

## THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH

### Such glory and such graves to share

Thither shall youthful heroes climb,  
The Nelsons of an aftertime,  
And round that sacred altar swear  
Such glory and such graves to share

John Wilson Croker, *Songs of Trafalgar*

As we move into what the Club has dubbed *The Collingwood Years 1806-1810* and then on into the rest of the Napoleonic decade, it is appropriate that we continue to reflect on the role and activities of The 1805 Club beyond the Trafalgar bicentenary.

At the very heart of what we do is the conservation of the monuments and memorials of those heroes, sung and unsung, who throughout the period of the Georgian sailing navy shaped Britain's maritime culture and significance. No other organisation is dedicated to this and their cenotaphs are themselves the very stuff of history - passports to the past and the means of exploring it.

Ultimately, nothing lasts. Everything that is whole, from books to buildings to the Seven Wonders of the World, disintegrates eventually. Of the last, none has survived save the Pyramids of Giza, Egypt, and even they, plundered and eroding, are on their way out. The guardian sphinxes 'discovered' during Napoléon's Egyptian campaign, foreshortened by Nelson's stunning victory at Aboukir Bay, are letting their treasures slip through their paws. The Pharaohs may have built their tombs to last for all eternity but even in an arid and desert climate, 5000 years is probably all their eternity lasts.

However, in our fast changing and uncertain world, the relative timescale is made much shorter. Moreover, The 1805 Club is concerned with the relics of modern history. So while many may forget and in the end all shall be forgot, it is left to us to highlight with advantage the deeds that our Georgian sailing ancestors achieved across a multitude of oceans and latitudes in terms of seamanship, exploration and war. Their memorials are the touching reminder of their bravery, adventures and achievements which helped to both shape the world and form our understanding of it.

Yet, the force of nature is a constant challenge as stones crack and mosses creep, as roots pry into fissures and acid rain dissolves. The conservation work of the Club seeks to slow down this poignant and ironically beautiful process of decay so that younger people and the generation to come are not deprived of their rich maritime heritage. Our mission is to identify and conserve these graves and monuments so that we can all enjoy and more importantly learn from the wonderful tales associated with those memorialised as we seek to bring them 'alive' through research and with imaginative and exciting club events.

Delivering the Cecil Isaacson Memorial Lecture at the AGM in April, Commander Pongo Blanchford RN described how immediately after Nelson's funeral the newspapers 'dropped' Nelson and rarely mentioned his name again. Lord Byron felt the pulse:

There's no more to be said of Trafalgar.  
'Tis with our hero quietly inturr'd.

It was the import of the Napoleonic war that dominated the news. In post-Trafalgar Britain it was generally felt that whatever Bonaparte may boast he could never now invade England, but that his continual continental aggrandisement could affect the nation's trade and developing empire in India. For the next ten years this created a vitally important but less well-publicised role for the Royal Navy, notably in the Mediterranean. The Duke of Wellington's remarks reveal that he fully appreciated the strategic importance of the Royal Navy in this period, 'If anyone wishes to know the history of this war, I will tell them that it is our maritime supremacy [that] gives me the power of maintaining my army while the enemy are unable to do so'. Psychologically and professionally for the Royal Navy Nelson's success at Trafalgar had achieved superiority over its French opponent.

Nelson is forever our icon, yet he himself was the first to recognise the considerable talent gathered around him, whether precursor, contemporary or protégé. As I have written before, alongside our focus on Nelson the Club now has the wonderful opportunity to reflect on some of these remarkable characters like Thomas Fremantle, William Hoste, Sydney Smith and not least Cuthbert Collingwood, whose particular skills Nelson acknowledged when he entrusted to him command of the weather division on 21 October 1805, knowing full well that its action against the enemy's rear was where the brunt of the battle would be fought and won: 'No man has more confidence in another man than I have in you: and no man will render your services more justice than your very old friend' (*Victory*, 9 October 1805).

Collingwood was honoured in Newcastle and Gateshead on 14 June at the presentation of The New Trafalgar Dispatch to the Lords' Lieutenant of Northumberland and Tyne & Wear. The 1805 Club was a main partner in this flagship bicentenary project and club vice chairman Bill White, who led it, and myself were present at the ceremony at HMS *Calliope*.

This RNR unit lies alongside the Tyne beneath the dazzling new Sage Centre and it is conceivable that on-going regeneration may threaten HMS *Calliope*'s future. The 1805 Club is proud of its links with the Royal Navy of today and I

thought members would like to read the letter your chairman wrote to the local newspaper afterwards, since I believe it not only helps to demonstrate the support that the Club gets from the Royal Navy, but also the continuity of history that links the work that we do, and its relevance to our lives now:

'I had the pleasure of visiting Newcastle on 14 June for the presentation of The New Trafalgar Dispatch to the Lord Lieutenants of Tyne and Wear and Northumberland and to the Mayors of Gateshead, Newcastle and Morpeth. The new dispatch was inspired by the original written by Tyneside's Trafalgar hero Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood, which reported the victory and the death of Lord Nelson.'

The ceremony took place at two of Newcastle's most important maritime locations: Trinity House and HMS *Calliope*. The young men and women based at HMS *Calliope* and on parade for the occasion were a credit to the Royal Navy and to Newcastle and Gateshead and I feel that their commitment and dedication deserves congratulation.

Admiral Sir Alan West, former First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff, reminded everyone present that while much may have changed in the 200 years since Trafalgar, the Royal Navy remains as relevant as ever and in the final analysis in our uncertain world, 'it is on the Navy under the good providence of God that our wealth, prosperity and peace depend'. It is often overlooked that as an island nation 95 per cent of our trade is carried by sea and that the Royal Navy is there to protect the free movement of this shipping, as much as it is to project the nation's influence worldwide and to carry out humanitarian relief and counter drug operations.

It therefore struck me how very fortunate is Newcastle and Gateshead in having a flourishing naval establishment of the high calibre of HMS *Calliope* at the heart of its community. HMS *Calliope* reinforces the community's links with the real world, is an important focus for the training of young people, and is a reminder of the historic links Newcastle and Gateshead have with the sea.

Recent operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated the vital role of the Royal Naval Reserve in support of the regular forces and the success of HMS *Calliope* highlights for us all the importance of the partnership that exists between our great cities and the Royal Navy. Long may this partnership thrive and the White Ensign fly proudly beside the Tyne.'

In May your Council spent a whole day reflecting on the role and activities of The 1805 Club beyond the Trafalgar bicentenary. We had our first 'Awayday' last year at a hotel in Bath and felt that it was worthwhile repeating. This year the Naval Historical Branch at the Naval Base in Portsmouth very kindly allowed us the use of their superb new library for our meeting. It was a perfect location and a real privilege and we are indebted to Captain Christopher Page RN for arranging it. This dispatch already reveals some of our thinking!

In February I highlighted the Club's closer links with HMS *Collingwood*. I am now delighted to confirm that we shall be organising an international historical one-day conference at the establishment's Maritime Warfare School, the largest naval training organisation in Western Europe, on 13 September 2008. The conference is entitled *The Collingwood Years: Naval Strategy in the Mediterranean 1806-1810*. Once again this highlights the relationship of our work with today's Royal Navy as well as the intellectual dimension of the club's activities.

Turning now to more immediate club activities for members, your redoubtable events officer, Lynda Sebbage, has been battling with a serious back injury but has nevertheless arranged a cornucopia of events: a private visit to the famous Lloyd's Nelson Collection on 17 August, a marvellous day at Buckler's Hard in the company of Brian Lavery on 2 September, and this year's Trafalgar Dinner at Newhouse, which magically falls on the 21 October! As if that is not enough for one year, which started with the St Paul's Cathedral funeral service on 9 January, she and Barry Coombs organised a wonderful weekend on 10-11 June in 'Nelson's Monmouth', which included a private view at the Nelson Museum, the Naval Temple on the Kymin, the Nelson monument in Hereford and rare and intimate visits to the homes of vice president Anna Tribe and Clive Richards (see article on p.10). Thanks to Alison Henderson, the local press coverage of our visit was excellent.

10 June was also a record for the Club. It held two events on the same day in different parts of the country! While some members were enjoying Monmouth, Charles Davis and Peter Sims, of the new and flourishing South West Group, were taking another group around Devonport naval base (report on page 7).

And what of remembering Britannia's God of War? Apart from his totem spirit, which permeates the continuing naval story of the Napoleonic Wars, the Club is preparing for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in September 2008...

What day more fit the birth to solemnize  
Of the greatest Hero you can surmise?

With good wishes to you all,

**Peter Warwick**

P.S. Chris Gray has just secured another £1,000, from the Idlewild Trust for the Trafalgar Captains Memorial project.  
Bravo Zulu!