THE LIMNER COMPANY



IRISH SCHOOL

Portrait miniature of Admiral Sir George Johnstone Hope (1767-1818), wearing naval uniform with gold epaulettes, gold braid and buttons, a telescope in his hand

Circa: circa 1806

Watercolour on ivory; (licence 25EP6H7L)

Oval, 85mm (3 1/4in) high

Gilded metal frame, the reverse engraved ‘Sir George Hope’, the whole set into a 19th century leather case

A description of Sir George was printed in the Naval Chronicle shortly after his death in May 1818;

‘His manners were of the true seaman-like appearance and the frankness which is so peculiarly the characteristic of the gallant defenders of our country was combined with the manners of the perfect gentleman.’[1]

George came from an impressive family of naval connections and valour. Born on 6 July 1767, he was the son of Hon. Charles Hope Vere of Craigiehall, Linlithgow, and of his third wife Helen Dunbar. He was the grandson of the 1st Earl of Hopetoun, cousin of Vice-Admiral Sir William Johnstone Hope, uncle of Admiral Sir Henry Hope, and step brother of Captain Charles Hope. He was related also to the Dundas family, a connection that would prove beneficial to his later career.

He joined the navy in 1781 and was commissioned lieutenant on 29 February 1788. At the commencement of the French Revolutionary War in 1793 he was commanding the Bulldog 14 in the Leeward Islands, and returning to Europe he took several prizes off the Iberian Peninsula.

In May 1798, Hope, in the frigate Alcmene, was sent by Lord St Vincent to join Nelson in the Mediterranean on his search for the French expeditionary force. Hearing that Nelson's flagship, the Vanguard, had been badly damaged in a storm. Hope erroneously supposed that Nelson would make for Gibraltar for repairs and took his ship and the rest of Nelson's frigates there, thus depriving the admiral of his scouts at a critical point on the campaign. 'I thought he would have known me better,' Nelson said in frustration. He then served with Nelson again during the civil war in Naples in 1798/9 when he helped to evacuate the King and Queen of Naples and their entourage from Naples to Palermo.

In 1801, he commanded the Leda (38) in the Egyptian campaign and continued in active service – so much so that shortly before Trafalgar, it was reported that he had been at home only fourteen months in the previous eight years.

At Trafalgar, HMS Defence sailed at the very rear of Collingwood's column, and thus was unable to engage the enemy closely until nearly two and a half hours after firing had commenced. Then, for nearly half an hour, she engaged the French Berwick. As that ship pulled away from the Defence, only to be attacked by the British Achilles, Hope turned his attention to joining the Revenge in pounding the Spanish San Ildefonso into submission. The Defence had thirty-six killed and wounded, and, by comparison with other British ships, suffered relatively minor damage. Hope managed to anchor with his prize and weathered the gale that ensued: as a result, the San Ildefonso was one of the few trophies to survive both battle and storm. For the part he played, Hope received the naval gold medal, the thanks of Parliament, and a sword of honour from the Lloyd's Patriotic Fund.

It is likely that this portrait miniature was painted just after Trafalgar, as it relates closely to an engraving of which versions exist in the National Portrait Gallery and British Museum. Here, he wears a different uniform but the pose is the same, with the telescope in his hand. The engraving, published posthumously does not state the original source for the portrait, but it is likely to be this miniature. Other prints show him in a similar pose but without his hand in view.

Post Trafalgar, he served in the fleet in the Baltic under Sir James Saumarez, and was made a rear admiral in 1811. In 1812/3 he was sent to bring the Russian fleet to England during the French invasion of that country. When Lord Melville returned to the Admiralty, Hope was again named one of the Lords. His patent is dated 24 May 1816. He continued in this office until his death (which took place at the Admiralty) in May 1818, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. He was a Knight Commander of the Bath, and for some time MP for East Grinstead.

[1] Naval Chronicle (1818), 424.