

THE VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

By Bill White,
Chairman, The 1805 Club

Members will appreciate that there is not much to report. Most, if not all, events both here and in the United States and elsewhere have been cancelled, so it is a matter of 'holding the fort' until relief (or a vaccine) arrives. But there are one or two matters to mention...

Firstly, due to some fraudulent activity by some other organisations registered as charities, the Charity Commission has tightened up on its procedures and it has become more bureaucratic and, as a result, dealing with the Commission has become more complex. We have therefore appointed Nicholas Ridge as Treasurer, a member who is a Chartered Accountant, to handle matters involving the Commission. He will work with Lindy Mackie, who will continue as Club Accountant and bookkeeper.

I was in Portsmouth on September 16th with our President, Admiral Sir Jonathon Band, visiting St Anne's Church, in HM Dockyard. St Anne's is a Naval Church dating from the mid 1700's and is under the aegis of the Chaplain of the Fleet. The Revd Adam Gay, the Chaplain of the church, received us and we were accompanied by Stephen Tregidgo, Christopher Hobby and Sheila White.

Our concern was to consider the material, text and appropriate location within the church for a plaque to commemorate Admiral Sir William Cornwallis, who had held the Portsmouth Command. More significantly, he commanded the British Fleet in maintaining the blockade of Brest during the Napoleonic Wars for about two to three years. During this period the fleet was continually at sea. Captain A T Mahan USN, the well-known US naval historian, declared this to be one of the greatest feats in naval history. We hope that a suitable memorial plaque can be mounted prominently within the church in 2021.

On a different subject, the Secretary recently received a report concerning the origins of the song '*Rule, Britannia*', containing misconceptions about the reference to slavery in the declaration in the famous song that:



"Britons never never shall be slaves".

To clear up the confusion, it will be helpful to look at how the song and its music came to be written and how it was subsequently modified into the form used today.

In 1730s, the 65-page text of *Alfred*, a Masque (or masquerade) by James Thomson (1700-1748) and David Mallet (?1705-1765), was set to music by Thomas Arne (1710-1778).

It was described as a "patriotic masque". The first production of the masque was performed for Prince Frederick at the Prince of Wales' residence at Cliveden in 1740 and opened on Drury Lane the following year. *Rule, Britannia* constitutes the six-stanza finale to the masque on pages 64 and 65. The text can be read (but not copied) at "[openlibrary.org](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL7198057M),books/OL7198057M".

The musical score was republished by Stainer and Bell in 1981. The metre of the version of the song in current use differs slightly from the 1740 version and the music has been amended accordingly.

The subject of the masque is the resistance to the Viking invasions of Britain and the final defeat of the Vikings in the late 9th Century by Alfred the Great (849?-899), King of Wessex and later of the Anglo Saxons. The Vikings were slavers and this lends relevance to the declaration quoted in the first paragraph above. During the 1730s Alfred was often represented, in Patriot party opposition writings, as a law-giver hero who exemplified Saxon liberty and Christian benevolence (in contrast to the then current prime minister Robert Walpole (1676-1745)).

However in the 1740s, the UK was also suffering from the depredations of Moroccan and Algerian slavers operating in the Atlantic. Many slaves were being taken from the crews of British ships and the slavers were also raiding coastal communities in Britain and Ireland. So at that time the song also had contemporary relevance.

At an appropriate time, a new production of *Alfred* might be contemplated under the aegis of the Club.

