

The Leader photographer captured this image of the dilapidated Charlotte's Quay in October 1970. The large building was once a pub and shop owned by Martin Clohessy. Although Martin died in 1909, his name was still above the door over sixty years later

Sails, seas and Europe's fate

A Limerick man was a witness to history at the Battle of Trafalgar

FROM THE ARCHIVES

**SHARON
SLATER**

LIMERICK CHRONICLE HISTORIAN



ON October 21, 1805, the most decisive naval battles with sailing ships in history took place off the coast of Spain when a British fleet under Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson defeated a combined French and Spanish fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar during the Napoleonic Wars. The era of British naval supremacy, brought about by the victory at Trafalgar, lasted for a century, until Germany's naval challenge during the First World War.

Nelson was already a national hero by the time the Battle of Trafalgar took place. Even by today's

standards, he would be considered a talented naval commander. He was the only contemporary to rival Napoleon Bonaparte in the art of war.

In the summer of 1805, Napoleon Bonaparte planned to invade Britain. To achieve this, Napoleon needed to gain control of the English Channel. He ordered the French fleet's three squadrons blockaded at Brest, Toulon and other ports to meet as one fleet to gain control of the Channel.

Nelson learned of this plan and was in hot pursuit of these fleets trapping them in Cadiz, Spain. At the end of September, Nelson's fleet of 27 ships now waited for French forces

to emerge. His plan involved splitting the fleet into two columns to break through the enemy line and overwhelm the centre and rear sections of the enemy's fleet.

On 19 October a British frigate, watching Cadiz, spotted the enemy fleet leaving harbour. It consisted of 33 ships, including the 136 gun Santissima Trinidad, the largest ship in the world. The French orders were to try to break into the Mediterranean.

Nelson's fleet received notice of the escape. In response, he ordered a general chase, and by dawn on October 21, 1805, the British fleet was only 9 miles away from the enemy. At twelve minutes to midday, the HMS Victory hoisted a signal that "England Expects That Every Man Will Do His Duty" and the two columns successfully pierced the enemy line firing into the bow and stern of enemy ships as they passed between them.

Over the next few hours, the fighting was severe as much of it was at close quarters. Serious damage was inflicted to the ships on both sides. It has been estimated that

**I expect to see
every man in his
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and I will go to sea
no more**

**- Some of Lord Nelson's final
words to William Burke**

8,500 were killed or wounded on both sides and the British took 20,000 prisoners.

Even Nelson himself was wounded during the conflict, having been shot by a musket ball at about quarter past one. Finally, at half past four that evening, the battle was over. Victory was assured to the British. Unfortunately, Horatio Nelson, who was fatally wounded, would not live long enough to revel in his victory.

After Nelson was wounded, he was removed below deck on the HMS Victory, where he was comforted in his final hours by Limerick man,

William Burke. The Globe of September 21, 1815 quotes Nelson as saying to Burke: "I expect to see every man in his station, and if we succeed today, you and I will go to sea no more."

The Battle of Trafalgar and the death of Nelson have been immortalised in painting, books and film. Burke's presence at the death of Nelson has been noted in many of these. In a painting of Nelson's last moments by Arthur William Devis, Burke is pictured to the right of Nelson, supporting his pillow. He is wearing a brown coat and red waistcoat.

The following day the British ships limped back to the safety of Gibraltar. Nelson's body was brought ashore. From here, it was placed in a vat of alcohol to prepare it for the long journey back to England. The sailors who lost their lives were buried at sea. Those who survived the battle, but who later died of their wounds, were buried in the Trafalgar Cemetery in Gibraltar.

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brother Robert Woulfe was living. Later, on the recommendation of the renowned Limerick doctor Sylvester O'Halloran, he moved to Paris where he trained under the French chemist Guillaume François Rouelle.

Sylvester O'Halloran was born in Caherdavin, Limerick on December 31, 1728, to Catholic parents, Michael O'Halloran and Mary McDonnell. After studying in Limerick with his mother's cousin, Séan Clárach Mac Domhnaill, a Gaelic poet who was educated in London and Paris as a surgeon. At the time, his Catholic faith had made it virtually impossible for him to take up his studies in Dublin.

O'Halloran returned to Limerick and became one of the founders of the Limerick County Infirmary on Mulgrave Street, which was not completed until after his death. Not only was he a master surgeon, but he was also an avid historian and patriot. He authored A History of Ireland in 1774, this book however was not published until 1804. On top of all his professional qualifications, he was also married to Mary O'Casey and had five children. He died in his house at Merchant's Quay on August 11, 1807 and was

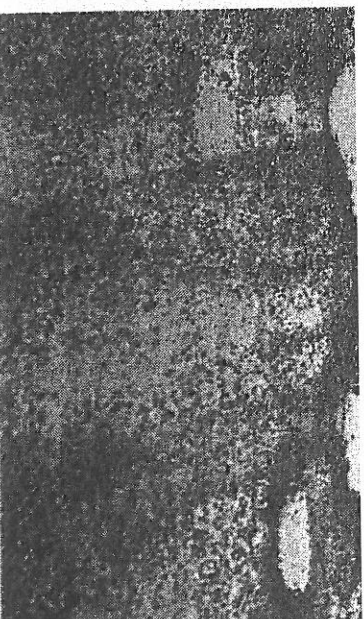
in London, followed by an appointment to the role of Surgeon General at Guadeloupe. He spent time in Germany and France, exploring mines before returning to Cornwall, England where in 1766 he examined and exploited the tin deposits there.

According to Philip Joseph Hartog, Woulfe wintered in London and summered in Paris, writing for both British and French scientific journals. In 1771, his work Experiments to Shew the Nature of Aurum Mosaicum was published in Philosophical Transactions.

He is also credited with inventing the Woulfe Bottle, a kind of wash bottle with two or three necks.

However, the apparatus has been traced back to J. R. Glauber, and its attribution to Woulfe seems to stem from his use of a vessel with two outlets in a series of distillation experiments described in 1767. That same year he was invited into the Royal Society, where he was described as a "Gentleman well skilled in Natural Philosophy and particularly Chemistry".

In his later life, he became fascinated with alchemy and became extremely eccentric, so much so that he was mentioned in the Curiosities of London, a book of London Ec-



The road to Caherdavin where Dr Sylvester O'Halloran was born three centuries ago. This picture was taken in 1964, but the road makes it seem much older

centrics published in 1860. Sir Humphry Davy, chemist and inventor, stated that Woulfe would "affix written prayers and recommendations of his processes to the Providence".

It was said in Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser on 24 August 1839 that Peter Woulfe was "so slovenly, and his rooms so extensive and so filled with furnaces, that it was difficult to reach his fireplace. Mr Brand mentions, that a friend (Dr Babington) of his once put down his hat and never

could find it again; confusion of his box. It was also stated in dependent from 16 Woulfe would only into his room if the knock. When he he with a friend or ac would send them eisting of an expens preparation" and w them again.

Woulfe refused to instead, he relied on Edinburgh to cure

Burke details the final moments in

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Who was the Limerick man who held Nelson as he died and why was he on board the HMS Victory? William Burke was born in Limerick in 1736. He enlisted in the navy as a young man, according to the Globe September 21, 1815 "under the protection of his illustrious kinsman, the late Edmund Burke" this report went to say that Burke "in private life he was admired for his amiable qualities; his gentlemanly manners

endeared him to all."

He rose to the rank of purser. The position of Royal Navy Purser came about in the fourteenth century; the Purser was responsible for the handling of money on board ship. Burke was responsible for purchasing supplies such as food and drink, clothing, bedding, candles that he then sold at a profit to the crew members. He was also responsible for maintaining and sailing the ships and were the standing officers of the navy. He

stayed with the ships in port between voyages as caretaker, supervising repairs and refitting.

He worked as a purser on board the HMS Victory from 18 April 1804. He was the oldest member of the crew under Nelson's command.

Not long after the famous battle, Burke retired to the sleepy little town of Woudham, Rochester, England after a long career in the navy. His houses there are now tourist attractions, as is his grave, where the local children of Woudham lay

flowers on Trafalga Burke would just se Napoleon War, ha on the 12 Septem short months after terloo. He was 79 ye

He sadly also or sons. On July 21, 1 two year old son, L Burke, of the HMS tally wounded with French ship Che moved to the Nava mouth where he pa