

Admiral Killigrew (c. 1652-1712) **The Unlucky Hero**

Admiral Henry Killigrew, after retirement a notable figure in Hertfordshire and especially St Albans, had a distinguished naval career. The purpose of this article is to indicate that, had not Fate dealt him an unlucky hand, he may have ranked with the more famous commanders of the period.

The St Albans connection

The Churchwardens' Accounts for St Peter's parish, St Albans, at the end of the 17th Century contain a reference to payments made by Admiral Henry Killigrew and then by Lady Killigrew (although no evidence has been found that Henry was knighted). What brought a high-ranking naval officer to Hertfordshire? Brenda Burr ¹ published a note concerning his property in St Albans and mentioned the local school named after him. However this major landowner and one-time St Albans MP had had an eventful naval career and might have acquired great fame but for a series of unlucky events.

Some details of this career appear in the Dictionary of National Biography but further information on his family and his life has been obtained from other sources, including Herts. Archives and Local Studies (HALS), the British Library and *The History of Parliament* ² This article will be largely concerned with his time at sea and his retirement from the Navy.

Some family background, at court and in public life

Admiral Killigrew was descended from a family that remained firmly loyalist from the time of Elizabeth to that of Charles II. It included diplomats, artists and courtiers (among them, the first patentee of the Drury Lane Theatre). Three cousins of his grandfather married, respectively, Sir Nicholas Bacon, Cecil, Lord Burghley and Ralph Rowlett of Gorhambury.

Henry's father, also Henry, served the Duke of York as chaplain, both before and after the Restoration, and eventually applied for the rectorship of Wheathampstead but, as he apparently considered it not very central to his ambitions, he resigned in favour of his son-in-law Dr John Lambe, and was appointed to a more lucrative position as Master of the Savoy, which was later dissolved "due largely to Killigrew's improvidence and greed".³

The Rev Henry's daughter, Anne, made an impact in Stuart society. "Beauty, a wit, an agreeable poet and accomplished painter, maid-of-honour to a royal duchess [of York, Mary of Modena], almost perfect in character, sweet and gracious in her manner".⁴ Lely painted her portrait and Dryden wrote an ecstatic memorial ode in her praise. Tragically, she died of smallpox at the age of twenty-five. His other daughter, Elizabeth, John Lambe's wife, has a memorial stone, half-covered by the altar, in St Helen's, Wheathampstead. John acted for the admiral in later property transactions in St Albans.

Early naval career

Elizabeth's brother, Henry Killigrew, the subject of this article, was commissioned Lieutenant at the age of sixteen (or even younger) in 1666 on board the *Saphire*. Fourteen of his many commissions are held at Herts.Archives and Local Studies ⁵. They are of particular interest in being signed variously by Charles II, James, as Duke of York and later as King, Prince Rupert and the Secretary of the Navy, Samuel Pepys, as well as other Commissioners.

Henry was promoted to Captain five years later. As an example of Charles II's confidence in him, in one commission he was entrusted with bringing to England the financial portion of Catherine of Braganza's dowry. This was "21,700,512 reis, contained in a metal-bound chest". He endorsed his receipt, "contents and inside unknown", slightly difficult to believe but no doubt an insurance against any possible accusations of a shortfall.

Later, in home waters, he is addressed as "C-in-C of all His Majesty's ships in the Medway", including a commission to hold courts-martial. After service in the Tangiers expedition and then off West Africa, he was back in the Mediterranean, as Commander-in-Chief in charge of a squadron. His task was to conclude a peace with Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, home ports of the Barbary Corsairs, a formidable combination of North African and renegade European pirates



.HMS Maudant,
Commander, H Killigrew, 1684–5
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The admiral's clerk's private journal

This voyage is described in a remarkable quarto volume of over two hundred pages, beautifully hand-written by G. Wood, his clerk on board the *Dragon*, held in the British Library ⁶. The diary covers about three years of action (1686-9) and is itself worthy of a full transcription and commentary, covering naval and diplomatic affairs, comments on the inhabitants and 'superstitions' of the Maltese and Spaniards, the character of the Corsairs and their rulers and much else. However, it is hoped some extracts will illustrate Killigrew's personality and the theme of this paper.

The author spends the first several pages professing his lack of education; or, as he puts it (spelling as shown):

'Fortune having most of all by designs sported herself by making me one of the objects of her cruelty chiefly therein depriving me from the opportunity of having my education at the feet of Gamaliel whereby she has rendered me so unhappy that I am not capable of doing better than only here to present me with

a plain imperfect journal of my travels that if she had not been so much my enemy I might have diverted me with a very pleasant history and not been necessitate as now I am.

I do confess I might have improved this journal very much if I had imparted my design of writing thereof to those ingenious gentlemen both officers and others that was on board of the same ship with me who I was able not only to assist but really to instruct me yet I durst not advise with none of them in this affair lest they should acquaint the Commander-in-Chief therewith, it being my chiefest care to keep the same from his knowledge I being so well acquainted with his humour for though he is delightly altogether in noble and honourable actions studying to do good to all men even to his enemies if he is the only person alive at this day that I know that least desires men's applause for the same. Thus fearing his displeasure as also his commands if I should forbear writing my journal because I have done myself the honour in several places therof to make mention of him without doing of which I could not go forward with my undertaking he being by imprudence and conduct the north point of my company' etc.

This is quoted at length because, in spite of being close to the Admiral, his diary was apparently written in secret; however, he goes on to say later that, in case it was discovered, he had written not as much to Henry's advantage as he should have done 'to save myself from being reputed a flatterer'. The importance of this lies in the fact that, from the Journal, it is clear that Henry was both a courageous and popular leader.

Commander-in-Chief of the Salley Squadron

'The brave Commander at that time was but a young man in the flower of his age yet that commission which he had for being Commander-in-Chief of the Salley [mod. Rabat, Morocco] Squadron was the eighteenth commission that he had the honour to receive from his late Majesty of blessed memory and from his present Sovereign so that the very number of his commissions bespeaks him even to strangers who know him not to be a man of great experience and to add to his experience he is a man of undaunted courage prudence and conduct making it his study in all his actions to do nothing though never so much to his advantage than that which is truly honourable and altogether tending to the honour and advantage of King and Country. He likewise carried his command with so much gravity and wisdom that he was both beloved and feared by all the Squadron from the highest to the lowest and for his prudence and diligence in managing of His Majesty's affairs my following Journal will give a further account'.

'England's Glory'

Wood later described how, in a naval engagement, a gun next to the Admiral exploded, breaking his right leg and otherwise severely injuring him. He stayed in command until it was apparent that the enemy had put into port; only then did he sail to Gibraltar, a painful ten-day journey, during which his bones were set, but put out of joint by the rough seas. After twelve weeks in bed on board, during which time he had to be held up while he dealt with his dispatches, he suddenly fell into a fever and, 'at death's door', he was taken ashore. In three months, although weak, he had recovered sufficiently to sail back to England. A ballad, undated, in the British Library, and catalogued 'Admiral Henry Killigrew', refers to 'England's Glory in the

Behaviour of brave Killigrove' [sic]⁷ Even though it states that he died at sea and the date of the action is suspect, it indicates a popular perception of our hero.

Thwarted in diplomacy by a king's change of mind (1688)

It is apparent that, during his time in the Mediterranean, Killigrew, on the instructions of the Government and by a combination of tough naval action and impressive diplomatic skills, had so impressed the rulers of the Barbary Coast States that he had been on the brink of concluding a treaty. This would have enabled the ransom and release of hundreds of English and Scottish captives, who were doomed to slavery and the galleys. However, the Journal records that a letter from Pepys stated that His Majesty had ordered him to tell Killigrew that he had no intention of making peace. Wood, astounded, blamed the King's 'pernicious popish councillors'. The date given is 28th Dec 1688. This must have been the date received and after the flight of James II, but presumably nothing came of what would have been a successful finale to Killigrew's three years in the Mediterranean.

Admiral of the Blue, and one of three commanders of the fleet

Killigrew recovered from his injuries, was made Admiral of the Blue and, within the year, was on his way back to prevent the French fleet at Toulon from sailing to Brest on the Atlantic. However, violent storms forced him into Cadiz and the French slipped past in spite of his attempts to catch them. He managed to ride out the considerable criticism later, with the help of a patron, Lord Nottingham, by stating that 'all our ships are very foul and the French are all clean' [unimpeded by the growth of barnacles and such]. So he went back to Cadiz for refitting and then set out for home. Unfortunately, more bad weather held him up and he took thirty- five days to sail to Plymouth, where he found he had missed the Battle of Beachy Head, which gave the French temporary dominance of the Channel. 'Had we had Killigrew with us,' said Lord Torrington, 'the match would have been a little more equal'. Was this said in sorrow or annoyance?

Nevertheless, after some controversy, Henry was appointed one of three joint Commanders of the Fleet, However, within three months, Admiral Russell, who had previously supported him, became the sole Commander. Henry was given a regiment of marines in compensation, a demotion he took badly, to such an extent that, in January 1691, he refused at first to go to sea and one commentator said that Killigrew was 'in great dread that these officers will serve the son-in-law [William III] as they did the father [James II] [It will remembered that they changed allegiance with no problem]. The differences with Russell became so bad that the latter would not go to sea if Killigrew did, so the latter spent 1692 on shore on full pay.

While it is obvious that the job-security of admirals was very much dependent on their success, it was just as important to have an influential patron at home. Nottingham again put in a good word for Henry. He and Sir Ralph Delavall were appointed joint Commanders, along with Sir Clowdesley Shovell, a Whig, probably deputed to keep an eye on them, since both Killigrew and Delavall were suspected of Jacobite sympathies, probably with good reason.

The Smyrna Convoy

In 1693, the three admirals set out from Portsmouth along with a squadron under Sir George Rooke to escort the largest fleet of merchant ships to have sailed together, four hundred in number, the so-called Smyrna Convoy. Four councils of war were held at sea and, unaware that the [French] Toulon fleet had been joined by that from Brest, Rooke allowed Shovell and Killigrew to return home. That was

irresponsible enough but Rooke then failed to send out any frigates to reconnoitre and in Lagos Bay faced the whole French fleet. The ships were scattered, captured or burnt with an estimated loss to the merchants of one million pounds.

Killigrew as scapegoat for the fleet's mismanagement

Killigrew and Delaval heard of it on arrival back at Torbay. The outcry took a political turn. Rooke, who was mainly responsible, and Shovell were exonerated while Delavall and Killigrew were made to take the blame; Killigrew, with his somewhat Jacobite leanings, had known that he would be made a scapegoat. Questioned by the Privy Council, Killigrew was told by the Earl of Oxford that he had stained the honour of the nation, to which he replied that "it was too bad for him to be treated thus before the matter had been properly looked into". This time, his friend Lord Nottingham had been suspended from office and forbidden the Court and so was unable to help.

Killigrew was questioned at the bar of the Commons, who voted that there had been 'a notorious and treacherous mismanagement of the fleet this year' although the chief witness against him was later prosecuted for perjury. Another motion was put, that 'by not gaining intelligence ... of the Brest fleet, and not sending into Brest for intelligence before they left the Straits Squadron' they were guilty of 'a high breach of trust to the great dishonour of the nation'. This was defeated by ten votes and later the House of Lords exonerated both admirals. However, the business put an end to his naval career and he was deprived of his income of £3-4,000 a year.

A brother killed at sea

Seven years later, in 1700, he petitioned for full pension as an admiral. He was granted half-pay and then only to operate from 1697. He was unsuccessful in getting the arrears from 1694 -1697. A final claim, £1730 for clothing his marine regiment, was not settled until 1706. In 1702, he was finally granted a pension of £700 a year.

Thus, by an unfortunate combination of the incompetence of senior officers, the vagaries of the weather and, especially, political intrigue, Killigrew, about 44 years of age, retired from what had promised to be a career that would have ranked with those more famous figures who are remembered today. Before leaving naval affairs, mention must be made of Henry's brother, Capt. James Killigrew, killed in a sea fight against two large French ships in 1695. Although James had taken on the pirates alone, giving time for reinforcements to come up and capture the enemy, Henry was unable to claim prize money for his brother's estate because of the latter's death. The hand of Russell is apparent again.

A pension and retirement to St Albans

Henry retired to St Albans. In 1687 he had leased a large area of land from Samuel Grimston, which appears in a map at the Bodleian Library ⁸ and includes St Germain's Farm. He would have been familiar with the area from his ancestral connections and more particularly through his brother-in-law, John Lambe, who was his agent for the transaction. As his residence, he bought St Julian's, a house alongside the large barn previously belonging to the demolished Hospital of the same name, and acquired the advowson of St Stephen's, so that by the end of the century, he was established as a considerable landowner in the Town. His appointment as a Deputy-Lieutenant of the County was confirmed in 1702

The convoluted politics of St Albans at the end of the 17th Century require a chapter to themselves and included the Duchess of Marlborough's support for Henry's

election as an MP, albeit for only two years. The letters of Henry and his wife, Lucy, offer a glimpse of his domestic and political life in St Albans but these will have to await another paper..

Admiral Henry Killigrew died at St Albans in 1712.

Acknowledgements

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