Nelson Memorabilia

The Magic of Lord Nelson and a look at the Nelson Myths

by Roy Butler



Royal Doulton character jug of Viuce Admiral Lord Nelson showing him with an eye patch.



Imperial Ottoman Order of the Crescent shown as on Nelson's coat.



The so-called Death Mask of Vice Admiral Lord Nelson, now acknowledged to be a life mask.

The immense interest taken in Nelson over the years is to be expected as he was such an outstanding personality whose image will never die. Men who served under him wept when he died. 'The Nelson Touch' was no idle phrase, Nelson suffered with poor health for most of his short life (he died at the age of 47). Whenever he walked through the streets of London he did so with difficulty as mobs of people would throng around him. He took great interest in his crews especially with young midshipmen whom he encouraged. One of his famous phrases often quoted in biographies is "If any Commander cannot see my signals, he can do no wrong than to lay his ship against that of the enemy." He once remarked to Captain Lord Cochrane at their only meeting "Never mind the manouvres just go at them" a quote Cochrane never forgot and, judging by his attitude in battle, put Nelson's formula into action.

Nelson's charisma was developed from his early days. When boarding parties were required he was out in front, sword in hand. Seeing this small framed officer with such enthusiasm impressed the burly sailors. He never took to shades of grey, it was either black or white, like the time he imposed the Navigation Act on the American ships trading with the British West Indies, (the Americans had now become foreigners in his eyes after the revolution), upsetting both merchants in the West Indies and America. At the Battle of Trafalgar he was advised to wear a plain coat without the decorations to make him less of a target. He refused with the attitude that his men would be more encouraged to recognise himself in the thick of battle.

Nelson's funeral was the biggest spectacle London has ever seen. When the beginning of the procession had reached St Pauls Cathedral the end had not left Whitehall. Those of you who know your London will realise the distance covered. It is said that as the coffin passed men doffed their hats and the sound was like a soft wave breaking on the shore.

With the past 200th anniversary in 2005 what did all this mean to the collector, dealer and auctioneer? Several auction houses held a Nelson related sale and dealers probably had items put aside to help fill the demand. It was a good time for serious collectors to buy, as there were items on the market that would not normally be offered. Unfortunately for the antique trade there are no wholesalers to call upon to replenish stock, unlike the modern commemorative trade, which I noticed were producing some good quality souvenirs. There are many collectors of the centenary (1905) souvenirs, which have now become antiques in their own right. For the budding collector, there is still a variety of items which appear on the market: pistols, swords, hangers, cutlasses and dirks, medals, official, unofficial and commemorative; documents, letters, pictures, prints and general memorabilia. Condition is important if you wish to make your collection a good investment. However, personal items must be accepted in the condition in which they are found. When buying at auction houses it is always advisable to keep the lot number labels. Write the date purchased, name the article and amount paid at auction and file them away. They may become useful information for your heirs. Catalogues of purchase can often be overlooked, discarded or just not connected with pieces in the collection.

Let us take a look at a few anomalies regarding Nelson, which have crept in over the years, often through bad journalism in newspapers. We have all heard the phrase "I'm sure it must be true, I read it in the newspaper." In the Daily Telegraph on 2nd February 2005 it stated, and I quote "A letter written by Admiral Lord Nelson in 1797 detailing his perfect recovery, after losing an arm at the Battle of the Nile...etc." Nelson of course lost his right arm as a result of the failed action at Santa Cruz in 1797 and the Battle of the Nile was not until 1st August 1798. How many persons will now believe that not only did the Battle of the Nile take place a year earlier but that is where he lost his arm? Also regarding Nelson's eye, he never wore a patch. Royal Doulton made a very striking Toby jug of Nelson, complete with a very prominent black eye patch, this of course will help to continue the belief he wore one. There was also a film on Nelson starring Lawrence Olivier and Vivian Leigh in which Olivier, as Nelson, wore an eye patch. Of course, the film industry is well known for twisting historical facts. Another distorted fact is that "Nelson lost his eye". He retained his eye but his vision was so obscure in the right eye that it was like looking through heavily frosted glass. Messrs Locke & Co, the hatters in St James's (still in business) made Nelson a cocked hat with a green shade which could be folded down to protect his vision when the sun was very strong. Another interesting aspect has come to light in recent years regarding the so called death masks of Nelson, which are kept in the Royal Naval Museum (eyes closed) and the other in the National Maritime Museum (eyes open). From Victorian times until quite recently, these were regarded as death masks but there is no evidence of any death mask being taken. His surgeon, William Beatty MD, makes no reference to death masks in his narrative 'The Death of Nelson'. It is now believed they are life masks produced at the time of his visit to Vienna in 1800 and that they were made by Thaller & Ranson to make their famous marble bust. The facial expression on the masks are conducive to very warm wax being placed on the face rather than being expressionless in death.

In the past, Nelson has often been referred to as undersized. In one article I read it almost made him a midget, I suppose standing next to Captain Hardy it might be thought so. When the Royal Naval Museum created their last excellent revamp of the Nelson exhibits it was decided to have a lifelike figure of Lord Nelson. To establish his correct height, advice was taken from a professional tailor who measured one of Nelson's coats, allowing for the fall of the tails at the rear. As a result, his height has been established as 5ft 6in, which in itself was not diminutive for the average height of males at the time.

Here is the latest revelation, which I discovered some years ago, and to my knowledge has never been included in any biography. In 1995 I was invited to a preview of the Nelson Exhibition at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Whilst watching a French television crew getting excited filming a close up of the French ball (loaned by HM The Queen) which killed Nelson, I had a serious look at the undress frock coat mounted on a stand behind, that Nelson wore when he was shot at the height of the battle on that fateful day. It suddenly dawned on me that the undress badge of the Imperial Ottoman Order of the Crescent was sewn on his coat upside down. I found it hard to believe. Upon arriving home I searched through my Nelson library and sure enough, it was upside down. The crescent should be on the left hand side of the Order with the star on the right. On checking 'The Nelson Portraits' by Richard Walker I found that Sir William Beechy's 1800 portrait, Lemuel Abbot's, Heinrich Fuger's and others including a marble bust by Anne Seymour Damer, sculpted 1798-1801, all showed the Ottoman order correctly. Yet in an oil painting by A W Devis (painted after his death) it is shown upside down, probably taken from his coat after the Battle of Trafalgar. The wax and wood effigy in Westminster Abbey by Catherine Andras (1805) is also upside down, I believe Lady Hamilton had something to do with the arranging of this figure, particularly his hair. I have a theory why we find this order sewn onto his uniform incorrectly. Nelson was at sea for almost two years without setting foot on land from 1803-1805, starting with his duties in the Mediterranean and then, without authority (typical Nelson), chasing after Villeneuve to the West Indies and back. He sailed back to Portsmouth after checking with Collingwood who kept his eye on the returned French fleet. On arrival in London he went to the Colonial Office to meet Lord Castlereagh and incidentally in the waiting room met Wellington (as Sir Arthur Wellesley) for the first and only time. Whilst in London, he went to Salters, the cutlers in the Strand to view his swords and some official presents that had been presented to him that were in their safekeeping. He also visited the lace makes and purchased some sets of the various orders that had been bestowed upon him, then home to Merton and his beloved Emma and daughter Horatia. It was probably at Merton that Emma sewed the orders onto his undress coat and that of the Ottoman Order upside down. Chances are that it would not have been a seamstress or maid as Lady Hamilton was known to be very adept with the needle and thread and in any case would have been proud to have done the work. I feel sure a professional tailor would have known the correct way. It is an interesting theory. On that I rest my case. **Continued...**



Green painted laurel wreath that was placed on Nelson's coffin (with his foul weather hat) in the barge conveying his remains from Greenwich to Westminster, point to point 18.5in, consisting of eight leaves. Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Jul 05. HP: £13,000. ABP: £15,291.



Particularly interesting large enamel portrait miniature of Admiral Lord Nelson by Henry Bone RA, dated 1812. Bearne's, Exeter. Jul 02. HP: £12,500. ABP: £14,703.

Prices quoted are actual hammer prices (HP) and the Approximate Buyer's Price. (ABP) Includes an average premium of 15% + VAT.



English Meerschaum pipe bowl, 19thC, bas relief carving of Death of Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar, 32cm high. Bristol Auction Rooms, Bristol. May 02. HP: £7,800. ABP: £9,174.



George III mahogany and inlaid tallboy cabinet commemorating Admiral Lord Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar, inscribed. Hampton & Littlewood, Exeter. Apr 04. HP: £5,000. ABP: £5,881.



George III mahogany chest on chest, c1805, brass handles commemorating Admiral Nelson, moulded cornice over 2 panelled doors, swept bracket feet, 212.5cm high x 121.5cm wide. Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Apr 06. HP: £4,000. ABP: £4,705.



Admiral Lord Nelson: George III silver gilt snuff box, hinged lid decorated in relief with classical figures incl. 'Britannia' draped over a monument, cushion-moulded sides, reverse with engine-turned decoration, gilt interior bearing a short presentation inscription, by WP, London 1805, 3.25in long. Hy. Duke & Son, Dorchester. Aug 06. HP: £3,800. ABP: £4,469.



George III guinea dated 1787, mounted as a brooch and contained in a silver vinaigrette and with a small ebony box with silver plaque engraved 'Nelson Guinea. Found aboard Victory amongst personal effects of the Hero of Trafalgar. Graciously loaned to this Centenary Exhibition by the family of the Late Horatia Nelson Ward to whom the coin had been presented in infancy as a memento of her beloved father'. Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Oct 05. HP: £3,000. ABP: £3,528.



19thC reverse glass painting, 'Le Grand A'miral Nelson', 22.5 x 30in. Humberts inc Tayler & Fletcher, Andoversford. Jun 04. HP: £2,200. ABP: £2,587.



Carronade, c1800, 47in long, cast with a small crown at breech end, wood carriage, concrete plinth carved 'HMS Victory Trafalgar' & 'Nelson'. Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Oct 05. HP: £2,200. ABP: £2,587.



Rare pearlware Nelson commemorative mug. Mellors & Kirk, Nottingham. Feb 03. HP: £2,100. ABP: £2,470.



20thC R. Worcester porcelain plaque, Admiral Viscount Lord Nelson after Lemuel (Francis) Abbott (c1760-1802), 10 x 8in, printed mark to back, date code for 1929. Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Aug 07. HP: £2,100. ABP: £2,470.



Regency flame mahogany breakfast table, sunburst veneered tilt top, 4ft, inscribed: made from Spanish mahogany from the Spanish flag ship San Josef, captured by Nelson at The Battle of St. Vincent in 1797. Identical with a table made by Nelsons orders for Lady Hamilton. Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 02. HP: £2,000. ABP: £2,352.

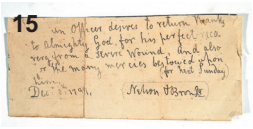


Staffordshire cream ware jug, c1812, transfer printed with 3 engravings: Admiral Nelson's ship, a lady and 2 children & 'The World in Planisphere', name J H Holt 1812 to spout and 2 verses, 26.5cm high. Hamptons, Godalming. Nov 01. HP: £1,700. ABP: £1,999.

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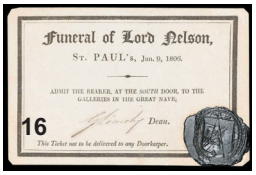


Sunderland or Newcastle Death of Nelson commemorative cream ware frog mug, early 19thC, printed portrait of Admiral Lord Nelson, interior applied with a brown frog, 5.5in high. Halls Fine Art, Shrewsbury. Sep 04. HP: £1,700. ABP: £1,999.



Manuscript note by Admiral Lord Nelson written in ink and signed 'Nelson & Bronte', dated Dec 8th 1797, 8.25 x 3.5in. Andrew Hartley, Ilkley. Apr 04. HP: £1,450. ABP: £1,705.

Images are in descending hammer price order. The price range is indicated at the start of each section.



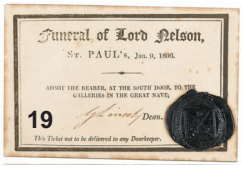
Admission ticket to Nelson's funeral at St Paul's Cathedral, 9th January, 1806. Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Jul 04. HP: £1,400. ABP: £1,646.



George III oak mahogany and inlaid longcase clock, c1805, swan neck hood enclosing an enamel dial signed Thos. Crawshaw, Refford, arch with a portrait of Lord Nelson, 8 day rack striking movement, anchor escapement. Rosebery's, London. Dec 04. HP: £1,400. ABP: £1,646.



'Funeral of the late Vice Admiral Horatio Viscount Nelson' ticket admitting 'Jeremiah Simpson into the Procession from Admiralty to St Paul's Cathedral', signed Isaac Heard, Garter, No. 506, originally made to Jeremiah Sampson then altered. Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Jul 05. HP: £1,300. ABP: £1,529.



Funeral of Lord Nelson, St Paul's Jan 9 1806, ticket admitting bearer to St Paul's signed by the Bishop of Lincoln who was also Dean of St Paul's and bearing his clear black seal. Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Jul 05. HP: £1,250. ABP: £1,470.



Oak comm. Longcase clock, death of Nelson - J Shaw, Spalding. John Taylors, Louth. Sep 99. HP: £1,200. ABP: £1,411.



George III silver gilt vinaigrette, engraved with portrait of Nelson, B'ham 1805, 1.75in. Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 02. HP: £1,200. ABP: £1,411.



Memorial pin brooch by William Tassie, 1 x 0.875in bust of Nelson facing right, set on bloodstone with piped gold? frame, signed on the truncation 'Tassie F 1805'. Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Jul 05. HP: £900. ABP: £1,058.



Gold coloured Nelson memorial fouled anchor brooch, stock of anchor in black enamel with 'Nelson' in gold, moveable ring at top, pin fastener, VGC. Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Jul 05. HP: £800. ABP: £941.



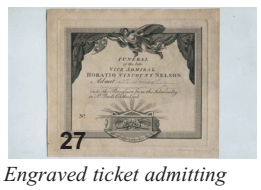
English School 19thC, oil on board, portrait of Admiral Lord Nelson. Halls Fine Art, Shrewsbury. Sep 05. HP: £800. ABP: £941.



Victorian parian (possibly Copeland) bust of Lord Nelson, 9.5in. Mervyn Carey, Tenterden. Dec 99. HP: £750. ABP: £882.



Early 19thC crystoleum depicting Lord Nelson's funeral barge. Ambrose, Loughton. Dec 00. HP: £750. ABP: £882.



Engraved ticket admitting Mrs Smedley to procession from the Admiralty to St Paul's Cathedral to funeral of Lord Nelson, printed on a single leaf of stiff paper 200 x 180mm. Mullock Madeley, Ludlow. Jun 06. HP: £720. ABP: £846.



Staffordshire pearlware figure of Nelson, early 19thC, standing before a cannon, his costume painted in colours, pink lustre splash base, 31cm high. Rosebery's, London. Mar 05. HP: £680. ABP: £799.



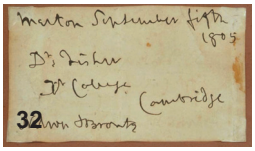
Spode Copeland 'Nelson Centenary 1905' Ltd. Edn. loving cup, printed/painted with roundels depicting Nelson, Britannia and H.M.S Victory within floral, thistle and oak leaf borders, No. 97 of 100, retailer T. Goode and Co, South Audley Street, London, 6in high. Dee, Atkinson & Harrison, Driffield. Sep 05. HP: £650. ABP: £764.



19thC English porcelain patchbox, hinged lid decorated with Britannia and bust on plinth, inscribed in Memory of Nelson. Locke & England, Leamington Spa. May 05. HP: £620. ABP: £729.



Early 19thC Prattware commemorative jug moulded in relief with named profile portraits of Admiral Nelson and Captain Berry, flanked each side with frigates in full sail 6in high, minor chip to spout rim. Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 03. HP: £600. ABP: £705.



Admiral Lord Nelson, envelope addressed in his hand to 'Dr. Fisher, V. College, Cambridge', inscribed 'Merton September Fifth 1805', signed 'Nelson & Bronte', 2.5 x 4.25in. Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Oct 05. HP: £560. ABP: £658.



Royal Doulton glazed stoneware loving cup commemorating life of Lord Nelson, 3 rope-effect handles, moulded with his portrait bust, coat of arms and legend, 6.5in. Gorringes, Lewes. Sep 05. HP: £550. ABP: £646.



George IV Scottish silver castle top snuff box, view of Nelsons Column in Edinburgh, floral border, John Caw, Edinburgh 1822, 3in. Gorringes, Lewes. Jun 07. HP: £550. ABP: £646.



Rose Maynard Barton RWS 1856-1929, 'Nelson's Column on Trafalgar Day, 1905', watercolour, 34.5 x 23.3cm. Rosebery's, London. Aug 06. HP: £450. ABP: £529.



Royal Doulton Admiral Nelson loving cup, designed by C.J. Noke and H. Fenton, issued 1935, Ltd Edn 192/600, printed marks, 26cm. Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Nov 05. HP: £400. ABP: £470.



Royal Doulton 'Nelson' commemorative stoneware jug, with a portrait of Nelson and entitled 'Nelson and his Captains' flanked by illustrations of sailships & portraits of Troubridge, Collingwood, Hardy and Miller, 21.5cm high. Rosebery's, London. Mar 05. HP: £340. ABP: £399.



19thC Spanish lidded baluster vase painted with a Nelson memorial armorial with motto Junta in uno tiva. Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 00. HP: £300. ABP: £352.



Nelson memorabilia, a small Regency gilt-framed wall mirror, frieze inset a verre eglomise panel depicting a profile of Admiral Lord Nelson, 57 x 34cm, re-gilt, glass replaced, damage. Bearne's, Exeter. Jun 05. HP: £300. ABP: £352.



Sampler worked by Sarah Clay and depicting a poem entitled 'The Rose', within a border of trees, flowers and ships, inscribed 'The Victory Admiral Nelson, Trafalgar', 18 x 20in, early 19thC, stained frame. Hartleys, Ilkley. Oct 07. HP: £280. ABP: £329.



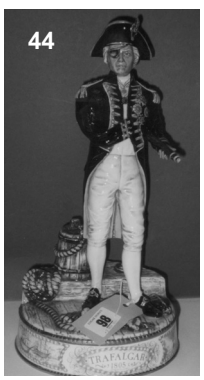
Sunderland pottery cream ware Nelson commemorative jug, c1820 transfer printed in black with portrait of Nelson surrounded by naval trophies and ships with moral verse below, also a view of 'Bridge Over the Weir' and verse, pink lustre border and lustre lined rims, restored, 7in high. Halls Fine Art, Shrewsbury. Jul 05. HP: £260. ABP: £305.



Pearl glazed earthenware jug decorated in low relief with portraits of Admiral Nelson and Admiral Collingwood decorated in brown, mustard and green Pratt enamels, 19cm high, early 19thC. Bearne's, Exeter. Jun 05. HP: £260. ABP: £305.



Royal Doulton glazed stoneware 1805-1905 Lord Nelson commemorative ewer, raised head and shoulders profile, ships and motto, with blue ground borders, dark blue borders, impressed mark, 10.75in high. Diamond Mills & Co, Felixstowe. Mar 06. HP: £260. ABP: £305.



Royal Doulton, Lord Nelson, HN 3489. Edgar Horn, Eastbourne. Dec 99. HP: £240. ABP: £282.



R. Doulton Nelson pottery jug decorated England Expects Every Man Will Do His Duty Lord Nelson born 1758 died 1805, impressed Royal Doulton X6421 LW, 8in. Denhams, Warnham. Jul 05. HP: £240. ABP: £282.



Early 20thC painted tin tea caddy decorated in red/gilt, front decorated in memorium of 'Admiral Lord Nelson', 4 x 3 x 4.5in high. Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Oct 05. HP: £230. ABP: £270.



English School, (late 18th/ early 19thC) oil on panel, head and shoulder portrait of Admiral Lord Nelson, 17 x 15.5cm. Gorringes, Bexhill. Dec 05. HP: £220. ABP: £258.



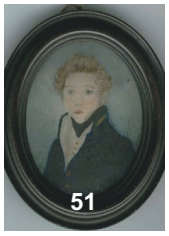
Royal Doulton stoneware 'Lord Nelson' mug, c1905, 7.5cm. Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Apr 05. HP: £200. ABP: £235.



Brown salt glazed stoneware flask, modelled as a bust of Admiral Lord Nelson, 20thC, 37.5cm high. Rosebery's, London. Feb 06. HP: £200. ABP: £235.



18thC oak 'Ditty' box, supposedly used by 'Admiral Lord Nelson', lacquered brass swan neck handle, 12 x 6.5 x 5.25in high, interior inscribed in ink 'Ditty Box used by Nelson on Victory 1805'. Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Oct 05. HP: £170. ABP: £199.



Maritime miniature portrait possibly executed in a sliver of ivory, boy in naval uniform, label back of frame 'Nelson when a boy',70 x 55mm. Mullock Madeley, Ludlow. Oct 05. HP: £130. ABP: £152.



Bronze bust of Nelson, 20thC, in bicorn hat, circular socle, 12cm. Rosebery's, London. Mar 05. HP: £120. ABP: £141.



Lord Nelson: Royal Doulton stoneware pot, embossed with portrait and ship medallions, printed marks, 6.5cm high. Hamptons, Godalming. Nov 01. HP: £110. ABP: £129.



Royal Doulton Nelson commemorative mug, 'England Expects Every Man Will Do His Duty', rope-twist handle, imp'd number X6424, 3.5in high. Dee, Atkinson & Harrison, Driffield. Apr 06. HP: £100. ABP: £117.



Late 19th/early 20thC Staffordshire pottery jug in the form of a standing figure of 'Admiral Lord Nelson' by a canon, 11.75in high. Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Oct 05. HP: £90. ABP: £105.



19thC Staffordshire pottery standing figure of 'Admiral Lord Nelson', anchor to his side, 8.25in high, head restored. Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Dec 05. HP: £80. ABP: £94.



Royal Doulton pottery character jug, 'Lord Nelson', 7.25in high. (6336). Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Oct 05. HP: £38. ABP: £44.



Staffordshire 'Nelson' Toby Jug, coloured glazes, 28cm high. Rosebery's, London. Apr 07. HP: £35. ABP: £41.