

THE CHAIRMAN'S DISPATCH

For the benefit of Europe in general

The great petition of Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson's Trafalgar Prayer of 1805, once again echoes across the years, "May the Great God whom I worship grant to my country and *for the benefit of Europe in general* a Great and Glorious victory . . ." (My italics).

These are challenging times. Britain has voted to leave the European Union. Historians in the future will look back at this defining moment in our history as a watershed. In the words of the new Prime Minister, Theresa May, "Brexit means Brexit." Yet in truth no one has the faintest idea what Brexit will look like or how long it will take before those future historians can say whether the British people on 23 June 2016 made the right or wrong choice. It was Chinese premier Zhou Enlai who famously said, when asked what were the implications of the French Revolution, it was "**too early**" to say. **Given that the Revolution was 227 years ago it rather emphasises the point. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.** What is certain is that few if any of us are likely to live long enough to find out!

Moreover, the long term consequences whatever they are will become lost in the global issues that are already dominating and defining this century: climate change, the increasing rate of sea level rise, atmospheric pollution, fresh water shortage, population growth, the so-called War on Terror and the geo-political tensions in the Black Sea, Arctic and South China Sea.

What I believe we can deduce is that Brexit highlights two considerations relevant to The 1805 Club's sphere of interest. Firstly, from an historical perspective, Britain is returning to its 'natural state', which is to be separate from mainland Europe while still being implicitly and necessarily involved with it. The words of Nelson's Trafalgar Prayer reflect the distinction. At the same time they reveal his strategic understanding of the importance of peace across the Continent as being in Britain's best interest.

From the time of Queen Elizabeth I Britain's destiny has been the open sea. The famous and magnificent Armada Portrait once owned by Sir Francis Drake and only recently saved for the nation with the help of the National Maritime Museum and public subscription, shows the Queen's right hand resting on the globe auguring and emphasising this vocation.

During the great Age of Sail that followed her reign Britain gradually secured command of the ocean and grew a vast empire separate from continental Europe. Nevertheless, it was continental Europe that provided its monarchs. Without them there would have been little reason for Britain to have allies and armies on the European mainland. The Dutch and German monarchs, William III and George I respectively, were recruited because they were Protestant and throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries it was this religious dimension that had brought about Britain's continental commitment.

Even so, it was the navy rather than the army that defended the nation's security, freedoms and international trade, thus underpinning the country's independent success and creating the *Pax Britannica*. Herein there is an important lesson for us today because with Brexit it is even more important that Britain understands and re-establishes its relationship with the sea and recognises the critical role to be played by the Royal Navy. Even

though Sir Winston Churchill called for "a kind of United States of Europe" after World War II, it was he who also said, "If Britain must choose between Europe and the open sea, she must always choose the sea." Like Nelson, he held a balanced and pragmatic view of Europe and Britain's place in it.

Ominously, the Fleet today is underfunded and at a low point with only 19 warships, a huge come down from 2003 when it still had 32 frigates and destroyers as well as the through-deck carriers HMS Ark Royal and HMS Illustrious. To compound today's crisis, only 13 of these warships are serviceable. The Type 45 'Daring' Class destroyers are prone to sudden and catastrophic loss of power to provide propulsion and operate weapons and other systems, and the same power defect is likely to affect the two new and much vaunted Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers. Meanwhile, the Type 26 Global Combat Ship is being further delayed and far from being a cutting-edge vessel as promised is no more than a new hull for the existing weapon systems of the aged Type 23 frigates, which will be transferred to it. To rub salt into the wounds there is a serious shortage of skilled engineers.

More defence cuts could come as a result of the economic impact of Brexit, but if Britain really intends to trade with the world then the case for a much stronger Royal Navy is surely very strong?

As ever, through our membership of NATO, this investment will also be 'for the benefit of Europe in general', as the West faces up to the real challenges on the high seas – especially in the Arctic and South China Sea.

Therefore, the fundamental truth from the Age of Sail is that 'It is [still] upon the navy whereon under the Providence of God, the wealth, safety and strength of the kingdom chiefly depend.' (Articles of War, 1661). This is the second reason for the Club's interest in Brexit.

The Club does not exist to record and conserve the graves and memorials of the sailing Royal Navy for heritage and sentimental reasons alone. We exist because the ethos of our naval past is the echo that must continue to resonate today. It makes what we do relevant and part of our mission is to use naval heritage and naval history to highlight the Royal Navy's vital importance today. Past naval glories and the deeds of those we honour, such as the Band of Brothers, help to inspire this ethos and to sustain the fighting tradition and can-do attitude of the Service. As Admiral Andrew Cunningham famously said in 1941, "It takes the Navy three years to build a ship. It will take three hundred years to build a new tradition."

The country is in real danger of demolishing this inherited tradition. We must not allow that to happen. The reality of Brexit must be exploited to the benefit of both the Royal and Merchant navies.

In my years as chairman I have seen The 1805 Club help to advance the understanding of naval history by way of initiatives ranging from practical conservation through to conferences, lectures and now fledgling educational programmes for the Royal Navy and schools. The 1805 Club changes with the times.

A thread running throughout these years has been the Club's publications, not least *The Kedge Anchor* and the *Trafalgar Chronicle*. Your editor, Ken Flemming, continues to improve the Kedge and Peter Hore, editor of the Chronicle has initiated and overseen a revolution that in association with Seaforth Publishing delivers our respected journal to a wider international audience by making it for sale beyond the membership. They are to be congratulated and I hope, like me, you eagerly await this year's issue, delivered free to members in this and future years in the usual way.



This is an exciting time for The 1805 Club because after 25 years of activity, which has consolidated its credibility and reputation, the Club like the country, is at a threshold. Your Council has been working to respond to the challenges and opportunities this presents and in addition to the changes to the *Trafalgar Chronicle* it is investing in a revamp of the website, led by Jo Birtwhistle, which will allow for the long awaited Memorials Log John Curtis has been working on to be published on line. We have also commissioned a feasibility study from Commander Garry Spalton RN rtd on a future strategy for The Trafalgar Way. The 1805 Club is now the official custodian of the Trafalgar Way and we are thrilled that Ride the Trafalgar Way is taking place in October. We shall be presenting The New Trafalgar Dispatch to the winning cyclist of each leg. We are also looking at ways to help support this splendid event in future years together with many other organisations along the Way who we are approaching to help us raise its profile. Bill White is masterminding this.

Hitherto we have fulfilled our charitable objectives in a variety of *ad hoc* ways but there is now a call for a sustained approach that will build on these achievements and integrate the various co-related elements. The underpinning themes remain conservation and recording, education and the promotion of naval heritage.

To have reached this point is a remarkable testament to the devotion of the Council's teams past and present. Nevertheless, If we are to meet the challenge we need to recruit more talent from the membership to serve on future Councils. We welcome Benedict Ryan this year who has followed in the wake of Geraint Day, Paul Kloss and Stephen Tredidgo. They add to an already great team and I thank them all. In Nelson's words they are a "fine sett of fellows"!

With all good wishes,

Yours aye,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Peter', written in dark ink on a light background.

Peter Warwick, Chairman