



A RUSSIAN SEA STORY

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The photograph (*not available*) shows the elaborate tomb still to be seen in the churchyard of St. Thomas's Church in the centre of Ryde. Overgrown with ivy the young trees it lies south of the church and a little east of the pathway. The tomb is of carved Portland stone with iron railings. The inscription is in Russian and English.

Sacred to the Memory of
Sir (?) Daniel Maleyeff
Captain of the Rank
of his Imperial Majesty's Russian Ship
TWERDOY.
Who died December 20th, 1808.
Aged 40 years.

Captain Maleyeff was buried on December 28 1808, and his name entered in the burial register at Newchurch. Possibly the word "Sir" is a translation of Russian title.

Behind this simple inscription can be traced the history of Napoleon's hold over Europe and Russia after Trafalgar, and the story of two naval officers of different countries and their lives, linked with Portugal and St. Thomas's Church, Ryde. In 1807, Russia was allied with the British against Napoleon. After action against the Turks, the Russians were more successful than the British, and the Russian ships sailed for the Baltic. Bad weather conditions delayed them and they sheltered near Lisbon. During this time a new alliance between the Great powers had taken place.

In July 1807, Napoleon and the Tzar Alexander of Russia signed the Treaty of Tilsit. It contained secret articles which extended to Portugal and Denmark. George Canning, the Foreign Minister, heard of these by fortunate intelligence work and a force was sent under Admiral Gambier and General Cathcart to deal swiftly with the Danes. In Portugal, Britain again moved with speed, the Portuguese co-operated and allowed Sir Sydney Smith to escort their fleet and Royal Family to Brazil. To help defend the Portuguese, the future Duke of Wellington took an expeditionary force and the Peninsular War began.

A young man who joined the British Navy as a First Class Volunteer in HMS Marlborough, 74, which escorted the Royal Family of Portugal to Brazil, was Thomas Robert Brigstocke. Later he was to marry Elizabeth Lydia Player daughter and co-heiress of George Player of Ryde House, Ryde.

On September 3rd, 1808, Rear-Admiral Charles Tyler, RN was present at the surrender in the Tagus of the Russian Rear-Admiral Seniavine after a long blockade. Admiral Tyler escorted the first division of the fleet in safety to Spithead. Here they were to be held for six months after the signature of peace between the two countries had taken place.

RYDE ST THOMAS'

The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle for October 10th, 1808, reports....."Portsmouth Saturday, October 8th... On Thursday evening, Admiral Tyler arrived at St. Helens from Tagus with the Russian Squadron which surrendered to Sir Charles Cotton.....The Russian officers have to leave to come ashore; the crews of the ships are to be sent home immediately..." .

There was some delay in sending the men back. Both men and ships were in wretched condition, the men being treated at Haslar Hospital.

On October 17th, 1808, the paper reported.... "There are no orders to bring the Russian ships into harbour – their powder is taking out - Admiral Sinivan has not been on shore; several officers of the squadron have... the sick of the squadron are ordered to be received at the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar, till Pegase is ready to receive them..." .

Later on October 31st, 1808 ..."The Russian ships Twerdy, Ratvizan, Skoroy, St Helena, Rasael, Silney and Keldyn, frigate, are gone down the western part of the Motherbank, where they are to lay in deposit till the conclusion of the peace with Russia-Admiral Seniavin is waiting on board the Twerdy till ships are appointed to take him, and those under his command, to Russia, he does not mean to come ashore...". This sounds very much as if Twerdoy was the flag-ship.

Possibly Daniel Maleyeeff, Captain of Twerdoy, was treated at the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar and sent to Ryde for convalescence. The Hampshire Telegraph for November 7th, 1808, states...."General Kellman, who came from Lisbon, having remained aboard the Africain at Spithead, for a fortnight, being given permission to land at Ryde in the Isle of Wight....." Portsmouth may have been considered a security risk.

Where did Captain Maleyeeff stay in Ryde? - perhaps at some inn. All we know is that he died on December 20th, 1808, and was buried after Christmas on December 28th, his name being entered in the burial register at Newchurch. Who paid for the tomb? - had he friends in Ryde, or was the money sent later?

What was the fate of the other Russian officers and men in the ships? By January 2nd, 1809, the Hampshire Telegraph stated...."Admiral Smivian" (they had great difficulty spelling his name correctly)...."has sent an officer in a Cartel to Morlaix, with dispatches for the Russian Ambassador at Paris respecting the payment of the crews of the Russian ships at Motherbank, who cannot go home till next spring".

The future Commander Thomas Robert Brigstocke, RN was more fortunate, but not before he had also experienced being a prisoner of war. The ship in which he was then serving, HMWS Java 46, was in action off San Salvador with the American ship, Constitution 55 guns HMS Java, in a gallant action, lost her Captain and many of her crew and was taken as a prize. In April 1813, Mr Brigstocke was exchanged . On July 24th, 1822, he married Elizabeth Lydia, daughter and co-heiress of George Player Esq of Ryde House, Isle of Wight.

When he went to church at St. Thomas's in Ryde did Commander Brigstocke ever pause at the grave of the unfortunate Captain Daniel Maleyeeff ---and did their ships ever pass each other all those years ago off Portugal. It is hoped that the tomb of the Captain Maleyeeff among with those of other Ryde residents will be spared, if the churchyard is ever turned into a public garden.



RYDE SOCIAL
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RYDE ST THOMAS'

It was Mary Player Brigstocke, a daughter of Commander Brigstocke and his wife Elizabeth Lydia, born January 18th, 1824, who became the Lady of the Manor of Ryde, and was by special act of Parliament the owner of St Thomas's Church.