



*HMS Tonnant, painting by Paul Deacon*

## Castle Pie Dinner

The by now famous first Castle Pie Dinner was served by Captain Pellew commanding *HMS Tonnant* in the summer of 1803 with Vice Admiral of the White Cornwallis attending plus several captains including Hornblower.

*HMS Tonnant* was an 80-gun ship built in Toulon 1791/92 captured by Nelson's ships at the battle of the Nile in 1798. After receiving a severe battering, she was refitted in Plymouth in 1801 and, as was common to both French and English navies, her original name was retained as a trophy snub to each other. *Tonnant* was much of her time at sea from 1803 up to the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 patrolling off the Spanish, Portuguese, and French Atlantic coasts. After the Battle of Trafalgar, in which she received little damage she remained in service until she was broken up in 1821 at Plymouth.

The dinner – as reported in *Hornblower and the Hotspur* – ran as follows (abbreviated):

“Another steward, also in dazzling white ducks, entered at this moment and spoke a few words in a low tone to Pellew, like a well-trained butler in a ducal house, and Pellew rose to his feet.

'Dinner, gentlemen,' he announced. 'Permit me to lead the way?' A door, thrown open in the midships bulkhead, revealed a dining-room, an oblong table with white damask, glittering silver, sparkling glasses, while more stewards in white ducks were ranged against the bulkhead.

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'Pellew provides good dinners,' said Lord Henry, eagerly, scanning the dishes with which the stewards were now crowding the table. The largest dish was placed in front of him, and when the immense silver dish cover was whipped away a magnificent pie was revealed. The pastry top was built up into a castle, from the turret of which flew a paper Union Jack.

'Prodigious!' exclaimed Cornwallis. 'Sir Edward, what lies below the dungeons here?'

Pellew shook his head sadly. 'Only beef and kidneys, sir. Beef stewed to rags. Our ship's bullock this time, as ever, was too tough for ordinary mortals, and only stewing would reduce his steaks to digestibility. So I called in the aid of his kidneys for a beefsteak and kidney pie.'

'But what about the flour?'

'The Victualling Officer sent me a sack, sir. Unfortunately, it had rested in bilge water, as could only be expected, but there was just enough at the top unspoiled for the piecrust.'

Pellew's gesture, indicating the silver bread barges filled with ship's biscuit, hinted that in more fortunate circumstances they might have been filled with fresh rolls.

'I'm sure it's delicious,' said Cornwallis. 'Lord Henry, might I trouble you to serve me, if you can find it in your heart to destroy those magnificent battlements?'

Paulet set to work with carving knife and fork on the pie, while Hornblower pondered the phenomenon of the son of a Marquis helping the son of an Earl to a steak and kidney pie made from a ration bullock and spoiled flour.

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'Fresh vegetables!' said Lord Henry ecstatically. 'Cauliflower!'

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'Young carrots!' went on Lord Henry, peering into each vegetable dish in turn. 'And what's this? I can't believe it!'

'Spring greens, Lord Henry, said Pellew. We still have to wait for peas and beans.'

'That's a kickshaw in which my chef takes particular pride. To go with it you'll need these purée potatoes, Hornblower.'

It was a dish of brawn, from which Hornblower cut himself moderately generous slices, and it had dark flakes in it. There was no doubt that it was utterly delicious; Hornblower, diving down into his general knowledge, came up with the conclusion that the black flakes must be truffle, of which he had heard but which he had never tasted. The purée potatoes, which he would have called mashed, were like no mashed potatoes he had ever sampled either on shipboard or in a sixpenny

ordinary in England. They were seasoned subtly and yet to perfection - if angels ever ate mashed potatoes, they would call on Pellew's chef to prepare them.

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'Caerphilly, sir?' murmured a steward in his ear. 'Wensleydale? Red Cheshire?' These were cheeses that were being offered him. He helped himself at random - one name meant no more to him than another - and went on to make an epoch-making discovery, that Wensleydale cheese and vintage port were a pair of heavenly twins, Castor and Pollux riding triumphantly as the climax of a glorious procession."

Ludwig Heuse

