Program of Events

Meetings begin at 7pm for a 7.30pm start unless otherwise stated
Please bring a plate for supper

Monday 8 September 2014 - Interview with Lady Emma Hamilton.
Betty Foster & Gillian Mead. At Bob Woollett’s Home, 100 Forrest St, Fremantle

Friday 17 October 2014 – 12pm Trafalgar Lunch at RAAFA, Booragoon

Sunday 19 October 2014 – 3pm Memorial Service at St George’s Cathedral

Friday 7 November 2014 – ‘Pickle’ Night at RAAFA, Booragoon
Monday 24 November 2014 – DVD of a talk by Graham Perkins
     “Emma Hamilton, Famous or Infamous” at Gwen Phillip’s home
                           4 Carroll St, Ardross.
Dear Members,

30th April 2014

At long last the Sword of Excellence presentation for 2012 has been made to Lieutenant (now Lieutenant Commander) Tony Hannemann RAN. The presentation was made on Tuesday morning by Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, Chief of Navy (CN) at Fleet Headquarters in Sydney. Unfortunately I was only informed of the presentation late on Monday, so given the extremely short notice, it meant that we were unable to have an official presence at the ceremony. I expressed our disappointment and Navy was most apologetic but explained that they had made several attempts to get CN and the recipient together at the same place and the same time (apparently Tony Hannemann’s job means that he spends most of his time travelling – and I think CN’s is much the same) but they did promise to try and do better next time! To add some credence to their claim, I understand that they didn’t have time to get the Sword itself to Sydney – it would appear to be still locked in its case in the Wardroom at Stirling! Anyway, on your behalf I sent the following email to Hannemann:

Dear Tony,

On behalf of all members of the Nelson Society of Australia, I would like to extend our heartiest congratulations to you on the award of the Vice Admiral Viscount Lord Nelson KB, Trafalgar Bicentennial Sword of Excellence for 2012. Having read the citation, I am sure that it could not have gone to a more worthy recipient and I know that you will be aware of the illustrious company that you now join. I regret that I am not able to be present in person at the ceremony which I believe, is due to take place at 1100 tomorrow (Tuesday 29th April) at Fleet Headquarters, but I’m sure that you will understand that geographical constraints and the short notice preclude this.

Since the initial award of the Sword was made in 2006 it has become customary to make a ‘Chairman’s Award’ of a book to each recipient as a permanent and personal memento, in addition to a Commemorative Medal which was struck by the Nelson Society of Australia in 2008 to mark the 250th anniversary of the birth of Horatio Nelson. The book that I have chosen for you is NELSON The Sword of Albion by John Sugden. It is the second volume of a biography of Nelson by this author and deals with the last eight years of his life (the really interesting part!!) from September 1797 to October 1805 covering the battles of The Nile, Copenhagen and Trafalgar in great detail. It’s a long read but I’m sure that you will enjoy it and hopefully it will give you some insight into what made Horatio Nelson a truly great leader. Commander Cooper has forwarded your postal address and I intend to mail it to you in the near future. Once again, many congratulations from all of us at the Nelson Society. We hope that the ceremony goes off well and that you can enjoy the moment.

With all good wishes

Michael Sargeant

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CHAIRMAN Nelson Society of Australia

Good morning Michael,

Thanks very much for your sentiments. I have been extremely humbled by both the award itself and the prestige that Navy has placed upon it. Without doubt this award is the highlight of my career. The presentation yesterday went very well, and while it may have lacked some of the ceremony of previous awards, it was still both appropriate and very effective in conveying the significance of the event. It certainly was more than effective at making me feel incredibly self-conscious and a little uncomfortable.

I found the citation to be quite touching as well. I must admit that my understanding of Nelson’s achievements was very light on detail until the announcement of the award. Having done some research since that time I have become increasingly flattered and humbled to even be associated with the award given the achievements of Nelson. I have taken some comfort in the fact that through all of his achievements and leadership in extreme conditions he also demonstrated some quantity of human character failings - just like the rest of us. It has made it easier to accept the award and understand better what it stands for - or at least what I believe it stands for beyond simply "excellence".

I look forward to reading the book you have chosen for me, and it is my understanding the precursor to it is also worth a read. At this stage my intention is to get my hands on a copy of that as well. This seems as good a time as any to start learning about the great man.

Again, thank you and the Nelson Society of Australia for your message, the award itself, the book and the commemorative medal. It is all going to help me treasure this moment in my career for many years to come.

Regards, Tony Hannemann
LCDR, RAN
Combat System Engineer
As we all know, Nelson was a commander par excellence but he wasn’t a one man band. A large factor in Nelson’s success as a leader was his ability to inspire confidence in his men and to weld them into a team, and for this he placed a heavy reliance on his captains. By the time of Trafalgar, Britain had been at war for more than half a century, at various times against Spain, Holland, Denmark and the United States, and almost continuously against the French; it was also the age of the great explorer/navigators such as Anson, Cook and Flinders Nelson and his captains were part of a second or third generation of naval officers who were heirs to a proud tradition of superb seamanship and fighting ability, honed by almost continuous operational service blockading the continental ports and harrying the enemy in a series of major actions.

By the end of the eighteenth century the Royal Navy had reached the peak of its efficiency and it had earned a reputation for professional excellence that was unrivalled in Europe, perhaps exemplified by Lord St Vincent when, as First Lord of the Admiralty he famously remarked to the House of Lords, “I do not say, my Lords, that the French will not come; I say only that they will not come by sea”

A major contributing factor to this efficiency was the fact that the Royal Navy recruited most of its officers from the emerging middle class; men who were in the main the sons of professional and mercantile families, doctors, solicitors, country squires and parsons etc, giving the Navy a base of solid, dependable and intelligent individuals with an inherent professional tendency. The Army by contrast, relied largely on the aristocracy to provide its officers. And then of course there was the examination for lieutenant that had been instituted by Pepys a century earlier, that every officer had to pass before he could gain the King’s commission.

The lieutenant’s exam was unique in Europe at the time, in fact it was the only professional examination in the World for the armed forces, and although patronage and influence were still necessary for further advancement, they played much less of a factor in the Navy than they did in the Army of the day, where commissions were frequently bought and sold, and private regiments were not unknown.

As a result, the navy of Nelson’s day was as close to being a meritocracy as it practically could be; it was a formidable fighting machine and Nelson was to become its greatest exponent. After the battle of the Nile, Nelson wrote to Lord Hood: “I had the happiness to command a band of brothers”.

In a previous presentation I have talked about Hardy, Blackwood and Fremantle, all of whom were among Nelson’s closest friends and confidants, but none of whom were part of the ‘Band of Brothers’ at least not in the strictest sense as it referred to the Nile.

Tonight I want to talk about five of the original ‘Band of Brothers’- Berry, Ball Saumarez, Foley and Miller. I’m going to start with Edward Berry, his first flag captain and a favourite, certainly at the beginning, not least because he was also a Norfolk man of sorts, but in the end I think, perhaps something of a disappointment to his mentor.

Edward Berry was born in 1768, the son of a London merchant who died when Edward was very young, leaving a young widow and seven children – five daughters and two sons. He was educated in Norwich by his uncle, the Reverend Titus Berry, and entered the navy as a volunteer in Burford, a third rate of 70 guns, at the age of 10, under the patronage of Lord Mulgrave, a Lord of Admiralty and a former pupil at the school. He was promoted to lieutenant in January 1794, serving later that year at the battle of the Glorious First of June.

He first came to Nelson’s notice in May 1796 when he joined Agamemnon (64), and transferred with Nelson to Captain as first lieutenant, receiving his captain’s “fullest approbation” when he commanded Captain during Nelson’s absence ashore at the siege of Port Ferrajo in Corsica. The Norfolk connection together with Berry’s penchant for action impressed Nelson who wrote to Sir John Jervis, then C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet: “I have as far as I have seen every reason to be satisfied with him, both as a gentleman and an officer”. Jervis himself was not stinting in his praise either when he wrote to the Admiralty: “Lieutenant Edward Berry, of whom the Commodore writes so highly, is a protégé of mine and I know him to be an officer of talents, great courage and laudable ambition”.

Berry was promoted to commander in November 1796 but remained in Captain as a volunteer, serving with distinction at the battle of Cape St Vincent on 14th February 1797 when he was first to board San Nicholas. After the battle, Nelson wrote: “The first man who jumped into the enemy’s mizzen-chains was Captain Berry, late my first lieutenant; he was supported from our spritsail-yard, which hooked in the mizzen-rigging... Having pushed on to the quarter-deck, I found Captain Berry in possession of the poop, and the Spanish Ensign hauling down”. Later, in October 1797, he was present when Nelson was knighted by King George 111. The king remarked that Nelson appeared to have lost his right arm, but Nelson quickly deflected the potential embarrassment by wittily replying: “But not my right hand as I have the honour of presenting Captain Berry!”

By this time, Nelson’s relationship with Berry was such that they had agreed that Berry would become Nelson’s flag captain when Nelson returned to duty, and on December 8th Nelson wrote to Berry: “If you mean to marry, I would recommend your doing it speedily, or the to-be Mrs. Berry will have very little of your company, for I am well, and you may expect to be called for every hour".

Edward Berry
Eager to comply with his admiral’s wishes, Berry married his cousin, Louisa Foster, on 12th December 1797 and a week later was appointed to command Vanguard (74) as Nelson’s flag captain. Vanguard was Berry’s first command and although he had gained a reputation for zeal and daring - both essential qualities in the Royal Navy at that time - he wasn’t as renowned for his seamanship, and this was to become evident when Vanguard was dismayed in a sudden gale in the Gulf of Lions, off the north coast of Corsica, on the evening of 20th May 1798. At the time Nelson was leading a small squadron of three 74s and three frigates, charged with trying to find out what the French were up to in Toulon where Napoleon was marshalling his forces for an attack on Malta and Egypt. Earlier that day, Vanguard’s crew had spent the afternoon rigging the upper masts and yards and setting up the topgallants and royals, but the other two 74s, Orion under Captain Sir James Saumarez and Alexander under Captain Alexander Ball, had maintained a shortened sail plan well aware of the treacherous nature of the weather in that part of the Mediterranean. Following her dismasting, it was only the magnificent seamanship of Ball that saved Vanguard from being driven ashore and two days later it was Ball and Alexander’s shipwright who were largely responsible for the almost complete re-rigging of Vanguard in the short space of three days. Berry’s shortcomings were further illustrated in January 1799 in a letter that he wrote to Nelson while serving as Nelson’s flag captain in Foudroyant (80): “My very dear Lord, had you been a partaker with me of the glory, every wish would have been gratified. How very often I went into your cabin, last night, to ask if we were doing right; for, I had nothing to act upon!...” and it was obvious that by now Nelson had become aware of Berry’s inadequacies when he had written to Fanny on learning of Berry’s appointment to succeed Hardy as his flag captain: “I shall be worn to death by being obliged to fag and think of those things which... excellent Captain Hardy takes entirely from me.” I should point out here that it seems to have been common practice in those days to appoint recently promoted captains as flag captains, the idea presumably being that admirals having had more experience, could keep a weather eye on junior captains. However, in the case of Vanguard both Berry and Nelson were new to their respective positions and a few things seem to have fallen down the cracks, at least at the outset. Nevertheless, Berry’s offensive spirit came to the fore at the battle of the Nile on the night of August 1st, 1798, when he fought Vanguard to his admiral’s complete satisfaction after the latter was disabled by a shrapnel wound to the head. Following the battle, Berry was sent home with dispatches together with Captain Thompson of Leander, but Leander was cornered off Corfu by Le Genereaux, one of the escapes from the Nile, and captured after some stiff resistance. Berry and Thompson were both injured in the action but released a few months later and knighted on their return to London where news of the great victory had earlier arrived in a duplicate set of dispatches sent via Naples.

Early in 1799, having recovered from his injuries, Berry was appointed to Foudroyant where he succeeded Hardy as Nelson’s flag captain, the news of which gave rise to Nelson’s comments to Fanny that I referred to earlier – but again, Berry’s fighting talents were usefully employed in the subsequent capture of Le Genereaux and Guillaume Tell, the last of the French to have escaped from the Nile.

After leaving Foudroyant in the autumn of 1800 he remained largely inactive until just prior to Trafalgar when he was re-appointed to Agamemnon, this time in command, and his arrival off Cadiz on 13th October 1805 prompted Nelson’s famous remark: “Here comes that fool Berry! Now we shall have a battle!” However, he achieved no particular distinction at Trafalgar and Edward Codrington in Orion later remarked wryly that Berry in Agamemnon had blazed away for all he was worth at friend and foe alike.

Berry’s last engagement was the battle of San Domingo in February 1806 and he is thought to be the only officer (apart from Collingwood) to have received three medals for command in three general actions, those being the Nile, Trafalgar and San Domingo. He was created a baronet in 1808 and between 1811 and 1813 he commanded Sceptre (74) and Barfleur (98) following which he commanded one of the Royal Yachts until the end of the war in 1815. He received a KCB in January 1815 and was promoted Rear Admiral in July 1821, although he was never appointed to command and thus became a ‘yellow admiral’. Suffering from ill health during the last few years of his life, he died on 13th February 1831. He had no children and his title died with him.

We now turn to Alexander Ball, a man whom Nelson, for purely superficial reasons, disliked when first they met but rapidly changed his mind when he really got to know and appreciate him, and they remained firm friends thereafter.

Alexander Ball

Alexander John Ball was born in Gloucestershire in 1757, the fourth son of Robert Ball, High Sherriff of that county, and his wife Mary. There seem to be few details about his childhood and early naval career, with most accounts recording that he joined the Navy after completing his schooling (but at what age remains unclear) and was promoted lieutenant in August 1778. He served with Rodney in Formidable (90) in the West Indies and was present at the battle of The Saintes in April 1782, being promoted to commander two days after the battle. He was made post in March 1783. Later that year he spent some time in France on half pay learning French, and it was in St Omer that he first met Nelson, who was attempting to brush up his own language skills. Nelson was not impressed with Ball’s habit of wearing epaulettes, at the time a French custom that wasn’t adopted by the Royal Navy until 1795, and wrote to his mentor, William Locker, describing Ball as “a great coxcomb".
My dear, invaluable friend, ...believe me, my heart

Ball was created baronet later that same month, and by June

James Saumarez was born at St Peter Port in Guernsey on 11th March 1757 into an old Guernsey family of Norman French ancestry and a long and distinguished history of service in the Royal Navy.

Ball remained on half pay until July 1790 when he was appointed to Nemesis, a 28 gun frigate, shifting to Cleopatra, a frigate of 32 guns serving on the Newfoundland station. In August 1796 he was appointed to command the 74 gun Alexander, firstly in the Channel fleet and later off Cadiz in the Mediterranean fleet under Jervis, and it was in Gibraltar in May 1798 that Ball was to renew his acquaintance with Nelson whom he joined, together with Sir James Saumarez in Orion, for their expedition into the Mediterranean to find out what Bonaparte was up to in Toulon. At their first meeting Nelson, probably remembering their previous encounter fifteen years earlier, exclaimed: "What, are you come to have your bones broken?" Ball answered that he had no wish to have his bones broken, unless his duty to his king and country required it, and then they should not be spared - hardly a propitious start to what was to become one of Nelson's closest friendships. However, the animosity was to be short-lived because before the end of the month Nelson had cause to embrace Ball and offer his profuse thanks for saving the flagship from disaster after the dismasting of Vanguard on May 20th, declaring that "A friend in need is a friend indeed".

Ball fought with distinction at the subsequent battle of the Nile, being jointly responsible with Swiftsure for completing the destruction of the French flagship. Following the battle, Alexander accompanied Vanguard to Naples, from whence Ball was detached to set up a close blockade of Malta in conjunction with a Portuguese squadron, Malta being at that time still under French occupation after Napoleon's conquest earlier in the year. Although the neighbouring island of Gozo was quickly retaken, it was two years before the French garrison in Valletta finally surrendered, by which time Ball had established extremely good relations with the Maltese, having with Troubridge managed to maintain much needed food supplies for the starving islanders, and he became the president of the Maltese National Congress until the French surrender in September 1800. Despite this, he wasn't involved in the surrender negotiations, being superseded by a newly arrived army officer, Major General Henry Pigot, and although he had expected to be appointed governor of Malta following the French capitulation, this did not eventuate and an aggrieved Ball left the island in April 1801 for Gibraltar where he was appointed Commissioner of the Navy. In June 1801, Nelson wrote to him from the Baltic with some understanding and sympathy: "My dear, invaluable friend, ...believe me, my heart entertains the very warmest affection for you, and it has been no fault of mine, and not a little mortification, that you have not the red ribbon and other rewards that would have kept you afloat; but as I trust the war is at an end, you must take your flag when it comes to you, for who is to command our fleets in a future war? ...I pity the poor Maltese; they have sustained an irreparable loss in your friendly counsel and an able director in their public concerns; you were truly their father, and, I agree with you, they may not like stepfathers. ... Believe me at all times and places, for ever your sincere, affectionate, and faithful friend." The red ribbon that was not forthcoming and that Nelson had referred to was of course the Order of the Bath, but in recognition of his services, Ball was created baronet later that same month, and by June 1802, to the great delight of the Maltese he was back in Valletta as British Minister Plenipotentiary to the Knights of St John of Jerusalem – the traditional rulers of the Island. By this time the Peace of Amiens had been in force for several months and under the terms of the Peace, the Knights of St John were supposed to be re-instated as the Rulers of Malta, but the Knights were profoundly disliked by the Maltese who much preferred British rule more specifically, Alexander Ball, so he was secretly instructed to delay the transition of government and the departure of the British garrison. This he successfully managed to do by dragging his heels until war between Britain and France resumed in May 1803, by which time the British had decided to take full control of the island. Ball was to remain in Malta acting as civil commissioner and de facto governor until his death in 1809. In November 1805 he was promoted to Rear Admiral, although he was never appointed to command and so technically speaking, he was another 'yellow admiral'. He died on October 25th 1809 and was buried in Valetta, with a monument being erected in his honour in the Lower Barracca Gardens in Valletta by the grateful Maltese. He was survived by his wife Mary and a son who inherited his title, but who died a bachelor.

The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge who became his secretary in 1804 described Ball as a 'truly great man' and he was certainly typical of the best naval officers of his day – resolute, resourceful, respected and extremely capable. He was an excellent seaman, a first class officer and able to turn his hand to most things including diplomacy and politics, all perhaps reflecting his upper middle class background - yet another British naval officer who became a successful civil administrator – as did so many here in colonial Australia.

And now to a man who was another of Nelson's most capable captains, but while there was a considerable degree of mutual respect for each other's abilities, they were never to become friends. Nevertheless, although of very different temperaments, James Saumarez and Horatio Nelson shared many qualities in common, including a certain talent for tactical genius.

James Saumarez

James Saumarez was born at St Peter Port in Guernsey on 11th March 1757 into an old Guernsey family of Norman French ancestry and a long and distinguished history of service in the Royal Navy.
He was the eldest son of Matthew de Saumarez and his second wife Carterette. Although he was officially entered in the ship’s books of the frigate Solebay in early 1768 (a common but unofficial practise) he actually joined the 32 gun frigate Montreal as a midshipman in August 1770 at the age of 13.

After serving in the Mediterranean fleet he passed for lieutenant in 1775, although he wasn’t commissioned until July 1776 following the battle of Charleston, at which time he was serving on the North American station in the 50 gun Bristol, flagship of Sir Peter Parker, an early patron of Nelson. He was appointed to command the 8 gun galley Spitfire in 1778, but had to run her aground and burn her after being cornered by the French in Narragansett Bay. He then transferred to Victory, and later to the 74 gun Fortitude in which he was wounded at the battle of the Dogger Bank in August 1781. Shortly afterwards he was promoted to commander of the fireship Tisiphone and was made post at the age of 25 with his promotion to the 74 gun Russell in which he fought with considerable distinction at the battle of The Saints in April 1782. During the course of the battle he hauled Russell out of the line to aid in the capture of the French flagship Ville de Paris prompting Rodney to remark that: “The Russell’s captain is a fine fellow, whoever he is!”

By now, the North American War was over and Saumarez returned to Guernsey on half pay. He married Martha Le Marchant in October 1788, remaining on half pay until war broke out again in 1793, when he was appointed to command the 36 gun frigate, Crescent, in which, on 20th October 1793 he captured the French frigate La Reunion he received a knighthood. In March 1795, he was promoted to command the 74 gun Orion in the Channel fleet, and took part in the battle of Ile de Groix on 22 June 1795. In February 1797 he joined the Mediterranean fleet under Sir John Jervis, just in time to take part in the battle of Cape St Vincent where he managed to force the surrender of the Spanish flagship Santissima Trinidad a first rate of 136 guns and at the time, the largest warship in the world.

Unfortunately he was unable to take possession and Santissima Trinidad subsequently escaped. He was also instrumental in capturing Salvador del Mundi although she struck to Victory, and to his disgust he received credit for neither action in Jervis’s dispatch. In May 1798, Saumarez and Orion joined Nelson’s squadron monitoring the French preparations at Toulon. The squadron was subsequently enlarged to thirteen 74s and although Saumarez was, by virtue of seniority, second-in-command to Nelson, they didn’t see eye to eye on many things and Nelson frequently sought Troubridge’s counsel in preference to that of Saumarez. It would seem - as Lavery points out in “Nelson and the Nile” - that Saumarez never came under Nelson’s spell and I suspect, probably regarded Nelson’s vanity and his habit of self-promotion with some disdain, particularly after Nelson, who was also very upset that he hadn’t rated a special mention in Jervis’s dispatch following the battle of Cape St Vincent, took matters into his own hands and managed to get his own account of the battle published in some of the London papers.

Nevertheless, although Saumarez and Nelson had their differences, he did express a kind of grudging respect for Nelson when, at a particularly difficult time halfway through their pursuit of the French, probably when they were on their way back to Syracuse after leaving Alexandria in mid-July 1798, he wrote to his wife “Fortunately I only act here ‘en second’, but did the chief responsibility rest with me, I fear it would be more than my too irritable nerves would bear.”

He was to acquit himself well during the battle, capturing Peuple Souverain and Le Franklin, although he had another falling out with Nelson after the battle when he questioned the tactic of doubling the enemy line on the grounds that it exposed the British ships to friendly fire.

Needless to say, Nelson didn’t agree, storming off below without giving Saumarez a chance to explain himself and he found himself escorting the prizes to Gibraltar after the battle for his pains. Nevertheless, Nelson was to pay tribute to Saumarez later when he wrote that “I could have formed no opinion of Orion that was not favourable to her gallant and excellent commander and crew.”

In 1799 Saumarez was appointed to the 80 gun Caesar and sent to blockade Brest, a gruelling and exhausting task that had its effect on his health but in September 1800 he was told by St Vincent (at the time C-in-C of the Channel fleet) that: “with you there I sleep as soundly as if I had the keys of Brest in my pocket”. On January 1st 1801 he was gazetted Rear Admiral and in June was created a baronet.

Sent to blockade Cadiz, in a brilliant night action on July 12, 1801 which came to be known as the battle of the Gut of Gibraltar, he defeated a much larger combined French and Spanish squadron, for which he was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath and also granted an annuity of £1,200 p.a. from the British government. Peace was restored briefly in 1802 and he returned to his family in Guernsey but after war broke out again in May 1803 he was appointed to command the defence of the Channel Islands and as a result he missed Trafalgar. He was promoted to Vice Admiral in 1806 after which he found himself blockading Brest again, this time as Commander-in-Chief of the Channel fleet. In 1808 he was appointed to the command of the Baltic fleet and hoisted his flag in Victory, his instructions being to protect British trade with the Baltic states - a trade that was vital to Britain’s war effort - after Russia had signed an alliance with Napoleon in July 1807. The Baltic was to prove a delicate balancing act, especially after Sweden declared war on Britain in November 1810 at France’s behest, but with great tact and diplomacy, Saumarez managed to keep trade moving and after Napoleon attacked Russia in 1812, Saumarez used the fleet to hamper French operations in the Baltic.

He was promoted to Admiral in 1814 and appointed Admiral of the Port at Portsmouth, and then to the honorary post of Rear Admiral of the United Kingdom in 1819 and Vice Admiral of the United Kingdom in 1821. He was C-in-C Plymouth from 1824 until 1827 and raised to the peerage as Baron de Saumarez in 1831. He was also an Elder Brother of Trinity House and an honorary General of the Royal Marines, the last naval officer to hold this position.

James Saumarez died at St Peter Port on 9 October 1836 at the age of 79, survived by his wife and four of his eight children.
We now turn to Thomas Foley, who although not a close friend was highly regarded by Nelson. Foley fought with distinction at the Nile and Copenhagen.

**Thomas Foley**

Thomas Foley was born in 1757 on the family estate in Llawhaden, Pembroke-shire, the second son of John Foley and a nephew of Captain Thomas Foley who sailed with Anson on his famous circumnavigation between 1741 and 1744. He entered the navy in 1770 as a midshipman aboard the sloop *Otter* in which he served for three years on the Newfoundland station before being appointed to the 54 gun fourth rate *Antelope*, the flagship of Rear Admiral Gayton in the West Indies. While in the Caribbean, he saw a lot of service in the smaller craft on the station and had considerable success against American privateers.

*Antelope* returned to England in 1778 and he was promoted to lieutenant on 25th May, shortly after her arrival, transferring almost immediately to the 64 gun *America*, which at the time was attached to the Channel fleet under Admiral Keppel. Foley was present at the First battle of Ushant in July 1778, an indecisive battle against the French in which the Channel fleet came off second best, following which Keppel was court martialed and although acquitted, was relieved of his command.

In October 1779, Foley was appointed to the 98 gun second rate *Prince George*, flagship of Rear Admiral Digby, under the overall command of Admiral George Rodney. He was to see considerable action in *Prince George* when she participated in the capture of a Spanish convoy off Cape Finisterre on 8th January 1780, followed by the defeat of a French squadron in the First battle of Cape St Vincent (also known as the Moonlight battle because it took part mainly at night) a week later during which seven French ships were captured or destroyed, as well as the relief of Gibraltar which occurred several days after that – quite an eventful month.

Foley and *Prince George* then sailed with Rodney to the West Indies and took part in the battle of The Saintes in April 1782. Later that year he was appointed to the temporary command of *Warwick* at New York after her captain, George Elphinstone (later Lord Keith) was invalidated home, shortly afterwards being confirmed in the rank of commander and appointed to the armed ship *Britannia* (not to be confused with the 100 gun first rate of the same name). He remained in command of *Britannia* until she paid off in England at the beginning of 1785. From December 1787 until September 1790, he commanded the sloop *Racehorse* in home waters and was promoted to post captain on 21st September 1790, but remained unattached until the outbreak of the French Revolutionary War in February 1793.

In April 1793 he was appointed to command the 98 gun second rate *St George* as flag captain to Rear Admiral John Gell and joined the Mediterranean fleet under Lord Hood at the siege of Toulon. Later, while still in command in *St George*, after Gell was superseded by Hyde Parker, Foley took part in several minor actions off Toulon; then in March 1796 he accompanied Parker when he shifted his flag to the first rate *Britannia*, remaining in command when Parker was succeeded by Vice Admiral Charles Thompson at the end of 1796.

On St Valentine’s Day 1797 Foley saw action in the (more well-known) battle of Cape St Vincent and shortly afterwards was appointed to command the 74 gun third rate *Goliath* in the Inshore Squadron blockading Cadiz, and it was in *Goliath* on 1st August 1798 that Foley gained renown and a major advantage for Nelson’s fleet at the battle of the Nile when he led the British ships around the head of the French line in Aboukir Bay, catching the enemy completely off guard by engaging it from the landward side.

There has been much conjecture, even to this day, as to whether Foley was acting under his own initiative or whether he was under instructions from Nelson to do so if it appeared feasible. The most reasonable and commonly held explanation is that Foley did indeed act on his own initiative but with the knowledge that this was a tactic that had been discussed between Nelson and his captains, prior to the battle. Be that as it may, it was a masterstroke that gave the British fleet a significant advantage and contributed in no small measure to the overwhelming victory that Nelson achieved at the Nile. Following the battle, *Goliath* together with *Zealous* and *Swiftsure* remained off the Nile Delta, blockading Alexandria, and at the end of 1799, after further service with the Mediterranean fleet, Foley returned to England.

In January 1800 he was appointed to command another 74, *Elephant*, in the Channel fleet and early in 1801 he sailed to the Baltic with Hyde Parker and Nelson. Nelson’s flagship *St George* was of too deep a draft to negotiate the Sound and the channels off Copenhagen so Nelson shifted his flag into *Elephant*. Although Hardy was Nelson’s flag captain in *St George* and transferred to *Elephant* with Nelson, Foley acted as Nelson’s flag captain during the battle, and it was to Foley that Nelson supposedly exclaimed: “You know, Foley, I only have one eye - I have the right to be blind sometimes” and then holding his telescope to his blind eye said: “I really do not see the signal,” after Hyde Parker had made the signal to break off action.

By this time Foley had become one of Nelson’s firm favourites and in his dispatch to Parliament Nelson paid tribute to him writing: “To Captain Foley, who permitted me the honour of hoisting my flag on the Elephant, I feel under the greatest obligation. His advice was necessary on many important occasions throughout the campaign”. After the battle, Nelson returned to *St George* and *Elephant* remained with the Baltic fleet until the autumn of 1801 when she returned to England and paid off. He was married on 31st July 1802 to Lady Lucy FitzGerald, a daughter of the Duke of Leinster and shortly afterwards they dined with Nelson and the Hamiltons at the Foleys’ newly restored home at Abermarlais in Carmarthenshire (which had been purchased with Foley’s share of the prize money from the capture of a Spanish treasure ship in 1783) during Nelson’s ‘progress’ with the Hamiltons through Wales and the West Country. Curiously, Foley’s wife was actively involved in the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and was a passionate supporter of Irish independence; it is interesting that she chose to marry a very senior British naval officer and one wonders how much Foley knew of her political leanings and activities.

In September 1805, when preparing for Trafalgar, Nelson called on Foley at his London home to offer him the position of Captain of the fleet, but by this time Foley’s health had broken...
and he was forced to decline. Lady Foley later recalled that: “Lord Nelson expressed his regret in a manner so strong and affecting as to have made a great impression on my memory”. Although Foley never went to sea again, he was promoted Rear Admiral in 1811 and Vice Admiral a year later upon his appointment as Commander-in-Chief in the Downs. Based at Deal, this was more than an honorary position despite the victory at Trafalgar, and more than thirty enemy ships were captured or sunk during his tenure.

It was also during this time that Foley accidentally foiled a conspiracy to defraud the Stock Exchange when, in February 1814 a messenger arrived at Foley's headquarters from the Continent bearing news of the supposed death of Napoleon. However, Foley decided to send the message by ordinary mail instead of by telegraph thus inadvertently thwarting the plot. Nevertheless, the ensuing scandal embroiled another famous naval officer and parliamentarian, Lord Cochrane, who was expelled from Parliament and dismissed the Service as a result. Foley was knighted upon his retirement in 1814 and returned to his estate in Wales and it was here, some years later that he was visited by the Duke of Clarence (later William IV) and they shared many happy reminiscences of their times together in the Navy. In 1825 he was raised to full Admiral and in 1830, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, and it was there that he died on January 9th, 1833, at the age of 75. He was survived by his wife - there were no children. He was buried in the Garrison Chapel in Portsmouth, fittingly in a coffin made from Elephant’s timbers.

The last of my captains tonight is Ralph Millar who, while not one of his closest friends, was another officer held in extremely high regard by Nelson.

**Ralph Millar**

Ralph Willett Miller was born in New York on 24 January 1762, into an American Tory family but was sent to England at an early age after his family lost all their property and possessions during the American Revolution, thanks to his father’s loyalist sympathies. It is not recorded when he joined the Navy but in 1778 he appears on the muster list of the 64 gun third rate Ardent in the Channel fleet under Gambier. Later that year he went to the West Indies with Commodore Hotham and after the battle of Fort Royal in April 1781 he was promoted to lieutenant in the 74 gun Terrible by Rodney; however, Terrible was scuttled shortly afterwards after sustaining heavy damage at the battle of Chesapeake and Miller returned to the West Indies and eventually to England where he arrived at the end of 1782. In December of that year he was appointed to another 74, Fortitude, but he then disappears for ten years, presumably some of which time would have been spent on the beach. With the outbreak of the French Revolutionary War in early 1793, Miller, still a lieutenant, was appointed to the 98 gun Windsor Castle in the Mediterranean fleet under Hood at Toulon, where Hood was supporting the Royalists.

who were under siege by a revolutionary army. Following the British withdrawal in December 1793, Miller was put in charge of destroying the arsenal and the remaining French ships after which he was appointed to the flagship, Victory where he led successful actions against the Corsican ports of San Fiorenzo, Bastia and Calvi - and it was during the Corsican campaign that he and Nelson first met.

In July 1794 Miller volunteered to lead an attack against the French fleet anchored at Golfe Jouan on what is now the Cote d’Azur. He was promoted to commander and ordered to fit out the captured French corvette Poulette as a fireship, but unfortunately, thanks to an unfavourable wind the attack failed, despite five separate attempts. In November 1795 Sir John Jervis succeeded Hood as C-in-C of the Mediterranean fleet and promoted Miller to post captain, appointing him to command firstly the captured 26 gun French frigate Mignonne and then a few months later, the 32 gun frigate Unité which had also been captured. However, his frigate commands were to be short lived because in August 1796, at Nelson’s request, Miller became the newly promoted commodore’s flag captain in Captain, taking part in the battle of Cape St Vincent in February 1797. He acquitted himself well in the battle and in recognition of his services, Nelson showed his gratitude to Miller by presenting him with a captured Spanish sword and a topaz and diamond ring.

Following the battle, Nelson was given command of the Inshore Squadron blockading Cadiz and Miller, as his flag captain, was to take part in several small boat actions, one of which was to almost cost Nelson his life when he was only saved by the prompt and selfless action of his coxswain, John Sykes who sustained serious injuries for his pains.

In April 1797, mutiny broke out in the Channel fleet and several ships were dispersed to other commands, among them the 74 gun third rate Theseus which was sent out to reinforce the Mediterranean fleet, arriving in May. Theseus’ captain, John Aylmer, was afraid that her crew would mutiny and carry her into Cadiz, and Jervis, concerned that Aylmer wasn’t up to the task requested Nelson, now a rear admiral, to transfer to Theseus. Nelson obliged, taking Miller with him as well as all six of Captain’s lieutenants plus seven midshipmen and a number of ratings – 47 men in total, and within a few weeks Nelson and Miller had managed to stabilise the situation in Theseus. This was confirmed when a note was dropped on the quarter deck one night: “...Success attend Admiral Nelson. God bless Captain Miller. We thank the admiral for the officers he has placed over us. We are happy and comfortable, and will shed every drop of blood in fighting the enemies of our country and in supporting the admiral” – and it was signed: “The Ship’s Company”.

In July, Theseus took part in the disastrous Teneriffe raid where Nelson lost his right arm and was invalided home. Miller also took an active part in the raid and was one of the few senior officers to remain unharmed. Returning to Cadiz, Miller remained in Theseus with the Inshore Squadron until May 1798, when Theseus was detached together with “some choice fellows of the inshore fleet” to join Nelson who was in the Mediterranean hunting down Napoleon and the French fleet. Miller again fought with distinction at the Nile and following the battle, sailed to Gibraltar with Saumarez and the prizes, later rejoining Nelson in Naples before being detached to join Commodore Sir Sidney Smith’s squadron in the eastern Mediterranean, where Smith was carrying out operations against the French in Egypt and Syria.
It was during the defence of Acre in May 1799 that Miller was killed in an accidental explosion that almost destroyed *Theseus* as well.

As Smith reported to St Vincent, Miller: "... had long been in the practice of collecting such of the enemy's shells as fell in the town without bursting, and of sending them back to the enemy better prepared and with evident effect. He had a deposit on board the *Theseus* ready for service, and more were preparing, when, by an accident for which nobody can account, they exploded at short intervals, killing and wounding nearly eighty men, wrecking the poop and the after part of the quarter-deck, and setting fire to the ship.

On learning of Miller's death, Nelson wrote that: "he is not only a most excellent and gallant officer, but the only truly virtuous man that I ever saw." With Nelson's support and at Berry's suggestion, a memorial to Miller was created and installed in St Paul's Cathedral. Miller left a wife and two young daughters who were awarded an annual pension of £100 by the British Government. His death at the early age of 37 was not only a great loss to his family and friends but also to the Royal Navy.

These then were a few of the "band of brothers" but they were all typical of most senior naval officers of the day. As demonstrated by Ball and Saumarez, they could also serve with distinction in diplomatic roles – indeed I think we often fail to recognise the tremendous initiative that most senior officers showed when operating in what were effectively independent situations or commands, often in hostile waters, when communications often took months to reach them and they had to rely on their own resources.

To counter the frequent lack of direction from above, many of them, notably St Vincent, Collingwood and Nelson, maintained a network of agents and spies to keep them informed about enemy movements and intentions. But above all it was their offensive spirit coupled with magnificent seamanship that made the Royal Navy the bulwark of England.

‘Wooden ships and iron Men ’ — it was indeed the heyday of the Royal Navy

Mike Sargeant

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**The Nile Captains**

Under Nelson's command at this time were:

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<th>Captain</th>
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<td>Capt. Thomas B. Thompson</td>
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<td>Lt. Thomas Hardy</td>
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Farewell St Michael's Hall!

Observant readers of our front page will have noticed the absence of the customary reference to the above in our program of forthcoming events. The reason for this is that this venue is no longer available and so the two remaining General Meetings for the year will be held at the homes of Bob Woollett and Gwen Phillips.

The Committee is investigating the possibilities for next year.
Please contact the Hon Secretary, Richard Savage, on 9310 6365 if you have any suggestions.

The Freycinet Collection

On Monday the 14th of July some twelve members of the Nelson Society joined the Custodians of the WA State Library, guests and friends to view a collection of maps and drawings depicting the two expeditions made by the French explorer, Louis De Freycinet to Western Australia in the early 19th century. Two members of the Custodian Group gave interesting talks about the exhibits, the life of Freycinet and the work their organisation undertakes to attract sponsors and raise funds to help the State Library acquire items of historical interest, such as the Freycinet Collection. Of particular significance among the exhibits were the chart of the Swan River made by Francois Heirisson in 1801 from its mouth to the vicinity of Henley Brook and the painting done by J. Alphonse Pellion of the Observatory camp set up by Freycinet on Shark Bay in 1818. A notable feature of the latter is the figure standing near her tent in the background, of Rose de Freycinet, Louis’ wife who had smuggled herself on board the Uranie and who accompanied her husband throughout the voyage.

Our congratulations and thanks go to Committee Member, Rob O’Connor, for his initiative and enterprise in organising the evening and also arranging the table of sumptuous refreshments and pleasing glass of wine for us to enjoy.