

# Admiral George Brydges Rodney

## (i) History and Contemporary Tokens

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### Abstract

This is the first of four short notes prompted by the acquisition of a shilling sized disc of silver engraved with a three masted sailing ship and the motto “Succes to the LORD RODNEY”. In this note the life of Admiral George Brydges Rodney will be described, along with a few contemporary tokens and engraved coins. Prior to Admiral Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar, Admiral Rodney was one of the most significant characters in British maritime history.

Subsequent notes will describe some more tokens, coins and medals etc. that were struck in celebration of Lord Rodney and his naval successes. The final note will present the story behind the engraved coin that started this work and the ship The Lord Rodney.

### Introduction

Admiral George Brydges Rodney, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Rodney, KB was a British Naval Officer. He is best known for his commands during the American War of Independence, his capture of St Eustatius in 1781, and his victory over the French at the Battle of the Saintes in 1782, where he is credited with pioneering the tactic of “breaking the line.”

Rodney was baptised on 13 February 1718<sup>(1)</sup>. His family was well connected but not wealthy after significant losses in the South Sea Bubble. He went to Harrow school until the age of 14 when he went to sea on board the Sunderland. Serving on several ships, he rose quickly through the ranks to become one of the youngest captains in the navy. In the 1740's he was involved with protecting convoys, blockades etc and captured his first Spanish ship in 1746.

In 1747 he was involved with the two battles of Cape Finisterre where six of the eight French naval guard were captured, though the merchant ships escaped. His prize money was £15,000. From 1749-51 he was appointed governor of Newfoundland, the naval involvement being due to the large fishing fleet, but this also planted the seeds of political ambition.

He was promoted to Rear Admiral in 1759 and took a small squadron to attack Le Havre and blockaded the River Seine and the French coast until 1761. This made him a very popular public figure. He was elected MP for Penryn in 1761. His ships were involved in the blockade of Martinique as part of the Seven Years' War.

In 1764 he was created a baronet and shortly afterwards, the governor of Greenwich Hospital. He became MP for Northampton 1768. As there were three candidates, securing the seat proved very expensive and Rodney spent an estimated £50,000 on the election! He held the Jamaica command 1771-1774 and then he was promoted to Rear-Admiral of Great Britain. The salary from this position did not fund his lifestyle and there was no prize money during these peaceful years, so he moved to France. In February 1778 he was promoted to Admiral of the White, but again, this did not bring financial security. Finally, the sponsorship of Marshal Biron allowed Rodney and his family to return to England.

In late 1779 he was brought back into command and ordered to relieve Gibraltar on his way to the West Indies. He captured 22 Spanish vessels and defeated a Spanish Admiral at the Battle of Cape St Vincent on the way.

By the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war, the island of St Eustatius was under Dutch control, but was essentially a free island with merchants of all nationalities trading goods with all countries, including Britain's enemies the Americans.

Rodney captured the island on 3 February 1781 and seized all of the military goods on the island along with the warehouses of goods from the merchants, including many British, who would later open lawsuits against him. The total value of goods seized was in excess of £3 million. It has been suggested that the resources that Rodney committed to capturing prizes and escorting them back to England compromised the fleet in the Caribbean.

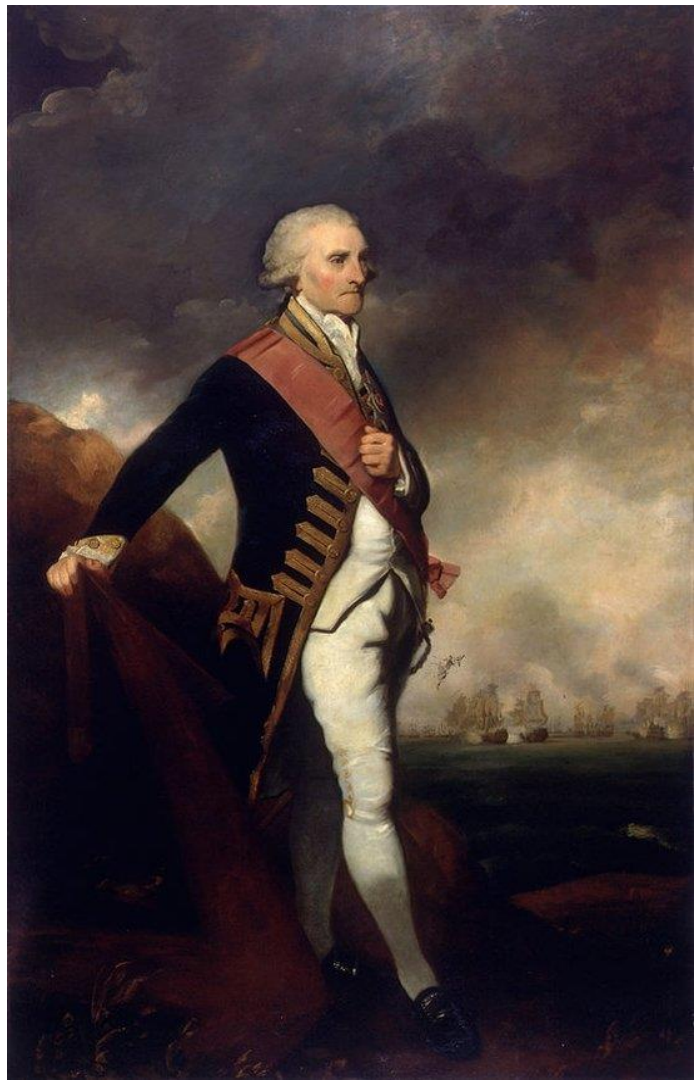
He briefly returned to England, defended his seat at Northampton and returned to his command in February 1782. On 12 April 1782, at the Battle of the Saintes, in the West Indies, he defeated the superior French fleet, under Comte de Grasse, sinking one ship, and capturing four including the flagship and the French admiral (Fig. 1).

The news of the victory boosted national morale and when the hero Rodney arrived home in August parliament awarded him a £2000 annual pension. He retired to his estate in Old Alresford and died in 1792.

In keeping with his stature, which would not be surpassed till the time of Nelson, there is a memorial to Admiral Rodney in St Paul's Cathedral crypt designed by Charles Rossi.

During Rodney's life, many trinkets, enamelled badges, delftware plates etc were manufactured to celebrate the man and his achievements (Fig. 2.).

As with all great historical figures there are contemporary tokens, medals and medalets struck to celebrate their achievements and as time passes and the name becomes part of national history they are remembered in other numismatic ways. The following pages and articles will present various tokens, medals, medallions etc. that relate to Admiral George Brydges Rodney.



**Fig. 1.** Admiral Rodney, after Joshua Reynolds (1789) with Battle of the Saintes in the background



**Fig. 2.** Admiral Rodney, enamelled silver box lid. (Thanks to Tim Millett).

### Adml Rodney

Obv. **ADM<sup>L</sup> RODNEY** around bust of Rodney facing  $\frac{3}{4}$  right. Engraved?  
Rev. Ship sailing left on fire. Die struck.  
Details. Br, 24 mm.  
Notes. 150%. Image © British Museum – M.4862.



### Success to Rodney's Fleet

Obv. Engraved *Succes to RODNEY'S fleet*  
Rev.  
Details. Ae, 28.8mm.  
Notes. 150%. Engraved on reverse of a George II  $\frac{1}{2}$ d 1740-54. Tim Millett collection - #085.



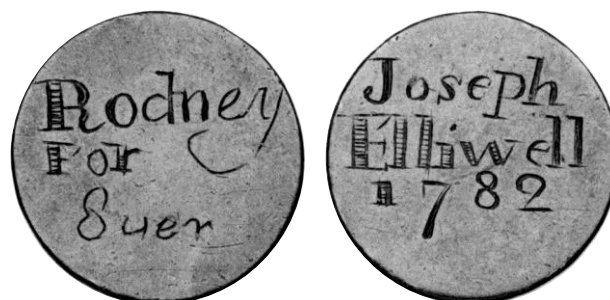
### Brave Rodney for Ever Huzza

Obv. **BRAVE RODNEY FOR EVER HUZZA**  
Rev. **BRAVE CLINTON FOR EVER HUZZA**  
Details. Ae, 27.4mm.  
Notes. 150%. Possibly engraved on a smoothed  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Image © British Museum – MG.1446.  
Clinton – likely Admiral George Clinton (c.1686-1761).



### Rodney for Ever

Obv. **Rodney For Ever**  
Rev. **Joseph Elliwell 1782**  
Details. Ae, 26 mm.  
Notes. 150%. Possibly engraved on a smoothed  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Sim Comfort Collection, EC 41<sup>(2)</sup>.  
Elliwell seems to be a Yorkshire surname, but no firm hits for Joseph yet.



### Success to The Lord Rodney

Obv. **Succes to the LORD RODNEY**  
Rev. Three masted ship to left  
Details. Ar, 25.5mm.  
Notes. 150%. Possibly engraved on a worn shilling. A ship with this name was launched in 1782 and its story will appear in a separate article.





## Jack's Coffee House

Obv. JACK'S COFFEE HOUSE 6<sup>D</sup>.

Rev. RODNEY 12<sup>th</sup> April 1782

Details. Ae, 23 mm.

Notes. 150%. Withers TB3<sup>(3)</sup> 1621. David Young collection.



Obv. JACK'S COFFEE HOUSE 6<sup>D</sup>

Rev. RODNEY 12<sup>th</sup> April 1782

Details. Ae, 23 mm.

Notes. 150%. Variety – no stop after 6<sup>D</sup>. Withers TB3<sup>(3)</sup> 1622. DNW 4 Dec 2018 lot 2476.



Obv. JACK'S COFFEE HOUSE 3<sup>D</sup>

Rev. RODNEY 12<sup>th</sup> April 1782

Details. Ae, 19 mm.

Notes. 150%. Withers TB3<sup>(3)</sup> 1623. David Young collection.



From the same series there are also a 3d and 6d for Ld. Howe, dated 1<sup>st</sup> June 1794. The Ld. Howe 6d obv. die is the same as W1622. Hence the Rodney tokens were probably issued after 1794.

Jack's coffee house was at 33 Dean Street, Soho<sup>(4)</sup>. These houses were built c. 1734 on the corner of Dean St. and Queen St.

From 1748 to 1775 the rates of No. 33 were paid by Ellis Roberts, when the house was well known as Jack's Coffee House<sup>(4, 5)</sup>.

The building was possibly named after John Roberts, a singer at Drury Lane and perhaps the licensee. In 1760–2 No. 33A was occupied by Jacob Leroux, a surveyor. He may have been the designer of Mrs. Cornelys's rooms in Soho Square.

In the 1780's the venue hosted a 'scientific club' under John Hunter, the surgeon. Members included Sir Joseph Banks, and captain Cook was also a visitor.

From 1783 the two houses were occupied together, and under the ownership of William Walker. Horwood's Map of London 1799 (sheet 2C) shows No 33 as a single building (Fig. 3.).

From 1809-11 the proprietor was John Gunnell. There is some ambiguity in the records but from 1805-11 the buildings may have been known as Morland's coffee house after the proprietor Henry Morland.



**Fig. 3.** No 33 Dean St. in 1799.

From 1813 to 1849 the buildings were known as Walker's Hotel.

In 1851 the two houses were divided again and included the shop fronts which survive today. From 1851 to 1883 the ratepayer for No. 33 was Joseph Rogers, sometime medical officer of St. Anne's and founder of the Poor Law Medical Officers' Association.

The building still exists at 33 Dean Street, Soho, on the corner with Bateman Street (Fig. 4.). The ground floor has been a restaurant for many years under different ownerships, most recently part of the 'Oliver Maki' sushi chain (2016-2019) and from April 2019 was owned by Arma Restaurants Ltd. The first floor now has a blue plaque 'Dr Joseph Rogers 1821-1889 Health care reformer lived here'<sup>(7)</sup>, a reminder of the building's illustrious past.



**Fig. 4.** No 33 Dean St. in 1906<sup>(6)</sup>.

## References and Acknowledgements

- (1) D. Macintyre. *Admiral Rodney*. 1962. The wiki page mostly follows this book, but has some modern reinterpretation and contamination.
- (2) S. Comfort. *Forget Me Not: A Study of Naval and Maritime Engraved Coins and Plate (1745 to 1918)*. 2004.
- (3) P. & B.R. Withers. *The Token Book 3 – Tickets and Passes and their values*. Llanfyllin 2016.
- (4) B. Lillywhite. *London Coffee Houses*. 1963. Pp280-281.
- (5) F.H.W. Sheppard (Ed.). *Survey of London: Volumes 33 and 34, St Anne Soho Dean Street Area: Portland Estate, Dean Street*. 1966, pp. 128-141.
- (6) J.S. Ogilvy. *Relics & memorials of London Town*. George Routledge & Sons, 1911. Plate 28 facing p.190.
- (7) W.H.G. Armytage. *Four Hundred Years of English Education*. Cambridge, 1965. p56.

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