

- ⁸ Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson* (London: Colburn 1844-46), i, p. 287.
- ⁹ David Brontë Green, *Grinling Gibbons: His Work as a Carver and Statuary, 1648-1721* (London: Country Life, 1964), p. 137.
- ¹⁰ Green, *ibid*, p. 139.
- ¹¹ Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin, *The Microcosm of London* (London: Ackermann 1808).
- ¹² See Justin Reay, *The Great Ship Ashore: the Admiralty in London* (Oxford, forthcoming) for a detailed description of the carvings and analysis of their provenance.
- ¹³ Nelson, letter to Frances Nelson, 8 January 1793, George Naish, *Nelson's Letters to his Wife* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), letter number 72.
- ¹⁴ Letters of Admiral Lord Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty to William Pitt the Younger as First Lord of the Treasury; *Pitt Papers* 30/70, National Archives, Kew.
- ¹⁵ Spencer family correspondence quoted in Charles Spencer, *The Spencer Family* (London: Viking, 1999), p. 160.
- ¹⁶ Nicolas, ii, p. 461.
- ¹⁷ Admiral Young to Lord Keith, *Keith Papers*, in-letter 10 November 1800, p. 146.
- ¹⁸ Lavinia Spencer is reported to have offered potatoes or rice to her guests in place of bread.
- ¹⁹ *The Times*, 4 February 1801, p. 3. We might imagine the presentation of this practical implement (now in the Nelson Collection at Lloyds of London) taking place at another Admiralty House dinner.
- ²⁰ ADM 3/147 Admiralty Board Minutes 16 May 1803 and J Sainty, *Admiralty Officials, 1660-1870* (London, Athlone, 1975).
- ²¹ White, *ibid*, number 274.
- ²² *The Times*, 2 July 1801.
- ²³ Nicolas, iv, p. 421.
- ²⁴ White, *ibid*, number 344.
- ²⁵ *The Times*, 10 and 14 March 1803.
- ²⁶ White, *ibid*, number 349.
- ²⁷ Nicolas, vii, p. 30.
- ²⁸ Christopher Lee, *Nelson and Napoleon* (London: Headline, 2006), p. 270.
- ²⁹ Nicolas, vol VII, p. 30.
- ³⁰ *Hampshire Chronicle*, 10 September 1805.
- ³¹ White, *ibid*, number 496.
- ³² Nicolas, *ibid*. notes p. 27; for Durham's role at Trafalgar see Michael Duffy, 'All was Hushed Up: The Hidden Trafalgar', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 91:2 (2005), 217 *et seq*.
- ³³ Nicolas, *ibid*, p. 32.
- ³⁴ *The Times*, 14 September 1805, p. 2.
- ³⁵ Various sources, including mentions in Tom Pocock's essay 'In Nelson's Footprints' in *The Nelson Companion*, ed. Colin White (Stroud, Sutton, 1995), pp. 102-127.
- ³⁶ There are many descriptions of this, for example see, Oman, pp. 564-65.
- ³⁷ White, *ibid*; see also his essay Colin White, 'A Man of Business: Nelson as Commander in Chief Mediterranean, May 1803-January 1805', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 91:2 (2005), 175-94.

‘Ever, with Real Esteem...’ Continuing the Nelson Letters Project

Colin White

On 16 January 1805 Vice Admiral Lord Nelson, then Commander in Chief in the Mediterranean, wrote to Surgeon Cornwall Reynolds, who had served with him ten years before in *Agamemnon*. He had just heard that Sir John Orde, a man whom he regarded as a rival, had been appointed to command a squadron in the Straits of Gibraltar, and he was complaining that this most lucrative area for prize money had been taken away from him. ‘You know’, he wrote, ‘I never was fortune’s Golden favorite (*sic*), mine is the age of Iron’.¹

A classic piece of vivid Nelsonian phrase-making- and yet you will search for it in vain in Nicolas’s monumental collection of his letters. After all the revelations and discoveries of recent years that is, perhaps, no longer surprising...what might be rather more surprising, is that you will not find it in White’s *Nelson- The New Letters* either! That is because by the time the current owner very kindly sent me a copy of the letter, my book had already gone to press.²

In fact the emergence of Nelson’s letter to Reynolds is not an isolated incident. New, hitherto unpublished, Nelson letters continue to emerge: since *Nelson – The New Letters* was published, eighteen months ago, I have been made aware of more than forty additional letters.³ Some have been most kindly sent to me by people who have read the book. The descendants of Captain George Mundy and Captain Lord Mark Kerr, two of Nelson’s frigate captains in the 1803/5 Mediterranean Campaign, sent me documents that complement the material already published in *Letters*.⁴ Here, for example, is Nelson writing to Mundy at the height of the excitement following the second French breakout from Toulon in April 1805:

...if you get any information of them beyond what I know of their having sail'd You will join me without a moments loss of time...You will send your boat onshore at Cagliari should there be little wind when you enter the Gulph, indeed I would have you make this very interesting enquiry Yourself but the Hydra is not to anchor.⁵

The letter, whose hurried scrawl betrays Nelson's anxiety as much as his convoluted grammar, has been annotated by Mundy, 'No information- they did not even know of the sailing'.

A number of other unpublished letters have appeared in sales during the last eighteen months and, in many cases, the vendors, or the new owners, have been kind enough to let me have copies. One such adds to our growing knowledge of Nelson's relationship with the Quaker merchant Edward Gayner who, it has been recently established, supplied him with intelligence from Rosas in Spain in 1803-04 and was probably imprisoned by the Spanish as a result.⁶ In March 1805, Nelson wrote to one of Gayner's colleagues in Bristol, Mr Edward Clayfield, 'I have not the smallest idea of his being put in prison and his conduct creates such an universal esteem that I have no doubt that he is both at liberty and respected'.⁷

A significant section of *Letters* was devoted to Nelson's use of patronage—the first major study of this key aspect of his life and career. The latest material also throws light on this fascinating subject. There is a poignant letter to John Coulson— obviously a former shipmate down on his luck. Nelson regrets he cannot help him find a place but, 'I send you a one pound note as it may be useful at this moment'.⁸ Thomas Louis is assured that Lord Chatham 'says he shall with pleasure render every service to your son'.⁹ Thomas Brodie, who commanded *Volcano* at Copenhagen, is told Nelson will 'always bear testimony that on every occasion when under my command that you always shewed the greatest Zeal for the Kings Servc: and in every respect did your duty as a most meritorious Officer'.¹⁰ And Rev Stephen Comyn, who had served as a Chaplain with Nelson at the Nile and at Copenhagen, is congratulated on his appointment as a parish vicar, 'which to a person who has conducted himself so prudently in pecuniary affairs will make you truly happy'. There is a characteristic postscript, 'I would not lose a moment in getting possession', and Emma Hamilton has also added a note, 'Joy joy to you & Mrs Comyn My Dear Sir you cannot tell my feelings (*sic*) & Lord Nelsons'.¹¹

In my introduction to *Letters* I paid tribute to the generous help I had received from so many colleagues, and they have continued to pass material to me, or to alert me to material that they have found. The 1805 Club's Editor, Huw Lewis-Jones, has made a particularly interesting find in the archives of the National Maritime Museum. In 1905, a Mr S. E. V. Filleul of Dorchester made his own rather special Trafalgar Centenary souvenir. Taking a copy of Orme's *Graphic History of the Life, Exploits and Death of Horatio*

Nelson, he interleaved it with a superb collection of prints and documents.¹² Huw spotted that, among the latter, were some unpublished Nelson letters and he kindly told me about them. They include an official note, dated 22 May 1780, to Lt Stephens of HMS *Janus*, and a hurried letter (7 August 1795), to Francis Drake the British minister in Genoa about convoys, '...this request for convoys proves the Absolute necessity of an English squadron cruising in the Gulph of Genoa'.¹³

But the gem of the Filleul Collection is a note, in Nelson's own hand, giving details of two of his orders of knighthood. This is not a polished document; rather, it is a rough memorandum, possibly intended for a friend or member of the family and so it has an immediacy about it that brings Nelson vividly to life.¹⁴

Finally, there are documents that I have found myself- among them, documents I overlooked during the preparation of the book! One of the most significant discoveries of The Nelson Letters Project was the collection of eight bound volumes of pressed copies of Nelson's letters from the Mediterranean between 1803 and 1805. Comparison between the contents of these volumes and Nelson's official letter books revealed that more than 400 letters- over 20% – did not appear in the official records. Analysis of the contents of the additional letters showed that a high proportion of them were either personal, or related to secret matters, such as intelligence operations, or delicate diplomatic negotiations.

I thought that I had identified all the new letters in this treasure trove but, when I checked my notes recently, I realised that I had in fact missed out the final volume – the one covering the last few weeks of Nelson's life, from 14 September to 21 October 1805.¹⁵ I duly visited the British Library a few weeks ago, to inspect the book – and, to my chagrin, discovered a further twenty-two unpublished letters, including ones to Admiral Duckworth, Lord Castlereagh, the Viceroy of Sardinia and members of Nelson's friends and family! The last letter in the book, addressed to Collingwood and dated 19 October, was published by Nicolas, who saw the original letter. But the penultimate one (and thus one of the very last that Nelson ever wrote), a delightful letter to his long-standing friend Richard Bulkeley, has never been published before.¹⁶ Here it is:

Victory Octr: 18th 1805

*My Dear Bulkeley
Many thanks for your kind letter of Sept: 29th: I hope I have fire*

eaters enough to give a very fair account of the Combined Fleets if we can get fairly at them. I think Sir Richd: Strachan will give a good account of the Rochefort Squadron from what I hear I believe he must have been in sight of them on the 10th: When your Son has served his time I shall take an early opportunity of promoting him.

*I am Ever My Dear Bulkeley
Yours Most Affectionately
Nelson & Bronte¹⁷*

What then of the future of The Nelson Letters Project and all the material it has amassed? The total of unpublished letters located now stands at almost 1,500. Of these, some 800 have been transcribed and just under 500 of the most important of those transcriptions were published in *Letters*. It was always the intention that the full results of the Project should be made available to all – but, as a result of the recent change in my personal circumstances, I am not going to be able to do very much work on the Project for the foreseeable future. Certainly, and regrettably, the idea of a complete new, collected edition of Nelson’s letters has had to be shelved – at least for now.

Nonetheless, ways will be sought to make the new material accessible. My good friend and colleague, Marianne Czisnik, has been commissioned by the Navy Records Society to prepare an edition of all Nelson’s letters to Emma Hamilton and the material located by the Project will, of course, be placed at her disposal. The British Library has commissioned me to produce a detailed study of the pressed copy letter books and their contents. Additionally, I am currently discussing with colleagues at the National Maritime and Royal Naval Museums (the joint sponsors of the Project) ideas for publishing the findings on the web. There are two main ways in which this could be done: first a complete list, with locations and references, of all the ‘new’ letters, so that they can be more easily found by future researchers and, second, transcriptions of those letters that are still unpublished.

But it should not rest there. I have never believed that Nelson’s letters are my exclusive preserve and have always sought to share the results of my research with other Nelsonians, and to encourage others to join in this great enterprise. So if any member of The 1805 Club is interested in pursuing the research further, do please get in touch with me at the Royal Naval Museum (Tel: 023 9272 7574; email: colin.white@royalnavalmuseum.org) and I will be delighted to discuss possibilities.

As always, Nelson has a phrase that perfectly suits the occasion. In the letter to Surgeon Reynolds with which I began this article, he refers to a rumour going round the Mediterranean fleet that the French would not dare to emerge from harbour while he was known to be still in command. ‘If that is so’, he wrote,

I ought to take myself off as soon as possible, for this fleet will send them to Hell let who will command it and I am not so arrogant as to suppose its success in the least depends upon my presence.

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- ¹ Nelson to Reynolds, 16 January 1805. Private collection.
 - ² However the ‘age of Iron’ passage (not the whole letter) is quoted, without references, in Tom Pocock, *Horatio Nelson* (London: Bodley Head, 1987), p. 301
 - ³ Colin White, *Nelson, The New letters* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005). Hereafter referred to as *Letters*.
 - ⁴ See *Letters*, numbers 341, 467-70.
 - ⁵ Nelson to Munday, 6 April 1805. Family collection.
 - ⁶ See *Letters*, pp. 369-70.
 - ⁷ Nelson to Clayfield, 30 March 1805. Private collection.
 - ⁸ Nelson to Coulson, 18 November 1802, Norwich Castle and Museum and Art Gallery NWHCM: 1949:83.
 - ⁹ Nelson to Louis, 17 March 1803. Private collection.
 - ¹⁰ Nelson to Brodie, 15 June 1802. Private collection.
 - ¹¹ Nelson to Comyn, 24 June 1801. Collection of Norwich School. For the story of Nelson’s involvement with Comyn’s appointment see *Letters*, p. 82 and numbers 134 and 135.
 - ¹² NMM: L 1993-12.
 - ¹³ *Janus* was the frigate Nelson was unable to take command of because he was so ill following the Nicaraguan expedition.
 - ¹⁴ The document is undated but analysis of the handwriting suggests that it was probably written in 1800/01, during Nelson’s brief stay in England before the Battle of Copenhagen.
 - ¹⁵ British Library: BL 34960.
 - ¹⁶ Bulkeley, an army officer, had served with Nelson in Nicaragua and they remained in touch for the rest of Nelson’s life. His son, also Richard, served in the *Victory* at Trafalgar and carried Hardy’s messages to the dying admiral – and received Nelson’s last message for his father.
 - ¹⁷ Nelson to Bulkeley, 18 October 1805. BL 34960 f.304.
 - ¹⁸ Nelson to Reynolds, 16 January 1805. Private collection.