

**County Record Office Cambridge, Cotton family correspondence, item ref 588/C116: copy [on paper watermarked 1838] of a letter from Captain Richard King, on board *Achille*, to his father Admiral Richard King, 27 October 1805.**

### **The correspondents**

Richard King (afterwards Sir Richard King, 2<sup>nd</sup> bt, 1774 – 1834), only son of Admiral Sir Richard King, entered the navy in 1788, and was made lieutenant in 1791, commander in 1793 and captain in 1794. In April 1804, King was appointed to the *Achille* (74 guns), from which the present letter was written immediately after Trafalgar. In 1811-12 he served as captain of the fleet to Sir Charles Cotton, and was promoted rear-admiral in August 1812. He was made KCB in 1815 and became vice-admiral in 1821. He married Maria Susanna, daughter of Admiral Sir Charles Cotton in 1822. He was appointed commander in chief at the Nore in 1833 and died at Sheerness in 1834.

Sir Richard King, 1<sup>st</sup> bt (1730 – 1806) was son of Curtis King, a master in the navy. He entered the navy in 1738, and was promoted lieutenant in 1745. In 1762, with Sir Hyde Parker, he captured the Spanish vessel *Santissima Trinidad*. His personal share of the prize money was more than £30,000. He was knighted in 1784 for his distinguished service in the E Indies, and was promoted rear-admiral of the white in 1787 and of the red in 1790. He was made baronet in 1792, and in the same year governor at Newfoundland. In 1794 he was returned unopposed as MP for Rochester, having reputedly spent about £5000 on the elections. He was made admiral of the blue 1795, admiral of the white 1799 and in November 1805 admiral of the red. He married in 1769 Susannah Maria Coker, daughter of William Coker of Mappowder, Dorset, and had four children, three daughters and a son Richard. He died in London in November 1806.

### **The copy letter**

According to the annotation at the end of the copy we have, a copy of King's original letter was made by one of his sisters, either Lady Hammond or Lady Rowley, who interpolated their father's comments. A close consideration suggests that the present copy, on paper watermarked 1838, may be a further copy of the first copy, perhaps not surprising given its importance to the family. This copy presumably came into the Cotton papers through Maria Susanna King, after her marriage with their brother's wife. The letter is written in the immediate aftermath of the battle, when King was struggling against the gale, in the hope of finding some opportunity to send reassurance home.

## Sources

*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, on-line version, articles on Sir Richard King<sup>1st</sup> bt (by P K Crimmin) and Sir Richard King<sup>2nd</sup> bt (by J K Laughton, revised Andrew Lambert), (September 2005)

## Transcript, with explanatory annotations

(orthography and punctuation have been retained)

(Copy)

Achille Sunday Oct 27 1805

My dear Father

I keep a letter written in case any unforeseen opportunity should offer suddenly, to inform you I am safe and sound, as no doubt long before this reaches you, you will have heard through our Enemy of the Action, which took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> off Cape Trafalgar. I suppose they will not state facts; but out of 40 sail that came out only 21<sup>1</sup> were seen going into Cadiz after the Action. In an Action like this, both sides must naturally suffer much; I have not been able to collect our loss<sup>2</sup>, as since the Fight, which is now a week, an unfortunate gale has been blowing, and all our Prizes as well as some of our Ships are dismasted; and since, the wind has been such that we can neither get to Gibraltar; or weather the other land to get to the Northward. I desire to hear the fate of the captured Ships and some of our own. You may put your mind at ease as to Achille's conduct, we were led into Action in a famous manner by Adml Collingwood, who led the lee line: I was the Sixth Ship in Action, and was pleasingly gratified, my plan behaved so well. We took our Prize, the *Berwick* of 74 Guns, previously an English ship<sup>3</sup>; also a Spanish ship of 74 or 80 Guns struck to us, but I was prevented taking possession of her by two French ships coming up to engage us, which they did at very close Action for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour; one was my namesake (L'Achille) and the other the *Berwick*, who afterwards struck to us.

(Papa imagines that the *Berwick* dropt astern while he engaged the Spaniard and then came up afterwards, for you will observe he mentions engaging the *Berwick* the same time he did the Spaniard.)<sup>4</sup> Our loss in killed and wounded is small considering that we were in close Action from  $\frac{1}{4}$  past 12 until 4 o'clock: 13 killed and 34 wounded, some very badly. My Captain of Marines lost an arm, and two of my Lieutenants slightly wounded. I shall not say more about myself than that I can now die knowing that in my Profession I have rendered my Country some service. My Ship has suffered a good deal, all my lower rigging running, masts etc very badly wounded and many Shot in the

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<sup>1</sup> 17 ships of the combined fleet were taken captive, 1 sank, 1 blew up and 2 were burned

<sup>2</sup> None of the British fleet was lost, though casualties were high

<sup>3</sup> *Berwick* was subsequently lost in the gale

<sup>4</sup> A note at the end of the letter attributes the sentence in parenthesis to the copiest

Hull. We make about 6 [?*illegible*] per hour. I hope to get home. Now my dear Father to what is truly melancholy and a great national loss, our poor Commander in Chief<sup>5</sup>, who was badly wounded & in an hour after died. A pleasanter man the world cannot provide as a Chief. Oh! that he had lived! I am sorry to state the loss of Duff<sup>6</sup> and Cooke<sup>7</sup>. Those in rotation were in Action first, then came Achille. I am thankful to Providence for my escape. A more glorious day for Old England is not in the Annals of History. I have never seen [such]<sup>8</sup> an Action with a Fleet, a single [*'Action' deleted*] one is not to be compared [*'with' deleted*] to it. I have not time to write more as I am hurried, but I am well and hope to get home. All our own Ships are safe. Love to all. Your very Affectionate Son,

Richard King

From the late V Adml Sir Richard King Bart KCB (then Captain King RN) to his Father, the late Admiral Sir Richard King Bart

N.B. The lines in parenthesis were probably written by one of his daughters, Lady Hammond or the late Lady (C) Rowley, who copied the letter.

Elizabeth Stazicker , October 2005

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<sup>5</sup> Nelson

<sup>6</sup> Captain George Duff, *Mars*

<sup>7</sup> Captain John Cooke, *Bellerophon*

<sup>8</sup> sense seems to necessitate the supply of this word, perhaps missed in copying