

# 1781 - The Battle of Jersey

## Heroes and Villains

### Major Francis Peirson (1757 –1781)

. . . was the eldest son of Francis Peirson<sup>1</sup> and his wife Sarah Codgell of Mawthorpe in the East Riding of Yorkshire. He usually spelled his name as Person.



He joined the army when he was 15 years old as an ensign with the 36th Regiment of Foot. His father's cousin, Lieutenant General Sir Richard Pierson, was his colonel. In September 1774 he was made lieutenant just before the regiment moved to Ireland. In May 1779 he moved to 75<sup>th</sup> (Prince of Wales') Regiment of Foot before he joined a new regiment, the 95<sup>th</sup> Foot, which was being raised in his home county of Yorkshire as a captain. However, in return for his promise to raise 100 men he was made a major when the regiment got to Jersey in April 1780.

*Major Francis Peirson by PJ Oules (1817-1885) supposedly based upon an earlier miniature by Philippe Jean.*



When the 95<sup>th</sup> Foot arrived in Jersey they were stationed in the west of the Island at La Hougue in St Peter from where they could protect St Ouen's Bay where the previous year there had been an attempt by the French to land.

As a major he was the third most senior officer in then regiment and at the time of the battle, he was the most senior officer of the regular army stationed in the island.

*Major Francis Peirson an engraving produced by J Walker of 148 Strand, London dated 19 February 1781 from a print made by Robert Samuel Marquard (1751 - 1792)*

---

<sup>1</sup> The family name was usually spelled PIERSON in contemporary accounts

# 1781 - The Battle of Jersey

## Phillipe-Charles Felix Macquart, Baron de Rullecourt (1744-1781)

. . . was born in Flanders in what was then called the Austrian Netherlands. He was an adventurer who may have simply taken the title of baron rather than had it conferred or inherited. He reputedly abducted his wife, Marie Félicité, from a convent.

When he was 17 he joined the Compagnie Flamande des Gardes du Corps (the Flemish Company of the French King's Guard). In 1767 he served as a captain in the Nassau-Luxembourg regiment before joining the French service. In 1774 he was a major in the cavalry and then he joined the Polish army as a colonel although he seems to have left Poland under a bit of a cloud and accusations of theft.



He returned to France just as Britain was faced with revolution in the American colonies and in 1777 he was introduced to the American representative to the court of Louis XVI, Benjamin Franklin. He was very tempted to seek his fortune fighting with the Americans but decided to remain in France and he 1779 he sailed with the Prince of Nassau as second in command in a failed attempt to capture Jersey. On his return he rejoined the French army as lieutenant colonel of the Luxembourg Volunteers. A regiment which counted amongst its men over 400 "convicted felons" and "a bewhiskered Turk" – Mir Saïd from southern India.

*Phillipe-Charles Felix Macquart, Baron de Rullecourt) painted by an unknown French artist in 1780.*

# 1781 - The Battle of Jersey

## Moses Corbet (1728-1817)

... was the eldest son of Moses<sup>2</sup> Corbet of St Helier and Francoise Corbet, daughter of Jurat James Corbet and Anne De Carteret, (Dame de Rozel). In 1748, when he was 20 years old joined the Royal Fusiliers as an ensign. When the Seven Years War started in 1756 he was a Captain and his regiment was sent first to Minorca and then to Gibraltar. In 1759 he was forced to return to England because of ill-health. At this time he met and married his wife Sarah Mytton of Halston, Shropshire. They had two children, a son James and a daughter but little is known of them.

In 1761 shortly after his marriage Corbet, now a major in the 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, returned to Gibraltar where he served for the rest of the war. Ill health forced him to leave the army in 1766 and he came back to Jersey where he became involved in island politics. He was one of the men behind the 1769 Corn Riots, which lead to the British

Government sending the army over to Jersey to restore order.



In 1771 Corbet was made Lieutenant Governor at an annual salary of £182 10/-. When the American War broke out the island had to be on guard against invasion. When it happened in 1779, Major Corbet was ready and the French were beaten off.

However, two years later he was not so successful, he was captured by the French and forced to surrender the island. Within two years he went from being a hero to perhaps the most hated man in the island.

*Major Moses Corbet directing the defence of St Ouen's Bay in 1779 by Philippe Jean (1755-1802)*

---

<sup>2</sup> His name appears to be spelt in various ways: Moise, Moyse and Moses.

# 1781 - The Battle of Jersey

## Pompey

The figure wearing the rather flamboyant uniform of the Royal Ethiopian Regiment<sup>3</sup> in Copley's painting of *The Death of Major Peirson* is sometimes referred to as Pompey, however, his true name has never been recorded. The man, who is shown shooting Baron de Rullecourt, the leader of the French force, in the act of revenging his master was actually the servant of Captain Christie who at the time of the Battle was in Bath. Peirson seems to have taken him into service while his actual employer was out of the island.



*and the means of returning to Jersey."*

At some stage he returned to London where he met up with a Jerseyman – Mr Fiott – who employed him on the strength of his participation in the battle of Jersey but dismissed him soon after as he was “*an incorrigible drunkard*”. He then appears to have wandered the country before turning up in York in search of the Pierson family. A diary published in the *Yorkshire Gazette* in the nineteenth century has an entry dated 1 June 1790 which states that “*The black servant of the late Major Pierson applied at the Mansion House, York, for relief, having travelled with a pass from Portsmouth to visit the parents of his excellent master*”. It was claimed that he had left Jersey for Portsmouth where he was pressed into a vessel called the *Barfleur*<sup>4</sup> but the captain on hearing his story discharged him and gave him a pass to York. The entry ends by saying “*Contributions to assist the distressed man were received at the York banks to enable him to provide clothing*

The man used by Copley as the model for the painting was in fact a servant of one of his neighbours in Leicester Fields, London, James Christie (of the auction house).

---

<sup>3</sup> The Royal Ethiopian Regiment. was made up of Black Loyalists, former or escaped slaves, who joined British colonial forces during the American Revolutionary War. They never actually served in Jersey.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Barfleur* was a ninety gun second rate ship of the line with a crew of 750 men and as the country had not been at war since 1783 it is unlikely that Pompey was pressed unless it had taken him seven years to get from Portsmouth to York.

# 1781 - The Battle of Jersey

## Mrs Jeanne Fiott (1732-1784)

Little is known of Mrs Fiott other than she received a musket ball in the shoulder while looking out of her window on the first floor of her house in King Street. She was the youngest daughter of Edoaurd Remon and Judith Jean of St Lawrence and was born on 23 December 1732. In June 1772, Jeanne married her brother Jacques' business partner, Nicholas Fiott of St Saviour following the death of his first wife, Anne Dumaresq.



Fiott had been at the centre of the anti-Charles Lemprière faction within the island throughout the 1760s and so was associated with Moses Corbet. In 1772 Fiott had acquired the title Seigneur of Mèlèche and he owned a number of properties including La Hougue, in St Peter's where the 95<sup>th</sup> Foot were billeted. It was to Mrs Fiott's house that the body of Major Peirson was brought after he had been shot. Mrs Fiott died in late December 1784 and was buried on New Year's Day 1785. Her husband died the following year.

*Miniature of Mrs Nicholas Fiott née Remon (1732-84) by an unknown artist.*

# 1781 - *The Battle of Jersey*

## **Pierre Journeaux (1741 – 1794)**

Reputed to be the traitorous Jerseyman who piloted the French through the rocks at la Rocque Journeaux is a mysterious figure.

Pierre Journeaux, born on 27 May 1741 married Marie Ahier on 7 March 1770.

Together they had four sons

Richard	b 10 Feb 1771
Philippe (1)	b 7 June 1775
Philippe (2)	b 28 Feb 1779
Francois	b 14 August 1784

Although named in one newspaper report as the traitor who lead the French into Jersey on the evening of 5 January Journeaux is supposed to have fled to France in July 1778 after killing Thomas L’Amy with his fist. This cannot be true as he was only accused of L’Amy’s murder on 22 Feb 1782 and his third son Philippe was born in Jersey when he was supposedly in exile. His fourth son, Francois, was born in the Island three years after the Battle of Jersey,

Despite the fact that he was supposed to a traitor, he does not appear to have been charged with anything. He died in the Island on 16 February 1794 .

# *1781 - The Battle of Jersey*

# 1781 - *The Battle of Jersey*

## **Captain Clement Hemery (1747 – 1809)**

Clement was the third son of Jacques Hemery and Anne Chevallier. In 1774 he married Margaret Dolbel in St Martin's church. They had a large family of 11 children.

Like his brother Jacques, Clement was a merchant dealing in the Labrador fishery. He was more involved in the Jersey Militia than his brother, serving as a Captain in the Militia Artillery. (He was promoted to Major before 1792, and later became Lieutenant Colonel of the Regiment du Sud in 1796).

Around 1780 Clement is recorded as an appraiser for the ships and cargoes seized as prizes or 'droits' and brought to Jersey. For this he was paid £40 by the Admiralty.

His house in St Helier overlooked the Market Square. On the morning of the Battle, he managed to avoid being captured by the French by dressing in dark clothing and escaping from his home by the back door into Morier Lane (Halkett Place). He made his way to and reported the French presence in town to Corbet who dispatched him on horseback to alert the 83<sup>rd</sup> Regiment at Grouville. On his way back to Town he was captured by French soldiers who placed him under guard La Rocque. He managed to escape and make his way back to Town to report to Corbet, but when he saw Corbet's house surrounded he made his way to Gallows Hill and joined Major Peirson's forces. Clement later wrote a letter to Madame de Carteret in Southampton about the battle.

# 1781 - *The Battle of Jersey*

## **James Corbet (1749- after 1810)**

Often assumed to be the son of Moses Corbet, James Corbet was actually a Scotsman. The eldest son of John Corbett and Janet Callandar, James was born on 29 August 1749 at Tollcross in the parish of Barony, Lanarkshire (just outside Glasgow). While he was destined for a career in the army his younger brother Cunningham Corbett (b.1751) became a merchant like his father.

James entered the army as an ensign in the Royal Regiment in October 1774. His status was given as Gentleman. In April 1777 he was made a lieutenant in the same regiment and three years later, in April 1780 he was made captain in the newly raised 95<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot and joined them in Jersey. During the battle he assumed command of the regiment following the death of Peirson for which he was officially thanked by the States of Jersey on 22 February. He was named as the Chief Mourner at Peirson's funeral and in the round of promotions following the battle, James was made up to Major. He stayed with the Regiment until it was disbanded at the end of the American Wars in 1783 when he returned to his home at Tollcross.

In October 1785 he married Miss Laura Gordon, eldest daughter of the late Nathaniel Gordon, Esq., of Whitehill. The couple had two sons, James and Gordon RN neither of whom had children.

In September 1794, when Britain was at war once more with France, James came out of military retirement to be commandant of Royal Glasgow Volunteers (1<sup>st</sup> Regiment). This regiment remained under arms until it was demobilised following the Peace of Amiens in April 1802; however, following the collapse of the peace and the resumption of hostilities, new volunteers regiments sprung up and James Corbet became Lieutenant Colonel Commandant of the Royal Glasgow Volunteers 4th Regiment or Sharp Shooters. They were disbanded 1808.

# *1781 - The Battle of Jersey*

## **Captain Peter Aylward (born about 1735 – died about 1805)**

Lieutenant Peter Aylward was commissioned a captain in the 9<sup>th</sup> Foot on 24 July 1762. Later that year he married a Miss Mee. Three years later his name appears in the list of those officers serving in East Florida. In 1769 he was the senior captain in the 9<sup>th</sup> Foot.

The following year in 1770 he was placed on the Half-pay list as belonging to the 109<sup>th</sup> Foot where he remained until he was appointed to his own Independent Company of Invalids, (formed from the out-patients of the Chelsea Hospital, 25 December 1779) in October 1779.

In June 1790 he exchanged his position with the Invalids in Jersey to be a Captain of one of the eleven new units created that year but bizarrely enough he was back in Jersey commanding his invalid company in Jersey in 1798 and was still there in 1800. His name does not appear in the Army List from 1805.

# 1781 - The Battle of Jersey

## **George Charleton (1713- 1789)**

George seems to have come from a family of gunners. He was born in Woolwich and joined the Royal Regiment of Artillery on 4 November 1742 as mattross<sup>5</sup>. Unlike the army, promotion in the artillery could not be purchased, so advancement was on merit. He was made up to gunner in June 1744 before finally making Fireworker in October 1745. Ten years later, in March 1755, he was promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant and October of that year he was made up to first Lieutenant. With the outbreak of the Seven Years War in 1756 he was promoted to the rank of captain-lieutenant; and by January 1759 he achieved the rank of captain.

In January 1771, after nearly 30 years of service with the regiment, Charleton was transferred to command one of the ten new Invalid Companies being raised. In August 1779 they were brought together as a newly formed Royal Artillery Invalid Battalion. Charleton's company was sent to Jersey in May 1780 where as senior artillery captain, he commanded the companies stationed in the island.

In June 1782, after nearly 40 years service, he was granted brevet rank of major in the Army and on 19 March 1786 he was actually promoted to the rank of Major in the Royal Regiment of Artillery. He remained in Jersey until 1787 when he was replaced by Captain William Godwin and he moved to Plymouth.

*La Gazette de l'île de Jersey* reported that Major George Charleton returned to Jersey from Plymouth on 31 August with his son and wife. George had married Catherine Flight in Dartford, Kent on 13 November 1749 and they had at least two sons Thomas Remnant Charleton who served in the artillery during the American Wars and George Thomas Charleton. He died 1 September and was buried in the Town Church on 4 September 1781. Catherine survived him and died in Kent in January 1797.

---

<sup>5</sup> Mattross was the gunner's ante.