

CHARISMATIC: Captain Frank Abney-Hastings, inset, and his pioneering warship, The Karteria. Abney-Hastings' heroic exploits are now recognised in a new book

UNKNOWN SAILOR

He fought at the Battle of Trafalgar aged 11 and is revered as a hero in Greece to this day – but in his home county of Leicestershire, few have heard of Frank Abney-Hastings

by **DAVID OWEN**

A 19th-century naval captain revered as a hero in Greece was all but forgotten in his home town - until now.

The swashbuckling real-life exploits of Captain Frank Abney-Hastings leave even the fictional heroics of Horatio Hornblower and Captain Jack Aubrey, of Master and Commander fame, in the shade.

He was born in Ashby in 1794 and fought in the Battle of Trafalgar as an 11-year-old trainee midshipman.

Given command of his first ship at 18, Abney-Hastings became one of the youngest captains in the Royal Navy and was touted as the next Nelson.

However, it was his role in the Greek war of independence – as captain of The Karteria, the world's first steam-powered warship – that cemented his place in history.

But while there are memorials honouring his feats in Greece, he remains relatively unknown back in England.

His remarkable story is now told in a new biography – *Commander of the Karteria: Honoured in Greece. Unknown at Home*.

Its writer, Maurice Abney-Hastings, 70, has spent 29 years, on and off, researching his ancestor.

He said: "I didn't really take much of an interest until my sister was invited by the Greek government in the early 1970s to an anniversary event celebrating Greek independence.

"She returned with a binder full of documents about Frank



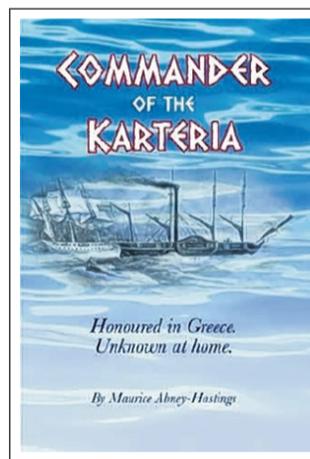
LABOUR OF LOVE: Maurice Abney-Hastings has spent 29 years researching his book about his heroic ancestor

and, as I was looking for a new project, she said 'why not have a look at this?' "What I discovered about this charismatic man was astonishing."

After leaving the Royal Navy, he became a supporter of the Greek fight for independence

and oversaw the construction in the 1820s of a revolutionary new paddle steam-ship, paid for with his own funds, which became the Karteria.

Abney-Hastings commanded the ship in several crucial actions against the Turks and



GRIPPING: Commander of the Karteria is available now

Egyptian navies before his death, from an infected battle wound, in 1828, aged just 34.

Ioannis Capodistrias, the first head of state of an independent Greece, ordered a national funeral ceremony for Abney-Hastings. He was buried on the

island of Poros, where there is a memorial to him, and his heart is immured in the Anglican Church in Athens.

Some 100 years after his death, Greece honoured him again by erecting a large monument in the Garden of Heroes, issuing a commemorative memorial medallion and naming two roads after him.

Maurice, who was a navigator in the merchant navy and ran his own boat-building business before becoming a writer, said: "I think Frank's true legacy is as a naval commander.

"When I was invited to give an address at the old Greek parliament building in Athens two years ago, I was amazed at how revered he still is in Greece. "There were more than 200 people in the audience and they all knew of him.

"I hope my book will help broaden people's knowledge about this remarkable man, especially in England."

With Maurice's help, Ashby Museum staged an exhibition last year which featured pistols belonging to Abney-Hastings, displays and models of the Karteria.

Kenneth Hillier, chairman of trustees for Ashby Museum, said: "It's rather sad really that such a charismatic and interesting figure is hardly known here in Leicestershire, or indeed even in Ashby.

"I hope, with Maurice's book, more people will know about this important historical figure of whom Ashby should be rightfully proud."

■ Commander of the Karteria is published by AuthorHouse and is available from major bookshops and online booksellers.

ADVENTURE: The life and times of Captain Frank Abney-Hastings

■ Frank Abney-Hastings was the grandson of the 10th Earl of Huntingdon, who legend has it was descended from Robin Hood.

■ He fought at Trafalgar aboard HMS Neptune – fourth in the line behind HMS Victory. It was the ship that took French Admiral Villeneuve into custody, as well as towing the stricken Victory into Gibraltar.

■ Despite his reputation as a duelist, on one occasion re-

ported in The London Times in 1827, he accidentally shot himself in the foot during a confrontation.

■ Hastings' promising Royal Navy career came to an undignified end in 1819 when he was discharged for sailing over the anchor of the Admiral's ship and setting it adrift. A mistake compounded by him then challenging its captain to a duel.

■ A poet and fellow Greek freedom-fighter once wrote –

"Intelligent and scientific, Frank Abney-Hastings to the above qualities unites those of great courage and coolness as well as enterprise".

■ The Karteria earned a mention in C. Northcote Parkinson's Hornblower series. In a letter to his uncle, Admiral Lord Horatio Hornblower wrote: "There was already in 1827 a steam warship which made every other ship obsolete. The Karteria had the means to revolutionise naval warfare."

IN THE COURTS

CASES dealt with at Leicester Magistrates' Court include:

Vanessa Ndlovu (34), of Garth Avenue, Mowmacre Hill, Leicester, admitted failing to tell the Department of Work and Pensions and Leicester City Council that she was working, knowing it would affect her Jobseekers' Allowance and housing and council tax benefit. She was fined a total of £145, with £50 costs.

Kerry Hancock (33), of Heyford Road, Braunstone, Leicester, admitted dropping a cigarette in Heyford Road on May 5. She was fined £25.

Bhupendra Kanabar (64), of Martin Street, St Matthew's, Leicester, pleaded guilty to failing to stop at a red light, on May 11.

He was given three points on his licence, fined £60 and told to pay £60 costs.

Gregory Wood (29), of Penney Close, Wigston, was proven guilty in his absence of speeding, on April 14.

He was given four points on his licence, fined £300 and told to pay £85 in court costs.

Daniel Tebbutt (23), of Ventnor Street, Spinney Hills, Leicester, was found guilty in his absence of dropping a cigarette in Gallowtree Gate, Leicester.

He was fined £100, with £75 costs.

Simon Wai Hung Pang (50), of Countryman Way, Markfield, admitted failing to notify the Department for Work and Pensions of a change in circumstance that would affect his income support.

He was given a community order, put on curfew for two months and ordered to pay £50 costs.

Claire Darwiche (35), of Neston Gardens, Saffron Lane, Leicester, admitted dropping a cigarette in Saffron Lane.

She was fined £60.

LEICESTERSHIRE LAUGHS



Dzeneta Vainauskaite, 21 Leicester

A blonde and a brunette are walking down the street. The brunette says 'Oh look, a dead bird!' The blonde looks to the sky and says 'where?'

Tell us your jokes! If you have a favourite, e-mail it to us and it might appear here. Include your name, age, where you live, phone number and a picture of yourself. And keep it clean! E-mail us at: newsdesk@leicestermercury.co.uk