

CAPTAIN JAMES ROBERT MOSSE RN (1745 – 1801)

By Dr Martin Mosse (great-great-great-grandson)

James Robert Mosse was born in 1745 into a family that has for centuries produced naval officers, clergymen and doctors for Britain. His father was Rev John Mosse, Rector of Great Hamden and Vicar of Great Kimble in Bucks. He was baptised on 5 December 1745 at Little Missenden, Bucks, and entered the Royal Navy as a captain's servant, in *Burford* (70) on 6 August 1757, when he was 11 years 8 months old. He took part in Hawke's raid on Rochefort that year and in November 1758 he joined *Lizard* (28) as ordinary seaman and master's mate, where he remained until May 1763.

In a memorandum of 1790¹ he describes this start to his career as follows: "He served in the Fleet at the reduction of every place in North America and the West Indies during the former War, the Island of Guadaloupe excepted, and towards the end was made a prisoner, in which fate he continued till the Peace." This would have been the Seven Years' War, the first global war which terminated with the Treaty of Paris in 1763. So his captors were presumably French.

Between 1763 and 1771 he served in the Channel in *Hussar* (28), *Tweed* (32), *Yarmouth* (64) and *Bellona* (74). From March 1771 to May 1775 he served in the East Indies under Sir Robert Harland, initially as a midshipman in *Northumberland* (70). On 4 October 1771 he was promoted by Harland to lieutenant and joined *Swallow* (14).²

However, Mosse saw little active service while in *Swallow*, *Orford* (70) and *Buckingham* (70) writing in the same memorandum: "Returned to England in the year 1775 in the Squadron, but with the loss of health occasioned by a blow from a piece of wood falling on his head when executing his duty and which rendered him incapable full 15 months or indeed till he returned to his native climate."³

During the American War of Independence Mosse served, from March 1776 until February 1778 in *Juno* (32), in which he recaptured the brigantine *Dinah* from the rebels,⁴ and then until January 1779 as second lieutenant aboard *Eagle* (64) with Lord Howe.⁵ During a brief interval ashore, on 16 March 1780 Mosse married Ann Grace, daughter of the Rev Stephen Kinchin of Stoke Charity, at Deane in Hampshire and they set up home at Wickham.

From October 1780 until August 1781 he served on the West Indies station in *Alfred* (72) and later *Vengeance* (74), and in April 1782 he became first lieutenant to Lord Howe in the *Victory* (100), accompanying him to the relief of the Great Siege of Gibraltar in command of the fireship *Pluto* with the rank of Commander on 19 June 1782. The National Maritime Museum still holds a Spanish flag with which is believed to have been presented to him at Gibraltar as a trophy of war.⁶ Afterwards he wrote:

"Our loss is but a few killed and wounded – not a Captain hurt;... The Victory did not fire a Broadside as did some of the other ships in the Centre – the Admiral did not think them near enough. Admiral Barrington ... commanded the Van, and Vice Admiral Milbank with the Rear Admirals Hood and Hughes in the Rear. We have only to regret it was not day instead of night; for I believe we should have made it as

glorious and complete a victory as the annals has ever produced, notwithstanding there great superiority.”⁷

On 19 April 1783 his rank as Master and Commander was confirmed but he was placed on half-pay and sent on impressment duty to Bristol. From May until October 1790 he served in the Channel as captain of *Wasp* (16), his captain's commission dating to 21 September.

On 27 February 1795, Mosse was admitted to the Worshipful Company of Glovers, a livery company, and on 2 June was granted the Freedom of the City of London.

Between 1793 and 1797 Mosse commanded the depot ship *Sandwich* (98) at the Nore, when, on 12 May 1797, mutineers seized his ship and the Mutiny at the Nore broke out. Mosse put this down with considerable humaneness and a number of prisoners from *Sandwich* wrote to him pleading for him to intercede on their behalf.⁸ His conduct of the prosecution of the ringleader Parker was reported in *The Times* of 23-26 June 1797: Parker was hanged on board the *Sandwich*.⁹ However, two months later the Duke of Portland wrote that the death sentences of a number of convicts from *Beaulieu* and *Sandwich* were indeed reprieved *during His Majesty's Pleasure* and that they should be sent ashore to the Middlesex Correction Centre at Clerkenwell.¹⁰

From September 1797 until April 1799 Mosse commanded the former Dutch fourth rate vessel *Braakel* (54), and then *Veteran* (64) on the North Sea Station. Mosse was present at the Battle of Camperdown (11 October 1797) off the Dutch coast under Admiral (later Viscount) Adam Duncan in which *Braakel* was listed as part of the disposition and line of battle, although not present with the flag during the action.¹¹

On 1 May 1799 Mosse took command of *Monarch* (74).

In spring 1801, Russia, Sweden and Denmark had formed the Northern Alliance and placed an embargo on British merchantmen. The British Fleet sailed for Copenhagen to put pressure on the Danes under Sir Hyde Parker who was embarked in *London* (98) as commander-in-chief. Nelson flew his flag in *St George* (98), later transferring to *Elephant* (74) being more suited to the shallow water off Copenhagen. There were plans to negotiate at Kronborg castle but Nelson was critical. At anchor off Jutland 16 March 1801 he wrote:

“Reports say we are to anchor before we get to Kronborg castle [Elsinore], that our minister in Copenhagen may negotiate. What nonsense. How much better could we negotiate was our fleet off Copenhagen and the Danish Minister would seriously reflect how he brought the fire of England on his Master's fleet and capital. To keep us out of sight is to seduce Denmark into a war which I as an Englishman wish to prevent.

I hate your pen and ink men, a fleet of British ships of war are the best negotiators in Europe, they always speak to be understood and generally gain their point, their arguments carry conviction to the breasts of our enemies.”

As they were preparing to sail south on the evening of 25 March Mosse wrote to his wife:

“Lord Nelson has done the Monarch the honour of choosing her for his Van Ship and she is to lead on, as soon as the winds will permit. This my dear love is the Post of

Honour, & I make no doubt we shall acquit ourselves with fresh laurels. Whatever may be the good fortune of the Day, you cannot avoid being a sharer in the Glory which I entrust & hope will follow..."¹²

30 March 1801 therefore saw *Monarch* leading the fleet through the two-and-a-half mile wide Sound between Swedish and Danish batteries towards Copenhagen. Hyde Parker tried to negotiate with the Governor of Kronberg Castle but as *Monarch* came abreast the castle and hoisted her colours, she was fired on – notably the Swedish guns on the other side remained silent. Nelson's squadron sailed south towards Copenhagen and on the night of 1 April anchored in the outer channel, two miles from the city.

On the day before the battle Mosse added to what was to be his last letter to his wife

*"Tomorrow it is likely, we shall approach nearer, in readiness for the most serious battle; - which induces me to write while I can write - Confirming all my affections on you and the dear children, hoping they will resolutely fix to live after God's Commandments, which will ensure them His Grace at the last. So God bless you, should it be my lot to fall - 'God's will must be done'!!"*¹³

After taking soundings over night, the Danes having removed all the navigation buoys, and despite being heavily outnumbered, Nelson's ships headed north up the King's Channel with the forts, the Danish hulks and then the Trekroner battery to port. The plan was that *Edgar* would lead and take up station alongside the Danish *Jylland*, then *Ardent* would pass *Edgar* and anchor next to the second Danish ship and so on up the line, but three ships went aground including *Russell*, dramatically changing the odds and warranting a change of plan.

Midshipman William Millard in *Monarch*, wrote

*"Observing [Russell's] awkward predicament, we reserved our fire until we came abreast of her opponents and honoured them with our first broadside. The crew of Russell gave us three cheers, to thank us for our assistance. We continued firing all the way down (the line) between our own ships; and when abreast of the Vice Admiral [Nelson], gave three hearty cheers, which compliment was returned by his men at their guns."*¹⁴

Monarch then continued north but much closer to the Trekroner battery than planned because of the missing ships, mooring ship abreast the two-decker *Sjaelland*.

Millard saw

*"...Captain Mosse on the poop; his card of instructions [Nelson's orders] in his left hand, and his right hand was raised to his mouth with a speaking trumpet through which he gave the word, "Cut away the anchor"... and in a few minutes the Captain was brought aft perfectly dead."*¹⁵

Lieutenant Colonel William Hutchinson, who was in charge of the marines on board and was to have led the attack on the Trekroner fort with a division of the 49th Regiment, suggested that the Captain's body if taken below would dampen the men's spirits, so Mosse was placed in the sternwalk covered by a flag. After the battle, Hutchinson was to preside

over his funeral because of his attachment to Mosse, whose body was then consigned to the deep.

Nelson wrote later "Amongst many other brave Officers and men who were killed, I have, with sorrow, to place the name of Captain Mosse, of the *Monarch*, who has left a wife and six children to lament his loss".¹⁶ Hyde Parker wrote similarly.¹⁷

His death, together with that of Captain Edward Riou was the occasion of much public mourning. The playwright Sheridan proposed in Parliament that their respective families be made the subject of a Royal bounty.¹⁸ On the motion of the Prime Minister, Henry Addington, a monument was placed in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral which reads: "The Services and Death of two valiant and distinguished Officers, James Robert Mosse, Captain of the *Monarch*, and Edward Riou of the *Amazon*, who fell in the attack upon *Copenhagen* conducted by Lord Nelson, 2nd April, 1801, are commemorated by this Monument erected at the National expense."¹⁹

Mosse's will is in the National Archives, Kew.²⁰ Ann died on 21 January 1843 and was buried in Wickham churchyard and commemorated there with her husband; so also in due course were their children. A memo he wrote about his family history survives in an unpublished paper *The Mosse Family* by J R Mosse dated 7 July 1898.

They had 6 children:

Robert Lee Mosse	1781 - 1872	Clerk of the Cheque in Portsmouth Dockyard.
Mary Ann Mosse	1784 - 1814	
Major Charles Mosse RA	1785 - 1831	
William Phillip Mosse	1787 - 1806	Lost in HMS <i>Athenian</i> .
Margaret Anne Mosse	1789 - 1866	
Eliza Amelia (Blatherwick)	1790 - 1858	

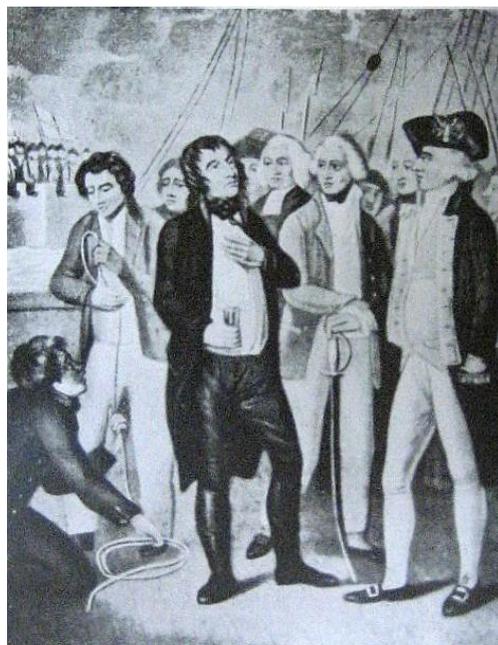
EPILOGUE

Mosse's great-great-grandson, Captain Harry Tylden Mosse, RN, commanded the converted Isle of Man passenger ferry HMS *King Orry* at the end of the First World War.²¹ His great-great-great-grandson, Commander J P Mosse, DSC, RN, commanded the sloop HMS *Mermaid* in the Second World War,²² and his great-great-great-great-grandson, Commander P J Mosse, RN, commanded the frigate HMS *Ambuscade* during the 1982 Falklands conflict.

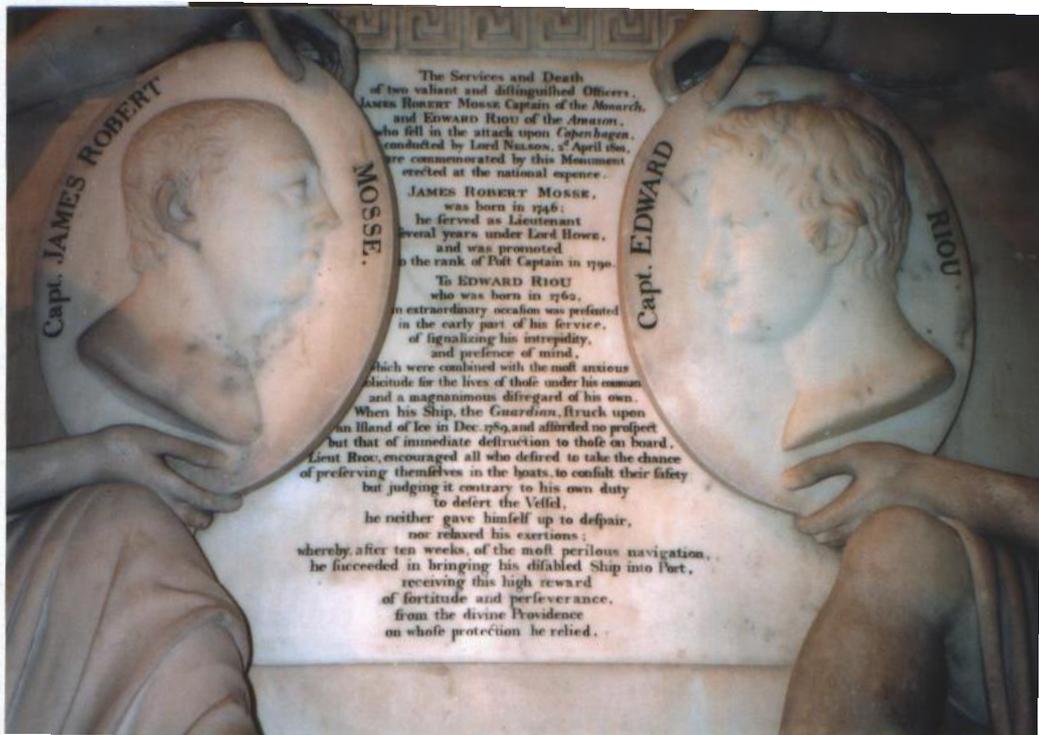


Captain James Robert Mosse

(1745 – 1801)



THE EXECUTION OF RICHARD PARKER
From the print at the British Museum



Two Captains Memorial: The Crypt, St. Paul's Cathedral

¹ Memorandum of Service compiled by J R Mosse dated 1790 held by the family.

² TNA/PRO ADM 6/87/229, ADM 107/6/77. The details of his appointments and their dates derive from a table obtained from the Admiralty by his great-grandson James Robert Mosse dated 4 December 1888.

³ Quoted in *Mosse Family Notes*, compiled by the Rev. Charles H Mosse, MA, Vicar of Aldwick, Sussex, 1955, p.18. A copy of this may be found at http://www.brainwaves.org.uk/downloads/mosse_family_notes.pdf .

⁴ As listed in *American Vessels captured by the British during the revolution and war of 1812*, Nova Scotia, Vice-admiralty Court, Halifax. The Essex Institute, 1911, p.22

⁵ There is a puzzling notification in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* for Monday, August 30, 1779 of an auction to be held in Portsmouth on 9 September 1779 where " will be sold the *Nostra Sig. Del Carmen*, a Spanish Brigantine, almost new, taken by his Majesty's armed ship the *Three Brothers*, James Robert Mosse, Esq Commander, with all her tackel, apparel, and furniture, as when taken." No further details are known.

⁶ <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/551.html> .

⁷ The family holds Mosse's detailed (undated) account of this convoy to Gibraltar and the ensuing night action.

⁸ *Mosse Family Notes*, p.18. The letter from the (unnamed) prisoners dated 28th(?) June 1797 held by the family reads "We are impressed, Hon'd Sir, with the deepest sense of your Humanity and Justice of which we have witnessed so many instances, and Humbly hope that Mercy, that glorious attribute of the Almighty, might through your intercession be extended towards us".

⁹ Mosse's part in this is described in G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: An Account of the Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore I 1797* (Edinburgh: Pelican, 1935), reissued by Pen and Sword Military Classics in 2004. This includes a copy, reproduced above, of a print in the British Museum of The Execution of Richard Parker, Parker is shown standing with a glass of white wine in his hand, which he requested from and was granted by Captain Mosse, who is standing next to him. See also J D Glasco, "*We Are A Neglected Set*", *Masculinity, Mutiny and Revolution in the Royal Navy of 1797*, PhD dissertation (University of Arizona, 2001), which makes extensive references to ADM 51/1173 'Ship's Log HMS *Sandwich*' kept by Mosse, 1 March to 28 September 1797.

¹⁰ The letter giving Directions from the Duke of Portland from Whitehall dated 22nd August 1797 is held by the family.

¹¹ <http://scans.library.utoronto.ca/pdf/2/17/greatseafights01navyuoft/greatseafights01navyuoft.pdf>

A footnote explains: "The list of ships referred to as having been distributed by the secretary is apparently that which is attached to the minutes of the court-martial [of Captain John Williamson, of *Agincourt*], dated at Yarmouth, October 7th, 1797, and signed by Adam Duncan (vide ante, p. 311). The names of the *Standard*, *Formidable* and *Braakel* appear in this 'line of battle,' though they were not with the flag in the action."

¹² Letter from J R Mosse to his wife, 25 March 1801, held by the family.

¹³ Letter from J R Mosse to his wife, 29 March 1801, concluded 1 April 1801; held by the family.

¹⁴ W S Millard, *The Battle of Copenhagen; (Being the Experiences of a Midshipman on board H.M.S. "Monarch", told by himself)* (Maidstone: W S Vivish, 1897), reprinted from *Macmillan's Magazine*, June 1895, p.6. A copy is held by the family.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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- ¹⁶ *Naval Chronicle* vol 5 Jan-Jul 1801 p 355 Despatch of Nelson & Brontë dated 3 April 1801.
- ¹⁷ *Naval Chronicle* vol 5 Jan-Jul 1801 pp 352-353 Despatch of Admiral H Parker "It is with the deepest concern I mention the loss of Captains Mosse and Riou, two very brave and gallant Officers, and whose loss, as I am well informed, will be sensibly felt by the families they have left behind them; the former a wife and children, the latter, an aged mother".
- ¹⁸ *The Times*, Friday 17 April 1801, p.3.
- ¹⁹ *Naval Chronicle* vol 5 p 365 "[The Prime Minister] Mr. Addington then moved an Address to his Majesty, that a monument might be erected to the memory of Captains Riou and Mosse in the Cathedral of St. Paul. He said, at the same time, that due attention should be paid to their surviving relatives. The Motion was agreed to." Photographs of this monument are given above.
- ²⁰ NAA PROB 11/1363/90 Will of James Robert Mosse, Captain in the Royal Navy.
- ²¹ See <http://www.brainwaves.org.uk/downloads/htmorry.pdf> .
- ²² IWM Documents. 552 private papers of J P Mosse (27 December 1910 - 6 August 1995). See also <http://uboat.net/allies/commanders/1790.html> . *Mermaid* was one of the Modified Black Swan class, redesignated as frigates in 1948.