Derek Allen
and
Peter Hore



News of Nelson

John Lapenotiere's Race from Trafalgar to London

What the experts say:

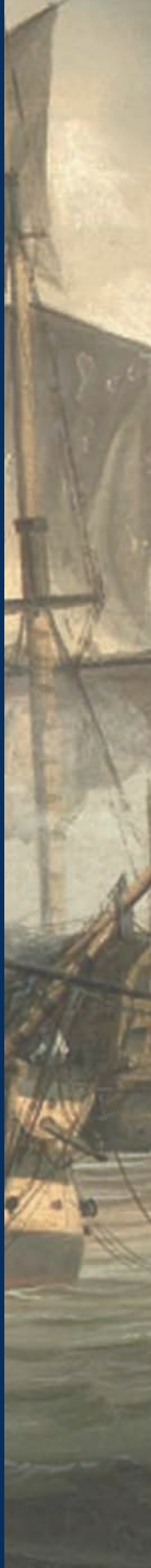
Peter Warwick, Chairman of the *1805 Club*: "An exceptional book: a well-researched and fascinating account which highlights the professionalism of the Royal Navy in which every man appeared an hero."

Bill White, Chairman of *The New Trafalgar Dispatch*: "Much enthralling information only brought to light by thorough research in primary sources. An essential reading for anyone who wants to know more about both the most famous dispatch in naval history and the man who brought it, with the news of Nelson,s death, to England."

Grahame Aldou,: *The Nelson Society*: "A taut account of John Lapenotiere, the Royal Navy officer entrusted with bringing the bittersweet news of Death and Glory from Trafalgar to the Admiralty, and his dramatic journey."

Derek Allen was born in Lewisham, in 1946, where he won a scholarship to Haberdashers' Aske's, New Cross. He went on to gain an MA in Modern Languages at St Catherine's College, Oxford, and to represent his college on television's University Challenge. Derek entered the world of publishing before joining the renowned book-binding firm of *Sangorski and Sutcliffe* and he worked for the antique map-sellers *Jonathan Potter* and *Warwick Leadlay Gallery*. His unique expertise was in researching catalogues and other publications, most notably *The Nelson Almanac*, published in 1998. Derek,s enormous and eclectic erudition also manifested itself in his participation in opening the *Autolycus Gallery* in Corfu. Derek Allen died after a short illness in late June 2004. He left behind him, much to the surprise of even those who thought they knew him well, an enormous body of work that with careful editing is the mainstay of *News of Nelson*.

Peter Hore was born in Durham in 1944, and this is his seventh book on naval strategy or biography since 1997, including the best-selling *Habit of Victory* (2005) which tells the story of the Royal Navy through first hand accounts researched in the archives of the National Maritime Museum. His tutor at Dartmouth was the renowned historian Ruddock F Mackay who inspired Peter to begin reading naval history in the dog-watches at sea, and he started from first principles with Herodotus and Thucydides: later he was a post graduate student under Dr Michael Duffy at the Centre for Maritime Studies, University of Exeter. Peter, who retired from the Royal Navy in 2000, is a trustee of the *Naval Review* and of the *Royal Naval Museum*, Portsmouth, and a member of the council of the *Society of Nautical Research* and of the **Navy Records Society**. He is now the Chief Executive of the *Cinema and Television Benevolent Fund*.



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Foreword

Derek Allen and I only met once. Fittingly, however, our meeting was over lunch in the hall of Michael Wade's Trafalgar House, which was a gift from a grateful nation to Nelson's brother, William, after he inherited the famous admiral's baronetcy. Our mutual interest in the life and times of John Lapenotiere and in his ship, *Pickle*, was at once obvious and warmly reciprocated. For long Derek had been painstakingly delving into his subject, and had read every possible document which might have a reference to *Pickle*, making careful transcripts of all that which was relevant. I was researching an article for the *Mariner's Mirror* on *Pickle's* captain, Lapenotiere, and had enjoyed some serendipity in my own work. Appropriately we were standing within a few miles of the route through Salisbury along which Lapenotiere raced on the afternoon of 5 November 1805 on his way from the storm tossed seas off Trafalgar, via Falmouth, to fog-bound London with his momentous news, and we talked fleetingly about our interests.

Sadly Derek and I never met again, and when he died in June 2004 he had not completed his intended book about *Pickle* which was in the advanced stages of planning. It was an honour therefore when I was offered access to Derek's archive and asked to write this book. *News of Nelson: John Lapenotiere's Race from Trafalgar to London* is a fusion of our two efforts, which could not have been done, the one without the other. I wish to pay tribute to Derek and to the quality of his research: he spent years tracking every possible clue, and hours in the library of the National Maritime Museum and at the National Archives at Kew, and elsewhere, and copied documents and made transcripts in order to create his own unique and very specialised archive. Time has not permitted me to check all his work, but, where I have been able to do so, or thought it necessary to read the originals myself, in every case I have found his work to be faultless.

I am grateful too to others who have helped me, and above all to Derek's wife, Lindy, for asking me to undertake this work. Any error in this book is mine: however, great thanks are due to Grahame Aldous, Pongo Blanchford, Anthony Cross, Barry Gough, Peter Warwick and Bill White for reading various drafts and for their valuable criticism. The *Ayshford Trafalgar Roll* by Pamela and Derek Ayshford and the *Complete Navy List 1793-1815* by Patrick Marioné have been priceless resources about the men involved. The specific expertise of others has been gratefully incorporated into *News of Nelson* including that

of: Pongo Blanchford, who has researched the progress of the Trafalgar dispatches and reconstructed charts of 1805; Richard James, whose knowledge of 19th century post-chaise is incomparable; Pieter van der Merwe, who told me the history of Lapenotiere's portrait; Matthew Sheldon, curator of the Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth; and Dennis Wheeler who has studied the storm which nearly wrecked Lapenotiere and the *Pickle*. I should also like to thank: Ian Mackenzie, for generously showing his notes on the *Pickle*; Liza Verity, for her expert advice; Anne Lapenotiere Maddever for information about her family tree; and Charlotte Bronskill of the National Portrait Gallery and Judy Harden of Bourton-on-the-Water, Cheltenham for helping to find and identify a previously unknown portrait of John Richards Lapenotiere. Bob O'Hara, valued colleague and researcher at the National Archives has, as ever, been an extraordinary source of information and an extra pair of hands and eyes in the archives.

I should also like to thank the trustees, directors and staffs of the, the National Maritime Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Royal Naval Museum, in Portsmouth.

Anthony Cross of Warwick Leadlay Gallery in Greenwich deserves a second mention, because not only did he sustain my purpose spiritually during the early months of 2005 and is the source of many of the illustrations in this book, but he spent many hours in the "*bus shelter*" with his particular friend, Derek Allen.

PGH
11 May 2005

Prologue

Cold fog gripped the city though it was only early November, reducing visibility to a few yards: decent folk had gone to bed long ago. Candlelight shimmered in the face of a clerk as he huddled forward over his desk, his pen scratching the paper. Little else stirred in the small rooms behind the imposing buildings which faced Whitehall, except in the board room of the Admiralty where William Marsden blew on his fingers and rubbed his eyes. He was turning their Lordships' discussions of the previous day into orders and letters to the fleet. A clock chimed one in the morning.

The immediate danger of invasion was over, he felt sure, now that Bonaparte had broken camp at Boulogne and marched off into deepest Europe, but he felt equally certain that the danger would return or a disadvantageous peace would be forced upon Britain unless the Frenchman's fleet could be destroyed. Then there was that worrying news which he had read in the *Morning Post* a few days ago. The newspapers were full of reports of a battle at Ulm and the shocking surrender of the Austrians. Reports said that 50,000 were killed, wounded or captured and 65 guns, and Mack's corps had escaped a trap only for him to surrender later. Nothing had been heard from Nelson or his fleet off Cadiz for a week or more, but the *Morning Post* had carried a story about fighting far away off Cadiz. Marsden's chief, Lord Barham, the First Lord of the Admiralty, wanted news and wanted news badly.

Startlingly somewhere in the still night, through the ochred glass which dripped with condensation, Marsden heard the unexpected clatter of hooves on the cobbles below in the courtyard and he strained to understand the raised voices.

In the courtyard the watchman jumped to his feet and seized a guttering torch: as he waved it in warning, it burst into light, glinting on a bright yellow post chaise which had entered the stone arch at a fast trot, far too fast for London's peasoup fog. The horses shied at the sudden flame, slipping on the damp cobbles, and the postillion swore roundly at him. Before the body of the carriage had swayed to a halt, a passenger sprang to the ground with the ease of someone used to meeting slippery moving decks, and ran forward to rattle the glazed doors of the Admiralty. The steam rose from the sweating horse and their harnesses jangled.

The watchman was used to unexpected callers late at night. He was also used to assessing strangers and seeing off those who were unwanted, but he sensed

that there would be no stopping this one. He was of middle height, well-fed even slightly stout, a large nose and receding hairline: from his greying hair, his age and lined face he was nearing middle age. The sea officer had flung back the shiny black tarpaulin coat he had worn for shelter in the freezing carriage revealing a lieutenant's uniform. Rather old for his rank thought the watchman and very impatient. The watchman thought he had seen this one before a year or two back.

Inside the portico a porter stumbled backwards as the lieutenant pushed the doors inwards, demanding to be shown to the secretary to the Admiralty, he mixed the long vowels of a west countryman with the air of someone used to command. The porter gestured the way and the lieutenant bounded to the top of the stairs where Marsden froze in the recessed doorway of the boardroom sheltering a candle with his hand. The lieutenant's buttons and lace were covered with verdigris and only dimly glinted in the glittering light.

Without waiting for further explanation the breathless officer announced, *"Sir! We have won a great victory but we have lost Lord Nelson!"*

The officer was John Lapenotiere, whose Huguenot family had served the British crown for five generations, and an extraordinary chain of events had brought him to the doors of the British admiralty at one o'clock on the morning of 6 November 1805. This is his story.