

NAVAL GENERAL SERVICE MEDAL AND ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS TO JOHN FELTON, SIGNAL MIDSHIPMAN IN H.M.S. VICTORY AT THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR 21ST OCTOBER 1805, WHO IS REPUTED TO HAVE BEEN IN THE VICTORY'S COCKPIT TO WITNESS THE DEATH OF ADMIRAL NELSON. AS SECOND LIEUTENANT OF HMS CURIEUX, TOOK PART IN A BLOODY ACTION AGAINST A FRENCH PRIVATEER OF FAR GREATER STRENGTH IN WHICH CURIEUX'S CAPTAIN WAS KILLED AND A THIRD OF THE CREW WERE CASUALTIES. IN 1809 WAS UNFAIRLY DISSMISSED THE SERVICE BUT WAS REINSTATED IN 1861 BY THE PRINCE OF WALES.



NAVAL GENERAL SERVICE 1793-1840, TWO CLASPS, COPENHAGEN 1801, TRAFALGAR 'JOHN FELTON, MIDSHIPMAN'

Condition; obverse ex brooch mounted, suspension re-affixed, NVF

With the following original documentation:

- 1) Commission appointing J. Felton as Commander (Retired), Royal Navy, dated 1.7.1861
- 2) Copy of Marriage Certificate of John Felton to Caterina Antoinette Valls, issued by the Mayor of Marseille and verified by both the British and Spanish Consuls, dated 12.5.1820
- 3) Passport Document permitting Felton and his wife passage through Gibraltar to Quebec, dated 9.6.1823
- 4) First copy of recipient's Last Will and Testament, dated 1.3.1838
- 5) Draft of a letter by the recipient in his own hand to the Admiralty, with a quantity of copied documentation referring to the recipient's Court Martial and subsequent re-instatement into the Navy- notes he was Signal Midshipman on Victory
- 6) Digital copies of the Court Martial of Lieutenant Muir of HMS Curieux 1806
- 7) Digital copies of the Court Martial of Lieutenant Felton of HMS Curieux 1809

Commander John Felton, R.N. (1785-1866), born Hackney, London; on Felton's service papers he is listed as Captain's Servant H.M.S. Bellerophon, 1791, before transferring later in the same year to a similar position in H.M.S. Vengeance - given his age it is likely that he would have been 'borne on the books' for 'time' by courtesy of the respective Captains; Volunteer H.M.S. Galatea, 1798; served as Able Seaman H.M.S. Bellona, before being appointed Midshipman, 14.11.1799 and served in the latter at the battle of Copenhagen (2.4.1801); served in H.M.S. Clyde, 7.7.1802-29.6.1803 before being appointed Midshipman H.M.S. Victory, 8.9.1805 and serving in her at the battle of Trafalgar where he served as Signal Midshipman and it is said was witness to Nelson's death in the cockpit of the Victory. Prior to the battle, Nelson had singled out and promised Felton and 3 other Midshipman and Mates (of the 27 on Victory) Promotion to Lieutenant once battle was done. After the battle, Lord Collingwood knowing Nelson's wishes, took these four Midshipman aboard his flagship with intention of getting them early promotion. However Collingwood was ordered to stay at sea another 7 months and meanwhile the Admiralty showered promotions among the returning members of the fleet, so that when these 4 deserving Midshipmen returned to England, their promotions were refused on the grounds that all available promotions had been made! See; *'The Battle of Trafalgar; A Poem'* below



Lieutenant 22nd December 1806; appointed 2nd Lieutenant to the sloop H.M.S. Curieux employed in the West Indies. Took part in the 'bloody' action against the much larger French privateer *Revanche*, during which she lost her Captain and a third of the crew.

On 3.11.1809 the *Curieux* struck the rocks off Pettit-Terre off the Saintes and was lost, 'That the loss of the said sloop must be attributed to the negligence of Lieutenant John Felton then Officer of the Watch, more particularly for his not having exercised promptness and decision in getting His Majesty's sloop *Curieux* out of danger after the land was discovered and do adjudge him to be dismissed from His Majesty's Service. The Court conceives much reprehension is due to Mr. John Woods the Master for not having more clearly stated the situation of the *Curieux* to Lieutenant John Felton who relieved him, and do admonish him to be more cautious in the future.' (copy of Court Martial findings included) Felton was dismissed from the Royal Navy 10.3.1810.

He seems to have joined his brother William Bowman Felton (Admiralty Agent Victualler in Port Mahon, Minorca) in the next few years being involved with private shipping in the Mediterranean before the two brothers and other relations emigrated to Canada. The family took up large grants of virgin forest Crown Land in Sherbrooke, Lower Canada. John Felton finally settled in Sherbrooke in 1823, becoming a Magistrate in the district of St. Francis and acting as an Agent for Crown Lands. He spent 37 years in the post, and during that time, despite being exempt, served as a private Militiaman during the troubles in Lower Canada, 1837-38.

In 1849 Felton applied for and received his Naval General Service medal with two clasps. In the summer of 1860 he submitted a Memorandum to the Admiralty seeking restoration to the Navy Lists and his former rank. Luckily for him this coincided that year with the Royal Visit of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) to Canada and America, accompanied by the Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Colonies. During the part of the tour to the Eastern Townships the Prince was made aware of John Felton's history and potentially harsh treatment by court martial. At a levee the Prince received Felton;

'His Royal Highness having been made aware of the hardships of Mr. Felton's case, - not by him, for he suffered uncomplainingly, - chose this day as the occasion for exercising the prerogative delegated by Her Majesty to him, and, when the old man presented himself at the reception, not only received him with the greatest cordiality, speaking to him kindly words, but intimated that from that moment he was restored to the position he had lost. This it was which caused the ebullition of feeling on the part of his brother sailor, Captain Moore, and the cheering on the part of that of the crowd. The act was in itself graceful, it was gracefully performed, and it was thoroughly appreciated. Everyone looked delighted. Mr. Felton could not conceal his pleasure, though he tried to look unmoved, and Mrs. Felton looked at her husband with more than usual pride as he and she were receiving the congratulation of the people.' (The Tour of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales Through British America and The United States, printed by J. Lovell 1860, refers).

The Duke of Newcastle belatedly set about arranging the above procedure in a letter to the Admiralty, dated 13.2.1861, on behalf of the Prince of Wales. In requesting Felton's re-instatement to the Navy, Newcastle refers to him as the 'Signal Midshipman on board the Victory'. The credibility of this statement is further attested to by the Order given in Privy Council (16.4.1861) restoring Felton to the Navy Lists, by referring to him as, *'this gentleman served in the battle of Copenhagen in 1801, and was signal midshipmate [sic.] of the Victory at Trafalgar.'* After due process, on 24.4.1861 the Admiralty wrote to John Felton informing him that he had been restored as a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy. He was retired Commander 1.7.1861. On the 31st of the same month Felton received a congratulatory letter on his promotion from the principal residents of his adopted Sherbrooke;

'We have known and respected you sir, for a long series of years, and have admired your unswerving loyalty under circumstances calculated to test the feelings of most men.... We are satisfied that there is not an individual in this community, or indeed in the whole District, who does not rejoice at this well merited tribute to your worth.' (See copy of letter).

Commander J. Felton, R.N., died 21.10.1866 and is buried in the Church of England Cemetery, Prospect Street, Sherbrooke, Canada where there is a monument to him. In his obituary in the Sherbrooke Gazette (27.10.1866) he is given as, *'an officer under the immortal Nelson, his signal midshipman at the Battle of Trafalgar, on the 21st October 1805 (possibly the last survivor of that celebrated day), and the witness of his hero's glorious death, on that same occasion, in the cockpit of the Victory.'*



Commander John Felton, R.N. 1785-1866

BELLONA, 1760

3rd rate 74 gun ship of the line. Complement: 650

On 3 March 1801 BELLONA, LONDON, GANGES, EUGENIE and HARPY sailed from Portsmouth to join Ad. Sir Hyde PARKER in the Yarmouth Roads.

To counter the threatening attitude of the northern powers the fleet with 18 sail-of-the-line, frigates and bomb vessels, sailed from there on 12 March and anchored at the entrance to the Sound on the 21st. On the 2 April the ships weighed to take up their assigned stations abreast of the enemy ships across the harbour of Copenhagen. AGAMEMNON failed to round the end of the shoal and had to anchor. BELLONA, due to the ignorance of her pilot, kept too far to starboard after rounding the Middle Ground shoal and got on shore about 450 yards from the rear of the Danish line. RUSSELL, following her, also ran aground with her bowsprit almost overlapping BELLONA's taffrail. Both ships could use their guns but not very effectively, and they were both within range of Danish shot. BELLONA's guns were old and some of them burst, killing their crews. She had nine seamen and two marines killed and forty-eight seamen, ten marines and five soldiers wounded.

CURIEUX, 1804

Brig-sloop ; Armament 18 (8 x long 6-pdrs & 10 x 24-pdr carronades. Complement: 67
Wrecked in the West Indies: crew saved. Captain Hon. Geo. Moysey

3 DEC 1807 ACTION WITH THE FRENCH PRIVATEER REVANCHE.

'On the 3d of December, at 10 A.M., latitude 14° 48' north, longitude 59° 14' west, the British brig-sloop Curieux, mounting 10 carronades, 18-pounders, and eight long 6-pounders, with a crew on board of rather less than 100 men and boys, commanded by Captain John Sherriff, while standing on the starboard tack with the wind from the north-east, discovered in the north-northwest, or right ahead, a strange ship steering under easy sail on the opposite tack. This was the late Liverpool slave-ship British-Tar, but now the French privateer Revanche, of 24 long guns, chiefly, it is believed, English 9-pounders, and one long French 18-pounder upon a traversing carriage on the forecastle, with a crew of 200 men, commanded by Captain Vidal.

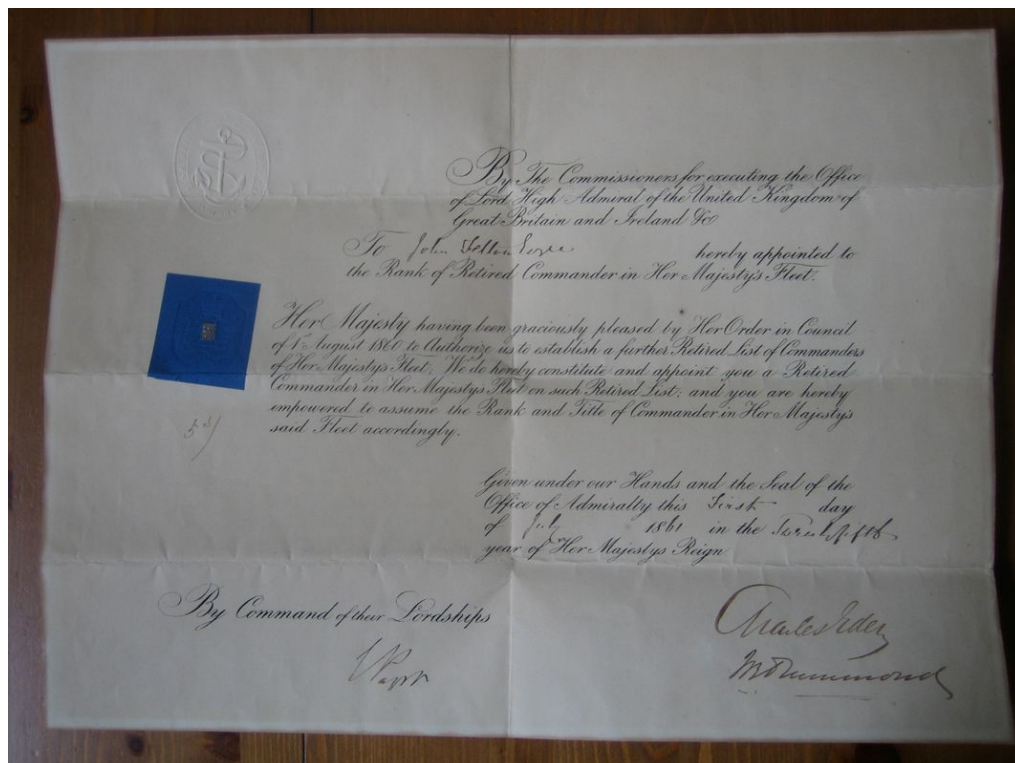
At 11 A.M., as the ship passed almost within gun-shot to leeward of her, the Curieux made the private signal. That not being answered, the brig soon afterwards tacked in chase, and at 1 P.M. discharged her bow gun at the Revanche; who fired one stern-chaser in return, hoisted her colours, and set more sail, edging away to the southward. At 2 P.M., having arrived abreast of the ship on the larboard and weather side, the brig brought her to close action. This continued for an hour ; by which time the Curieux had her braces, bow-lines, and tiller-ropes shot away. Seeing the unmanageable state of her opponent, the Revanche, at 3 h. 15 m. P.M., ran on board the Curieux on the starboard side a little before the mainmast. In this position the ship discharged her traversing gun and musketry ; by which the brig's main boom was shot away, Captain Sherriff and four or five of the men killed, and several wounded.

Finding themselves too warmly received, the privateer's men would not board, but retreated to the quarterdeck ; whence they kept up, for the space of ten minutes, an incessant and a very destructive fire of musketry. Lieutenant Thomas Muir, upon whom the command of the brig had devolved, now prepared to board ; but, being supported by only 10 seamen, the marines, and the boatswain, he was obliged to relinquish the attempt. At about this time, one of the Curieux's men having hove the ship's grappling overboard (in doing which he lost his right arm by a shot), the Revanche dropped astern. Presently afterwards, hauling up, the privateer crossed the stern of the Curieux, and, after firing into her two great guns and a volley of musketry, crowded sail to the north-west. Nor was the Curieux, whose, shrouds and back-stays were shot away, and two topmasts and jib-boom wounded, in a condition to make sail in pursuit.

The loss on board the Curieux amounted to eight killed, including her captain, and 14 wounded. That on board the Revanche, according to a paragraph in the Moniteur, amounted to two killed and 13 wounded. The Curieux, as soon as she had partially refitted herself, made sail for Barbadoes, and anchored the next day in Carlisle bay.

Lieutenant Muir was subsequently tried by a court-martial at Barbadoes, for the escape of the privateer, and was slightly reprimanded for not having done his utmost, after the death of his captain, to take or destroy the enemy's ship. Had, by any chance, the Revanche been captured and carried into Carlisle bay by one of the cruisers upon the station, her force would have been fully known ; and we cannot conceive that the commanding officer of a gun-brig (for, virtually, the Curieux was no more) would, under all the circumstances of this case, have been otherwise than honourably acquitted.'





FROM 'THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR: A POEM' BY LAURENCE HYNES HALLORAN (1806)

'To Him my faithful followers I commend, The anxious solicitude, with which the truly great and good Lord Nelson studied to promote the interest of his followers, formed a strong trait in his character, equally honourable to his feelings, and worthy of imitation by others.

been advanced to Lieutenancies ; while these brave, unfortunate young men, prior in claim, and senior in service, still continue petty officers.

In this narrative of facts, I mean not to attach blame to any quarter; neither am I influenced by any, but the most disinterested motives. The parties are almost entire strangers to me; but as the followers of my loved and venerated Lord Nelson, I would proudly testify my unbounded respect for his memory, by proving their friend and advocate, were my power as capacious, as my wishes are earnest, to serve and assist them.'

