

Napoleon III

The appearance of another Napoleon on the throne of the French Empire in 1852 made a lot of people in Britain very nervous. This nervousness led to the frantic development of new warships and naval defences to counter the threat.

Napoleon III was the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, 'old Boney' himself. He was born Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte and ended up exiled from France after the fall of his uncle. He made two attempts to lead Bonapartist risings against the French King Louis Philippe in 1836 and 1840 and ended up being thrown in jail.

In 1845 he managed to escape from prison and made his way to London. But Louis Napoleon kept an eye on events in his home country and his chance came in 1848 when Louis Philippe was brought down in one of the revolutions which were very popular across Europe in that year. Exploiting the legend of his uncle, Louis Napoleon got himself elected President of the French Second Republic. Although he was due to stand down in 1852, he staged a coup against the Republic in 1851 and in 1852 he restored the French Empire. It was then that he took the title of Napoleon III.



Napoleon III

As Emperor, Napoleon III tried very hard to resurrect the glory days of his illustrious uncle. He followed an adventurous foreign policy, trying to impose French influence across Europe. In 1853 he took France into the Crimean War against Russia as an ally of Britain. He was also a key mover in the creation of the Kingdom of Italy by providing the forces which drove the Austrians out of Lombardy.



Forts in the Solent

This enabled the forces of the King of Piedmont to take over the duchies of Parma, Tuscany, Modena, most of the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples. For a short time Napoleon III was powerful enough to make the Archduke Maximilian of Austria an unlikely Emperor of Mexico.

Britain watched all these developments and alarm bells began to ring in the late 1850s as France began building a new squadron of armoured steam frigates.

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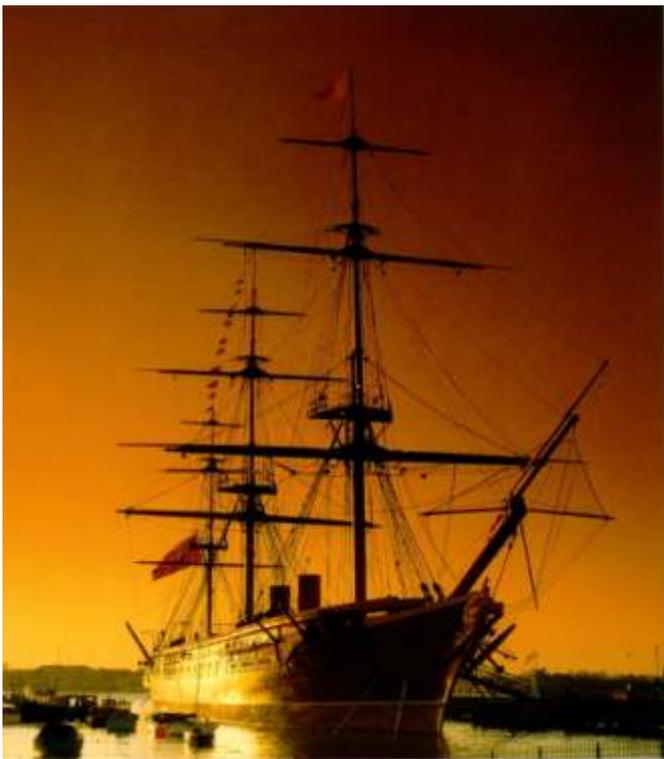
Napoleon III

Napoleon III took the view that if France could not compete with the Royal Navy in traditionally constructed ships, it was going to beat them with the latest technology.

The appearance of French ships such as *La Gloire* forced the British into pushing ahead with their own spending on new ships and new technology. The building of *HMS Warrior* was a direct reaction to this threat. Fear of French steam ships was one thing, but there was also a worry that the French would soon acquire guns as powerful as the new Armstrong gun pioneered by the British.

All this led to the introduction of a new militia in Britain and the heavy fortification of Portsmouth. Volunteer regiments were raised throughout the country. The first in Portsmouth were the Fifth Hants Volunteers, followed by a regiment of Dockyard workers, the Third Hants Volunteer Artillery Corps. The forts which were to protect Portsmouth from seaborne attack in the Solent and from land attack from north of Portsdown Hill were started in the 1860s and finished in 1880.

In 1870 Napoleon III's adventures came to an end when he allowed himself to be provoked into war by the scheming German genius, Otto von Bismarck. Following the defeat of French forces at Sedan, Napoleon III was forced to give up his throne and found himself exiled once again in England.



Napoleon III died in 1873 and his wife, the Empress Eugenie, had him buried at Farnborough in Hampshire and founded a Benedictine monastery to pray for him. His son died fighting with the British Army in the Zulu Wars.

HMS Warrior 1860
Portsmouth Historic Dockyard
Image courtesy of *HMS Warrior*



Cartoon Time!

Before the days of TV and the internet, political cartoons were an important way of banging a political point home. Even today, almost every newspaper runs political cartoons.

Some of the most famous political cartoons appeared in the magazine Punch. The one shown below dates from the days when Napoleon III was making the whole of Europe nervous by trying to emulate his uncle, the one and only Napoleon Bonaparte.

What do you think the cartoon is trying to tell us? Why is there a lion standing on one side of the picture and a man holding a poodle on the other? Political cartoons make use of symbols, have a look in a few newspapers and see if you can recognise some of these symbols and how they are used.

Have a think about it and then have a go at drawing your own. Your cartoon could be about events in the 19th century or it could be about something you might feel strongly about today.



BOW-WOW !!

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