

THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH!

Lest we forget

I am writing this dispatch a few minutes after 11-11-11-11. The nation has paused for two minutes to remember its brave Service men and women, and will do so again across the land and throughout the Commonwealth on Sunday -Remembrance Sunday.

Three weeks ago on Trafalgar Day over 70 people stood in silence at another ceremony: The First Sea Lord's Wreath Laying at St Paul's Cathedral. The new Ceremony, redesigned by The 1805 Club and organised by the Marine Society and Sea Cadets, is establishing itself as an important annual occasion and this year's was the finest yet. The bugler from the Band of HM Royal Marines was outstanding and the lowered colours of the Guard of Honour from the Royal British Legion added to the ceremonial and solemnity of the occasion. The Legion is the nation's custodian of Remembrance, ensuring that people remember those who have given their lives for the freedom we enjoy today. Even though it has its origins in the First World War it chooses to honour Nelson.

Only a few hours after the Trafalgar Day ceremony, St Paul's Cathedral closed its doors for the first time since the Second World War, as a result of the Occupy London encampment outside. The ceremony was therefore one of the last official duties by Canon Giles Fraser, who resigned a few days afterwards on the grounds that he did not wish to be associated with the possibility of a violent end to the Occupy demonstration.

Violence is the unavoidable factor in warfare and serving in the battle space requires unlimited liability. This is why Remembrance Day has become a day to remember those who have been affected by war and to thank the hundreds of thousands of men and women who have fought for our freedom and the freedom of others through *all conflicts*.

It is wretched that among part of the population there are those who misunderstand the meaning of Remembrance Day. They oppose its spirit and reflective ceremonies because they wish to make a stand against war. However, taking part and wearing a red poppy does not show support for war. It demonstrates that we care about our veterans and respect those that have fallen. Remembrance is not about whether we agree with why we went to war, nor is it about the wars of tomorrow.

For a growing number of people World War I and World War II are more likely to bring memories of sitting in a history classroom than memories of a battlefield. There are no longer any living veterans from the First World War, which in this respect places it on a par with the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The number of veterans from the Second World War dwindles with each passing year. Even the Korean War veterans are ageing. Veterans are the people who have traditionally been the backbone of Remembrance Day ceremonies throughout the Commonwealth. With their passing will Remembrance Day continue to hold the same meaning and endure?

More recent wars in which Britain has taken part, including the Gulf War, Iraq and even Afghanistan, do not seem to have made the same mark on the everyday lives of Britons that the First and Second World Wars did. That's not to say that some people's lives haven't been changed forever by these later conflicts. The regularity and frequency of those killed and wounded in action, small in number by the standards of total war, have enhanced the respect and admiration the general public has for Britain's armed forces. The way the small Wiltshire market town of Wootton Bassett, now given the name of Royal Wootton Bassett by the Queen stopped on 167 occasions to mourn the repatriated bodies driven through its streets affirms to this. However, perhaps because the sheer number of soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen involved is far fewer, the recent wars have not left the same very deep scars on the larger public consciousness.

When one looks into the eyes of a veteran and when they tell us their stories, we generally find their personal accounts of lasting interest. They are a window into a time most people now living will never know first-hand. This is equally true of the stories written down by the hundreds of thousands who are no longer with us whether they fell on the Somme or at Trafalgar. It befalls the historian and those involved in the conservation of our historical past to keep those stories alive. That is why the modest contribution The 1805 Club makes to the conservation of graves and memorials of those serving in the Georgian era is so relevant today. It is a part of the act of Remembrance.

As I looked around the congregation in the Nelson Chamber at St Paul's on Trafalgar Day I saw quite a number of red poppies and two of the five wreaths were made from them. The red poppy became a symbol of

Remembrance in 1921 because it grew on the graves of soldiers in France and Belgium. Interestingly, the phenomenon was first noticed during the Napoleonic Wars.

It occurs to me that the period between 21 October and 11 November each year is a natural one for a wider sense of Remembrance since it allows us to relate the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars with the war in Afghanistan. In turn, this resonates with Nelson's call for 'humanity after victory' and the traditional version of 'The Immortal Memory', which is not for Nelson alone, but for 'all those who fell with him'. In other words, as Remembrance Day now embraces the latest conflicts, so it seems reasonable to honour those who also served and fell for their country before the First World War. They too fought for our basic freedoms. Moreover, their service, stories and leadership – not least Horatio Nelson's – continue to inspire those serving in today's front line.

Master Mate Stephen Hilton is one among them. He served aboard the *Minotaur* at Trafalgar and took two flags after the battle, which have for many years been kept at St Mary's Church, Selling, Kent. Since my last Dispatch the Club has been closely involved in their future and conservation. The flags concerned are the *Minotaur*'s Union flag flown at the battle, and a flag believed to be from the captured *Neptuno*, which struck her colours to the *Minotaur*. The *Neptuno* flag is actually an Austrian rather than a Spanish ensign. They were preserved by Stephen Hilton and the family, which has long lived at Selling, and for many years furnished the Hilton Chapel at St Mary's. However, owing to their fragile condition they have not been on display since 1995.

In September it was feared that the flags were to be put up for sale on the open market and The 1805 Club together with many other organizations rallied in opposition. The Club helped to establish that the scare was unfounded and arrangements are now well-advanced for the flags to go the National Maritime Museum. The museum has the professional skill, experience and resources necessary for their long term care, and of course means they will stay in the UK. The Union flag will also be on permanent display to millions of people in the new Sailing Navy Gallery that opens in 2013. The 1805 Club has suggested that replica flags be made for the Hilton Chapel.

Meanwhile, the Lt William Hick's uniform, which the Club discovered last year, has been conserved by the conservation experts at the NMM and went on public display for the first time on Trafalgar Day. Eventually it will join the *Selling flags* in the Sailing Navy Gallery. The Club is privileged to be acting as an informal consultant on the themes and display in the gallery as a whole.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome and thank those who have enlisted as Topmen; eighteen so far with more in the pipeline. This is a good start and I hope others will follow so that we can reach our target of 50 Topmen. Enlisted Topmen should have received their certificates by the time they read this Dispatch.

A big thank you also to Winston Leese, who has masterminded a wonderful and limited edition bone china plate bearing the Club's insignia. They are being offered to members at a very fair price indeed as you will see in the notice elsewhere in this issue. The first batch sold out at this year's Trafalgar Dinner at Newhouse!

The dinner was a great success with both a talk by Dr Sam Willis about the huge volume of naval dispatches from the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars at the British Library, and a splendid toast to *The Immortal Memory* by our President, Admiral Sir Jonathon Band GCB DL. May I and the Council of the Club take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year.

Yours aye

Peter Warwick