

**MEMOIRS  
RELATING TO THE  
LORD TORRINGTON**

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Memoirs Relating to The Lord Torrington by John Knox Laughton

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**JOHN KNOX LAUGHTON**

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EDITED BY

JOHN KNOX LAUGHTON, M.A., R.N.



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## INTRODUCTION.

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THESE "Memoirs relating to the Lord Torrington," are printed from the MS. formerly in Lord Hardwicke's collection, at the dispersion of which, in 1882, it was bought for the British Museum, where it is now numbered Additional, 31,958. It is a very rough first-draft; full of erasures, interlinear corrections, transpositions, and interpolations, so that reducing it to order has been often a task of considerable difficulty. Many of the passages erased are in themselves interesting, and not unfrequently necessary to the sense. These have been retained, printed in heavy brackets. For the rest, the wild spelling and still wilder grammar and pronominal confusion are presented as the author left them. As to who that author was there is no clue except the little one on p. 146, which would seem to identify him with one of the permanent officials of the Admiralty. I had fancied it might be Thomas Corbett, for many years one of the Secretaries of the Admiralty, and previously secretary to Sir George Byng, of whose command in Sicily, 1718-20, he published an account in 1739. But Corbett had much more literary skill than the author of this MS.; he could spell much

better, and a comparison of handwritings shows no resemblance. The writing of the MS. is certainly not Corbett's; and all my endeavours, assisted by Mr. Hubert Hall of the Public Record Office, to match it in the Admiralty Records of the period, have been unavailing. There is, however, I think, no doubt that the work is, as it claims to be, compiled from Byng's journals and papers: it is thus a valuable, and, in many particulars, an unique contribution to the naval history of the period. Nowhere else is there a satisfactory account of the intrigues by which the navy was won to the cause of the Prince of Orange; and though the more purely naval relation is often overlapped by Burchett's *Transactions at Sea*, many of the details here given are interesting and novel.

It will be seen that the narrative stops abruptly in January 1705. It is impossible to assign the reason for this; but there does not seem to have been any continuation. Presumably after the author's death, the MS. came into the possession of Richard Owen Cambridge, the poet, from which it passed into that of Lord Hardwicke, probably the second earl, and certainly previous to 1790, when it was referred to by Dalrymple (*Memoirs*, App. to pt. i. 314). A note from Lord Royston, now let into the fly-leaf, embodies the little all that can be said of this. It is not dated, and runs:—

“Lord Royston's compliments to Mr. Cambridge and desires to know how his sore throat does. He was confined . . . [the rest of the page is cut off] . . . returns Mr. C. his MSS. about Lord

Torrington, which has some curious facts in it; and, though not complete, is well worth running over, and is certainly writ from family papers."

It is impossible not to regret that the writer who, notwithstanding his orthographical and grammatical atrocities, had access to these sources of information, was not able to continue his work, at least to the peace of Utrecht. Byng's conduct in 1708 has never been critically examined or fully explained; and the materials for doing so, even from his own point of view, would have been very welcome. The Sicilian campaign, the crowning glory of his life, has been very fully described by Corbett. It will be noticed that the title of the MS. as it stands, is a misnomer. The only Lord Torrington mentioned in it is Arthur Herbert, whose elevation to the peerage as Earl of Torrington is mentioned on p. 38, and who died without issue in 1716. George Byng was made Viscount Torrington in 1721, as a reward for the decisive victory off Cape Passaro. The title would therefore seem an indication that the author intended to complete his work to the end of his hero's career.

On the accession of George II. Lord Torrington was made First Lord of the Admiralty, and so continued till his death on 17th January 1733. Lord Hervey, who dearly liked saying something spiteful of the men he did not love, describes him as one who "never had 'aucun but pour aucune action' but the making his court and fortune." He undertook, he says, the Mediterranean command in 1718, "upon very unsafe and unwarrantable clandes-