



# **Commodore Squib: The Life, Times and Secretive Wars of England's First Rocket Man, Sir William Congreve, 1772-1828**

*James Earle*

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Sir William Congreve, political propagandist, lawyer, inventor, and Chief Equerry to King George IV, was one of the foremost military salesmen of the early nineteenth century. When England faced the overwhelming might of Napoleonic France, Sir William championed the potential of secret weapons, notably gunpowder rockets, mass-produced by the latest advances in manufacturing science. His was a world of fireships, bomb brigs, invasion fleets, experimental warfare, espionage, and the intense hostility of rival projectors . By turns acclaimed, derided, libelled and sued, Congreve belonged to a colourful breed whose influence on history is frequently overlooked. Yet for those who care to notice, his name and works are widely commemorated from the dark side of the moon to the most resounding phrases of the American National Anthem.

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