

## FAIRFORD HISTORY SOCIETY OCCASIONAL PAPER - 1

### COMMANDER CHARLES HAULTAIN, RN, KH (1787-1845)

Close to the graveyard wall, near the southern porch of St Mary's Church is the plain and unostentatious tomb of Commander Charles Haultain, Royal Navy. Local rumour has it that Commander Haultain had taken part in Nelson's famous victory at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Although this is not true, Charles Haultain did have a long and distinguished naval career and has a special place in the history of the Royal Navy.



Charles Haultain was born in London in December 1787, the eldest son of Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Haultain of Worcester who had seen much active service on the Continent with the 37<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot. Charles joined the Royal Navy as an Able Seaman on 2 January 1800 and served first on board HMS *Agincourt*, a 64-gun frigate that saw duty off Newfoundland, and in the North Sea and as a troopship to Egypt. The war with France and Spain under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte dominated the early part of Haultain's career. By 1801 Charles had been promoted to the rank of Midshipman and spent two years in the Mediterranean sailing on the sloops HMS *Bonne Citoyenne* and HMS *Vincejo*, both captured enemy ships. On 14 September 1803, now serving on HMS *Cerberus*, he took part in the naval bombardment of Granville on the Cotentin Peninsula of northern France.



Admiral Sir Robert Calder's Action off Cape Finisterre  
by William Anderson (© National Maritime Museum)

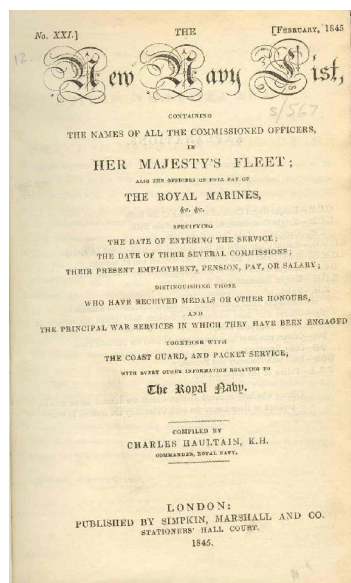
During the next two years Charles Haultain served successively on HMS *Speedwell*, *Thisbe*, *Glory* and *Ocean*. He was serving on board the 98-gun HMS *Glory*, the flagship of Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Stirling, during an action on 22 July 1805. A large Franco-Spanish fleet had evaded Nelson in the Atlantic for some weeks but a British squadron under Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Calder discovered and engaged the enemy fleet 100 miles off Cape Finisterre. The British Squadron succeeded in capturing two Spanish ships but the bulk of the enemy fleet escaped to regroup for the final battle at Trafalgar that would take place three months later.

On 26 April 1806 Charles Haultain was promoted to Lieutenant and was serving on board the 98-gun HMS *Prince* at this time. For the next three years he took part in blockading patrols off the coasts of France and Spain on board HMS *Prince*, *Queen* and *Excellent*. In 1809 he became the Senior Lieutenant of HMS *Decade*, a 36-gun captured French frigate which was based on the Irish station. Later the same year he transferred to another frigate, HMS *Active*, and proceeded to the Adriatic Sea. On 29 June 1810 Lieutenant Haultain, commanding HMS *Active's* launch, played a major role in the capture of a convoy of 24 French supply vessels near the Italian port at Grado. He later took part in several small boat actions but returned sick to England in October 1811.

Haultain was next appointed to the 2,457-ton HMS *San Josef* on 3 September 1811. Yet another former enemy ship, the *San Josef* had been captured by Nelson at the Battle of Cape St Vincent and with 112 cannons was the largest and most powerful ship that Haultain served on during his career. On 23 May 1812 he transferred to the 74-gun HMS *Egmont* in which he took part in the escort of a Russian fleet from the Baltic to England. In June 1813 Haultain volunteered for duty with Captain Arthur Farquhar's squadron which was charged with clearing

the French occupation forces from the ports and river mouths of Germany. These ports were a vital part of Napoleon's logistics chain during his march across Europe and into Russia. Based at the British naval station on the island of Heligoland, Haultain was placed in command of a flotilla of 12 gunboats which made many harassing actions along the north German coast including at Busum and Cuxhaven on the Elbe, and Blexen and Bremelehe on the Weser. At some time during this period he was attached to the headquarters of the Crown Prince of Sweden whose army had joined those of Britain, Austria and Prussia in the fight against Napoleon. In 1814 Swedish and British forces besieged the Danish-held town of Gluckstadt where Haultain led a shore party that assisted in the capture of this fortified town. For his conduct during the Baltic campaign Haultain was promoted to Commander on 15 June 1814 and was presented with the Swedish Gold Medal in 1819. On 13 August 1814 he married Elizabeth Seward of Southend, Essex.

After 1814 it does not appear that Charles Haultain saw active service again and probably spent the rest of his naval career at shore stations. On 1 January 1833 he was created a Knight of the Royal Hanoverian Guelphic Order in recognition of a distinguished naval career that had spanned three decades. This rare order was only awarded to British subjects between 1815 and 1837 when the connection to the House of Hanover ceased with the death of William IV. Haultain was one of the very few Royal Navy officers under the rank of Captain to receive this prestigious award which was represented by an impressive gold cross bearing the white horse of Hanover as its centrepiece.



In 1839 Charles Haultain became the editor of The New Navy List which gave the names and service details of all officers then serving in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines together with a wide range of other salient information including lists of officers on individual ships in service, rates of pay and pension and a record of the war service of relevant officers. While there had been official and unofficial Navy Lists since 1780, Haultain's new quarterly list was far and away more comprehensive and more detailed. Although he only edited the List for six years these books now provide the researcher with a wealth of information unsurpassed by any other published Navy Lists before or since. In raising the Navy List to a high standard he made a major contribution to the recording of Navy history and present day researchers owe Charles Haultain a huge debt of gratitude for his meticulous and painstaking efforts. Even without his distinguished service at sea his editorship of the Navy List has earned him a prominent place in the history of the Senior Service.

Commander Charles Haultain died at Fairford House on 4 June 1845 aged 58. It is not known when he moved to Fairford but neither he nor his wife Elizabeth is listed in the 1841 census. Soon after his death his wife moved back to her family in Essex where she died on 24 December 1877 aged 80.

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March 2006

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