

County Record Office Cambridge, Cotton family correspondence, item ref 588/C115: letter from Horatio, Viscount Nelson, Vice-Admiral, aboard the *Victory*, to Sir Charles Cotton bt, of Madingley, 16 Jan 1801 [repaired, having been torn into small pieces at some date in the late 19th or early 20th century]

The correspondents

Nelson had been made Baron Nelson of the Nile and Burnham Thorpe after the Battle of the Nile. His efforts thereafter on behalf of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies resulted in King Ferdinand creating him Duke of Bronte. He was appointed Vice-Admiral in June 1801, and after his success at Copenhagen was made Viscount. On 14 May 1803 he was made commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet. Two days later war against France was declared and Nelson hoisted his flag in *Victory* and sailed from Portsmouth to join the fleet at Toulon. During his fleet's long patrol, which lasted into January 1805, he used an anchorage in the Maddelena islands, off the north of Sardinia, to reprovision and rewater.

Sir Charles Cotton, 5th Baronet (1715-1812), his father's third son, had entered the navy in 1772. His conduct at the battle of 1 June 1794, though it received his commander's approbation, was not noted in despatches, a long-felt indignity. Cotton succeeded to the baronetcy on the death of his father in January 1795, his two elder brothers being already dead. He was advanced to the rank of vice admiral in 1802 and served with the Channel Fleet. He was afterwards (1808) made a full admiral. He died at Plymouth in 1812 and was brought back to Cambridgeshire for burial at Landwade. There is a monument to him in Madingley church.

The letter

Written from *Victory*, then probably at Maddelena, Nelson's letter is written in response to a letter to him from Cotton, carried by Dr Gillespie, who had brought it as a letter of recommendation when he joined Nelson as physician to the fleet in mid-January. Gillespie told his sister that, on the strength of the recommendations, 'I immediately became one of the family'. Nelson's letter was directed to 'Sir Charles Cotton Bart, Channel Fleet'. The postmark on the cover demonstrates that Nelson's response reached him via Portsmouth.

Sources

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, on-line version, articles on Nelson and Cotton (September 2005); Edgar Vincent, *Nelson, Love and Fame*, Yale, paperback edition, 2004, p531

Transcript

(orthography has been retained, but punctuation added to assist reading)

Victory January 16th 1805

My Dear Cotton

Dr Gillespie delivered me your letter, and I can have no doubt but that he will merit every commendation that you and his other friends have bestowed upon him. I own I am very much purposed in favour of his abilities from what I have seen of him. I believe I shall return without getting at the Toulon fleet which will be a grievous mortification to, my Dear Admiral, your old friend

Nelson & Bronte

Sir Ch Cotton Bart

Elizabeth Stazicker, October 2005