

establish the origin of each in a period of experimentation before an accepted combination of traits had become formalised in a standardised type. However, we may conclude that the Highclere sword presents a unique amalgam of characteristics taken from

other contemporary but short-lived types. The near contemporaneity of Rosnoën swords and Ballintober swords is demonstrated in the Penard (Langrove, Gower) Hoard which contains examples of both classes (Crawford and Wheeler 1920, 137–8, Fig 3).

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A LETTER FROM SOUTHAMPTON, SEPTEMBER 1779

The following letter, now in the Norfolk Record Office (NRO, MC 28/27, 465 X 9) was written from Southampton in early September 1779. Its author, Messenger Monsey (Anon 1789; Ketton-Cremer 1944), was at the time visiting Hampshire on holiday with his daughter, and in it gives a brief account of his excursions to his friend William Wiggett Bulwer of Heydon Hall in Norfolk. In 1779, Monsey was an old man of seventy-six who had led a full and interesting life. He had been educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge,

and had subsequently studied medicine in Norwich. In the 1720s, he began his practice in London, and through the patronage of the Earl of Godolphin he was appointed Physician to the Chelsea Hospital, the post which he held until his death. He became, in the 1730s, medical adviser to the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole; and soon other leading politicians were availing themselves of his services. In addition to these illustrious acquaintances, he moved in the literary circles of the capital, acquiring the reputation of a wit

and a man of learning, and enjoying in particular the friendship of David Garrick. Monsey was, however, a strange, eccentric, and irascible man – traits which became increasingly marked in the latter part of his life (and which are, to a degree, reflected in this letter). For years he was embroiled in a number of astonishingly acrimonious disputes with his colleagues at the Chelsea Hospital. His friendship with Garrick was terminated by a foolish quarrel (Garrick 1963, III, 1212–3). Dr Johnson could not abide his company: he was ‘vehement against . . . (him), (calling him) a fellow who swore and talked bawdy’ (Boswell 1964, II, 64). In spite of the anxieties concerning his health expressed here, Monsey survived a further nine years, dying in December 1788.

The letter is of interest chiefly on two counts. First, it provides a glimpse of the leisure activities of the rich in the area around Southampton in the latter part of the eighteenth century. With the decline of the port, facilities for pleasure were encouraged by those in authority with a view to reviving the flagging economy of the town (Sandell, in Morgan and Peberdy 1958; Temple Patterson 1966, 39–60). Monsey mentions the balls and sea bathing, and meetings with people of polite society. He also went on pleasure voyages, and took the opportunity of visiting places of historic interest in the vicinity.

Secondly, the letter gives a vivid account of important national events as perceived by an ordinary individual. At the time when it was written, the British war effort in the War of American Independence (1775–83) was reaching its nadir (Mackesy 1964, 237–430). Having suffered defeat at the hands of the rebel colonists at Saratoga, Britain itself was now threatened by the entry of France and Spain, in 1778 and 1779 respectively, into the conflict on the Americans’ side. On 30 July 1779, a combined Franco-Spanish fleet set sail for the Channel with a flexible invasion plan in mind (Temple Patterson 1960). Ideally, the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth were to be captured and occupied by a military force of thirty thousand men. Attacks were also to be

made on Bristol and Liverpool. But if this proved impossible, Plymouth was to be substituted as the main target of hostilities (Temple Patterson 1960, 1–20, 37–58).

On 15 August, the armada reached the Lizard, having successfully avoided the ships of the British Home Fleet commanded by Sir Charles Hardy. The next day it was sighted off Plymouth, and this caused a panic with the inhabitants making ‘every possible exertion to move off with their families to Truro, Tiverton’ and other towns inland (Temple Patterson 1960, 182). Soon the area around the Solent was gripped by similar alarms. The dread and despondency felt as the enemy was expected to move up the Channel is well captured by Monsey, as is the popular incredulity and anger at the navy’s failure to engage the force. The high-point of these fears was the incident on the Isle of Wight described below. Monsey’s comments on the clergy in connection with this were typical: in religion he was a free-thinker and had scant respect for the church.

In the event, however, such consternation proved unjustified since, by the time Monsey was putting pen to paper, the danger had, in fact, already passed. Owing to delays on the Spaniards’ part, the expedition had set out much later than had originally been planned; and it was now felt that it would be impossible to accomplish the attack on Portsmouth before the onset of bad weather in the Channel put the whole enterprise in jeopardy. Furthermore, poor provisioning and sickness were taking a heavy toll in lives, and it was therefore decided to pull back with a view to taking Falmouth, and embarking the army in Cornwall. But an easterly wind drove the ships out to sea, and to the disappointment of the British Admiralty, who were hoping for a battle, they did not enter the Channel again, but instead returned home. No further invasion of Britain was attempted during the war.

Southampton Sept 7th

Dear Sr.

1779

Cou’d you conceive that any man in his senses & possess’d with such fears of the French as as (sic)

I am shou'd voluntarily run into the sound of their Cannon & almost within reach of their Balls but I verify the old Saying

Quos Impostor vult perdere, dementat prius ('Those whom a charlatan wishes to destroy, he first makes mad'). If I had an Eye that *did* see & an Hand that did *not* shake, I wou'd give you a detail of our Ramble but as that wou'd be of as little concern to you as it is to me, It may suffice to tell you my Daughter I and Rose set out for Lymington on Monday I thought to meet some Company, but they being to depart on thursday we sail'd from Lym. to Cowes in the Isle of Wight went to Newport & Carisbrook Castle to Southampton next day, both very pleasant voyages indeed.

That day Sr. C.H. (Sir Charles Hardy) pass'd with all his fleet at the back of the Isle about 4 hours after we had left it, and the fr are now said to be there waiting for time & that Hardy (?) to pay his Compliments to 'em tomorrow with powder and Ball, - The Hour is big with important Events, and the Lord have mercy upon us, miracles I fear are ended & so we are undone probably, I hope not certainly.

A Parson in the Isle of Wight preaching on Sunday received a note in his pulpit that the fr. were seen off there, out he jumps, fires a Beacon and threw the Whole Island into the utmost consternation but it prov'd only some transports, they say, (cf Temple Patterson 1960, 216-7) - Those fellows were always incendiaries & will be so to the end of the Chapter.

I long much to be out of this place where I don't know a single creature and I want neither Bathing nor Balls but I wou'd willingly give the women what diversion I can for their trouble, - We have a vision of sailing to morrow to Spithead, & seeing Netly Abbey, whether we shall accomplish either, God knows.

I have a scheme to return by Oxford if the french General has not hoisted his Lillies on the Cupola of the Theatre there, - I find I am too late for the Post so I keep my Lr open till to morrow or next Day, and give you a fresh account of a Compleat Victory over our invincible Enemies, If we succeed I'll come down into Norfolk & make a Bonfire of my old wither'd great oak & make Molly (Bulwer's daughter) Qu. of france but the first thing to be made is to make our fleet fight which I am going to do on thursday.

The 9th at ½ past Eleven & got there a little before 4 saw all the fleet at Spithead, the Dock Yard, & some very large fouling pieces upon the

Ramparts, who are to talk with the french in fire & brimstone, - This day (the 10th) we left Portsmouth at *nine* & by a very quick passage of 11 hours arriv'd here at *eight*, wet, dirty, and daggled by the help of a little boat, - Sic nos servavit Apollo. ('Thus Apollo rescued us': cf Horace *Satires* I, ix, 78.)

It is said Sr. Ch. is to sail to morrow, to find the french then I suppose by L.S.s (Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty) direction who came to P. on Sunday is to lose 'em again, but if to morrow be as to day, The warriors will have nothing to do but like Homers Gods to eat drink and be merry, till the fr. cannon interrupt 'em.

I fear that the S. Governor was as much if not more alarmed than the rest of the inhabitants, which is not very clever (?) what will be the event of all these Things God only knows and I wont pretend to prophecy I am but a very insignificant part of the society and according to the trite Adage

Qui decumbet humi non habet unde etc
Bad or good in all probability I have not long to live to see much of it. I believe I shall stay these two or three days longer & then set out for Oxford for a night or two & so hope as it may happen. I wish and hope all your family well & happy & free from Alarms of all kinds I am rather better for my jumble (a jolting journey) had a good night but indeed master Bulwer I am almost worn out, for two or three days past I have the appearance of the faces of all people being smear'd over with Blood by candlelight, & shillings look like Gold, I wish they were so, for the sake of those I leave behind me & you have been so good almost to make 'em so, - When you see my good friends Lord & Lady Walpole & family be so kind as to make my service acceptable for I love 'em all they are good folks, I hope I need not desire you to do this to all yr family, when I have so great an interest in part of it, my service to Mr Istard too, Mr Bulle & any of the Crows if they fall in your way, and believe me

Dear Sr.

Very affectly yrs

M. Monsey

My daughter joins
in cordial respects to you
all with her Daughter
& hopes you had yr. things
safer

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