

THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH:

FROM VICTORY TO DARING

For the second time this year I have to start my dispatch with more than a tinge of sadness, owing to the untimely death of David Harris. David was a wonderful man, a friend, a great supporter of The 1805 Club, a marvellous Treasurer and former editor of the *Trafalgar Chronicle*. Stephen Howarth has written a splendid and moving obituary for this issue, which not only serves to underline how much we shall miss David, but also highlights the debt we owe to him.

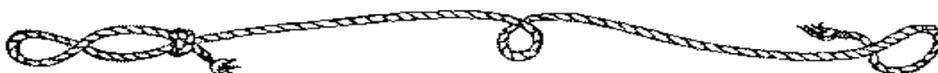
Lieutenant Commander David Harris MBE Royal Navy was the 95th Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*, between 1991 and 1993. There is no more illustrious warship name in British naval history than HMS *Victory*, which is inextricably linked with Admiral Lord Nelson, the Battle of Trafalgar and today's Royal Navy – as the oldest commissioned warship in the world and flagship of the Second Sea Lord and Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command. She is more than just timber and tar. She is, to use the late Colin White's phrase, 'the beating heart' of the Royal Navy and its standards and traditions; an icon for all those who have served and continue to serve. She is a potent reminder that Britain is a maritime country and as such we should never lose sight of the worth of our Navy in securing the nation's freedoms and democracy. The sea should be at the heart of our defence. The standards can be damaged when, as Nelson once wrote to Lady Hamilton, "Government don't care much for us".

It is an amazing coincidence that the ship that is forever associated with Nelson was ordered in the year of his birth, and that her construction was begun before his first birthday, 250 years ago. *Victory's* elm keel was laid on 23 July 1759 in the Old Single Dock (Number 2) at Chatham Royal Dockyard, construction continuing for six years.

Designed by Sir Thomas Slade, the Senior Surveyor of the Navy (1755-1771), she was then the biggest warship ever built for the British fleet. Carrying 100 guns on three decks and with a length of 69.34 metres and a beam of 15.8 metres, she displaced 3,556 tonnes and drew 7.44 metres of water 'at mean load'. Some 6,000 oak and elm trees from the depleted Wealden forests of Kent and Sussex and oak and fir from the Baltic were used in her construction. The reason she enjoyed such a long fighting career was that much of this timber was more than a century old. It had been deliberately stockpiled to create a new first rate at a future date. This also accounts in part for why she has survived to this day.

In January 1922, thanks to the efforts of the Society for Nautical Research, *Victory* was permanently dry-docked in Number 2 Dock, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth, where she has been variously restored, repaired and lovingly preserved ever since. The 1805 Club is honoured to be among the organisations that are officially regarded by the Royal Navy as 'stakeholders'. Recent reports in the press have questioned her future and status, but under its recent Naval Heritage Strategy the Royal Navy is clearly demonstrating its duty of care for this magnificent ship at a difficult time. *Victory* is part of a stretched defence budget and it is clearly a challenge to justify monies for the preservation of 'wood and tar' when sailors and marines requiring adequate kit are at risk of their lives in operational theatres. Last winter, up to 40 per cent of our forces in Afghanistan were from the Royal Navy and Royal Marines. In spite of rumours, there are no plans for the ship to be sold or decommissioned, and she will continue as the flagship of the Second Sea Lord. A full report from the Royal Navy on how she will be looked after is due to be published later this year.

Meanwhile, close to the *Victory's* berth lies another warship. Her formidable and futuristic slab-sided stealth profile is topped by a radar tower as tall as an electricity pylon. She is as impressive as the wooden walls and towering masts of her antecedent. She is HMS *Daring*, the Royal Navy's latest asset and the first of a new class (Type 45), described as 'the most advanced surface warship in the world'. She weighs 7,500 tons and is 152.5 metres in length, which is a lot larger than the Navy's existing Type 42/ Sheffield Class. Powered by an integrated electric propulsion system, driven by Rolls Royce WR21 gas turbines, her twin 100 ton electric shaft motors allow her to exceed 30 knots. At 18 knots, *Daring* can cruise across the Atlantic, from Portsmouth to New York and back, without stopping. Another advantage is her high-speed manoeuvrability, which is unmatched by any previous Royal Navy warships. Her armament includes Sea Viper missiles, a 4.5in medium calibre main gun, and a flight deck large enough for a twin-rotor Chinook helicopter, although



her typical helicopter aircraft are either the AgustaWestland Merlin EH-101 HM Mk 1 or the modified Westland (Future Lynx) Lynx MHA 3/8.

Whether or not *Daring* is 'the most advanced surface warship in the world', one is tempted to speculate what Nelson would make of her. I believe he would be excited at the progress of technology and amazed at *Daring's* capabilities, which would have been unimaginable in his era, although he could reflect on how *Victory* was the super weapon of *his* day. He would surely regret that the original order for the *Daring* class has been halved to six. Ultimately with Nelson, however, we know he would focus on the values and traditions of the service itself: the quality of leadership, the practice of 'mission command', of which he was a master, and the professionalism and 'can do' attitude of the ship's company. I am sure he would also derive a little satisfaction from the fact that every warship, including *Daring*, still salutes his old flagship as they pass her berth! In this way the ethos of the Royal Navy is like a golden thread that connects the past with the present and the future.

The Club's conservation work is linked to this thread, and there is much it wishes to achieve in the future - like the Royal Navy, with limited resources. This is why at this year's Members' Day and Annual General Meeting at The Old Royal Naval College on 25 April, I was again delighted to pay tribute to the untiring work of all of the Club's Council members. They have been a tremendous team: enthusiastic to a fault, creative in their ideas and skilled in their actions. It is sometimes easy to overlook that they are all volunteers.

May I take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to Barry Coombs, who has now stood down from Council. For two years he was a superb Events Officer. Both big and small events ran smoothly under his calm and friendly stewardship. This is also the opportunity for me to introduce you to two new Council members: Susan Amos, who takes the reins from Barry, and Lindy Mackie who takes over as Treasurer. Council has also co-opted another new face: Captain Peter Hore. I am sure you will join with me in extending a very warm welcome to them all.

Appropriately, Susan's first event is a celebration of the laying down of the keel of HMS *Victory* with the Club visit to the Historic Dockyard Chatham on 25 July!

Progress continues to be made on all fronts but I shall, if I may, highlight just three of them: The Website Educational Programme, The Nile and Copenhagen Captains Memorial and Membership.

Dianne Smith, working with students from Admiral Lord Nelson School, Portsmouth, has completed the first stage of the ambitious Website Educational Programme, which will be launched this year. The students have designed web-based material about Nelson and the Royal Navy for their peer group(s), which will be accessible through The 1805 Club's website. While this first step is a small one, the potential is enormous, since it is a ground-breaking way for the Club to excite younger people about the heroes of the Georgian sailing navy. Dianne will be the first to give all the credit to the students, but I hope she will also take a bow for the innovative nature of the project and the hard work hard she has put into developing it; also Peter Green, for being the vital link between Dianne and the students; and, of course, Admiral Lord Nelson School itself. We look forward to a close and rewarding relationship between the Club and the School.

The Nile and Copenhagen Captains Memorial has reached the point where we can begin surveying the identified graves and memorials, prior to fundraising for those considered to be at risk. I very much hope we shall be able to publish another book similar to The Trafalgar Captains Memorial, and that the short biographies will again be written by Club members. If you have a favourite captain at either of these battles and would like to write about them, please let me know. Meanwhile, for this year the Club will direct its funds towards a number of ad hoc conservations, which we shall report in a subsequent issue.

The membership of the Club has fluctuated between 450 and 500 for the past three years, and in this issue Linda Ebrey, the Club's Membership Secretary, sets us all a challenge to help take it above the 500 level again!

As ever, my thanks to Randy and Dana Mafit in the USA and to Paul and Penny Dalton in the UK, for putting together yet another fine issue of *The Kedge Anchor*.

With kindest regards to you all,

Peter Warwick

