

## CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH: A Birthday To Remember

**E**arlier this year I happened to be in Poland and arranged to meet the former president and leader of Solidarity, Lech Walesa. The aim was to highlight the coincidence of his birthday, which falls on 29 September, Nelson's birthday!

It was a bright sunny morning when I arrived at his office at the famous Green Gate in Gdansk. Initially he was surprised that I had even bothered to see him because, while he knew about Lord Nelson, he said he couldn't even swim! However, when I replied, "Nor could Nelson!" his eyes lit up. So now they had two things in common.

He then pointed out that he "wasn't a war fighter". While I had to agree on the technicality that he hadn't made his career the armed services, I emphasised that he had fought a different sort of 'war', and moreover one that highlighted the two fundamental similarities he shared with Nelson: moral courage and humanity. Now I really had his interest!

He was flattered and also a little embarrassed when I pointed to his own bravery and moral courage in first clambering over the gates *into* the Gdansk shipyard, and subsequently standing his ground for what he believed in until victory was achieved. His tinge of embarrassment converted to genuine humility when I highlighted his own humanity – the singular word that also defines Nelson.

And so he agreed that he would come to Britain for Nelson's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations in Norfolk if a slot could be found in his full diary. It was not to be, but the meeting not only introduced him to The 1805 Club, it also showed how Nelson's words at the end of his *Sketch of my Life*, "Go thou, and do likewise", are as relevant today as they ever were, for in his own way Lech Walesa had indeed done likewise.

NELSON 250 was an amazing success and I don't imagine anyone who came to Burnham Thorpe for the Thanksgiving Service, whether members, guests or residents, will ever forget this unique celebration in the tiny village set in countryside that is little changed from what it looked like all those years ago. They will recall the charming performance by Burnham Thorpe's young children, the Dean of Norwich's expressive sermon, the large turnout and the very smart guard provided by the Sea Cadets. The Guard was inspected by Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope, Commander-in-Chief Fleet, who with Lady Stanhope, joined the Club for the whole weekend. He was also Guest of Honour at the splendid civic Birthday Dinner in Lynn's historic Town Hall. Our thanks go to everyone else who took part and helped to make this national celebration the success that it was, not least the Mayor, councillors and officers at King's Lynn, the commanding officer and crew of HMS *Raider* for their initiative and special visit to King's Lynn, and the splendid Fermoy Gallery for its stunning Nelson Exhibition.

Without doubt this year's events programme has been exceptional, with the Club arranging eight major events in addition to NELSON 250. Many Council members have been involved in their preparation, but I should like to thank Barry Coombs, the keystone for most of them, for his resilience, good humour and wonderful organisational skill throughout. Next year we shall enjoy a slightly quieter programme as we gear up for the Collingwood commemorations in Newcastle in March 2010, but there are a number of attractive events in the pipeline culminating in October with the Club's Trafalgar Dinner on the 17th. Our final event for 2009 will be the Wreath Laying Ceremony at St Paul's Cathedral on Trafalgar Day itself, which we now co-organise with the Royal Navy and Marine Society and Sea Cadets. All members will receive an invitation to this.

The Club had the honour of redesigning this year's ceremony and well over 70 people attended. You will find a more detailed report of the occasion in this *Kedge Anchor*. Also, starting with this issue, is a regular report from Council; an overview of our discussions which we hope will give you a better idea of how we 'run' your Club.

In my last Dispatch I described how *The Nile and Copenhagen Captains Memorial* is the next major conservation project of the Club. As with the Trafalgar Captains we are keen to involve our members and as you will see from the separate article in this issue (see page 4), we are calling for volunteers to visit the graves to carry out preliminary surveys, including photographs. I am pleased that thanks largely to the painstaking research by Club Secretary John Curtis we have been able to identify virtually all of them but we still need members to confirm our information and to check their condition. We have published their whereabouts in the Members Area of the website, but are also listing them here. We earnestly hope that we shall find a 'fine sett of fellows' to help us with this essential work. Please contact John, who will give you more details and the survey guidelines.

Talking of fine fellows, I should like to take this opportunity to thank Sim Comfort for the support he gave to the Bayntun Dinner in July, and in particular for the production of the keepsake, which he has since reproduced for all our members and which you will find enclosed with this copy of *The Kedge Anchor*.



To conclude, In early October I was in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. We have a new member there and I managed to welcome him aboard within a few days of his enrolling - the Chairman is always pleased to meet new members! I was cheered to hear that the RNA was organising their annual Trafalgar Dinner in the city and found the idea that the Immortal Memory would be drunk with mango juice so compelling that I had to mention it here. I am sure they had a wonderful evening in spite of the alcoholic restrictions, and I dare say Nelson, who had a flavour of the Arabian Peninsular from his visit to Basra, would be fascinated.

It gives me much pleasure to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a wonderful New Year.

With kindest regards,

***Peter***

Peter Warwick  
Hon Chairman

