

## THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH

### Friendship, Humanity and Heroism



On a cold, blustery day in February I attended a meeting of the Official Waterloo Committee at the National Army Museum in Chelsea. Yes, hard on the heels of the Nelson bicentenaries, the Wellington machine is gearing up to celebrate this famous soldier's military career, notably his campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula 1808-1814, and its culmination at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

Will a 'Wellington Festival' overshadow the memory of Nelson? Some of you will recall that during the Club's Cecil Isaacson Memorial lecture last year, Commander Pongo Blanchford highlighted how, after his state funeral, mention of Nelson in the newspapers fell away almost entirely. Events in the Napoleonic Empire were far more significant, and worrying. Will Nelson's memory fade 200 years later in the same way?

We are familiar with the Iron Duke's story of how as General Sir Arthur Wellesley he met Nelson on 12 September 2005, just one day before the admiral left London to join the *Victory*. Unfortunately, we do not have an account from Nelson to sit alongside it. However, we can assume from Wellington's version that the 'sudden and complete metamorphosis' to Nelson's behaviour from 'a style so vain and so silly as to surprise and almost disgust me' to that of 'a very superior man', means that Nelson soon recognised he was in the company of a

professional fighting man with a remarkable intellect and reputation. One imagines that he was impressed by Wellesley, who at 36 had already acquired a great reputation in India.

We should rightly see Wellington as a 'Great Man' of his age. Militarily, in the words of an anonymous soldier, he did not 'know how to lose a battle', and in the Peninsula shattered the myth of French invincibility. Like Nelson, he was a national hero; the man credited with finally checking Napoléon. Yet, the contrast with Nelson and the significance of Trafalgar compared with Waterloo is revealing, and the lessons of *The Trafalgar Festival* and *SeaBritain 2005* are pathfinding. Combined they will undoubtedly influence the august committee in Chelsea's choice of 'values' to celebrate Wellington's achievements, and the impact the Waterloo bicentenary will have on the imagination of the country in 2015, and as a result on Nelson's contemporary legacy.

The historical contrasts are considerable. Nelson died at the peak of his career and reputation, with his all-round abilities intact, and crucially in his finest hour. Wellington survived and went on to experience a mixed political career, dying a 'national treasure' rather than the embodiment and immediate saviour of his country. Nelson was the last admiral in the Royal Navy to achieve a series of set piece victories, whereas other 'first generals' of their age have matched Wellington's great military ability. Trafalgar saw the annihilation of the Combined French and Spanish Fleet; Waterloo was 'so nice a thing – so nearly run a thing'! Trafalgar caged Napoléon's aggrandisement to the confines of Europe and laid the foundations for Britain's subsequent global maritime supremacy into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In retrospect Waterloo was the coda to the Napoleonic era. It was an interruption to the reconstruction of Europe already underway at Vienna, where the Great Powers were laying the foundations for a new Europe whose legacy survives to this day in the guise of the European Union, underpinned, ironically, by the Code Napoléon.

The fundamental values chosen for *The Trafalgar Festival* may be summed up in three words: friendship, humanity and heroism. These are powerful values that served the bicentenary and Nelson well. The strongest of them is humanity. It both recognises the power of the 'brotherhood of the sea' - the humanity between former enemies during the great storm after the battle is one of the more distinctive features of Trafalgar - and Nelson's personal humanity. It was the very essence of the man and a quality that permeated his modern style of leadership.

Wellington was humane too, but his acerbic aristocratic character lacked the characteristic 'Nelson' warmth, and unlike Nelson his leadership style was far more authoritarian. Wellington believed that his kind were predestined to lead and he did so by stamping his iron will on the men he commanded.

After Waterloo thousands of wounded and dying were abandoned to their pity, some enduring the agony for more than a week before they expired. Consequently, where heroism, friendship and leadership may be applied in varying degrees to Waterloo and the Peninsula War, humanity may not.

Humanity, friendship and heroism will be at the fore in Great Yarmouth on 31 March at the unveiling of the first memorial in the UK to those who fought at the Battle of Copenhagen 1801. It is now generally agreed that the truce Nelson sent ashore at the climax of the battle was inspired by his sense of humanity, rather than as a *ruse de guerre*. The wording on the memorial, which is in English and Danish, reads:

### A Homage to all Heroes: Copenhagen 1801

This memorial commemorates all those who fought at the first Battle of Copenhagen on 2 April 1801. It especially honours the magnanimity of Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, who addressed his message of truce 'To the Brothers of Englishmen, the Danes', and the gallantry of the Danes, epitomized by the courage of 17-year-old Lieutenant Peter Willemoes.

This plaque was unveiled on 31 March 2007 and was the first in the United Kingdom to commemorate and honour the participants in the Battle of Copenhagen of 1801. The British fleet sailed to the Baltic from Great Yarmouth and returned here after the battle.

Coincidentally, this year marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the second Battle of Copenhagen in August 1807, for which Nelson is invariably vilified by the Danes for bombarding their city, even though he had been dead for two years! Ironically, the man who *was* present, in command of a division supporting the expedition that forced the Danes to give up possession of their fleet before it fell into French hands, was General Sir Arthur Wellesley!

Since its formation The 1805 Club has taken the lead erecting two new memorials, one to Lady Hamilton in Calais and now the Copenhagen 1801 Memorial at Great Yarmouth, with funds raised at the Copenhagen 200 Years Conference, jointly organised by the Club, The Royal Naval Museum, The Nelson Society and The Society for Nautical Research. Nevertheless, the Club's core activity remains the conservation of graves, monuments and memorials. In order to highlight the professionalism and nature of the work involved this issue of *The Kedge Anchor* carries a special supplement: *Conservation Matters*. This explains how the Club goes about its central task, explains the difference between conservation and restoration, and looks at the Club's past achievements and future projects. We hope you will find it informative. You are welcome to ask for further copies if you believe you can use them to help promote the Club's work, or raise funds!

The main projects in the pipeline are themed in the mould of The Trafalgar Captains' Memorial. They include The Nile and Copenhagen Captains' Memorial, and the 'Mediterranean Fleet Memorial 1806-1815'. The latter reflects the fact that Napoléon Bonaparte rather than Wellington dominated the post Trafalgar era and how it was sea power - the Royal Navy and the merchant marine - which both contained his territorial ambitions and supported Wellington's campaigns in the Peninsular.

The intellectual contribution the Club is making directly to this crucial but largely ignored period of naval history is spearheaded by its own international naval historical conference at the Maritime Warfare School, HMS *Collingwood* on 13 September 2008 entitled *The Collingwood Years: Naval strategy in the Mediterranean and Atlantic 1806-1810*. Additionally the Club is involved in the organisation of an important three-day academic conference at the Palacio de Godoy in Madrid, 2-6 April 2008, entitled *Napoleonic Empire and the New Political Culture*, and in the arrangements for the first of the Nelson Legacy conferences, *Following Nelson: Legacy in Warfare and Society*, which is being held in Portsmouth on 29 September this year, the anniversary of Lord Nelson's birthday. *Following Nelson* is jointly organised by The 1805 Club, The Royal Naval Museum, The Society for Nautical Research and The Nelson Society, and is followed by a dinner in HMS *Victory*. Further details of these events are forthcoming but you may like to make a note of the dates in your diary now!

This year's Annual General Meeting is on Saturday 21 April. Sally Birkbeck, after ten years dedicated and superb service as membership secretary, is stepping down from the Council, as is Lynda Sebbage. They have both been splendid officers and intend to continue to give their active support to the Club through the Council's sub-groups. Lynda is only retiring until her health improves! Meanwhile, Linda Ebrey and Barry Coombs are standing for Council in their places and there is no doubt that, if elected, they will be keen and diligent executive members.

At the AGM, as mooted last year, the Council will seek your support to increase the individual membership fee in 2008 from £25.00 to £35.00. The fee has not changed since the Club's foundation in 1991 and in spite of all efforts to economise inflation since then, together with the growth in membership and the significant improvements to the Club's regular publications, has eroded the surplus income from the membership fee. This means that very little, if any, of the fee is now available for conservation projects - the Club's *raison d'être*! If the membership fee had increased in line with inflation it would in fact be £35.93 today. We want to continue to undertake our essential conservation work. We want you to feel that your membership is worthwhile and that you are receiving genuine benefits. We want the Club to flourish and grow in influence. I therefore hope we can count on your continued support at the new rate.

After the AGM, Justin Reay will deliver this year's Cecil Isaacson Memorial Lecture. Justin is based at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and his paper, "*To render an effectual service': Collingwood's Star Captains in Catalunya*" (Catalonia), promises to be riveting. The Council and I very much hope to see you there.

With good wishes to you all,

**Peter Warwick**

