

THE 1805 LOG BOOK OF HMS VICTORY

KEPT BY THE SAILING MASTER HMS VICTORY – THOMAS ATKINSON

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On the 30th June 1919 that great London auction house Sotheby's sold the original Sailing Masters Log Book for HMS **Victory** compiled during the period September 19th 1805 to January 15th 1806, extant throughout until ship was taken in hand by Chatham Dockyard for the major post Trafalgar rebuild which lasted for just over two years. It evoked enormous interest world-wide and still today, famous national institutions, libraries, museums will still tell you who has, keeps or owns the log book eager to tell one that whilst regrettably they don't own it, they know a man 'wot does! As my title shows you, it is in a library in the very centre of that lovely university city Oxford, and being a national document in a library, it is available for public viewing but only on a few days each week.

It is the private log of Thomas Atkinson, the Sailing Master who later on became known as the Navigation Lieutenant and then, as at the present time, the Navigating Officer often referred to as The Pilot. At the end of **Victory's** commission which took in the Battle of Trafalgar [1803 -1806] Atkinson went through the normal staff processes which dictated that he should make a fair copy of his Log Book, present that to the Admiralty and then destroy the rough copy. However, he had a premonition that his book might be worth keeping especially when Trafalgar became daily, the most important naval battle played-out through the centuries, so he kept it. It remained in his family finally being passed down to the great grandson of Thomas Atkinson a man with the surname of Carey, in whose name it was sold, again by Sotheby's in 1911, to a private collector called Mr Thomas J Barratt of Hampstead. It is remarkable that the deck-log also records the signals which passed between **Victory** and the Fleet on the morning of Trafalgar, and that there is no mention of them whatsoever in the fair log.

Unfortunately, this record stops at 9.15 A.M., and therefore does not include the famous signals made just before the action commenced. The chief interrupt of the log-book etc., however consists in the vivid account of the battle itself, which written on the day after the action must be almost the earliest official record of it in existence. At 1100 the enemy began to fire on the Victory.

Standing towards the enemy's van with all sails set. At four minutes passed twelve, opened our fire on the enemy's van in passage down their line. At 20 past twelve – in attempting to pass through the enemy's line, fell onboard the 10th and 11th ships –when the action became general. At 1.15 the Right Honourable Viscount Lord Nelson K.B., and Commander-in-Chief was wounded in the shoulder. At 1.30 the **Redoubtable**, having struck her colours, we ceased firing our starboard guns but continued engaging the **Santissima Trinidad**, and some of the enemy's ships on the larboard side – observed the **Temeraire** between the **Redoubtable** and another French ship of the line – both of which had struck. The action continued general until 3 o'clock when several of the enemy's ships around us had struck. Observed the **Royal Sovereign** with the loss of her main and mizzen masts and several of the enemy's ships around her dismasted. At 3.10 observed four sail of the enemy's van tack, and stood along our line to windward. Fired our larboard guns at those which could reach them. At 3.40 made the signal to tell our ships to keep their

wind and to engage the enemy's van coming along our weather line. At 4.15 the Spanish Admiral struck to some of our ships which had tacked after them - observed one of the enemy's ships blow up, and 14 sail standing towards Cadiz, and 3 sail of enemy ships standing towards southward. Partial firing continued until 4.30 when a victory having been reported to the Right Honourable Viscount Lord Nelson K.B., and Commander-in-Chief . He then died of his wounds. At 5 the mizzen mast fell about 10nfeet above the poop. The lower masts, yards, bowsprit all crippled. Rigging and sails very much cut. The ships around us much crippled -several of our ships pursuing the enemy to leeward -saw Vice Admiral Collingwood's Flag flying on board **Euryalus** - and some of our ships taking possession of the Prizes....At daylight [Oct 22] saw our fleet and prizes 43 sail in sight still closing with our fleet .

Atkinson himself was wounded at Trafalgar by a splinter from the fore-brace struck off by the shot which killed Scott, Nelsons Secretary and the first officer to perish.