

THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH

Engage The Trafalgar Festival more closely!

The Trafalgar Festival is underway! Four months packed with events up and down the country began spectacularly on 28 June with the International Fleet Review and culminate in October with the Trafalgar Weekend for which more than a thousand events have now been registered.

For Nelson, 200 years ago, there was not the same sense of anticipation, excitement or certainty. For two years he had been trying to bring the French fleet and subsequently the Combined Fleet of France and Spain to action in order to secure a crushing victory. In July 1805 he was down hearted. 'Cape Spartel in sight, but no French Fleet nor any information about them: how sorrowful this makes me.' he wrote after his 3,459-mile dash across the Atlantic and back. His efforts had once again been frustrated. The Great Chase after Villeneuve 'as far as Trinidad' and back had ended without a battle. Nevertheless, in a dispatch sent by the fast brig *Curieux* under the command of Captain George Bettesworth, who arrived at the Admiralty on 8 July, he had given the astute Lord Barham, First Lord of the Admiralty, time to issue a decisive order. Barham instructed Admiral Sir Robert Calder to raise his blockade of Ferrol and to cruise between Ushant and Cape Finisterre, in order to strengthen the defence of the south western approaches to the English Channel.

On 22 July Villeneuve ran straight into Calder's squadron some 120 miles off Cape Finisterre. Barham's cunning and strategic instinct had paid off. At 11 am the French emerged from a fog bank and Calder's inferior force ran down on them as fast as the light and baffling winds would allow. The action did not start until 5.15 pm and lasted four hours. The fog, failing light and gun smoke meant that neither side could see each other clearly. Nevertheless, Calder captured the Spanish 80-gun *San-Rafael* and 74-gun *Firme*, and so badly mauled the French *Atlas*, 74 guns, and three more Spanish ships that they took no further part in the campaign. The Spanish suffered 650 casualties, three times as many as the British. Calder did not renew the action the following day, for which he was severely criticised and faced a Court Martial, but Villeneuve saw no reason to renew the battle either and was relieved to get his fleet into Vigo. He was down to four days water and had as many as 1,700 sick, many with scurvy. Villeneuve now sailed south for Cadiz where he met his destiny off Cape Trafalgar on 21 October.

In spite of the criticisms levelled at Calder, there can be no reservations about the strategic success of Calder's Action – it has never been given a name. It was his attack on the returning Combined Fleet, and not the Battle of Trafalgar, that put an end to Napoleon's grand invasion plans.

The 1805 Club celebrated The Great Chase with a memorable dinner on the lower gun deck of HMS *Victory* on Friday 13 May. It was a superb, atmospheric, evening and a marvellous overture to the Trafalgar Festival. Our guest of honour, Admiral Sir Jonathon Band KG, Commander-in-Chief Fleet, was unexpectedly taken ill a few hours before the dinner and the valiant Lady Sarah Band delivered his speech with considerable aplomb and to the delight of everyone present. I am pleased to report that Admiral Band is now fully recovered.

The Council shares my concern that many members of the Club were not able to attend the Great Chase Dinner because of the limited numbers. It does seem that whatever basis we choose to distribute tickets – by ballot or first come first served – there is disappointment for some. On this occasion the dinner was very heavily oversubscribed. Consequently, and thanks to the enthusiasm of our new events officer Lynda Sebbage and her team, Barry Coombs and Ken Chaproniere, the Club has organised another exclusive event, on Sunday 23 October, and *priority* will be given to applicants who were unable to come to The Great Chase Dinner and last year's Newhouse Trafalgar Dinner. The 'Norfolk and Suffolk Bicentenary Trafalgar Dinner' is being held at Hintlesham Hall in Suffolk and includes a talk by Martyn Downer, author of *Nelson's Purse*. Coincidentally the 23rd is the last day of the Trafalgar Festival.

Lynda is also organising a special Club event to coincide with the ceremonial arrival of The New Trafalgar Dispatch to The Old Admiralty in Whitehall on 9 September. We thought it would be good for members who want to watch the arrival of Lieutenant Lapenotiere in the post chaise, accompanied by cavalry from the Queen's Household Division, a full Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines and the Sea Cadet Corps, to be able to continue the celebrations. Lynda has therefore arranged with Lock & Co of St James', Nelson's hatters, for a private tour and a talk by Kenneth Cliff. Nelson visited Locks on 9 September 1805 and his order written in the ledger for that day will be on display. Afterwards, members are invited to the Army & Navy Club in Pall Mall for The 1805 Club's Celebration Dinner for the arrival of The New Trafalgar Dispatch where our guest of honour is Commander Andrew Gordon-Lennox Royal Navy, Secretary of the Royal College of Defence Studies and the person who has masterminded the arrangements for the delivery of The New Trafalgar Dispatch to London.

Memorabilia for the bicentenary is burgeoning. The 1805 Club is producing a special issue of the Trafalgar Chronicle to mark the bicentenary year and Randy Mafit, our North American Secretary, is preparing a keepsake for all members.



