

On This Day – 14th December 1775

Admiral Thomas Cochrane born



If you have been to Culross you will have noticed a bust flanked by both Saltires and the Chilean national flag. This is to commemorate Admiral Thomas Cochrane, probably one of the Inner Forth's most adventurous and daring citizen. Cochrane was actually born just outside Hamilton, but spent much of his youth in the Fife village that now commemorates him, as his family owned an estate nearby and stayed at the Abbey House.

Cochrane's uncle signed him up to the navy at the age of 4, as part of an underhanded but common practice at the time called 'false muster' - this meant that if Thomas actually set sail with the navy at the age of 17 (as he did in 1793) he would, on the books, have 13 years of service already, allowing him to move up the ranks quicker.

Cochrane became well known in the navy for his heroic and daring exploits, leading to him being dubbed Le Loup des Mers - the Sea Wolf - by Napoleon I, but was ultimately dismissed from the Royal Navy after being convicted of fraud. Later in life he helped organise the rebel navies of Chile, Peru and Brazil as they fought wars

of independence from colonial rule, being awarded the Order of Merit of Chile. A similar venture in Greece was less successful.

Cochrane also somehow found the time to serve as an MP for the English constituency of Honiton between 1806 and 1818, becoming known for his reformist politics, and equally notorious for admitting to bribing his constituents.

He died in 1860, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Aside from the bust near his childhood home, Cochrane is remembered in Chile with ships named for him, and even collections of poetry dedicated to his actions for an independent country. He would also serve as inspiration for multiple fictional characters like Horatio Hornblower, and the Flashman character created by Robert Brightwell, as well as featuring in Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe series.

More information:

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