

= John Benbow =

John Benbow ( 10 March 1653 ? 4 November 1702 ) was an English officer in the Royal Navy . He joined the navy aged 25 years , seeing action against Algerian pirates before leaving and joining the merchant navy where he traded until the Glorious Revolution of 1688 , whereupon he returned to the Royal Navy and was commissioned .

Benbow fought against France during the Nine Years War ( 1688 ? 97 ) , serving on and later commanding several English vessels and taking part in the battles of Beachy Head , Barfleur and La Hogue in 1690 and 1692 . He went on to achieve fame during campaigns against Salé and Moor pirates ; laying siege to Saint @-@ Malo ; and fighting in the West Indies against France during the War of the Spanish Succession ( 1701 ? 1714 ) .

Benbow 's fame and success earned him both public notoriety and a promotion to admiral . He was then involved in an incident during the Action of August 1702 , where a number of his captains refused to support him while commanding a squadron of ships . Benbow instigated the trial and later imprisonment or execution of a number of the captains involved , though he did not live to see these results . These events contributed to his notoriety , and led to several references to him in subsequent popular culture .

= = Family and early years = =

Benbow was born the son of William and Martha Benbow . The astrologer John Partridge recorded the exact time and date of his birth as being at noon on 10 March 1653 , and this is the date used by the National Museum of the Royal Navy , the Encyclopædia Britannica , and the local historical accounts of Joseph Nightingale published in 1818 . A biography within an 1819 publication of The Gentleman 's Magazine , however , records in a short biography entitled Life and Exploits of Admiral Benbow by D. Parkes that he was born in 1650 , as does the 1861 Sea kings and naval heroes by John George Edgar . Edgar records that Benbow 's father died when Benbow was very young , while Parkes ' account describes his father as being in the service of the Army under Charles I and not dying until Benbow was in his teens . Encyclopædia Britannica writes that Benbow 's father was in fact a tanner . Meanwhile , his uncle , Thomas , was executed by Charles I. Both Parkes and the National Museum of the Royal Navy concur that Benbow was born in Coton Hill in Shrewsbury , Shropshire , and Nightingale asserts that the death of both uncle and father , and the family 's association with Charles I in the years following his execution , ensured that the " family were brought very low . " Benbow 's lack of possessions , Nightingale writes , turned him to a career at sea .

= = Naval career = =

= = = Early years = = =

Benbow entered the Royal Navy on 30 April 1678 , aged 25 years . He became master 's mate aboard the 64 @-@ gun HMS Rupert under the command of Captain Arthur Herbert , whilst she was fitting out at Portsmouth . He sailed with her to the Mediterranean , where Herbert was promoted to the rank of vice @-@ admiral whilst serving under the commander @-@ in @-@ chief in the Mediterranean , Admiral Sir John Narborough . During this period the English fleet was often in action against the Barbary pirates of North Africa that were actively preying upon European shipping . The Rupert herself captured an Algerine warship in 1678 , which was later commissioned in the Royal Navy as the HMS Tiger Prize . Benbow distinguished himself well in a number of actions against the Algerine vessels , and won Herbert 's approval . On Narborough 's return to England , Herbert was appointed acting commander @-@ in @-@ chief , and made Benbow master aboard HMS Nonsuch on 15 June 1679 . The Nonsuch would remain at Tangiers and off the African coast and had a number of successive captains who would go on to achieve flag rank , including

George Rooke , Cloudesley Shovell and Francis Wheler . All were impressed by Benbow , and would afterwards help to advance his career .

The Nonsuch was next in action on 8 August 1681 , this time against the Algerine warship , the Golden Horse . The Golden Horse had been engaged by HMS Adventure , under the command of Captain William Booth , and when the Nonsuch arrived on the scene the Golden Horse surrendered . A dispute then arose over the question of the prize money and how it should be shared out , and comments were made amongst the Nonsuch 's crew against those of the Adventure . Benbow 's repetition of these eventually came to Booth 's knowledge , and the captain brought a court @-@ martial against Benbow , however this revealed that Benbow had only been repeating these words rather than being their originator . Benbow was ordered to forfeit three months ' pay , amounting to £ 12 15s . , to the Adventure 's crew , and to " ask Captain Booth 's pardon on board His Majesty 's ship Bristol , declaring that he had no malicious intent in speaking those words ; all the commanders being present , and a boat 's crew of each ship 's company " .

= = = Merchant trading = = =

The Nonsuch then returned to England and was paid off on 9 November 1681 . Benbow left the Navy and entered the merchant service , sailing a merchant vessel from London and Bristol to ports in Italy and Spain . By 1686 he was a " tough merchant seaman " and the owner and commander of a frigate named the Benbow , trading with the Levant . In May 1687 he commanded a merchant vessel , the Malaga Merchant , and was aboard her when she was attacked by a Salé pirate . He mounted a successful defence and beat off the attack . It was claimed afterwards that he cut off and salted the heads of thirteen Moors who were slain aboard his ship , and then took them into Cadiz to claim a reward from the magistrates . A Moorish skull @-@ cap , " coated with varnish and set in silver " and bearing the inscription " First adventure of Captain John Benbow , and gift to Richard Ridley , 1687 " is referred to in 1844 by Charles Dickens in Bentley 's Miscellany where he speaks of Shrewsbury 's history , and the 1885 Dictionary of National Biography also relates the story .

= = = Return to the Navy = = =

Benbow only returned to the Navy after the Glorious Revolution in 1688 . His first recorded commission was to the post of third lieutenant of HMS Elizabeth on 1 June 1689 , under the command of Captain David Mitchell . His first command came on 20 September of that year , when he was appointed captain of HMS York . He was transferred to HMS Bonaventure on 26 October and then to HMS Britannia on 12 November .

Benbow 's next post was as Master Attendant of Chatham Dockyard . He then moved to become Master Attendant at Deptford Dockyard in early March 1690 , a post he intermittently held for the next six years . He was master of HMS Sovereign in summer 1690 , under his old commander Arthur Herbert , now Lord Torrington . He was assigned to act as master of the fleet , and took part in the English defeat in the Battle of Beachy Head . After the defeat , a Royal Commission was held into the circumstances that led to it . Benbow was highly regarded as a specialist in both navigation and pilotage , and his evidence given in July 1690 to the preliminary investigation strongly favoured his old patron , Torrington . He did not however testify during Torrington 's court @-@ martial in December that year .

Benbow continued aboard the Sovereign throughout 1691 , and by the summer of 1692 , was again master of the fleet , this time under Admiral Edward Russell , then aboard the Britannia . Benbow worked closely with his old colleague David Mitchell , then serving as Russell 's first captain , and Josiah Burchett , Russell 's clerk . Benbow may have advised Russell to take the Gull Passage inside the Goodwin Sands to the Downs , where they linked up with the Dutch forces . Benbow served as master of the fleet during the Battles of Barfleur and La Hogue . After the battles , Benbow returned to Deptford to resume his duties as master attendant , spending a brief period at Portsmouth Dockyard helping to oversee repairs to the fleet . He had already had his pay upgraded to that of a master attendant , he was now to be paid as a master , in addition to his master

attendant 's wage , presumably as an acknowledgement of his special services .

= = = With the bomb flotillas = = =

Benbow returned to active naval service in September 1693 , joining Thomas Phillips , the second engineer of the ordnance , in jointly commanding a flotilla of bomb vessels to attack Saint @-@ Malo . Benbow went aboard the 48 @-@ gun HMS Norwich and began the bombardment on 16 November . It continued intermittently until 19 November when a large fireship was sent into the harbour . An attempt was made to bring her alongside the town walls , but she ran aground , was set on fire , and exploded . Despite the failure of the initial plan , considerable damage was done , and Benbow 's forces were able to take the fort on Quince Rock and disabled it , carrying artillery and prisoners away and bringing them to Guernsey . Benbow was still dissatisfied with the overall result and initiated a court @-@ martial against Captain Henry Tourville , accusing him of cowardice for not bringing his ship in closer . There was no conviction though , as the mortars were proved to be defective .

Benbow 's experience led to him being promoted to a similar flotilla , this time to be deployed against Dunkirk under the command of Vice @-@ Admiral Shovell . A number of converted merchant vessels , rigged like fireships but designed to explode rather than burn , were assigned to support the expedition . Benbow had a hand in preparing these vessels for the operation throughout 1694 , and worked closely with the principal storekeeper of the ordnance , Willem Meesters . Benbow 's attacking fleet was covered by Shovell 's fleet on the Downs and the attack was planned for 12 and 13 September . However , the French were able to block the entrance to the port , preventing Benbow 's squadron from entering , and a storm further disrupted operations . Benbow drew back from Dunkirk , and instead sailed around to Calais , where he carried out a further bombardment on 27 September . He returned to the Downs and then resumed his duties at Deptford Dockyard . He spent December organising a convoy for a fleet of merchant vessels due to sail to Cadiz .

= = = Rise to admiral = = =

Benbow was soon at sea again in March 1695 , being appointed commander @-@ in @-@ chief of His Majesty 's ships which were then off the coast of France . His squadron was highly successful , taking a number of French merchants in early April and bringing them to England as prizes . Benbow was recommended by Lord Berkeley , who had served with Benbow at Saint @-@ Malo , to be promoted to rear @-@ admiral at the next opportunity , and in the meantime he was appointed to the command of the 70 @-@ gun HMS Northumberland . He was soon joined by a volunteer ? his then fourteen @-@ year @-@ old son ? also named John Benbow . Benbow then sailed with Berkeley and the Dutch lieutenant @-@ admiral Philips van Almonde to Saint @-@ Malo , intending to operate against privateering operations being conducted from the area . Benbow moved to command HMS Charles Galley , to direct the inshore operations of ten English and Dutch warships , nine English bomb vessels , and seventeen small boats and vessels . They began operations on their arrival off Saint @-@ Malo on 4 July , remaining in action until evening the next day when they withdrew , without having achieved any decisive result . Several houses had been destroyed for the damage and loss of a few of the bomb vessels . Benbow was given eight bomb vessels and seven or eight frigates and was dispatched down the coast . He attacked Granville on 8 July , shelling it with over 900 bombs over several hours , and departed having set the town ablaze .

= = = Public and private reception = = =

The outcome of the operations had left Benbow in a tense relationship with his immediate superiors . Berkeley had been accused of excessive timidity in his actions , which it was believed had led to the failure of the attack on Dunkirk . Benbow on the other hand was widely lauded for his fearless inshore attacks with his bomb vessels . Berkeley wrote on 28 July :

As to Captain Benbow , I know of no difference between him and me , nor have we had any . He has no small obligation to me , but being called in some of the foolish printed papers ? the famous Captain Benbow ? , I suppose has put him a little out of himself , and has made him play the fool , as I guess , in some of his letters . I will not farther now particularize this business , but time will show I have not been in the wrong , unless being too kind to an ungrateful man .

However the Admiralty approved of Benbow 's conduct and ordered him " to be paid as Rear @-@ Admiral during the time he has been employed this summer on the coast of France ... as a reward for his good service . " Benbow was then appointed to the grand committee of sixty men to oversee the plans for Greenwich Hospital in December 1695 , but the issue dragged on until 1 May 1696 . The Admiralty again stepped in and Benbow was finally promoted and appointed commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the squadron before Dunkirk as " Rear @-@ Admiral of the Blue for the duration of this present expedition " and moved aboard the 70 @-@ gun HMS Suffolk . His orders were to protect English and Dutch shipping , especially from the squadron of the privateer Jean Bart. Bart was mostly successful in evading pursuit however , usually escaping into Dunkirk when Benbow 's force drew near .

Benbow was appointed to command a squadron in the Soundings in December 1696 . He carried out a number of cruises between March and August 1697 , protecting allied trade and escorting the West Indian and Virginian merchant fleets into port . These activities marked the last English naval expedition of the war . He also carried out reconnaissance activities on the French fleet in port in Brest in July , before resuming patrol operations off Dunkirk , this time in concert with a number of Dutch ships under Rear @-@ Admiral Philips van der Goes , until the end of the war in September 1697 .

= = = Appointment to the West Indies = = =

Benbow was made commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the King 's ships in the West Indies on 9 March 1698 and instructed to tackle the issue of piracy . He sailed in November , the first leg taking him from Portsmouth to Madeira . Sailing under his protection from the Salé pirates was the Paramore , under Edmond Halley , then sailing to the North Atlantic to carry out experiments to observe magnetic variations . Benbow finally reached Barbados in February 1699 , and moved to the Spanish Main aboard his flagship , the 60 @-@ gun HMS Gloucester . He threatened the governor of Cartagena with a blockade , and so compelled him to restore two English merchant ships that he had detained . These ships had been intended to take part in an expedition against the Scottish Darién scheme . Without the ships , this became impossible and the colonists were saved for the time being . This was counter to the English government 's desire to see the end of the Scottish colonising efforts , and in June Benbow and the other West Indies governors received orders " not to assist the Scotch colony in Darien . "

Benbow then sailed as far north as Newfoundland in order to drive the pirates away , but they evaded capture . Benbow returned to England in the summer of 1700 , and was appointed to the command of a fleet in the Downs . Benbow served there until summer 1701 , under the command of Admiral Sir George Rooke . He was promoted to rear @-@ admiral of the red on 14 April , followed by vice @-@ admiral of the blue on 30 June . He then flew his flag in the 70 @-@ gun HMS Breda .

= = = Spanish treasure fleet , West Indies , the Action of 1702 = = =

With the peace becoming increasingly uneasy , the English government became concerned over the possible fate of the Spanish silver fleet , due to arrive in European waters from America . They were worried that the French would intercept the ships and use the treasure for war preparations . Benbow was issued secret instructions to find the fleet , and then " to seize and bring them to England , taking care that no embezzlement be made " . Benbow 's squadron was detached on 2 September and sailed for the West Indies , arriving on 14 November , and was at the Jamaica station in mid @-@ December . He remained there for several months , being joined on 8 May 1702 by several vessels under Captain William Whetstone . Whetstone was made Rear @-@ Admiral

under Benbow , who had been promoted to Vice @-@ Admiral of the White on 19 January 1702

By now , the War of the Spanish Succession had broken out , and news of its declaration reached Benbow on 7 July . He detached Whetstone and six ships to search off Port St Louis in Hispaniola for a French squadron under Admiral Jean du Casse , which he believed would call at the port on his voyage to Cartagena , and from there he might raid English and Dutch shipping . After Whetstone had left , Benbow took his squadron and sailed for Cartagena , anticipating that either he or Whetstone would find Du Casse and bring him to battle .

By the time that Whetstone had reached Hispaniola , Du Casse had already departed . Benbow 's force subsequently sighted the French on 19 August , sailing off Cape Santa Marta . The French had three transports and four warships carrying between 68 and 70 guns , while Benbow commanded seven ships carrying between 50 and 70 guns . The English forces were heavily scattered , and the light winds meant that they were slow to regroup . They did not achieve a form of collective order until four in the afternoon , after which a partial engagement was fought , lasting about two hours , until nightfall caused the fleets to temporarily break off .

The action quickly revealed a breakdown in discipline amongst Benbow 's captains . He had intended that the 64 @-@ gun HMS Defiance under Captain Richard Kirkby would lead the line of battle , but Kirkby was not maintaining his station . Benbow decided to take the lead himself , and the Breda pulled ahead , followed by the 50 @-@ gun HMS Ruby under Captain George Walton . The two maintained contact with the French throughout the night , but the other five ships refused to close . The chase ensued until 24 August , with only Benbow , Walton , and Samuel Vincent aboard HMS Falmouth making active efforts to bring the French to battle . At times , they bore the brunt of the fire of the entire squadron . The Ruby was disabled on 23 August , and Benbow ordered her to retire to Port Royal . The French resumed the action at two in the morning on 24 August , the entire squadron closing on the Breda from astern and pounding her . Benbow himself was hit by a chain @-@ shot that broke his leg and he was carried below .

Benbow was determined to continue the pursuit , despite his wounds and despite Captain Kirkby 's arrival on board , attempting to persuade Benbow to abandon the pursuit . Benbow summoned a council of war , and the other captains agreed , signing a paper drafted by Kirkby which declared that they believed " that after six days of battle the squadron lacked enough men to continue and that there was little chance of a decisive action , since the men were exhausted , there was a general lack of ammunition , the ships ' rigging and masts were badly damaged , and the winds were generally variable and undependable . " They recommended breaking off the action and following the French to see if the situation improved . Benbow had " seen the cowardly behaviour of some of them before , [ and ] had reason to believe that they either had a design against him or to be traitors to their country if an opportunity happened that the French could have destroyed the Admiral " . He , therefore , ordered the squadron to return to Jamaica . On their arrival , he ordered the captains to be imprisoned , awaiting a trial by court @-@ martial .

Benbow received a letter from du Casse after the engagement :

Sir ,

I had little hopes on Monday last but to have supped in your cabin : but it pleased God to order it otherwise . I am thankful for it . As for those cowardly captains who deserted you , hang them up , for by God they deserve it .

Yours ,

Du Casse .

= = = Trial of the captains = = =

Acting Rear @-@ Admiral Whetstone returned to Port Royal , having spent 62 days cruising off Hispaniola , and preparations were made for the trial . Before it could begin , Captain Thomas Hudson died , who had commanded HMS Pendennis . The remaining captains appeared at the court @-@ martial which convened on the Breda , held between 19 and 23 October . Due to his injuries , Benbow passed to Whetstone the role of presiding over the court , but he was present at the trial . The court found Captain Kirkby of the HMS Defiance and Cooper Wade of the Greenwich

guilty of breach of orders , neglect of duty , and the " ill signed paper and consultation ... which obliged the Admiral ... to give over the chase and fight " , and condemned them to be shot .

John Constable of HMS Windsor was found guilty of breach of orders and drunkenness and was cashiered . Samuel Vincent of the Falmouth and Christopher Fogg of the Breda were initially sentenced to be cashiered for signing the six captains ' resolution , but Benbow personally declared that they had fought bravely , and their sentences were remitted by the Lord High Admiral . The sentences were deferred so that Queen Anne could have a chance to examine the proceedings . After her consideration in January 1703 , she allowed the sentences to proceed and Constable , Kirkby , and Wade were returned to England as prisoners . Constable was imprisoned until 1704 , when the Queen pardoned him . Kirkby and Wade were shot aboard HMS Bristol on 16 April 1703 while she was anchored in Plymouth Sound under Captain Edward Acton . Controversy slowly began to develop over the events of August 1702 . Supporters of the disgraced Kirkby and Wade sought to discredit Benbow by publishing their own account of the action .

= = Death and burial = =

Benbow died at Port Royal , Kingston , Jamaica on 4 November 1702 . Whetstone reported that the cause of death was " the wound of his leg which he received in battle with Monsieur Du Casse , it never being set to perfection , which malady being aggravated by the discontent of his mind , threw him into a sort of melancholy which ended his life as before . " He was buried on 16 November in the chancel of St Andrew 's Church , Kingston . A marble slab was later laid over the grave , emblazoned with a coat of arms and inscribed :

Here lyeth the Body of John Benbow , Esq . , Admiral of the White , a true pattern of English Courage , who lost his life in Defence of his Queene & Country , November the 4th , 1702 , In the 52nd year of his age , by a wound in his Legg . Received in an Engagement with Monsr . Du Casse ; being Much Lamented .

Secretary of State Lord Nottingham wrote to Benbow in January 1703 , before news of his death had reached London , to inform him that the queen was " extremely well pleased with your conduct and much offended with the baseness of those officers who deserted and betrayed you . " Meanwhile , the cabinet was preparing to promote him to vice @-@ admiral of the white and to dispatch him to transport troops to Newfoundland .

= = Personal life and legacy = =

Benbow married a woman named Martha ( died 1722 ) after his return to England in 1681 . The couple had at least seven children , including daughter Martha and sons Richard and John . Another son Solomon was baptised in 1686 but died in infancy . There are also records of two more sons named Richard who were born in Kent , and another daughter named Katherine . Son John went on to serve in the Royal Navy . The family lived in the parish of St Dunstan and All Saints , Stepney . In 1709 , Katherine married Paul Calton of Milton , Berkshire , where Benbow is said to have stayed in the 1690s .

= = = Unruly behaviour = = =

Benbow signed a three @-@ year lease on Sayes Court in June 1696 , a house belonging to diarist John Evelyn . Six months later , Evelyn wrote to a friend complaining , " I have let my house to Captain Benbow , and have the mortification of seeing everyday much of my former labours and expenses there impairing for want of a more polite tenant . " In January 1698 , Tsar Peter of Russia arrived in London to study British shipbuilding and seamanship . He and his entourage were provided with Sayes Court to reside in during their stay by William III . The Russians spent three months in London before leaving to tour the country . Benbow promptly asked for reparations from the Treasury , in order to be able to reimburse Evelyn and recover his own losses . He complained that the Russians had caused considerable damage to his house , with " much of the furniture broke

, lost or destroyed " . Christopher Wren was instructed to survey the property and declared it " entirely ruined " . Benbow lost " twenty fine paintings " and " several fine draughts and other designs relating to the Sea " from his personal property . The Treasury eventually allowed payment of £ 350 9s . 6d. in compensation .

== = " Brave Benbow " == =

Benbow 's fame led to his name entering popular culture . A monument by sculptor John Evan Thomas was erected in 1843 by public subscription in St Mary 's Church , Shrewsbury commemorating Benbow as " a skillful and daring seaman whose heroic exploits long rendered him the boast of the British Navy and still point him out as the Nelson of his times . " A 74 @-@ gun ship of the line and two battleships were named HMS Benbow .

Robert Louis Stevenson named a tavern the " Admiral Benbow " , where Jim Hawkins and his mother live , in his romantic adventure novel Treasure Island . He also titled the first chapter " The Old Sea Dog at the Admiral Benbow " . There are a number of real life Admiral Benbow public houses around the world , and other institutions have also borne his name .

The incident of August 1702 also took hold on the popular imagination , and was celebrated in an alehouse song :

Its musical theme forms one of the three arrangements on which English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams based his Sea Songs , originally arranged for military band in 1923 as the second movement of his English Folk Song Suite , and subsequently re @-@ arranged for full orchestra in 1942 by the composer .

Another song has survived from the period with different air and rhythm but also known as Admiral Benbow , and it is often sung by folksingers . It begins We sailed from Virginia and thence to Fayal .

= = In popular culture = =

Captain Benbow is prominently mentioned in " Down by the Sea " , the last song on Business as Usual , the 1981 album by Australian rock group Men at Work .

The pub in the novel Treasure Island by R.L. Stevenson is named after him .

Admiral Benbow , ostensibly in the context of a pub , is also mentioned in the 1983 song " Get Out of London " by English new wave duo Intaferon .

== = Specific == =

== = General == =