

Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Oxford Gentleman

Mary Harriet Sparks

Mr B Moorhouse

TOWSEY TALES

NAME: Henry Whalley Towsey

BIRTH DETAILS: circa 1783, Oxford

DEATH DETAILS: 31 Mar.1860, Lymptone, Devon

CHART REF: Towsey Chart E1

MARRIAGE DETAILS: circa 1791, Headington, Oxon

SPOUSE: Ann Elizabeth ...?

The eldest son of Henry Towsey, surgeon at the Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, was Henry Whalley Towsey. He became a surgeon, like his father, and had a thirty year career as a navy surgeon. His first posting was Assistant Surgeon on HMS Royal Sovereign.

The Royal Sovereign, under Admiral Collingwood, was one of the two flagships at the Battle of Trafalgar. The other was the Victory, with Admiral Lord Nelson in command.

When Nelson boldly ordered his fleet to charge straight through the French line, Royal Sovereign led the first column whilst Nelson led the second. The Royal Sovereign was badly

damaged during her encounter with the Spanish 3 decker, Santa Ana, with 44 killed and 94 wounded. Henry W Towsey would have been very busy amputating limbs shattered by the flying wooden debris.

The Royal Sovereign was completely disabled and almost destroyed during the battle, but not before disabling the Santa Ana, which lost 238 men.

When Nelson was killed, Collingwood took over command.

Henry Whalley Towsey's Trafalgar Campaign Medal was sold at auction in 2005, for £14,000.

In the days before blood transfusions, when a sailor's arm or leg was shattered by the flying debris of battle, being able to quickly and accurately cut through the tissue, saw through the bone and then fold over and sew a flap of skin over the stump, had to be accomplished in the very short time before the patient bled to death.

Henry W Towsey moved to the HMS Formidable in January 1806, and was promoted to Surgeon in December 1810. He was appointed to the Dromedary store-ship in March 1816 and placed on half-pay later that same year. In June 1824 he was appointed to the Nieman on the Cape station (South Africa), but was again placed on half-pay in June 1827. He was finally declared unfit for sea service in December 1839 and went to Devon, where he lived with his wife on 2 acres of pasture with a house and garden at Lymptone. He died there on 31 March 1860. His wife died at some point after 1851.

Only 18 medical officers survived to claim the medal and clasp for Trafalgar.



21 October 1805. HMS Royal Sovereign, Admiral Collingwood's flagship, at the Battle of Trafalgar, with Henry Whalley Towsey as Assistant Surgeon, nearing the Franco-Spanish line, opening fire on the Santa Ana.