

THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH



Peter Warwick

“The Old Admiral”

September, October and November are always fascinating and inspiring times for anyone interested in the history of the Georgian sailing era and Lord Nelson in particular. Three anniversaries come one after the other. We celebrate Nelson's birthday on 29 September 1758, commemorate his Immortal Memory and that of those who fell with him at the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805 and celebrate the journey of Lieutenant John Richards Lapenotière with the news of the victory and Nelson's death, which reached the Admiralty on 6 November 1805.

Heroes are born before they are made, so even though his parents preferred to call him Horace they could not have guessed that his Christian name, Horatio, would ultimately fit perfectly England's finest hero. There are few, if any, British historical characters from 200 or more years ago who continue to have such an enduring, pervasive and iconic impact. This longevity and durability is based on the worthiness of his qualities and in particular the combination of his humanity and persevering spirit. Sir Isaac Heard captured it during Nelson's funeral service when unscripted he added, 'and the Hero who in the moment of Victory fell covered with Immortal glory' to the long list of Nelson's titles.

At the Club's annual Trafalgar Dinner at Newhouse on 18 October guest of honour Lord Sterling of Plaistow reflected this rare spirit in his toast and it was also palpable at the Sea Cadet Parade in Trafalgar Square the following day, and at the First Sea Lord's wreath laying ceremony at Nelson's tomb in St Paul's Cathedral on 21 October.

The 1805 Club has the privilege of being formally involved in both of the latter ceremonies and as I stood wreath in hand at the base of Railton's column gazing at the great bronze plaque on the North face of the plinth, which depicts Nelson at the Battle of the Nile by William Frederick Woodington. I was not only conscious of 'all those who fell with him' but also of those who had dedicated their lives to the naval service. Specifically, thanks to a recent discussion with our North American Secretary John Rodgaard, 'The Old Admiral'.

Born 20 years later than Nelson in 1778, he went to sea at the same age. As if a sign of his future destiny he was introduced to President George Washington at the very beginning of his career. He died on 6 November 1869; the anniversary of the day Lapenotière delivered Collingwood's Trafalgar Dispatch to the Admiralty. He had given sixty-two years of distinguished service to his country, had outlasted most of his ships and outlived all of his junior officers, hence the sobriquet given to him by the poet Edmund Clarence Stedman. He was given a stunning funeral, second only to Abraham Lincoln's. His name? Charles Stuart.

He was the one
Whom Death had spared alone
Of all the captains of that lusty age,
Who sought the foemen where they lay,
On sea or sheltering bay,
Nor till the prize was theirs repressed their rage.
They are gone – all gone;
The rest with glory and the undying Powers;
Only their name and fane and what they saved are ours!

Rear Admiral Stewart's biography is a virtual history of the US Navy from its founding in the late eighteenth century. His adventures and influence spanned the French, Barbary, 1812, Mexican and American Civil wars. During the War of 1812 he commanded the USS Constitution – 'Old Ironsides', one of the two ships that he outlasted and now the most famous US Navy vessel ever and the oldest warship afloat in the world. Stuart is famed for his epic action on 20 February 1814 against HMS Cyane (34) and HMS Levant (21), during which he skillfully maneuvered the superior *Constitution* as if his frigate was a dinghy on a pond and simultaneously defeated the two British ships.

Yet in spite of being more significant he is not as well-known as Captain John Paul Jones. Such is the mystery of immortality. John Rodgaard and his co-author Claude Berube are to be praised for bringing Stuart out from the shadows and I am confident that we shall hear a lot more about him in future not least because he was the subject of John's paper on US activities in the Mediterranean between 1815 and the 1840's at The 1805 Club's international naval historical conference on the island of Menorca 4–11 October this year.

Vice chairman Bill White and Club member Lorraine Ure deserve a hearty and genuine 'Bravo Zulu' for arranging such a significant occasion which brought together such a distinguished line up of speakers, including Professor Andrew Lambert, Colonel Nicholas Lipscombe, Michael Crumplin, Dr Agustin Guimera, Charles Fremantle and of course John Rodgaard. I was very disappointed not to be there!

The Club has been pleased to contribute to the restoration of the Royal Naval Hospital on the Isla de Rey in Mahon harbour established in 1711 – the oldest in the world. Moreover, we are delighted that the conference raised a further 1,000 Euro for the restoration programme.

Restoration, conservation or preservation? There are a multitude of threats to outdoor monuments and memorials. Neglect is the most common, but pollution, bird droppings, salt contamination, leaf staining, acid rain, rusting ironwork, tree and shrub intrusion, subsidence, vandalism and accidental damage can all take their toll. The action required depends on the nature and extent of the threat and the philosophy inspiring the nature of repairs.

Conservation is a professional approach far removed from well-meaning interference, such as indiscriminate cleaning, which may do more harm than good. It aims to safeguard the long term future of the memorial at its original site with the minimum possible intervention. It does not replace parts of the structure that have gone missing, such as railings. This is The 1805 Club's philosophy, which it has described and delineated in its Conservation Guidelines. The historical roots of the philosophy go back to William Morris, the founder the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877. He favoured sensitive repair rather than destructive restoration.

Restoration aims to return a memorial or building to a previous state in its history. This is a much more invasive approach and one that can sometimes have destructive rather than constructive results. Preservation is another form of action. It is an even more interventionist approach because it can involve maintaining the surrounding environment in an unchanged state in order to either conserve or restore the memorial or building.

There is an ongoing discussion about the margin between conservation and restoration and following the excellent review by Stephen Tregidgo of all the conservations undertaken by the Club over the past 24 years it is a subject that we shall be re-visiting to see if changes need to be made to the Club's guidelines to reflect contemporary professional practice.

Admiral Charles Stuart was recognized for his innovation and ability to adapt to changing political and technological circumstances and therefore we echo his attitude. Nevertheless, his long career also conceals an anxiety when we consider the perpetuation of The 1805 Club. As Chairman I and my fellow Council members have a duty of care to the Club because it is larger than any personality representing it, in the same way that the US and Royal navies are bigger than any of the officers that serve, no matter how long or illustrious their careers. Typically, a tour of duty in, say, the Royal Navy is two years. The anxiety is that a substantial number of those on Council have been in post for much longer than this. I have been privileged to be your chairman for more than ten years!

While I believe your longest serving Council members are all happy to continue to stand for re-election in 2015, every one of them thinks of the longer term and how the Club will progress and prosper when inevitably the time comes for them to stand down.

These apprehensions are heightened when we remember that Huw Lewis Jones is standing down as editor of the *Trafalgar Chronicle*, the Club's premier publication. The 2014 edition is his last. Huw has done a fantastic job and we owe him a huge thank you for his own long service to the Chronicle. That it is so well regarded by the naval historical community is down to his creativity, energy, dedication and professionalism. We wish him well in the future and hope that from time to time he may be one of the Chronicle's contributors!

I am therefore pleased that the current Council includes new blood and I hope that this process will continue so that succession paths and opportunities are more obvious. Ultimately the Club is only as strong as its membership and so I ask all of you to seriously consider whether you might be prepared to take a more active role in future. Please feel free to contact me.

With kind regards and best wishes to you all,

Peter Warwick, Chairman