

## **1798 – 1810 THE SEA FENCIBLES**

14 March 1798 saw the formation of The Sea Fencible Service. Companies of volunteers were enrolled 'for the protection of the coast either ashore or afloat, comprising all fishermen and other persons occupied in the ports and on the coast'. It was the first organised reserve of volunteer seafaring men in Britain and was formed during the Napoleonic Wars to defend against the threat of sea borne invasion by the French.

Districts were under the command of a Post Captain who controlled a flotilla of armed boats and also a number of signal posts, each commanded by a Lieutenant. Members of the Service were trained and exercised in the use of cannon and pike.

The service was disbanded after the peace of Amiens in 1802 but reformed the following year on the threat of a French invasion.

Originally the local District (including Bristol) covered an area from Hartland Point to Kings Road with a general rendezvous at Minehead. In 1803, a Bristol District was formed with boundaries of Gloucester and Chepstow. Pilots and watermen at Pill were enrolled and became exempt from the press gang. Furthermore, the Bristol Common Council offered £300 in total paid in £3 bounties for the first 100 members who enrolled in the Royal Navy.

The Service was disbanded on 31 January 1810 and the Sea Fencibles last appeared in Steel's Navy List for March of that year numbering 61 Captains, 245 Lieutenants and 23,455 men.