

THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH!

Nelson 250: A celebration founded on the hero's optimistic spirit

Friday, 29 September 1758. One can only imagine how Catherine Nelson felt giving birth to her sixth child - a son; her first two sons had died within a few months of being born and this boy was considered small and fragile. Yet it was a still, 'very fair' day, and as Carola Oman wrote in her much-loved biography *Nelson*, 'The auspices were propitious. The birthplace was lavishly picturesque'. Certainly, the father and local Rector felt reassured by 'the air from our light gravell soil, impregnated with the sweet *Farinæ* of the field, is as healthy as any spott whatever.'

But, what were they to call him? They had naturally called their first born Edmund. The second they had christened a more fashionable Horatio, after Catherine Nelson's great uncle, Horatio Walpole, who had stood godfather to the child. Dare they use this name again or would it be too heroic for this frail little boy? They were brave and named him Horatio, even though they preferred to call him Horace. Little could they have guessed that the name would eventually fit perfectly England's finest hero.

"an opportunity to *celebrate* his life rather than commemorating his battles"

Heroes are born before they are made. Horatio Nelson's deeds were celebrated less than three years ago under the banner of the Trafalgar 200 but that is no excuse for the close proximity of the 250th anniversary of his birthday to be overlooked, if only because in Nelson we have an immortal hero. Moreover, it gives us an opportunity to *celebrate* his life rather than commemorating his battles, allowing us to focus on his early and formative years.

There are few, if any, British historical figures from 200 or more years ago who continue to have such an enduring, pervasive and iconic impact. This longevity and durability is based on the worthiness of his qualities, and in particular the combination of his humanity and optimistic spirit. Optimism is the ultimate foundation for the many reasons people have for celebrating birthdays and anniversaries. And so it is with Nelson. His personal story focuses on the day that is coming, not the day that is gone. Hope inspires us all and the shared sense of optimism explains why the Nelson legacy sits so comfortably in the modern setting.

The 1805 Club is rising to this occasion with a series of important celebration events in Norfolk. It is also launching a visual identity for the 250th anniversary.

"in a 'national' celebration of Nelson's birthday"

This identity is being offered and made freely available to all bodies and organisations that wish to join in a 'national' celebration of Nelson's birthday. The more who use it the more likely it will have an impact on the wider consciousness of the country; and that is the objective. To initiate this The Club is sending the identity to all the key players, including museums. Given the media's attachment to anniversaries we are also preparing a media campaign.

The three-days of birthday celebrations in Norfolk start on Friday 26 September. These are a mixture of public and member-only events. On the 26th members will have the opportunity to visit Paston School (now Paston College) at North Walsham where they can enjoy one of the earliest influences on Nelson's life. That evening we attend a Civic Dinner in honour of Nelson at King's Lynn. The following day includes guided tours around historic King's Lynn, a private visit to Houghton Hall, the home of Sir Robert Walpole, and a birthday premiere concert at All Saints' Church, Burnham Thorpe. We return to All Saints' on Sunday afternoon for a special Thanksgiving Service led by the Dean of Norwich Cathedral. Other attractions are in the pipeline!

"stimulating research and discussion into the Georgian sailing navy as a whole"

As yet another way of marking the anniversary of Nelson's birthday, The 1805 Club is proud to be organising not one but two naval historical conferences in 2008. This is the first time in its history that the Club has undertaken such ambitious events alone and reflects its commitment to stimulating research and discussion into the Georgian sailing navy as a whole, as well as conserving the graves of naval heroes. If these conferences prove successful the Club will organise more in the future, as well as continuing its enthusiastic involvement



with The Nelson Legacy Conference Series, which is already preparing a distinctive conference for September 2009.

The late Tom Pocock, a former vice president of the Club, coined the phrase 'Stopping Napoleon,' and to honour his memory the Collingwood Years conference is being dedicated to him. Further details of both conferences are on pages 8 and 9.

These occasions are part of a very busy events calendar this year co-ordinated by Barry Coombs, which includes national as well as regional events organised by the Club's burgeoning 'regional groups' led by Susan Amos (South East), Peter Sims (South West), and Mark Thorburn (North East). The activities comprise the AGM and Cecil Isaacson Memorial Lecture in April, the re-dedication of the conserved tomb to Captain John Richards Lapenotiere in May, the Glorious First of June Weekend including dinner at Belvoir Castle, and with thanks to Dr Colin White a fundraising dinner in July in the Nelson Gallery at the Royal Naval Museum for the conservation of Captain Henry Bayntun's grave, concluding in October with the Club's very popular Trafalgar Dinner at Newhouse. Further information about all of these events can be found on pages 7-10, and on our new website at www.1805club.org.

I cannot conclude this dispatch without congratulating all involved, and particularly Linda Ebrey, for the launch of the new website. As ever with innovative ventures involving technology, there are teething problems, but we have been heartened by the very positive comments received from those of you who have visited the site and its members' area. If you have not done so already you can get your password for the members' area from Linda (Lebrey@btinternet.com)

As ever may I offer my thanks to Randy and Dana Mafit, Paul and Penny Dalton and our 'contributing editor', Alison Henderson, for another excellent issue of *The Kedge Anchor*.

Whatever we do, it is marvellous to feel that we are sustained by the support of our members. As we start another exciting, busy, and special Nelson anniversary year, I'd like to thank you for all you do to sustain our optimism.

With best wishes,

Peter Warwick