

SUMMARY OF THE LIFE AND CAREER OF SIR EVAN NEPEAN B ARON OF BOTHENHAMPTON PC FRS

Note – My research is ongoing and anticipate finding additional material, which may result in adjustments or corrections.

It is beyond the scope of this study to visit national archives. The following are listed by **National Archives (Kew) as holding documents/Correspondence connected to Sir Evan Nepean**– e.g. State Library NSW (1) British Library - Asian & African Studies (5) & Manuscript Collection (9) National Archives Kew (2) Royal Greenwich, National Maritime Museum - Card Library & archive (4) Oxford University, Bodleian Library – Special Collection (*seem to relate to Secret Service*) (1) Buckinghamshire Archive (1) National Library of Ireland (1) Public Record Office , N. Ireland (1) Public Records Office Scotland (1) National Library of Scotland, Manuscript Collection (1) Morgan Library New York USA (1) New York Historical Society (1) – Some of these collections seem to be extensive.

Among other possible places for research include of National RN Museum, Portsmouth, maybe *in 2023*), Saltash Museum (*hopefully in 2023*), Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, **Most of the books listed below do reference their sources.**

As research progresses it is being written up into a narrative, currently quite advanced first draft.

Sir Evan Nepean is x5 my Great Uncle. My direct ancestor is his younger brother Nicholas

Parents – Nicholas Nepean and Margaret née Jones. Nicholas was an Innkeeper (Green Dragon) at Saltash, Cornwall. Nicholas served as Mayor in Saltash. Sometimes referred to as a 'Gent'. Said to be wealthy (*hope to find out more if & when I visit Saltash*).

Born –19 July 1752, St Stephens, Saltash, Cornwall

Married – Margaret Skinner at Garrison Church, Greenwich, daughter of Captain Skinner RE and Hester née Lauder

Siblings – Thomas (Major General, Royal Engineers), Nicholas (served in Marines, New South Wales Corps & Army, Lieutenant General at retirement). A sister and 2 brothers died young.

Died – 2 October 1822 at Loders, Dorset, Interred in family vault.

Education – Not known, needs research, but quite likely Grammar School or private education. Father probably had the financial resources

CAREER

Royal Navy -

- Joined at Plymouth as a **Captain's Clerk**, 28 December 1773
- While serving in American Revolutionary War promoted to **Purser** on 31 December 1775
- **Secretary** to Admiral Lord Shouldham on HMS Bristol and later on HMS Ocean when Port

- Admiral at Plymouth, 1776 – 1778 (*This suggests his talents were already being noticed*).
- Later joined HMS Achilles, transferring to HMS Hero and finally 1780 to HMS Foudroyant under command of Captain John Jervis (later Earl St Vincent). Remained on Foudroyant's books until 25 June 1782 – employed as a secretary

Later on Earl St Vincent and Nepean came together at the Admiralty, as the two men at the very top of the navy at a crucial time – more below.

Appointed Under Secretary of State Home Department by Earl of Shelburne, Prime Minister – April 1782 (precise date needs confirmation) to 1794

A new department, replacing North & South Departments. Shelburne had briefly been Secretary of State before becoming Prime Minister. An extraordinary advance from purser.

Duties included

- Secret service – Spies and counter intelligence. Political and naval intelligence
- Planning and coordinating arrangements for penal colony in New South Wales including the First Fleet and establishing the colony
- Commissioning plans for botanical expeditions e.g. HMS Bounty to Tahiti in the quest for breadfruit and successful second voyage. George Vancouver's expedition to Northwest coast of North America
- War and colonies, especially Canada – e.g. partitioning Ontario and Quebec and border problems
- Irish government regulation.

While in this appointment served under 6 Ministers of State

His health suffered, aggravated by over work. Had to take sick leave. Lord Grenville (Secretary of State) out of concern for his health - “to prevent him killing himself by his labours” secured a sinecure post for him in Jamaica as “Clerk of the Peace and Chief Clerk of the Supreme Court of Jamaica”, which he held until 1819. He did go to Jamaica for a short time and returned with health improved. Already held sinecure as Naval Officer in Grenada, Dominica & Barbados.

He was given an assistant and additional clerical support staff, from then on his health improved

Appointed Under Secretary to Department of War and Colonies (a new department), 1794 – 1795

- Transferred with Henry Dundas (Minister of State) from Home Department
- The department was mainly concerned with army affairs and Evan was soon moved into the Admiralty, a post best suited to his talents

First Secretary to Board of Admiralty – 1795 –1804

This was at the time of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, when Napoleon was massing troops at Boulogne to invade England. Only the Royal Navy stood between England and invasion, not unlike 1940. To do this the RN had to defend the Downs, patrol the English Channel, blockade French ports e.g. Brest, divert ships to protect Ireland, intercept convoys as well as protecting trade and the colonies

Along with the Treasury the most important government post. The workload was enormous. The Admiralty office was the centre of naval administration.

- Almost everything passed through Nepean's hands. Nepean had an Assistant Secretary and a small team of clerks. Everything was hand written
- General responsibility for administration of the Royal Navy including the Royal dockyards
- Attended Admiralty Board meetings (which were frequent, if not daily)
- Drafted or dictated orders and instructions and passed eg to Admirals and Captains, such as plans for naval operations, fleet and ship movements, promotions. Also to subordinate departments
 - Other than the most important, which were signed by 3 Board members, were signed by Nepean - *I am directed by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.....*
 - Dispatches received by Nepean usually started – *Pleased to inform Your Lordship* and signed *Your obedient servant*
 - Sorting out corruption, theft, malingering and poor construction practices in the Royal Dockyards, especially when Earl St Vincent was First Lord. Evan was aware of this from his time at Plymouth working as Secretary for Admiral Shouldham.
 - Intelligence – employed informants some on behalf of the Foreign Office. Involvement in a 'deniable' plot by French Royalists to assassinate Napoleon. Uncovered by a double agent
 - Oversight of a number of Admiralty Boards

The First Secretary had a higher salary than the First Lord

Chief Secretary to Ireland, 1804-1805

The post became vacant owing to the retirement on health grounds of the present occupant. Prime Minister Addington proposed Nepean to fill the position, approved by King George III. Nepean had no wish for the situation, but always willing to do what was asked of him, against his better judgement, accepted the appointment.

It was at first sight not a success. At request of Henry Dundas now First Lord, with the approval of the King was back at the Admiralty as a Commissioner within a year. I need to investigate further. (*started December 2022*) The problem *may* lie in Nepean's relationship with the Lord Lieutenant (I think there is something here to investigate) and/or Prime Minister Addington. His 3 successors were no longer in the post. He had an excellent relationship with William Pitt (younger), who was PM for most of his Civil Service career. After returning to the Admiralty continued the duties and represent Ireland in parliament until his successor was appointed.

Commissioner at the Admiralty, 1805 – 1806

- Attended Admiralty Board meetings. Research needed on this part of his career (*started December 2022*). It did, of course, include the time of Trafalgar

Following the death of William Pitt, his career in government service ended

Declined the offer of a **Lordship of the Treasury** in 1809 by PM Spencer Percival

Governor of Bombay (now Mumbai), 1812 – 1819

Appointed by the Honourable East India Company. I have yet to start research on this appointment. However, it is known he was able to develop his botanical interests, frequently corresponding with Sir Joseph Banks (botanist and president of the Royal Society) and sending plants and seeds to him or perhaps more likely to Kew Garden.

OTHER

Made **Baronet of Bothenhampton (& Loders) in the County of Dorset, 27 November 1802 by King George III**

Admitted to the **Privy Council, 1804**

Member of Parliament (It was quite normal for a senior Civil Servant to also be a MP)

- Queensbury (Isle of Sheppey, Kent), 1796 – 1802, On the Admiralty interest
- **Bridport** - Two terms, 1802 – 1812 , Bridport returned 2 MPs. Sat as Tory. The constituency with minor changes existed 1295-1885. (with one member from 1868). Unsuccessful in getting Admiralty patronage for Bridport industry, possibly because Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham dockyards had their own 'rope walks'

Sheriff of Dorset - 1822 – died later that year

Bridport Town Hall Clock Tower and Cupola, donated by Sir Evan c.1805

Royal Society – Elected a Fellow in 1820

Places named after Sir Evan Nepean

- **Australia** (there may be more)
 - Nepean River, Including Nepean Lake, Nepean Dam, Nepean reservoir & Nepean Gorge
 - Nepean Blue Mountain District
 - Nepean Highway from Melbourne to Portsea and nearby Nepean Point (South east Victoria),
 - Nepean Point (Victoria) – National Park with heritage sites
 - Nepean Bay (S. Australia),
 - Nepean Island (external territory of Norfolk Island,)
 - Nepean District Hospital, Penrith NSW
 - Nepean High School NSW
 - Nepean Creative Performing Arts High School NSW

The Nepean River is a major river bordering the south west and west of Sydney, length 111 miles

- **Canada** -
 - 'Nepean', originally a township, later designated a city. Now a part of Ottawa, Ontario

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- **India - Mumbai**
 - Nepean Road
 - Nepean Sea Road, renamed in 1960s but apparently still referred to by its original name by locals. A very upmarket area

Loders Court

Purchased 1799, the estate included land in Bothenhampton

Died at Loders, 2 October 1822 and is interred in the vault in the nave of St Mary Magdalene church, Loders. There is a large memorial on the south wall of the church

I understand the garden at Loders court does not reflect his botanical interest

Final Notes

I believe the astonishing turn in Evan's career in 1782 can reasonably be attributed to the patronage of Captain John Jervis (who had a high regard for Nepean) and his close friendship with Earl of Shelburne. He may also have shown an ability for intelligence work

Throughout his career, Nepean was highly regarded for his talents, hard work, diligence and integrity. Became a friend of Prime Minister William Pitt ygr, Earl St Vincent, Lord Nelson and other prominent individuals. He was also highly regarded and trusted by King George III

I have seen no evidence he was a slave owner, trader or gained any benefit from the slave trade. The convicts sent to NSW were explicitly not to be treated as slaves (that *may* have changed later under a different UK government regime). I suspect he leaned towards the abolitionists and have seen some evidence of that when Governor of Bombay (*I hope to investigate further*).

Main Sources

- Extract from History of Parliament
- Welcome to Saltash – Sir Evan Nepean
- Musée de Nepean Museum – Canada
- Evan Nepean - Wikipedia
- Captain's Clerk -Wikipedia) also 'Nelson's Navy'- see books)
- Purser – Wikipedia)
- Admiral Molyneux Shouldham – Wikipedia
- John Jervis, 1st Earl of St Vincent – Wikipedia
- Extract from 'John Jervis Admiral Lord Vincent' – Captain MV Anson RN
- HMS Foudroyant - Wikipedia
- William Petty, 2nd Earl of Shelburne - Wikipedia
- Captain William Skinner (Father in Law) – Wikipedia
- List of Home Secretaries 1782 -1803 – Wikipedia
- Extract from Edinburgh Gazette re letters from Earl St Vincent to Nepean

- Secret Intelligence Service – Spies before James Bond – Wikipedia
- First Lord of the Admiralty - internet
- Chief Secretaries Office - internet
- Office of Chief Secretary of Ireland – internet
- Lord Lieutenant of Ireland – Wikipedia
- Yorke - 3rd Earl of Hardwicke – Lord Lieutenant of Ireland – internet
- Irish Habeous Corpus Bill & Irish Additional Forces Act - internet
- Bridport Parliamentary Constituency - Wikipedia
- List of Lord High Admirals and Commissioners of the Admiralty – Nepean 1804 -06
- Nepean, 1st Baronet, Statesman, Governor of Bombay, lists extensive correspondence
- Extracts from “Admiralty Administration, 1783 – 1806”, Patricia Crimmin – A thesis for degree of Master Arts 1965
- London Gazette February 1804 & September 1804
- Nepean River – Wikipedia
- Loders archives

Principle Books for Reference

- Nelson's Navy – The Ships, Men and Organisation 1793 – 1815 -Brian Lavery
- Nelson & Napoleon – The long Haul to Trafalgar – Christopher Lee
- Far Distant Ships – The Royal Navy and the Blockade of Brest 1773 -1815 Quinton Barry
- This Dark Business – The Secret War Against Napoleon – Tim Clayton
- Most Secret and Confidential – Intelligence in the Age of Nelson - Steven E Mafeo
- Paradise in Chains – The Bounty Mutiny & Founding Australia – Diana Preston
- In the Hour of Victory – Royal Navy at War in the Age of Nelson – Sam Willis (*includes extracts from dispatches to Nepean following sea battles*).
- Botany Bay – The Real Story - Alan Frost
- The First Fleet – The Real Story - Alan Frost
- Fatal Shore – Robert Hughes
- Britain Against Napoleon – The Organisation of Victory 1793 – 1815, Roger Knight
- The Prime Ministers – Edited by Ian Dale - Re PMs Shelburne, William Pitt ygr and Addington.
- Planting the World – Jordan Goodman
- Images of Nature – The Art of the First Fleet – Lisa Di Tommaso, Natural History Museum

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Subject to revision in light of continuing research and corrections