

THE KEDGE ANCHOR

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NELSON RETURNS TO WALES AND THE MIDLANDS

Between July and early September this year, the Official Nelson Commemorations Committee (ONCC) co-ordinated a series of events in South Wales and the Midlands to mark the 200th anniversary of Nelson and the Hamiltons' remarkable tour in 1802. Our Chairman Colin White (who is also Chairman of the ONCC) managed to take part in every event. This is his report.

On Sunday 26 August 2002, four young students from the sixth form college in Abergavenny came first in the fun regatta at Monmouth. After only two weeks of intensive training they had managed to learn to row well enough to beat off all opposition in a special "scratch crew" competition - and had enjoyed themselves so much that they had already decided to continue training and learn to row properly. Now they came onto the balcony of Monmouth Rowing Club to receive their prize.

There they found waiting for them Vice Admiral Lord Nelson, accompanied by Emma, Lady Hamilton - and 1805 Club Vice President Anna Tribe. The looks on their faces as His Lordship stepped forward, shook them by the left hand, and spoke eagerly to them about their achievement were a joy to see!

That moment, above all others, will stay with me as a telling symbol of the success of "Nelson's Tour 2002." The Tour was organised by the Official Nelson Commemorations Committee as a curtain-raiser for the much more ambitious series of events with which we will mark 2005 - the "Trafalgar Festival." But even though it was small-scale, the "Tour" remained true to the Vision of the Trafalgar Festival. And central to that Vision is the idea that we should reach out wide into the community here and overseas, and draw new people - and especially youngsters - to an under-

standing of the importance of the Sea to our heritage and culture. Those four young men from South Wales had never thought much about the water before - and certainly not about Nelson - and yet I am sure that the memory of the brief moment on the balcony of Monmouth Rowing Club will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

"Nelson's Tour 2002" was a great success. Significant sums of money were raised for various charities - including The 1805 Club. Some high-quality events were arranged - including the memorable 1805 Club concert at Merton Church organised by Bill White and Peter Warwick. Some important people were involved - Lord Lieutenants and Lord Mayors particularly, each of whom immediately started thinking about what they might do in 2005. And, there was some superb press coverage - it has been calculated that the various press stories were seen by a readership approaching a million in South Wales and the Midlands.

But, above all, people had *fun*. Enjoying a superb feast of music and words in Merton Church; sipping champagne on the terrace of Picton Castle in Pembrokeshire (a jewel-box of an eighteenth century house set inside the walls of a mediaeval castle); munching their way through a generous Lord Mayoral buffet in the sumptuous Reception Room of the Council House at Birmingham; cheering the arrival at Monmouth of Lord Nelson and his party in the *Victory's* replica cutter, manned by its splendidly authentic crew (including Peter Warwick!); or simply basking in the glorious sunshine that blessed every event - at every stage, smiling faces and an excited buzz of conversation predominated. Exactly, as happened in 1802. *Roll on 2005!*

Colin White

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