

THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH!

Of Wooden Walls

In his 'Sketch of my Life' Lord Nelson writes that he 'was sent to the high school at Norwich and afterwards removed to North Walsham'. This is the only direct reference he makes to his short period of school learning. The rest of his education began 'on the disturbance with Spain relative to the Falkland Islands' when he 'went to sea with my uncle, Captain Maurice Suckling in the *Raisonable* of 64 guns. At the age of 12 the wooden world of the Royal Navy became his classroom from where he 'graduated' to become Britain's greatest naval hero.

He would have been on the threshold of starting his school days about 250 years ago. A significant part of them would be spent at Paston School at North Walsham. In contrast to the conventional grammar education at Norwich 'high school', Paston was a progressive institution with a liberal and arts-based curriculum, which furnished the young Nelson with a love of Shakespeare and an ability to write, as described by Colin White, with 'an exhilarating stream of consciousness that vividly captures his impulsive and eager way of speaking.'

Paston was a fortunate beginning but the patronage, watchful eye and wisdom of his maternal uncle, Captain Maurice Suckling, was also unconventional. Rather than arranging for his protégé to serve with him, as was typical of 'interest', he arranged for the teenage Nelson to undergo as wide a variety of experience as possible, including a spell in the merchant navy, time in small boats in the Thames, an expedition to the Arctic and two years in a crack frigate. Suckling ensured that he was not 'lost' with so many others in the environment of a large battleship. This wide range of activity fostered Nelson's individuality and free-thinking spirit.

Boys and girls of a similar age today are very unlikely to experience such an education! However, there is one thing that is the same: the fertile, imaginative and enquiring minds of young people and the desire of teachers to give scope to their endeavor and abilities.

In addition to its conservation activities The 1805 Club exists 'to advance the education of the public by promoting and engaging in original research into, and the publication and dissemination of knowledge of, the sea services of the Georgian period'. The Club's publications, notably the annual *Trafalgar Chronicle* and the *Kedge Anchor* newsletter, together with its international conference activities, go a long way to achieve this objective. Nevertheless, for many years we have also sought to develop an imaginative and sustainable educational strategy that reaches a young audience. This is now taking shape, which is why this issue of the *Kedge Anchor* focuses on the work we are doing in this field.

Under the splendid guidance of Council member Dianne Smith the Club has embarked on an ambitious project, which is original yet founded on proven techniques. The aim has been to develop innovative, interactive and dynamic teaching resources that will engage children between the ages of 7 and 13 (Key Stage 2 and 3), the very age span of Nelson's formative naval years!

These resources are both internet and school based. The full details are in Dianne's article but I should like to highlight the success of the first in-school pilot delivered on 21 January as part of the West Sussex Gifted and Talented programme. Working alongside Jerome Monahan, an independent tutor who has designed The Wooden World Workshop: Nelson and the Georgian Navy for The 1805 Club, we spent a whole day with a group of children drawn from nine different schools. It was a fantastic experience and one clearly enjoyed by all of the students, the majority of whom rated the workshop as 'excellent'.

As Jerome writes in his post workshop report, 'The fact that the feedback was so positive from a group covering such an age range is extremely encouraging and suggests what we were offering was both accessible but also sufficiently stretching for all. All declared they had both learnt a great deal and found certain activities challenging which is as it should be'.

The workshop is based on a structured framework, or script, carefully prepared beforehand, but the emphasis is on the students themselves who have to do most of the work. For instance at one point they were invited to listen to a portion of the soundtrack from the film *Master and Commander*, in which *Variations on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* by Vaughan Williams is used to accompany a scene in which a sailor falls overboard and has to be abandoned in immense seas off Cape Horn.

The joy was that when students were then asked to create pieces of prose and poetry based upon their impressions of the soundtrack alone, they created some staggeringly good work. The following is an example by participant Tom Daly of St Wilfrids R C School:

*The sea, O, the sea
Magical and elegant to some yet,
Dull and life-shattering to others
Oh, it sounds victorious
Makes you feel a winner,
Or terrible it may be
And makes you quiver.*

*The sea, O, the sea
A glistening light for eternity
How wonderful the sea can be
Or is it just horrible
A realm of horror
It might be the brightest pearl
Or just a murky swirl.*

Equally exciting was the desire for more information about Nelson and his death, the ships, weapons, and crew ('because I found it really interesting'), the Battle of Trafalgar, who the French and Spanish were that Nelson fought against and how much Nelson's tactics helped advance sea battles.

The next step is to arrange three more similar workshops in other regions, which will give the Club credibility to apply for specific funding to roll out a host of Wooden Walls whole class-mixed ability workshops across the country. This is where the website development also comes in, since it will soon include an animation of Nelson's life and be a shop window for the work of the students attending The Wooden World workshops.

The educational programme as a whole is being dedicated as a memorial to the 1805 Club's first President, Lily McCarthy.

This year's Members' Day and Annual General Meeting takes place on Saturday, 5 May. Anthony Cross, after ten years dedicated and superb service as co-editor of the *Trafalgar Chronicle*, is stepping down from the Council. He has been a splendid editor and officer and we shall naturally miss him. However, he intends to continue to give his active support to the Club, most notably by writing for the Chronicle rather than editing it. We offer him a huge thank you and at the same time recognize the enormous contribution made by Huw Lewis-Jones who will continue as Editor. We can all look forward to another stunning edition of the *Trafalgar Chronicle* later this year.

We have had fewer events during the past twelve months, which is highlighted by the exceptional number we managed to arrange in 2010! However, the future is bright as we plan a range of events to add to our flagships: The Members' Day on Saturday, 5 May at Greenwich and The Trafalgar Dinner on Saturday, 20 October, again at historic Newhouse. In the immediate pipeline are special visits to The Old Admiralty, Whitehall, The House of Lords and Commons, the home of Earl Howe at Penn House, Amersham, a Study Day in partnership with The World Monuments Fund at St Paul's Cathedral in September, and a joint event with the Royal Navy at Dartmouth Royal Naval College, including a lecture on Naval Leadership by Michael Duffy. The various dates will be announced soonest.

With all good wishes,

Peter Warwick