

## THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH

### “None of my reputation has been diminished in the late Glorious Action”

Nelson wrote these words in a letter to his friend the Duke of Clarence, dated 22 February 1797, a few days after the Battle of Cape St Vincent, hoping that he would circulate it to other influential people and even the press. He was conscious of the importance of his popular image to his career.

Since my last Dispatch, the role and legacy of things maritime, and the Royal Navy, has been highlighted by among other things, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Falklands War, the fire in the *Cutty Sark*, the hostage-taking in the Gulf, the launch of HMS *Astute*, and the sad death of one of our Vice Presidents, Tom Pocock.

At first sight these events may seem unrelated, but there is an important thread joining them all; a thread that also connects them to the work of The 1805 Club. It is summed up in one word: reputation.

The regrettable media shambles that followed the hostage taking of the ‘*Cornwall 15*’, in the disputed waters of the Shatt-al-Arab Waterway, will not diminish the true long-term reputation of the Royal Navy. Its significant role today in Afghanistan, which is not reported by the media in the same high-profile way, and its remarkable and stunning action twenty-five years ago in the inhospitable South Atlantic, continue a trend of distinction that goes right back to the Georgian sailing navy.

In 1805 the Royal Navy had gained a supremacy over the world’s oceans, which it no longer has today. Yet the public still adheres to ‘England expects’ and the ‘habit of victory’. This expectation puts the reputation of the navy into a difficult position. It is also much harder to measure and agree on the recent past.

Nevertheless, while the technology may have changed since Trafalgar, the ethos of the service and the dedication of its people has not. Their enthusiastic ‘can-do’ attitude will weather the short-term knock to its reputation, provided the service is given the resources to fulfil the global, versatile role *expected* of it. The launch of HMS *Astute*, the Royal Navy’s most powerful attack submarine for blue water operations, goes some way to underpinning its resource strength but leaves no room for complacency.

And so it is with The 1805 Club, albeit on a much smaller canvas. While we have not taken knocks to our reputation, the Council, supported by many enthusiastic members, displays a similar ‘can-do’ approach to the management and activities of the Club, and the fulfilment of its key objects. The Club’s reputation is gaining ground all the time, yet there is, happily, no sense of complacency.

The activity of the recently formed local groups in the south west and south east is a case in point. They are important assets to our members and their popularity is such that a local group is also being established in the north east – Collingwood country! Close by is Hartlepool, County Durham, home to the *Trincomalee*. Those looking after her and other historic ships around the country, highlighted in the interview with Martyn Heighton on page 18, including HMS *Victor*, HMS *Warrior* and SS *Great Britain*, will have been shocked at the disaster to the *Cutty Sark* in Greenwich.

In fact, while not of the Georgian sailing era, the fire damage to the *Cutty Sark* will have upset us all. All three decks have been lost, so she has suffered a significant amount of damage. One thing that saved her was her construction, because she was composite built, with iron frames and wooden planking. If she had been a wooden ship she would have been lost entirely. Moreover, a substantial part of her was removed beforehand as part of the restoration: the masts, the wheel, the coach-housing, the jolly boats and all the artefacts that were on board. *Cutty Sark*’s reputation will be a key factor in filling the funding gap that has now risen, as a result of the fire, to £17m. The outlook is bright and she should open to the public again in 2010. While the amount involved dwarfs the sums required by the Club for conservation of monuments and memorials, the relevance of reputation to successful fundraising for heritage issues is the same.

As with the restoration of the *Cutty Sark*, the Club has much it wants to achieve in terms of conservation. This is why at this year’s Annual General Meeting at The Old Royal Naval College on 21 April, I was delighted to pay tribute to the untiring work of all of the Club’s Council members. They have been and remain a tremendous team: creative in their ideas, skilled in their actions and enthusiastic to a fault. In the words of the title of Justin Reay’s Cecil Isaacson Memorial Lecture they strive ‘to render an effectual service.’ If one seeks the source of the Club’s reputation this is where you will find it.

May I take this opportunity to welcome three new members to Council: Barry Coombs who takes over events from Lynda Sebbage; Linda Ebrey who takes the reins from Sally Birkbeck as membership secretary; and Dianne Smith who is developing the educational activities of the Club, particularly to reach younger people. Both Sally and Lynda



will remain closely involved with the activities of the Club, and on your behalf it was pleasure to thank them for their wonderful efforts over many years, in Sally's case a remarkable 11 years! (Report on page 11.)

Progress is being made on all fronts. The chairman of The Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery has met with the Club at the grave of Admiral The Hon Sir Thomas Bladen Capel (1176-1853), captain of the *Phoebe* at Trafalgar. Capel's grave is one of the two outstanding conservation projects of The Trafalgar Captains' Memorial and we hope that with the Friends' support we shall be able to more easily raise the £9,000 required. Admiral Sir Henry William Bayntun, captain of the *Leviathan* at Trafalgar has a more attractive memorial and although the Heritage Lottery Awards for All scheme has not found itself able to support the conservation, we still have other potentially promising routes to explore. In both instances the Club will also be contributing to the work from its own funds.

Research for the Nile and Copenhagen Captains' Memorial is well underway and we aim to complete this so that plans for any conservation required can follow hard on the heels of the completion of works for Capel and Bayntun.

The Club is also funding the maintenance work on the Bolton tombs at All Saints Church, Burnham Thorpe. They were among the earliest of the Club's projects but the march of time leaves its toll and so it is vital to check the degradation. You will see a flyer with this issue, and an article, on page 16, by Club member Mike Tapper, about the need to carry out work on All Saints Church's electrics. This is an area where the Club's charitable objects prevent us from helping directly with funding, but given that All Saints is in many ways Nelson's memorial in Burnham Thorpe, the Club is keen to support the church's fundraising efforts, and hopes that individual members will make whatever donation they feel they can to ensure the completion of the works in time for the anniversary of Lord Nelson's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday next year.

All Saints will be one of the centrepieces of the major weekend (26-28 September 2008) event the Club is organising in partnership with residents of the village of Burnham Thorpe and the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk to celebrate the birthday. Highlights include a concert and a special service at All Saints and a civic Dinner in the magnificent Town Hall in King's Lynn.

This will be the second major event in Norfolk organised by the Club. On page 6, you will find the report on the very successful *Homage to all Heroes* at Great Yarmouth between 31 March and 1 April 2007.

The redevelopment of the website is now being carried forward by a professional firm, to both improve its architecture and presentation while at the same time providing members with a password only Forum area. This is prior to the construction of an exciting and important educational resource that will enhance the approachability and relevance of the Club through 'living history', especially with younger people and local communities. The improved website will also play a crucial role in both sustaining and increasing the membership of the Club.

This will be particularly important as we get closer to January next year, when for the first time in the Club's history, membership fees for individual members rise; from £25.00 to £35.00. The increase has been driven by the need for more money to carry out projects and the inevitable erosion of value by inflation. In fact, if subscriptions had kept pace with the increase in inflation since the foundation of the Club in 1990, today they would be nearly £36.00! Nevertheless, members have seen considerable improvements to this newsletter and other Club publications, notably *The Trafalgar Chronicle*. Our continuous aim is to enhance the overall benefits for members, who we hope also enjoy their membership because they believe in our conservation work and so wish to further the Club's influence and reputation.

For those of you who already pay by Standing Order, may I ask you to cancel your existing arrangement and open a new Order at the new rate. Linda Ebrey will be contacting each of you directly about this in due course.

And so to Tom Pocock. His reputation as a naval historian and Nelson biographer is assured and there was a tremendous turnout for his funeral on 21 May at Chelsea Old Church. But with his death the Club has lost a very good friend, a Vice President, and strong supporter of what we do and stand for. One of Tom's last contributions was to endorse the Club's use of *his* phrase, 'Stopping Napoleon', as the theme for its activities during the anniversary years leading up to 2015. This will be one small legacy, but the Council will be considering other ways to pay him tribute. We are grateful to Peter Hore for the obituary, appearing on the front page and following on pages four to five, written especially for this issue of the *Kedge Anchor*.

As ever my thanks to Randy and Dana Mafit, and Paul and Penny Dalton for producing yet another superb issue, and to our 'contributing editor', Alison Henderson. Their reputations have been undiminished by their actions!

With best wishes,

*Peter Warwick*

