

CAPTAIN JAMES ROBERT MOSSE, R.N. (1745-1801)

James Robert Mosse was born in 1745 into a family that has through the centuries produced Naval captains, clergy and doctors in considerable profusion and continues to do so today. He was baptised on 5th December 1745 at Little Missenden, Bucks, and entered the Royal Navy when 11 years 8 months old by the favour of the Captain of HMS *Burford*; he was rated as Captain's Servant in that ship on 6th August 1757. This was the usual way in which boys were trained for commissioned rank in those days. James served there as such until October 1758. In November 1758 he joined HMS *Lizard* as Ordinary Seaman and Master's Mate, and remained in her until May 1763. Both these ships were on the North America and West India Station. While serving in the *Lizard* as Master's Mate, he was taken prisoner by the Americans, "in which fate he continued till the Peace", as he later wrote.

Between 1763 and 1771 he served in and about the Channel in the *Hussar*, *Tweed*, *Yarmouth* and *Bellona*. From 1771 to 1775 he served on the East Indies Station in *Northumberland* as a Midshipman with Sir Robert Harland who promoted him to Lieutenant on 4th October 1771. At this point he joined *Swallow*, moving later to *Orford* and *Buckingham*. He wrote in a memo believed to be still in the possession of the family:

"Returned to England in the year 1775 in the Squadron, but with the loss of health occasioned by a blow from a piece of wood falling on his head when executing his duty and which rendered him incapable full fifteen months or indeed till he returned to his native climate."

From March 1776 until January 1779 he served on the America station with Lord Howe, first in *Juno* and then from February 1778 as Second Lieutenant aboard *Eagle*. From October 1780 until August 1781 he served on the West Indies Station in *Alfred* and later *Vengeance*.

In April 1782 he became First Lieutenant to Lord Howe in the *Victory* and accompanied him to the relief of Gibraltar in command of the fire ship *Pluto* with the rank of Commander.

On 19th April his rank as Master and Commander was confirmed and being placed on half-pay he was sent on impressment duty to Bristol. From May until October 1790 he served in the Channel as Captain of the *Wasp*, his Captain's Commission dating to 21st September of that year.

Between February 1793 and September 1797 he was in command of the depot ship *Sandwich* at the Nore, and it was during this period that the mutiny of 1797 occurred. This mutiny he put down with considerable humaneness and there are or were in the family's possession several letters written by seamen to Captain James Robert Mosse begging him to intercede on their behalf. His conduct of the prosecution of the ringleader Parker was reported verbatim in *The Times* of 23-4 June 1797. Parker was later executed on board the *Sandwich*.

From September 1797 until April 1799 he served in the North Sea in command of *Braakel* and *Veteran*.

On 1st May 1799 he became Captain of the *Monarch*, and as such led Nelson's fleet through the Sound towards Copenhagen on 30th March 1801, expecting fire from the Danes in Kronborg Castle to the West and from the Swedes to the East; in the event the Swedes held their fire. Oliver Warner

describes the opening of the battle on 2nd April as follows:

"It was the *Monarch*, Captain Mosse, which had the toughest usage among the British ships, playing a similar part to the *Bellerophon* at the Nile, but facing a fixed battery instead of a French three-decker. Observing the *Russell's* predicament [grounded], Mosse reserved his first broadside till the *Monarch* came up with her, a gesture for which he was rewarded by the cheers of the stranded ship's company. Mosse continued firing all the way down the line, gave Nelson three hearty cheers, and passed on. He...proceeded north until he was within range of the *Trekroner*, and then moored head and stern abreast of the Danish No. 13, the unrigged two-decker *Sjaelland*. Mosse himself was killed soon after his ship was in position."¹

He was buried at sea after the battle.

Midshipman Millard, serving on *Monarch*, recorded how he last saw his Captain, "on the poop; his card of instructions [Nelson's orders] in his left hand, and his right was raised to his mouth with the speaking-trumpet, through which he gave the word, 'Cut away the anchor'....In a few minutes the Captain was brought aft perfectly dead."

James Robert Mosse married Ann Grace, daughter of the Revd. Stephen Kinchin of Stoke Charity, Hampshire, on 16th March 1780 at Deane, Hampshire. They lived in Wickham and had six children.

His death, together with that of Captain Edward Riou who fell heroically in the same battle, was the occasion of much public mourning. The poet Sheridan proposed in Parliament that their respective families be made the subject of a Royal bounty. On the motion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer a monument was placed in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral which reads:

"The services and death of two valiant and distinguished Officers, James Robert Mosse, Captain of the 'Monarch' and Edward Riou of the 'Amazon' who fell in the attack upon Copenhagen conducted by Lord Nelson 2nd April, 1801, are commemorated by this Monument erected at the National expense."

Ann died on 21st January 1843 and was buried in Wickham churchyard and commemorated there with her husband. So also in due course were:

Their son, Robert Lee Mosse, his wife Eliza and their daughter Maria;
Their daughters Mary Ann, Margaret and Elisa Amelia.

¹ Oliver Warner, *Nelson's Battles* (London: Batsford 1965) p.120.

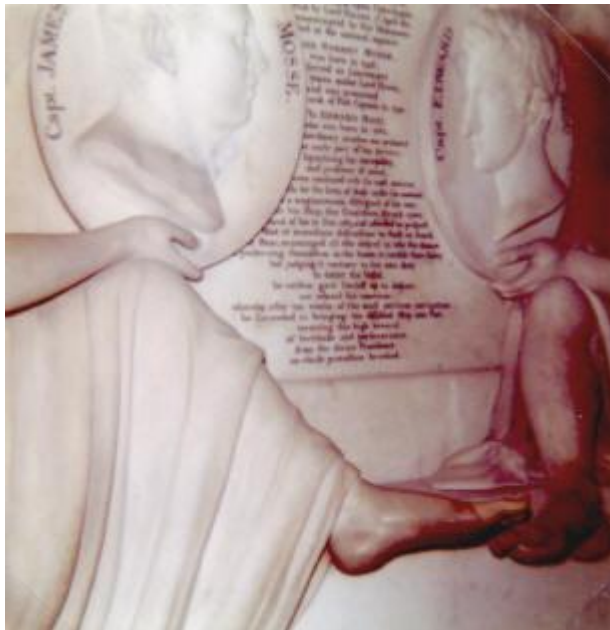
**Two Captains Memorial
The Crypt, St. Paul's Cathedral**



Copenhagen 2nd April 1801

Captain James Robert Mosse

Captain Edward Riou



Copenhagen 2nd April 1801