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JOHN PAUL JONES

During the second half of the eighteenth century the name of John Paul Jones was one which struck fear and hatred into every British seaman.

Jones was born in Scotland as John Paul in 1747, went to sea when 13 years old and by the age of 21 was master of a ship engaged in the West Indies trade. In 1773 he was involved in a brawl with mutinous seamen in the port of Scarborough, Tobago, during the course of which he killed one of them with his sword.

This, and other scandalous behaviour, made him so unpopular in the Indies that he adopted the name of Jones and fled to America where he offered his services to the government of the Colonies and played a very active part in many naval engagements against the British arising out of the War of Independence then being bitterly fought. In 1779, John Paul Jones was in command of a squadron of four American and French ships, of which his, the '*Bonhomme Richard*' was the flagship. For months he had harried merchant ships in the North Sea and Britain's trade with the Baltic ports was in real danger.

A large convoy of about 40 merchantmen was sailing northwards along the Yorkshire coast escorted by two ships of the Royal Navy, HMS '*Serapis*', a frigate of 44 guns, and HMS '*Countess of Scarborough*', a smaller sloop with 20 guns.

Coastguards on the cliff top sighted the John Paul Jones squadron and quickly flashed a warning to the escorting ships of the convoy.

Outnumbered two to one in ships and guns, '*Serapis*' and '*Scarborough*' turned to face the raiders. In the battle which ensued '*Serapis*' and '*Bonhomme Richard*' became locked together and for two hours fought with the muzzles of their guns touching. Finally, after great bloodshed, the two British ships were forced to surrender, but so long had they fought and so severe was the damage they inflicted on the American squadron, including the sinking of the '*Bonhomme Richard*', that the convoy escaped and John Paul Jones had to terminate his North Sea adventure and withdraw to Holland.

In the eyes of the British, John Paul Jones was little better than a traitor, a pirate and a mercenary, but to the Americans he was, and is, one of their great naval heroes. Such is the irony of war. The two British Captains suffered Court Martial, but were acquitted and became great heroes. Each had conferred upon him the Freedom of the Borough of Scarborough and also that of the City of Kingston upon Hull.

A silver casket lined with heart of Oak, which was presented to Captain Thomas Piercy of the '*Countess of Scarborough*' by the Council of the Borough of Scarborough on 25 October 1779, to mark the 'Freedom' ceremony, has been in the possession of the Royal Navy for many years and has been displayed in the wardroom of a succession of HMS '*Scarboroughs*' during that time.

The last ship of this name went out of commission in 1972. Captain W J Graham, her last Commander, handed this historic casket over to the Scarborough Borough Council with a request that they retain custody of it until such time as a new HMS '*Scarborough*' is commissioned, when consideration could be given as to its future. The other casket, presented to Captain Pearson of '*Serapis*' was auctioned at Sotheby's in 1978 and sold for £3780.