

Dr Nick Slope MA PhD MCIPD
Chairman
The Nelson Society
47 Thanestead Copse, Loudwater, High Wycombe,
Bucks, HP10 9YH

Tel: 01494.520418
Mobile: 07968127406
email: nickslope@hotmail.com
website: www.nickslope.com



THE NELSON SOCIETY
PRESIDENT - The Rt Hon The Lord Walpole

7 September 2011

REF. 2062: Proposed Sale of Two Trafalgar Flags

Dear Sir/Madam,

It has recently been brought to our attention that there is a proposed sale of two Trafalgar flags that originated from the Hilton family in Selling.

As Chairman of The Nelson Society I would like to express to you the concern of the members of our Society at this proposed sale. The Battle of Trafalgar was a defining moment in British and European history and any artifacts connected to it must be considered to be national treasures of great importance. In particular the iconic significance of flags from that great battle cannot be understated. I would implore you on behalf of the nation not to put these important artifacts up for sale.

From the information supplied to me it would appear that these flags were a local bequest by one of Nelson's sailors, Commander Stephen Hilton, who fought at Trafalgar, to the church of St Mary the Virgin, Selling, in Kent. I am further informed that the Hilton family opposes the disposal of these flags. If this information is correct then it would be a national and local disgrace if these flags were to be sold into private hands.

Many people from Kent served honourably at the battle and I believe to put up for sale a flag that they fought under and one that they risked their lives to capture is an insult to those men and women. At Trafalgar HMS *Minotaur* and HMS *Spartiate* engaged in an hour-long duel with the Spanish ship *Neptuno* and when she struck her colours a boarding party from the *Minotaur* boarded her. It seems quite likely that Stephen Hilton was a member of this party and that is where the *Neptuno's* flag came from.

A recent auction of a Trafalgar flag was objected to by this Society, without, alas, effect and the battle ensign of HMS *Spartiate* was sold at auction to an overseas buyer and this will no doubt be the fate of these two flags if they go under the hammer. If it is a matter that the funds to conserve these flags are not available please consider donating them to an appropriate museum such as the National Maritime Museum that have the expertise to look after them properly; the organisation that I represent would gladly assist in any fund-raising activities to assist in their conservation if that were the case.

As a naval historian and archaeologist who has been rescuing the remains of sailors and marines from Nelson's fleet at the Battle of the Nile (1798) I am only too aware of the cultural significance of such artifacts; they are important for the cultural legacy of our nation and are irreplaceable.

Please ensure that they will be available for future generations to admire and to honour the men of Kent – please do not sell them; England Expects....

Yours faithfully

Dr Nick Slope
Chairman, The Nelson Society

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