

## Information sheet no 002

### John Benbow

John Benbow was born 10th March 1653 at Shrewsbury, Shropshire. He entered the Navy on the 30 April 1678 as a Master's Mate on board HMS *Rupert*. He took part in actions against the Algerine corsairs in the Mediterranean, and won promotion to Master of HMS *Nonsuch* on the 15 June 1679.

On 8 April 1681, whilst taking part in operations off the north coast of Africa, Benbow was court martialled for disrespect, and sentenced to forfeit three months pay. When his ship was paid off, Benbow was discharged from the Navy and he joined the merchant service. He re-entered the navy in his first recorded commission as third Lieutenant of HMS *Elizabeth* on 1st June 1689. On 20 September 1689, he was appointed Captain of HMS *York*, but on the 26 October transferred to HMS *Bonaventure* and again on the 12 November to HMS *Britannia*.

In March 1690, Benbow was appointed as Master Attendant of Chatham Dockyard, which post he held for some years, but during which, he saw active service at various times. In the summer of 1690, while Master of HMS *Sovereign*, he acted as Master of the Fleet culminating in the English-Dutch defeat at the battle of Beachy Head. Benbow gave evidence at Admiral Lord Torrington's court martial and acquittal. In summer 1692, he was again Master of the Fleet at the battles of Barfleur and La Hogue. In 1693, he saw action at the attack of St Malo, and in 1694, the attack on Dunkirk. For his services, he was appointed Master Attendant at Deptford Dockyard. During his appointment, the dockyard was visited by Tsar Peter the Great of Russia on his tour of Europe to learn naval shipbuilding skills.

He was promoted to Rear-Admiral in 1695 and in March 1698, appointed Commander-in-Chief West Indies, engaged in operations against Spanish pirates, in the West Indies and off the coast of North America. On returning to England in 1700, he was almost immediately appointed to the command of HMS *Downs*. On 30 June 1701, he was promoted to Vice-Admiral of the Blue serving under Sir George Rooke. He returned to the West Indies as Commander-in-Chief in November 1701. Further promotion to Vice Admiral of the White came on 19 January 1702.

On the 19 August 1702, Benbow's squadron attacked a French squadron off Cartagena for five days. The attack was a disorganised affair, with three of the English ships sustaining most of the French squadron's firing. On the 24 August, Benbow's right leg was shattered by chain shot. Later, Captain Kirkby of HMS *Defiance* came on board HMS *Breda*, Benbow's flagship to urge Benbow to give up the chase. All the Squadron captains were summoned on board; they concurred with Kirkby and Benbow was compelled to return to Jamaica.

Benbow ordered a court martial of the Captains for cowardice, and all were found guilty in 1703, two being sentenced to death. Before the trials took place, Benbow had died from his wounds at Port Royal on 4 November 1702. He was buried in the chancel of St Andrew's Church, Kingston, Jamaica. He had married early in his life and had several children though only his daughters survived to adulthood.

*Note: The use of the abbreviations HMS in this information sheet is to clearly define the ships of Royal Navy. The abbreviation did not come into common use until c.1790s*

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