

THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH!

“Remember Nelson”

The enemy standing before him had the weather gauge and was, for once, ready to fight. He could see them two miles distant preparing to bear down on his short line, which was sailing eastwards and dangerously close to the lee shore. The enemy approach was at right angles and in two distinct divisions. Six frigates opposed his four. This was Trafalgar in miniature, except that the enemy was dictating the tactics. He may have been out-gunned, but his squadron was not out-classed. Cleared for action his frigates beat to quarters. Their port lids were open, and the guns, loaded with double shot, were run out. His patient and well-trained gun crews were steadfast. He felt exalted and was keen to express his confidence and excitement to all those under his command. He needed an inspirational signal. Instinctively his mind found two words: 'Remember Nelson'. They did the trick.

His name was William Hoste and the Battle of Lissa in the Adriatic was about to begin. The Royal Navy contested French dominance of the Adriatic from the small island of Lissa and on 14 March 1811 Rear Admiral Edouard Dubordieu and Captain William Hoste fought their fierce little frigate action, supported on the French side by their Venetian allies and some smaller ships. In spite of being out-gunned and outnumbered Hoste, a protégée of Nelson, won a brilliant victory and we commemorate the 200th anniversary of his achievement within a few weeks of this issue of the *Kedge Anchor*.

The Battle of Lissa, and a subsequent engagement off the same island in November of the same year, underlines how the naval struggle between France and Britain continued long after Trafalgar, how sea power was the key to Napoleon's ultimate defeat in 1815, and how the habit of victory, infused with the spirit of Nelson, was to crown the last decade of this Golden Age of the Royal Navy, 1740-1815.

Hoste's career serves to remind us of the enduring influence of the example and success of the captains and admirals of the second half of the eighteenth century and how their leadership enhanced the style and spirit of the Royal Navy, and captured the imagination and support of the general public.

The nature of their leadership is attracting an increasing amount of interest. It was also something that fascinated our former chairman and vice-president, the late Dr Colin White. He saw naval leadership as his next field of study. Therefore, in searching carefully for an appropriate memorial to Colin, The 1805 Club with the Society for Nautical Research, Centro Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas (CSIC), and National Museum of the Royal Navy (Royal Naval Museum) have partnered to launch a three-year leadership project at the heart of which will be three conferences, each featuring a Colin White Memorial Lecture. It is hoped the first conference on 'naval leadership in the Atlantic world' will be held in Portsmouth this November, followed in subsequent years by conferences in Madrid and the United States. The Madrid conference in 2012 will complement the commemorations for the Peninsular War, during which the Royal Navy made a crucial contribution, and the conference in the United States in 1813 will tie in with The War of 1812, when a new naval power emerged on the world stage and some of the fiercest single-ship duels ever seen took place.

Naval battles, like Lissa, and the quality of leadership at sea during these wars remind us of the importance of sea power to our island. Notwithstanding stunning advances in technology during the last two hundred years, this is as true today as it was at the end of the Golden Age. It therefore comes as a bitter disappointment that the latest, savage, yet so called 'strategic' defence review has failed to recognize this fundamental truth. Today, the essential importance and relevance of the Royal Navy needs all the support it can muster, and while the Club's conservation and research work goes unnoticed by the vast majority of people, its relevance is brought into sharper focus by this palpable need to 'get the message across'.

Lissa, like The War of 1812, draws our attention to the frigate, fast and agile warships that generally concentrated their firepower on one deck and were famously described by Nelson as the "eyes of his fleet". And as he wrote in 1798, there were never enough of them: "Were I to die at this moment, want of frigates would be stamped on my heart"! We are fortunate in the UK to have two survivors, the *Unicorn* in Dundee and the HMS *Trincomalee* at Hartlepool. The latter, with its impressive maritime history centre, is the venue for our joint event with the Society for Nautical Research in August and you will find full details in this issue (see page 8).

The historical backdrop of anniversaries was featured in the Council's discussions during its 'Away-day' at the Naval Historical Branch in February (and is reported on elsewhere in this issue). This was the third time

the Council had arranged to spend time deliberating Club strategy as opposed to day-to-day matters. Our President, Admiral Sir Jonathon Band GCB DL, joined us for the morning and explained how the Club was a respected part of the 'naval heritage family'. It was a very worthwhile session which is helping us to chart the future course of the Club. Three important challenges emerged: Project themes and activity, our educational programme, and the scope and need for more resources, including fundraising. I will write about each of these in more detail in future dispatches.

Meanwhile, with the focus on projects and fundraising we look forward to the official launch of *The Nile and Copenhagen Captains' Memorial* at The Mayor's Parlour, Kensington Town Hall on 17 March 2011. Many members cannot make the reception but your generosity is already recognized by the donations you have made *in lieu* of attending. These already surpass £1,000, equivalent to over 30 guests being at the event, thanks to the underlying sponsorship of DBR (London) Ltd.

The Club's twentieth anniversary Aynsley china mugs are also selling well and I encourage you to buy yours now if you haven't already done so – or another if you have purchased one already! – since it is a strictly limited edition.

Also, don't miss the Club's Members' Day, AGM and Cecil Isaacson Memorial Lecture by Tim Voelker at The University of Greenwich on Saturday, 7 May 2011. We'd love to see you.

With best wishes to you all,

Peter Warwick