

THE SPY OF WICKHAM - HENRY LUTTERLOH



A sailor, one Stephen Ratcliffe, owned a boat in Folkstone. In 1780, he was engaged by Monsieur Isaac Roger, a French émigré, to deliver documents to a contact in Boulogne for the, (very large), sum of £20 per trip. Radcliffe

made a few trips, but became increasingly uneasy about being involved in an enterprise whose legality was questionable. So he decided to ask the advice of a friend, one Joseph Stewart of Sandwich, a merchant.

Together, Ratcliffe and Stewart decided to go to London where they brought their concerns to the attention of Lord Hillsborough, Secretary of State. On 4th July, Stewart passed a package to Sir Stanyer Porton who opened it. Although addressed to a Mr Smith at Boulogne, it was found to contain a letter addressed to the French Marine

Another package was taken to the Admiralty on 16th July. This was returned by messenger to Stewart. On the 2nd August, Ratcliffe went to London and took a carriage to Westminster Bridge and, upon alighting, stepped into another carriage in which Stewart was waiting. *continued...*

A further package was passed to Stewart and taken to Sir Stanyar who opened it. The contents were copied and the original returned to Ratcliffe for dispatch to France.



Attempts were made to identify the writer of the messages without result, so a trap was set. Ratcliffe should pick a quarrel with Roger concerning his payments. He went to London

to see Roger and demanded to see his principle.

Roger left him for a short time and returned with **Francis De La Motte**, another French émigré who had relatives living in Wickham. De La Motte told Ratcliffe that recent packages had not been delivered swiftly enough to be of use and refused to pay more. But he offered the £20 fee for future deliveries plus a 100 guinea bonus for good service. As a result of this meeting, the other principle in the affair was identified, a German born man, one **Henry Lutterloh**, a gentleman of Wickham, and the principle procurer of intelligence for De La Motte

On the morning of 4th January 1781, two agents, Charles Jellous, a King's Messenger, and a Mr. Prothero, accompanied by a constable, visited the home of Mr. Richard Otley in Bond Street, London, where Francis Henry De La Motte was living.

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After a long delay, De La Motte turned up and was seized by while Jellous went through his pockets. A number of papers were found. These contained details of British warships at Spithead and Portsmouth Harbour along with their state of readiness, as well as their projected sailing dates. Other papers contained information on East India Company affairs including the ships ready to sail, details of troops embarking and information about Admiral Rodney and the strength of his fleet at Barbados.



De La Motte and Henry Lutterloh were both arrested and taken to the Tower of London. Both men appeared at a trial. Henry Lutterloh saved his own life by issuing a damning testimony against his former accomplice, De La Motte. Lutterloh was certainly guilty of high treason for, by his own evidence, he treated with the Defence Ministry in France stating. “the ministry of France wished to take Commodore Johnstone's squadron; I laid them the plan how to take it; they agreed in every

respect.” However, he later approached the British Government, informing them of all that he had been doing and offering to assist them in the struggle against the French.

From his nefarious trade in state secrets, Lutterloh “made a substantial fortune”.

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The prosecution sums up Lutterloh nicely - "While you was poor, you grew rich by joining De la Motte in schemes of assisting France against England: when you got rich, you intended to grow still richer by assisting England in schemes against France". On the other hand, the defence made an argument that De La Motte was an innocent, duped by

the villainous Lutterloh.

In fact, the court treated Lutterloh quite kindly. As for de la Motte, having been found guilty of High Treason, he was sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered. But was the right man hanged, or should it have been Henry Lutterloh on the gallows, or perhaps both men?

Lutterloh's evidence at De la Motte's trial makes fascinating reading. For extracts from the court records of the trial of Francis De La Motte , held on 24th April 1784, including the damning testimony of Henry Lutterloh who procured much of the intelligence for de la Motte, click **HERE**.



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