your services may be.^[162]

4.9 Return to England

The recall of Sir William Hamilton to Britain was a further incentive for Nelson to return, although he and the Hamiltons initially sailed from Naples on a brief cruise around Malta aboard the *Foudroyant* in April 1800. It was on this voyage that Horatio and Emma's illegitimate daughter *Horatia* was probably conceived.^[163] After the cruise, Nelson conveyed the Queen of Naples and her suite to Leghorn. On his arrival, Nelson shifted his flag to HMS *Alexander*, but again disobeyed Keith's orders by refusing to join the main fleet. Keith came to Leghorn in person to demand an explanation, and refused to be moved by the Queen's pleas to allow her to be conveyed in a British ship.^[164] In the face of Keith's demands, Nelson reluctantly struck his flag and bowed to Emma Hamilton's request to return to England by land.^[165]

Nelson, the Hamiltons and several other British travellers left Leghorn for Florence on 13 July. They made stops at Trieste and Vienna, spending three weeks in the latter where they were entertained by the local nobility and heard the *Missa in Angustiis* by Haydn that now bears Nelson's name.^[166] By September they were in Prague, and later called at Dresden, Dessau and Hamburg, from where they caught a packet ship to Great Yarmouth, arriving on 6 November.^[167] Nelson was given a hero's welcome and after being sworn in as a freeman of the borough and received the massed crowd's applause. He subsequently made his way to London, arriving on 9 November. He attended court and was guest of honour at a number of banquets and balls. It was during this period that Fanny Nelson and Emma Hamilton met for the first time. During this period, Nelson was reported as being cold and distant to his wife and his attention to Emma became the subject of gossip.^[168] With the marriage breaking down, Nelson began to hate even being in the same room as Fanny. Events came to a head around Christmas, when according to Nelson's solicitor, Fanny issued an ultima-

tum on whether he was to choose her or Emma. Nelson replied:

I love you sincerely but I cannot forget my obligations to Lady Hamilton or speak of her otherwise than with affection and admiration.^[169]

The two never lived together again after this.^[169]

4.10 Parker and the Baltic

Shortly after his arrival in England Nelson was appointed to be second-in-command of the Channel Fleet under Lord St Vincent.^[170] He was promoted to Vice Admiral of the Blue on 1 January 1801,^[171] and travelled to Plymouth, where on 22 January he was granted the freedom of the city, and on 29 January Emma gave birth to their daughter, Horatia.^[172] Nelson was delighted, but subsequently disappointed when he was instructed to move his flag from HMS *San Josef* to HMS *St George* in preparation for a planned expedition to the Baltic.^[173] Tired of British ships imposing a blockade against French trade and stopping and searching their merchants, the Russian, Prussian, Danish and Swedish governments had formed an alliance to break the blockade. Nelson joined Admiral Sir Hyde Parker's fleet at Yarmouth, from where they sailed for the Danish coast in March. On their arrival Parker was inclined to blockade the Danish and control the entrance to the Baltic, but Nelson urged a pre-emptive attack on the Danish fleet at harbour in Copenhagen.^[174] He convinced Parker to allow him to make an assault, and was given significant reinforcements. Parker himself would wait in the Kattegat, covering Nelson's fleet in case of the arrival of the Swedish or Russian fleets.^[175]

4.10.1 Battle of Copenhagen

Main article: [Battle of Copenhagen \(1801\)](#)

On the morning of 2 April 1801, Nelson began to advance into Copenhagen harbour. The battle began badly for the British, with HMS *Agamemnon*, HMS *Bellona* and HMS *Russell* running aground, and the rest of the fleet encountering heavier fire from the Danish shore batteries than had been anticipated. Parker sent the signal for Nelson to withdraw, reasoning:

I will make the signal for recall for Nelson's sake. If he is in a condition to continue the action he will disregard it; if he is not, it will be an excuse for his retreat and no blame can be attached to him.^[176]

Nelson, directing action aboard HMS *Elephant*, was informed of the signal by the signal lieutenant, Frederick Langford, but angrily responded: 'I told you to look out on



Nicholas Pocock's Battle of Copenhagen. Nelson's fleet exchanges fire with the Danish, with the city of Copenhagen in the background.

the Danish commodore and let me know when he surrendered. Keep your eyes fixed on him.^[177] He then turned to his flag captain, Thomas Foley, and said 'You know, Foley, I have only one eye. I have a right to be blind sometimes.' He raised the telescope to his blind eye, and said 'I really do not see the signal.'^{[177][178]} The battle lasted three hours, leaving both Danish and British fleets heavily damaged. At length Nelson dispatched a letter to the Danish commander, Crown Prince Frederick, calling for a truce, which the Prince accepted.^[179] Parker approved of Nelson's actions in retrospect, and Nelson was given the honour of going into Copenhagen the next day to open formal negotiations.^{[180][181]} At a banquet that evening he told Prince Frederick that the battle had been the most severe he had ever been in.^[182] The outcome of the battle and several weeks of ensuing negotiations was a 14-week armistice, and on Parker's recall in May, Nelson became commander-in-chief in the Baltic Sea.^[183] As a reward for the victory, he was created Viscount Nelson of the Nile and of Burnham Thorpe in the County of Norfolk, on 19 May 1801.^[184] In addition, on 4 August 1801, he was created Baron Nelson, of the Nile and of Hilborough in the County of Norfolk, this time with a special remainder to his father and sisters.^{[185][186]} Nelson subsequently sailed to the Russian naval base at Reval in May, and there learned that the pact of armed neutrality was to be disbanded. Satisfied with the outcome of the expedition, he returned to England, arriving on 1 July.^[187]

4.11 Leave in England

In France, Napoleon was massing forces to invade Great Britain. After a brief spell in London, where he again visited the Hamiltons, Nelson was placed in charge of defending the English Channel to prevent the invasion.^[188] He spent the summer reconnoitring the French coast, but apart from a failed attack on Boulogne in August, saw little action.^[189] On 22 October 1801 the Peace of Amiens was signed between the British and the French, and Nelson – in poor health again – retired to Britain where he

stayed with Sir William and Lady Hamilton. On 30 October Nelson spoke in support of the Addington government in the House of Lords, and afterwards made regular visits to attend sessions.^[190] The three embarked on a tour of England and Wales, visiting Birmingham, Warwick, Gloucester, Swansea, Monmouth and numerous other towns and villages. Nelson often found himself received as a hero and was the centre of celebrations and events held in his honour.^[189] In 1802, Nelson bought Merton Place, a country estate in Merton, Surrey (now south-west London) where he lived briefly with the Hamiltons until William's death in April 1803.^[191] The following month, war broke out again and Nelson prepared to return to sea.^[192]

5 Return to sea

Main article: Trafalgar Campaign

Nelson was appointed commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet and given the first-rate HMS *Victory* as his flagship. He joined her at Portsmouth, where he received orders to sail to Malta and take command of a squadron there before joining the blockade of Toulon.^[193] Nelson arrived off Toulon in July 1803 and spent the next year and a half enforcing the blockade. He was promoted to Vice Admiral of the White while still at sea, on 23 April 1804.^[194] In January 1805 the French fleet, under Admiral Pierre-Charles Villeneuve, escaped Toulon and eluded the blockading British. Nelson set off in pursuit but after searching the eastern Mediterranean he learned that the French had been blown back into Toulon.^[195] Villeneuve managed to break out a second time in April, and this time succeeded in passing through the Strait of Gibraltar and into the Atlantic, bound for the West Indies.^[195]

Nelson gave chase, but after arriving in the Caribbean spent June in a fruitless search for the fleet. Villeneuve had briefly cruised around the islands before heading back to Europe, in contravention of Napoleon's orders.^[196] The returning French fleet was intercepted by a British fleet under Sir Robert Calder and engaged in the Battle of Cape Finisterre, but managed to reach Ferrol with only minor losses.^[197] Nelson returned to Gibraltar at the end of July, and travelled from there to England, dismayed at his failure to bring the French to battle and expecting to be censured.^[198] To his surprise he was given a rapturous reception from crowds who had gathered to view his arrival, while senior British officials congratulated him for sustaining the close pursuit and credited him for saving the West Indies from a French invasion.^[198] Nelson briefly stayed in London, where he was cheered wherever he went, before visiting Merton to see Emma, arriving in late August. He entertained a number of his friends and relations there over the coming month, and began plans for a grand engagement with the enemy fleet, one that



Horatio Nelson, 1st Viscount Nelson

would surprise his foes by forcing a pell-mell battle on them.^[199]

Captain Henry Blackwood arrived at Merton early on 2 September, bringing news that the French and Spanish fleets had combined and were currently at anchor in Cádiz. Nelson hurried to London where he met with cabinet ministers and was given command of the fleet blockading Cádiz. It was while attending one of these meetings on 12 September, with Lord Castlereagh the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, that Nelson and Major General Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, met briefly in a waiting room. Wellington was waiting to be debriefed on his Indian operations, and Nelson on his chase and future plans. Wellington later recalled, 'He (Nelson) entered at once into conversation with me, if I can call it conversation, for it was almost all on his side and all about himself and, in reality, a style so vain and so silly as to surprise and almost disgust me.'^[200] However, after a few minutes Nelson left the room and having been told who his companion was, returned and entered into an earnest and intelligent discussion with the young Wellesley which lasted for a quarter of an hour, on the war, the state of the colonies and the geopolitical situation, that left a marked impression upon Wellesley. This was the only meeting between the two men.

Nelson returned briefly to Merton to set his affairs in order and bid farewell to Emma, before travelling back to London and then on to Portsmouth, arriving there early in the morning of 14 September. He breakfasted at

the George Inn with his friends George Rose, the Vice-President of the Board of Trade, and George Canning, the Treasurer of the Navy. During the breakfast word spread of Nelson's presence at the inn and a large crowd of well wishers gathered. They accompanied Nelson to his barge and cheered him off, which Nelson acknowledged by raising his hat. Nelson was recorded as having turned to his colleague and stated, "I had their huzzas before: I have their hearts now".^{[201][202][203]} Robert Southey reported that of the onlookers for Nelson's walk to the dock, "Many were in tears and many knelt down before him and blessed him as he passed"^[204]

Victory joined the British fleet off Cádiz on 27 September, Nelson taking over from Rear-Admiral Collingwood.^[205] He spent the following weeks preparing and refining his tactics for the anticipated battle and dining with his captains to ensure they understood his intentions.^[206] Nelson had devised a plan of attack that anticipated the allied fleet would form up in a traditional line of battle. Drawing on his own experience from the Nile and Copenhagen, and the examples of Duncan at Camperdown and Rodney at the Saintes, Nelson decided to split his fleet into squadrons rather than forming it into a similar line parallel to the enemy.^[207] These squadrons would then cut the enemy's line in a number of places, allowing a pell-mell battle to develop in which the British ships could overwhelm and destroy parts of their opponents' formation, before the unengaged enemy ships could come to their aid.^[207]

6 Battle of Trafalgar

Main article: [Battle of Trafalgar](#)

6.1 Preparation

The combined French and Spanish fleet under Villeneuve's command numbered 33 ships of the line. Napoleon Bonaparte had intended for Villeneuve to sail into the English Channel and cover the planned invasion of Britain, but the entry of Austria and Russia into the war forced Napoleon to call off the planned invasion and transfer troops to Germany. Villeneuve had been reluctant to risk an engagement with the British, and this reluctance led Napoleon to order Vice-Admiral François Rosily to go to Cádiz and take command of the fleet, sail it into the Mediterranean to land troops at Naples, before making port at Toulon.^[205] Villeneuve decided to sail the fleet out before his successor arrived.^[205] On 20 October 1805 the fleet was sighted making its way out of harbour by patrolling British frigates, and Nelson was informed that they appeared to be heading to the west.^[208]

At four o'clock in the morning of 21 October Nelson ordered the *Victory* to turn towards the approaching enemy



The Battle of Trafalgar by J. M. W. Turner (oil on canvas, 1822–1824) shows the last three letters of the signal, "England expects that every man will do his duty" flying from Victory.

fleet, and signalled the rest of his force to battle stations. He then went below and made his will, before returning to the quarterdeck to carry out an inspection.^[209] Despite having 27 ships to Villeneuve's 33, Nelson was confident of success, declaring that he would not be satisfied with taking fewer than 20 prizes.^[209] He returned briefly to his cabin to write a final prayer, after which he joined *Victory*'s signal lieutenant, John Pasco.

Mr Pasco, I wish to say to the fleet "England confides that every man will do his duty". You must be quick, for I have one more signal to make, which is for close action.^[210]

Pasco suggested changing 'confides' to 'expects', which being in the Signal Book, could be signalled by the use of a single flag, whereas 'confides' would have to spelt out letter by letter. Nelson agreed, and the signal was hoisted.^[210]

As the fleets converged, the *Victory*'s captain, Thomas Hardy suggested that Nelson remove the decorations on his coat, so that he would not be so easily identified by enemy sharpshooters. Nelson replied that it was too late 'to be shifting a coat', adding that they were 'military orders and he did not fear to show them to the enemy'.^[211] Captain Henry Blackwood, of the frigate HMS *Euryalus*, suggested Nelson come aboard his ship to better observe the battle. Nelson refused, and also turned down Hardy's suggestion to let Eliab Harvey's HMS *Temeraire* come ahead of the *Victory* and lead the line into battle.^[211]

6.2 Battle is joined

Victory came under fire, initially passing wide, but then with greater accuracy as the distances decreased. A cannonball struck and killed Nelson's secretary, John Scott, nearly cutting him in two. Hardy's clerk took over, but he too was almost immediately killed. *Victory*'s wheel was shot away, and another cannonball cut down eight

marines. Hardy, standing next to Nelson on the quarterdeck, had his shoe buckle dented by a splinter. Nelson observed 'this is too warm work to last long'.^[212] The *Victory* had by now reached the enemy line, and Hardy asked Nelson which ship to engage first. Nelson told him to take his pick, and Hardy moved *Victory* across the stern of the 80-gun French flagship *Bucentaure*.^[212] *Victory* then came under fire from the 74-gun *Redoutable*, lying off the *Bucentaure*'s stern, and the 130-gun *Santísima Trinidad*. As sharpshooters from the enemy ships fired onto *Victory*'s deck from their rigging, Nelson and Hardy continued to walk about, directing and giving orders.^[212]

6.3 Nelson was shot



Nelson is shot on the quarterdeck, painted by Denis Dighton, c. 1825.

Shortly after one o'clock, Hardy realised that Nelson was not by his side. He turned to see Nelson kneeling on the deck, supporting himself with his hand, before falling onto his side. Hardy rushed to him, at which point Nelson smiled

Hardy, I do believe they have done it at last... my backbone is shot through.^[212]

He had been hit by a marksman from the *Redoutable*, firing at a range of 50 feet (15 m). The bullet had entered his left shoulder, passed through his spine at the sixth and seventh thoracic vertebrae, and lodged two inches (5 cm) below his right shoulder blade in the muscles of his back.

Nelson was carried below by sergeant-major of marines Robert Adair and two seamen. As he was being carried down, he asked them to pause while he gave some advice to a midshipman on the handling of the tiller.^[213] He then draped a handkerchief over his face to avoid causing alarm amongst the crew. He was taken to the surgeon William Beatty, telling him

You can do nothing for me. I have but a short time to live. My back is shot through.^[214]

Nelson was made comfortable, fanned and brought lemonade and watered wine to drink after he complained of feeling hot and thirsty. He asked several times to see Hardy, who was on deck supervising the battle, and asked Beatty to remember him to Emma, his daughter and his friends.^[214]

Hardy came belowdecks to see Nelson just after half-past two, and informed him that a number of enemy ships had surrendered. Nelson told him that he was sure to die, and begged him to pass his possessions to Emma.^[215] With Nelson at this point were the chaplain Alexander Scott, the purser Walter Burke, Nelson's steward, Chevalier, and Beatty. Nelson, fearing that a gale was blowing up, instructed Hardy to be sure to anchor. After reminding him to "take care of poor Lady Hamilton", Nelson said "Kiss me, Hardy".^[215] Beatty recorded that Hardy knelt and kissed Nelson on the cheek. He then stood for a minute or two before kissing him on the forehead. Nelson asked, "Who is that?", and on hearing that it was Hardy, he replied "God bless you, Hardy."^[215] By now very weak, Nelson continued to murmur instructions to Burke and Scott, "fan, fan ... rub, rub ... drink, drink." Beatty heard Nelson murmur, "Thank God I have done my duty", and when he returned, Nelson's voice had faded and his pulse was very weak.^[215] He looked up as Beatty took his pulse, then closed his eyes. Scott, who remained by Nelson as he died, recorded his last words as "God and my country".^[216] Nelson died at half-past four, three hours after he had been shot.^[215]



The Death of Nelson by *Daniel Maclise* (Houses of Parliament, London)

7 Return to England

Nelson's body was placed in a cask of brandy mixed with camphor and myrrh, which was then lashed to the *Victory*'s mainmast and placed under guard.^[217] *Victory* was towed to Gibraltar after the battle, and on arrival the body was transferred to a lead-lined coffin filled with spirits of wine.^[217] Collingwood's dispatches about the battle were carried to England aboard *HMS Pickle*, and when the news arrived in London, a messenger was sent to Merton Place to bring the news of Nelson's death to Emma Hamilton. She later recalled,

They brought me word, Mr Whitby from the Admiralty. "Show him in directly", I said. He came in, and with a pale countenance and faint voice, said, "We have gained a great Victory." – "Never mind your Victory", I said.

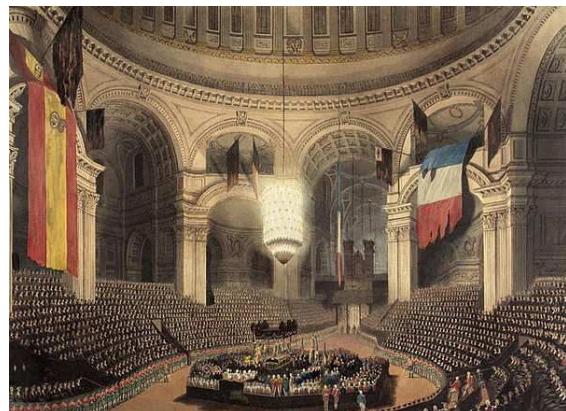
"My letters – give me my letters" – Captain Whitby was unable to speak – tears in his eyes and a deathly paleness over his face made me comprehend him. I believe I gave a scream and fell back, and for ten hours I could neither speak nor shed a tear.^[218]

King George III, on receiving the news, is alleged to have said, in tears, "We have lost more than we have gained."^[219] *The Times* reported

We do not know whether we should mourn or rejoice. The country has gained the most splendid and decisive Victory that has ever graced the naval annals of England; but it has been dearly purchased.^[219]

The first tribute to Nelson was fittingly offered at sea by sailors of Vice-Admiral Dmitry Senyavin's passing Russian squadron, which saluted on learning of the death.^[220]

8 Funeral



Nelson's coffin in the crossing of St Paul's during the funeral service, with the dome hung with captured French and Spanish flags.

Nelson's body was unloaded from the *Victory* at the Nore. It was conveyed upriver in Commander Grey's yacht *Chatham* to Greenwich and placed in a lead coffin, and that in another wooden one, made from the mast of *L'Orient* which had been salvaged after the Battle of the Nile. He lay in state in the Painted Hall at Greenwich for three days, before being taken upriver aboard a barge, accompanied by Lord Hood, chief mourner Sir Peter Parker, and the Prince of Wales.^[221] The Prince of Wales at first announced his intention to attend the funeral as chief mourner, but later attended in a private capacity with his brothers when his father George III reminded him that it was against protocol for the Heir to the Throne to attend the funerals of anyone except members of the Royal Family.^[222] The coffin was taken into the Admiralty for the night, attended by Nelson's chaplain,

Alexander Scott.^[221] The next day, 9 January, a funeral procession consisting of 32 admirals, over a hundred captains, and an escort of 10,000 soldiers took the coffin from the Admiralty to St Paul's Cathedral. After a four-hour service he was interred within a sarcophagus originally carved for Cardinal Wolsey.^[223] The sailors charged with folding the flag draping Nelson's coffin and placing it in the grave instead tore it into fragments, with each taking a piece as a memento.^[224]

9 Assessment



Scott Pierre Nicolas Legrand's Apotheosis of Nelson, c. 1805–18. Nelson ascends into immortality as the Battle of Trafalgar rages in the background. He is supported by Neptune, whilst Fame holds a crown of stars as a symbol of immortality over Nelson's head. A grieving Britannia holds out her arms, whilst Hercules, Mars, Minerva and Jupiter look on.

Nelson was regarded as a highly effective leader, and someone who was able to sympathise with the needs of his men. He based his command on love rather than authority, inspiring both his superiors and his subordinates with his considerable courage, commitment and charisma, dubbed 'the Nelson touch'.^{[225][226]} Nelson combined this talent with an adept grasp of strategy and politics, making him a highly successful naval commander. However, Nelson's personality was complex, often characterised by a desire to be noticed, both by his superiors, and the public. He was easily flattered by praise, and dismayed when he felt he was not given sufficient credit for his actions.^[227] This led him to take risks, and to enthusiastically publicise his resultant successes.^[228] Nelson was also highly confident in his abilities, determined and able to make important decisions.^[229] His ac-

tive career meant that he was considerably experienced in combat, and was a shrewd judge of his opponents, able to identify and exploit his enemies' weaknesses.^[225] He was often prone to insecurities however, as well as violent mood swings,^[230] and was extremely vain: he loved to receive decorations, tributes and praise.^[231] Despite his personality, he remained a highly professional leader and was driven all his life by a strong sense of duty.^[230] Nelson's fame reached new heights after his death, and he came to be regarded as one of Britain's greatest military heroes, ranked alongside the Duke of Marlborough and the Duke of Wellington.^[232] In the BBC's *100 Greatest Britons* programme in 2002, Nelson was voted the ninth greatest Briton of all time.^[233]

Aspects of Nelson's life and career were controversial, both during his lifetime and after his death. His affair with Emma Hamilton was widely remarked upon and disapproved of, to the extent that Emma was denied permission to attend Nelson's funeral and was subsequently ignored by the government, which awarded money and titles to Nelson's legitimate family.^[234] Nelson's actions during the reoccupation of Naples have also been the subject of debate: his approval of the wave of reprisals against the Jacobins who had surrendered under the terms agreed by Cardinal Ruffo, and his personal intervention in securing the execution of Caracciolo, are considered by some biographers, such as Robert Southey, to have been a shameful breach of honour. Prominent contemporary politician Charles James Fox was among those who attacked Nelson for his actions at Naples, declaring in the House of Commons

I wish that the atrocities of which we hear so much and which I abhor as much as any man, were indeed unexampled. I fear that they do not belong exclusively to the French ... Naples for instance has been what is called "delivered", and yet, if I am rightly informed, it has been stained and polluted by murders so ferocious, and by cruelties of every kind so abhorrent, that the heart shudders at the recital ... [The besieged rebels] demanded that a British officer should be brought forward, and to him they capitulated. They made terms with him under the sanction of the British name ... Before they sailed their property was confiscated, numbers ... were thrown into dungeons, and some of them, I understand, notwithstanding the British guarantee, were actually executed.^[235]

Other pro-republican writers produced books and pamphlets decrying the events in Naples as atrocities.^[236] Later assessments, including one by Andrew Lambert, have stressed that the armistice had not been authorised by the King of Naples, and that the retribution meted out by the Neapolitans was not unusual for the time. Lambert also suggests that Nelson in fact acted to put an end to the

bloodshed, using his ships and men to restore order in the city.^[236]

9.1 Legacy

Main articles: Legacy of Horatio Nelson, 1st Viscount Nelson and Monuments and memorials to Horatio Nelson, 1st Viscount Nelson

See also: List of places named after Horatio Nelson, HMS Lord Nelson and HMS Nelson

Nelson's influence continued long after his death, and



Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square, London

saw periodic revivals of interest, especially during times of crisis in Britain. In the 1860s Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson appealed to the image and tradition of Nelson, in order to oppose the defence cuts being made by Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone.^[237] First Sea Lord Jackie Fisher was a keen exponent of Nelson during the early years of the twentieth century, and often emphasised his legacy during his period of naval reform.^[238] Winston Churchill also found Nelson to be a source of inspiration during the Second World War.^[239] Nelson has been frequently depicted in art and literature; he appeared in paintings by Benjamin West and Arthur William Devis, and in books and biographies by John McArthur, James Stanier Clarke and Robert Southey.^[240] Nelson is also

celebrated and commemorated numerous songs, written both during his life and following his death. Nelson's victory in the Battle of the Nile is commemorated in "The Battle of the Nile : a favorite patriotic song."^[241] Thomas Attwood's "Nelson's Tomb : a Favourite Song" commemorates Nelson's death in the Battle of Trafalgar.^[242]

A number of monuments and memorials were constructed across the country, and abroad, to honour his memory and achievements, with work beginning on Dublin's monument to Nelson, Nelson's Pillar, in 1808, subsequently destroyed in 1966.^[243] In Montreal, a statue was started in 1808 and completed in 1809.^[244] Others followed around the world, with London's Trafalgar Square being created in his memory in 1835 and the centrepiece, Nelson's Column, finished in 1843.^[245] A Royal Society of Arts blue plaque was unveiled in 1876 to commemorate Nelson at 147 New Bond Street.^[246]

10 Titles

Nelson's titles, as inscribed on his coffin and read out at the funeral by the Garter King at Arms, Sir Isaac Heard, were:

The Most Noble Lord Horatio Nelson, Viscount and Baron Nelson, of the Nile and of Burnham Thorpe in the County of Norfolk, Baron Nelson of the Nile and of Hilborough in the said County, Knight of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Vice Admiral of the White Squadron of the Fleet, Commander in Chief of his Majesty's Ships and Vessels in the Mediterranean, Duke of Bronté in the Kingdom of Sicily, Knight Grand Cross of the Sicilian Order of St Ferdinand and of Merit, Member of the Ottoman Order of the Crescent, Knight Grand Commander of the Order of St Joachim.^[247]

He was a Colonel of the Royal Marines and voted a Freeman of Bath, Salisbury, Exeter, Plymouth, Monmouth, Sandwich, Oxford, Hereford, and Worcester.^[248] The University of Oxford, in full Congregation, bestowed the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law upon Nelson in 1802.^[249]

In July 1799, Nelson was created Duke of Bronté (*Duca di Bronté*), of the Kingdom of Sicily (after 1816, existing in the nobility of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies), by the King Ferdinand, and after briefly experimenting with the signature "Brontë Nelson of the Nile" signed himself "Nelson & Brontë" for the rest of his life.^[250] Nelson had no legitimate children; his daughter, Horatia, subsequently married the Rev. Philip Ward, with whom she had ten children before her death in 1881.^[251] Because Lord Nelson died without legitimate issue, his viscountcy and his barony created in 1798, both "of the Nile and of

Burnham Thorpe in the County of Norfolk”, became extinct upon his death.^[252] However, the barony created in 1801, “of the Nile and of Hilborough in the County of Norfolk”, passed by a special remainder, which included Lord Nelson’s father and sisters and their male issue, to Lord Nelson’s brother, **The Reverend William Nelson**. William Nelson was created **Earl Nelson** and **Viscount Merton** of Trafalgar and Merton in the County of Surrey in recognition of his brother’s services, and also inherited the **Dukedom of Bronté**.^[253]

10.1 Armorial bearings

Arms were originally granted and confirmed on 20 October 1797. The original Nelson family arms were altered to accommodate his naval victories. After the Battle of Cape St Vincent in 1797, Nelson was dubbed a **Knight of the Bath** and granted heraldic supporters of a sailor and a **lion**.^[254] In honour of the Battle of the Nile of 1798, the Crown granted him an **augmentation of arms** that may be **blazoned** “on a chief wavy argent a palm tree between a disabled ship and a ruinous battery all issuant from waves of the sea all proper”, the motto, “*Palmam qui meruit ferat*” (“let him who has earned it, bear the palm”, Latin), and added to his supporters a palm branch in the hand of the sailor and the paw of the lion, and a “tri-colored flag and staff in the mouth of the latter”^[255] [256] After his death, his older brother and heir was granted the augmentation “on a fess wavy overall azure the word **TRAFalGAR Or**”.^[257]

- Original Nelson Family arms (“Or, a cross flory sable, over all a bendlet gules”, bendlet last not shown here) and the final version with all augmentations.^[1]
- Arms of Viscount Nelson, and the later Earls Nelson (sans augmentation)
- Contemporary drawing depicting the arms of Admiral Nelson before Trafalgar.^[1]

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11 See also

- Bibliography of 18th-19th century Royal Naval history
- Turning a blind eye

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13 Notes

- [1] The spelling of the name was widely varied, and numerous versions exist even in the current literature. Variations include *Hinchinbroke*, *Hinchinbrooke*, *Hinchibroke*, *Hinchinbrook* and *Hinchingbrooke*.

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15 Further reading

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- The Volcano Lover, a novel by Susan Sontag, features Nelson prominently as a partially fictionalized character.
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16 External links

- Hansard 1803–2005: contributions in Parliament by the Viscount Nelson
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- The Nelson Society
- Norfolk Nelson Museum
- Original Letters Written by Horatio Nelson Shapell Manuscript Foundation
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