

Sir James Saumarez



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The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period is littered with extraordinary characters ... Nelson, Cochrane, Sidney Smith, Pellew, the list goes on and on. The name of Sir James Saumarez, outside of his native Channel Islands has been largely forgotten except perhaps by those with an interest in the naval history of the period. Last year, I was fortunate enough to deliver a lecture on Sir James in the Captain's cabin. What I didn't know at that time was that there was also a family connection to HMS Trincomalee!

To recap, Sir James Saumarez was born in St Peter Port, Guernsey into an established, if relatively humble Island family. There was a history of previous naval service, in fact, two uncles had been Captains in the Royal Navy of George II and one had been the flag captain for Lord Anson during his famous circumnavigation of the globe.

In a career that lasted over half a century, Saumarez was present during some of the key military and naval events of the late 18th and early 19th Century. He first saw service in the Mediterranean, then during the American war of independence; was present at the battle of Dogger Bank (1781), the Battle of the Saintes under Rodney (1782) and following a long period of peace, further distinguished himself as a frigate Captain in the Channel during the early years of the Revolutionary war period (1793-1794).



*Sir James Saumarez
(1809 – Thomas Phillips)*

He served at the second battle of St Vincent in 1797 after which Sir John Jervis (in command of the British fleet) was created Earl St Vincent and was Horatio Nelson's second in command at what is considered to be Nelson's greatest victory, the Battle of the Nile in 1798.

His Career rose even further following his victory in command of a British force at the second battle of Algeciras in 1801, for which he was thanked in parliament and awarded presentation swords from the City of London.



After a period in charge of the vital Channel Islands station during the 1803-1805 invasion scare, he saw service as second in command of the Channel fleet before being given the Baltic station in 1808.

The Baltic at that time was of huge strategic importance to Britain, as masts, spars, cordage and other naval stores were sourced from this area. During this time Sir James (as he then was) was required to perform an almost diplomatic function in addition to his naval duties, handling sensitive negotiations with the unpredictable and (in theory at least) hostile Swedish court, the Danes and the Russians, whilst simultaneously keeping the vital trade routes open.

On the termination of his appointment in the Baltic, after almost six years, Sir James retired from active service afloat. In 1814 he was promoted to admiral and in 1815 advanced to GCB on the expansion of Order of the Bath.

In 1819 he was appointed rear-admiral of the United Kingdom and in 1821 advanced to vice-admiral. From 1824 to 1827 he was port admiral at Plymouth, and in 1830 he received his last naval promotion, to admiral of the red on 22 July. In 1831 he was raised to the peerage as 1st Baron de Saumarez of Guernsey. Finally, in 1832 he was promoted to general in the Royal Marines. He died in Guernsey in 1836, aged 79. He was buried in his native parish of C atel and subsequently a 99 foot obelisk was built in his memory (1887–9) in Guernsey’s Delancey Park. This was demolished by occupying German forces in 1943.

As for our connection, one of his brothers, Richard Saumarez (1764-1835) became a surgeon and married the daughter of the governor of Alderney. Together they raised two daughters and three sons. As a surgeon, Richard built up a lucrative London based consulting practice. His wife died in 1801 and he remarried before retiring to Bath with his second wife, a rich widow and great-aunt of General Gordon (of Khartoum fame).

His third son Richard (1791-1866), nephew of Sir James Saumarez enjoyed a distinguished career in the Royal Navy, rising to the rank of Admiral and being appointed as a Knight of the Austrian Order of Leopold.

The youngest son of Admiral Richard Saumarez, great nephew of Sir James (also James) also entered the navy. The Navy Lists show James as being on the second commission of HMS

Trincomalee from the start, joining the ship on 21st July 52. His service record shows him still as lieutenant on 11th January 1854. He died on board HMS Trincomalee at Callao, Peru on 25th February 1854 aged just 22.

The graves of Admiral Richard Saumarez, James and other members of the Saumarez family can be found in Locksbrook Cemetery, Bath. The photograph of the gravestone is courtesy of Mike Hinton of the Crimean War Research Society.



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