


# Trafalgar Swords of Honour

by *DEREK SPALDING*

*Derek Spalding has been a student and collector of antique weapons since age nine (i.e. since 1950). As he matured, his main interests focused ever more on the English Middle Ages and on the Napoleonic/Regency periods, spheres in which he has researched extensively in hitherto unexplored documents.*

*He has a marked preference for armor and edged weapons over firearms. Quite a few years ago he intended to teach applied arts, but after a brief career as a commercial artist-illustrator he decided to make weapons history his life's work, and toward that end joined the firm of Peter Dale, Ltd., London. Trafalgar Swords of Honour is the first serious study of this absorbing epicycle of armes-blanches history.*



War was decreed by France against Great Britain on February 1st, 1793, and 'His Majesties Proclamation' for making reprisals was dated on the 11th of the same month. During this war, which was to last twenty-two years, the ancient custom of awarding swords to national military and naval heroes was revived. The present notes deal with some of the most well-known swords-of-honour, those awarded by the Patriotic Fund at Lloyd's, particularly those awarded to officers who commanded ships at the Battle off Cape Trafalgar on the 21st October 1805.

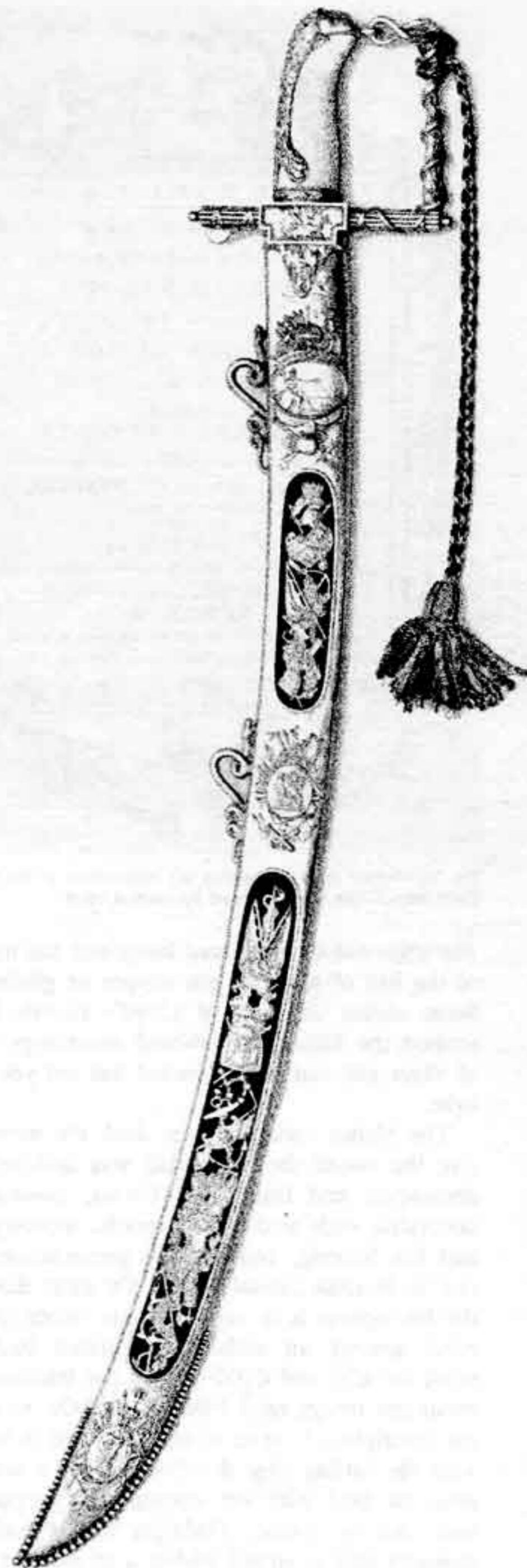
The Patriotic Fund was founded at a meeting called at Lloyd's Coffee House, Royal Exchange, London, on July 20th, 1803. It was there decided that "to animate the efforts of our defenders by sea and land it is expedient to raise, by the patriotism of the community at large, a suitable fund for their comfort and relief, for the purposes of assuaging the anguish of their wounds, or palliating in some degree the more weighty misfortune of the loss of limbs, or alleviating the distress of widows and orphans, and granting pecuniary rewards or honourable badges of distinction for successful exertions of value or merit." The "honourable badges" took the form of superb neo-classical silver vases and handsome gilt sabres. Lloyd's were very up-to-date in choosing sabres, for the 19th century ushered in the curved-blade sword as the fashionable officer's side-arm; light cavalry regiments had adopted a new pattern sabre in 1796, and certain infantry officers



were ordered to wear sabres in 1803.

The Patriotic Fund sabres were divided into three main grades, starting with a sword of £30 value for presentation to mates and midshipmen, and proceeding to a sword of £50 value for lieutenants and a £100 sword for commanders and captains. For their gallant services in the Battle of Trafalgar many of the officers who commanded ships were awarded a special "Trafalgar" sword, of which more anon. Although the majority of Lloyd's swords were awarded to Royal Navy officers, thirteen were awarded to officers in the Royal Marines and four swords went to army officers.

All but one of the existing Lloyd's swords are engraved on the scabbard top with the name and address of the London sword cutler and jeweller, Richard Teed of Lancaster Court in the Strand. Most £100 swords are signed "Richard Teed, Sword Cutler, Lancaster Court, London"; this inscription is engraved in Roman capital letters around the thickness of metal at the mouth of the scabbard. Early £50 swords were similarly signed, but after 1804 the majority in this value category were signed in the more usual place on the top rear of the scabbard. This change was probably due to the revised inscription "Richard Teed, Dress sword maker to the Patriotic Fund, Lancaster Court, London" being too long for the original position around the throat. The odd sword out, as previously mentioned, is the £50 sword awarded in 1805 to Lieutenant George Pigot; its scabbard is signed by another well-known London



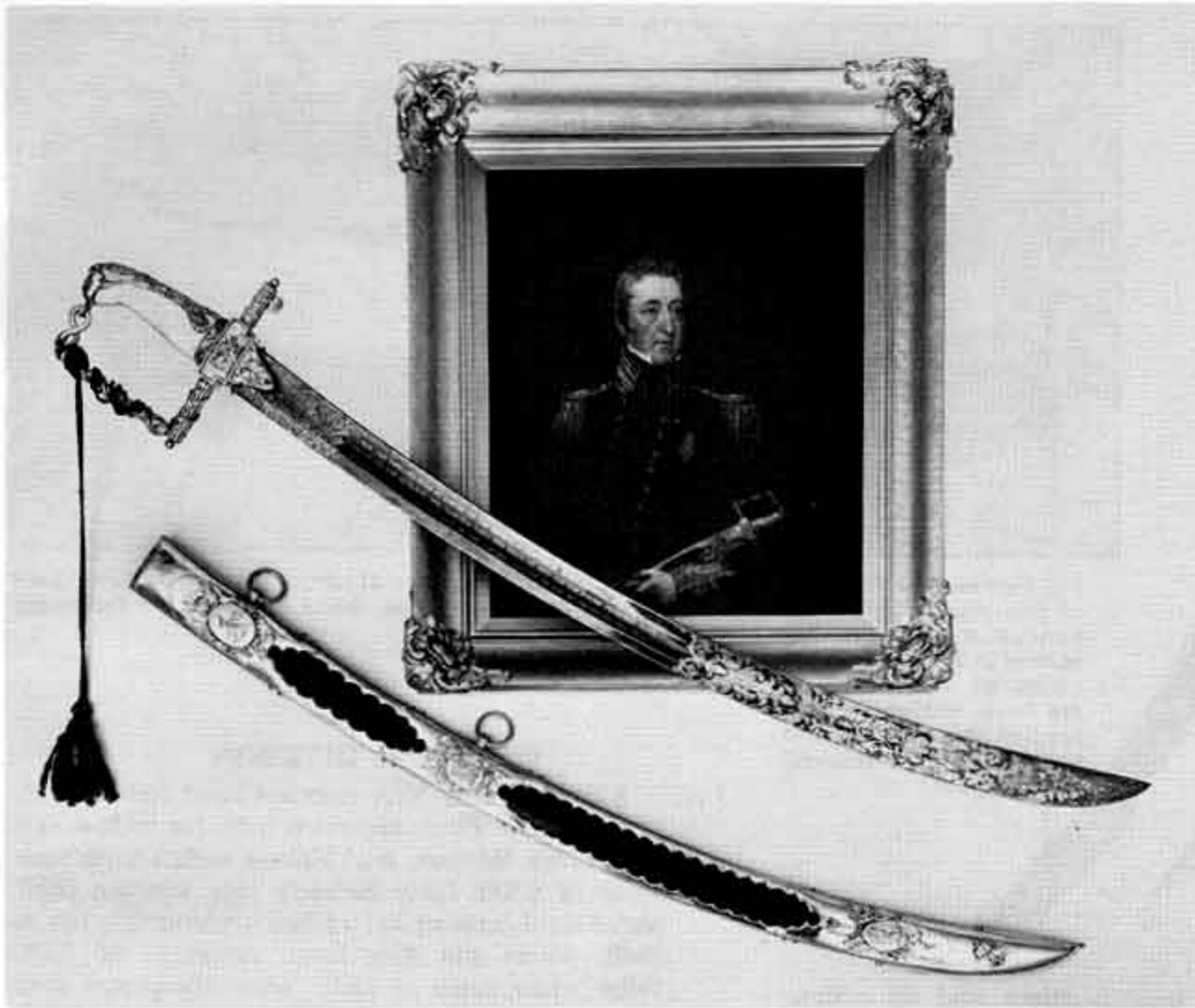


Fig. 4—Sword of £50 value voted to Lieutenant G. A. Crofton of H.M.S. Cambrian for a boat action in September 1805. The portrait shows Lt. Crofton in later life (c. 1850) still proudly displaying his sword of honour.

with two mermaids each bearing a banner inscribed respectively "VICTORY" and "TRAFALGAR".

The major visual difference between the grades of swords was in the amount of decoration on the scabbards. £30 swords (Fig. 2) had scabbards of normal construction: the body was made of wood covered in blue leather, and the three mercury gilt mounts were entirely separate units, well engraved with non-classical naval motifs and emblems; each mount was encircled by two bands of gilt cable, the cable on the top two mounts being pierced by circular suspension rings. The £50 scabbards (Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 7) were more elaborate and the decorative theme was classical. The gilt mounts were no longer three separate units but were joined by decorative side pieces which also formed the borders of two oval shagreen panels on the front and rear of the scabbard. All these mounts were attached to the wooden scabbard body by small gilt screws. The decoration was both engraved and applied; each main section of mounting had a small applied oval cartouche depicting Hercules in the course of one of his Labours, usually in combat with the Nemean Lion or with the nine-headed Hydra or taming the three-headed dog-serpent Cerberus on a leash; each cartouche was surrounded by a trophy of naval arms. The sword was suspended by two circular rings of cable.

The gilt metal mounting of the £100 and Trafalgar scabbard (Figs. 6 and 9) was formed as one

complete unit into which the wooden scabbard body was inserted. The two oval panels were now of dark blue or black velvet which was decorated further with applied gilt trophies. Two of the oval cartouches still depicted Herculean Labours but the top cartouche was replaced by a larger oval panel depicting a seated Britannia holding the Union Shield and a trident overlooking two ships at sea. The Trafalgar scabbard had a similar panel but now with Britannia holding a victor's laurel wreath and gazing out over the assembled fleets. On the highest grade scabbards the name of the recipient's ship appeared on a ribbon scroll above the top oval panel, and on the Trafalgar scabbard on drapes below this panel were the words "NELSON, TRAFALGAR, 21st Oct<sup>r</sup> 1805." Scabbard suspension rings were replaced by ornate curling serpents, and the trail of the chape was of beaded form.

Lloyd's sabres were presented in a polished mahogany case the lid of which was fitted with an inlaid folding brass handle and a rectangular brass plate. The plate was engraved with the recipient's name, the date and brief details of the award. The case was lined with blue baize and Richard Teed's trade label was pasted to the inside of the lid; with each sword came a small printed card explaining the classical symbolism of the hilt (Fig. 1). Each sword had a sword belt and a knot. The belts were of two types: for the lower grades of swords they were of

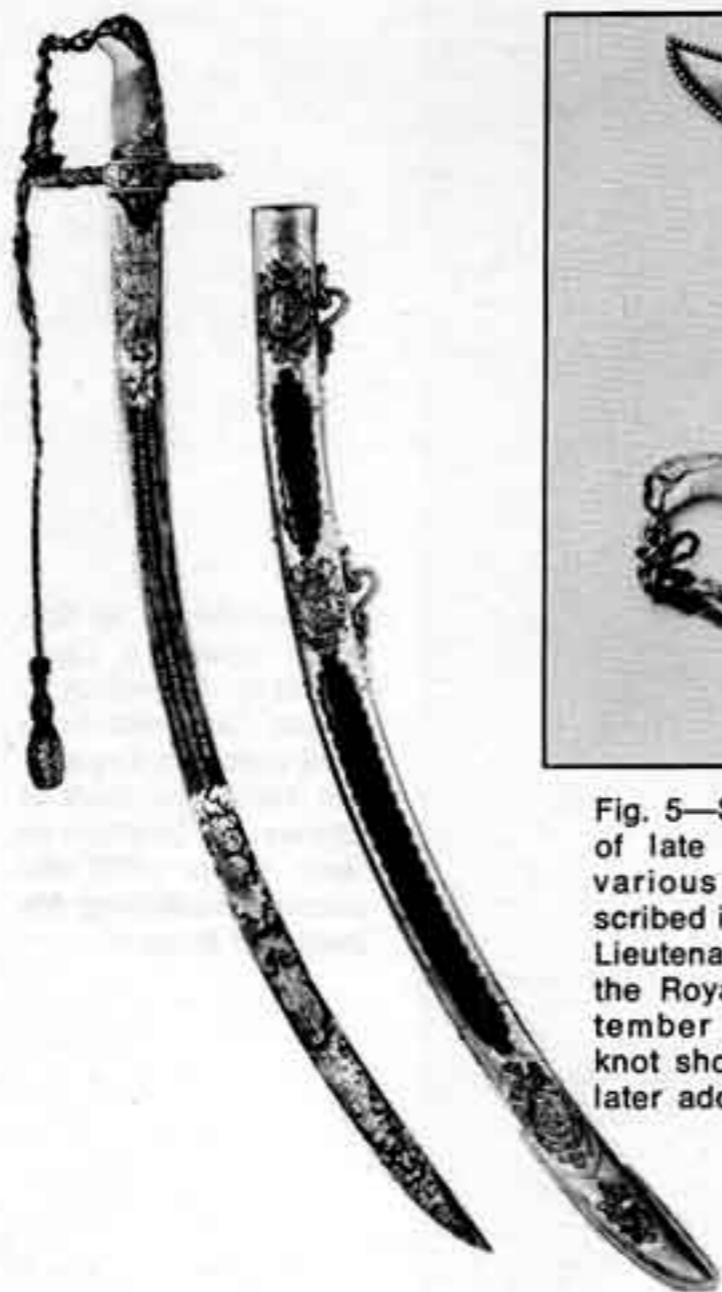


Fig. 5—Sword of £50 value of late type showing the various differences described in the text. Voted to Lieutenant Robert Pye of the Royal Marines in September 1809. The sword knot shown is an incorrect later addition.



Figs. 6 and 7—Trafalgar sword of honour voted to Captain Robert Redmill of H.M.S. Polyphemus. Below is a standard £50 sword for comparison.

blue leather with gilt bullion edges and an ornate wavy gilt centre line; all the buckles and joint bosses took the form of gilt lion masks, and the clasp was a small gilt "S" snake between two lion masks. For the £100 and Trafalgar swords the snake was replaced by a circular clasp (Fig. 10) depicting Hercules in combat with the Hydra, in the exergue the words "Patriotic Fund 1803." The sword knots were of blue and gold twisted cord with a large blue tassel having gold bullions.

The Battle off Cape Trafalgar, fought on October 21st 1805, was the naval action for which the greatest number of Lloyd's swords were awarded at one time. In the past it has been assumed that each of the officers commanding a ship received a sword, but this was not the case. Some officers have been recorded as receiving a sword when in actual fact they received a silver vase. This mistaken impression of swords all-round (with notable exceptions) is continued in the latest publication on naval swords. The following list denotes wherever possible documentary evidence of the officer receiving either sword or vase (the ships are listed in the battle formation as they were on the 21st October):\*

\*The Editors recommend David Howarth's *Trafalgar: The Nelson Touch* (Glasgow, 1969, William Collins Sons & Co.; London, 1971, Fontana Books [paperback edition, richly illustrated]), for a gripping you-can't-put-it-down account of Trafalgar, its antecedents and consequences. Many of the officers in Mr. Spalding's tally of sword awards will come to life in Mr. Howarth's pages, and the positions and roles of their ships will be made clear.

### WEATHER DIVISION

**VICTORY (100 guns).** Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson K.B. (killed). The Fund presented both his widow and his brother, William, Earl Nelson, with a silver vase value of £500. Lady Nelson's vase was not completed until January 1810 when it was sent to her in Bath, where she then lived. Although of £500 value when voted in 1805, when completed over four years later the actual cost of this vase was £650.

Captain Thomas M. Hardy was voted a silver vase of £100 value. This was probably the vase exhibited at the Royal Naval Exhibition at Chelsea, London, in 1891 as exhibit number 1935 (R.N.E.\*\* 1935).

**TEMERAIRE (98 guns).** Captain Eliab Harvey is believed to have been voted a sword. No letter of thanks for a sword appears in Lloyd's Nelson Collection (L.N.C.) and as yet to the author's knowledge his sword is unrecorded.

**NEPTUNE (98 guns).** Captain Thomas Francis Fremantle was voted a £100 vase which was exhibited at the Royal Naval Exhibition in 1891 (R.N.E.-1966).

**CONQUEROR (74 guns).** Captain Israel Pellew was voted a sword. Upon his arrival in Plymouth in August 1806 he received the "very handsome sword which the Patriotic Committee have been pleased to present me." His letter of thanks to the Fund is in Lloyd's Nelson Collection (L.N.C.-P.179).

**LEVIATHAN (74 guns).** Captain Henry William Bayntun is believed to have been voted a sword.

**AJAX (74 guns).** Lieutenant John Pilford (acting Captain in the absence of the Captain) was voted a sword which is now in a private collection in the United States.

#### \*\*Abbreviations Used in Text

L.N.C.—Lloyd's Nelson Collection (London), followed by the appropriate letter number.

R.N.E.—Catalogue of a Royal Naval Exhibition, Chelsea (London), 1891.



Fig. 8—Trafalgar silver vase designed by John Flaxman and made by Rundell, Bridge & Rundell of London.

**ORION (74 guns).** Captain Edward Codrington is believed to have been voted a sword.

**AGAMEMNON (64 guns).** Captain Sir Edward Berry was voted a vase of £100 value which was exhibited at the Royal Naval Exhibition in 1891 (R.N.E.-1928).

**MINOTAUR (74 guns).** Captain Charles John Moore Mansfield was voted a sword which is still in the possession of his descendants in England. The sword is complete with its case, belt, knot and symbolism card.

**SPARTIATE (74 guns).** Captain Francis Laforey is believed to have been voted a sword.

**BRITANNIA (100 guns).** Rear-Admiral Lord Northesk was voted a vase of £300 value.

Captain Charles Bullen was voted a sword. In a letter to Lloyds dated 6th September 1806 Captain Bullen states he had received the sword and "I beg you will be pleased to assure those Gentlemen who compose the Committee, how sensible I am of the Honour, they have confer'd on me, and my thanks for it." (L.N.C.-P.62).

**AFRICA (64 guns).** Captain Henry Digby was voted a sword. In his letter of thanks, 9th January 1806, the good Captain notes, "I have been given to understand that to wear it we have not the Sanction of the Lords Commissioners of the Admty." (L.N.C.-P.272).

## LEE DIVISION

**ROYAL SOVEREIGN (100 guns).** Vice-Admiral Sir Cuthbert Collingwood was voted a silver vase of £500 value. Patriotic Fund Minutes, 3rd December 1805: "Resolved—That a vase of like value (£500) be presented to Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood, who, after the death of the Commander-in-Chief in the hour of victory, so nobly completed the triumph of the day."

Captain Edward Rotherham was voted a vase of £100 value which has now returned to its home and can be viewed in the Nelson Collection at Lloyd's. In a letter to Lloyds dated 5th February 1806 Captain Rotherham writes, "Understanding it to be the intention of the Committee to do me the honour of presenting me with a Sword of the value of one hundred pounds I inclose a letter to them on the subject which you will also be pleased to lay before them." It would appear that Rotherham asked the committee for a vase in lieu of the intended sword. (L.N.C.-P.44).

**MARS (74 guns).** Captain George Duff was killed early in the action by a shot which decapitated him. A vase of £100 value was voted to his son and widow, Sophia. Her letter of thanks dated 14th January 1806 for "the flattering gift of a piece of plate to myself and my son as a testimony of their regard to the memory of my beloved and lamented husband" is in Lloyd's Nelson Collection (L.N.C.-P.154).

Lieutenant William Hannah succeeded to the command on the death of his Captain and was voted a vase of £100 value. His letter of receipt and thanks for the vase is at Lloyd's (L.N.C.-P.161). It is dated 24th October 1806 and the Lieutenant states, "To say that I am proud of the honour, that I admire the Workmanship would be a very inadequate representation of my Feelings on such an occasion."

**BELLEISLE (74 guns).** "Captain William Hargood, H.M.S. Belleisle, who shared in the danger and glory of the memorable victory of Trafalgar, a vase of the value of £100."

**TONNANT (80 guns).** Captain Charles Tyler was voted a sword. In a letter of thanks dated 21st August 1806 he writes, "I have received the Sword ordered by the Gentlemen of the Committee of the Patriotic Fund to be presented me it is extremely handsome."

**BELLEROPHON (74 guns).** Captain John Cooke was killed because he refused to take off his gilt epaulettes. Lieutenant Cumby pointed out to his Captain that his epaulettes would make an excellent mark for snipers in the enemy's tops. Cook replied, "It is too late to take them off; I see my situation, but I will die like a man," which is unfortunately what he did. His last words were, "Tell Lieutenant Cumby never to strike." It was resolved that a vase of the value of £200, with an appropriate inscription, be presented to Mrs. Cooke, his widow.

Lieutenant William Pryce Cumby, who took command on the death of his Captain, was voted a sword. In a letter to Lloyd's dated 24th July 1806 he writes, "I beg to acknowledge the receipt of a most elegant Sword from Mr. Teed," and "that I

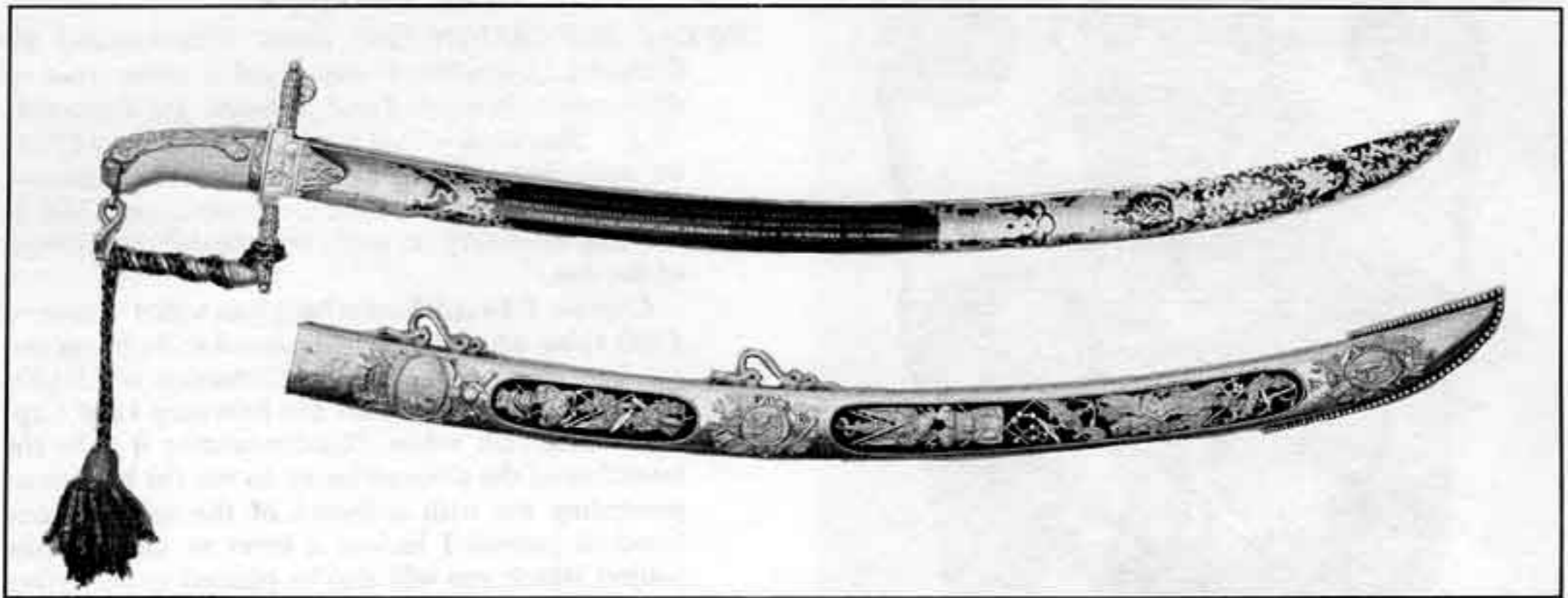


Fig. 9—Highest-grade Trafalgar sword, presented to the Honourable Henry Blackwood, Captain of H.M.S. Euryalus.

shall never disgrace the honourable weapon now entrusted to my care." (L.N.C.-P.235).

*COLOSSUS* (74 guns). Captain James Nicoll Morris was severely wounded and it was resolved that he be voted a vase of the value of £100.

*ACHILLES* (74 guns). Captain Richard King was voted a sword which is now in the Collection of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich (Sword 123.)

*POLYPHEMUS* (64 guns). Captain Robert Redmill was voted a sword which was sold by auction at Sotheby's in London in March 1966.

*REVENGE* (74 guns). Captain Robert Moorson was voted a sword. He received it in August 1806 and in his letter of thanks dated the 12th of the same month he states, "I shall have great pleasure in preserving to my family, such a lasting and appropriate remembrance of the Battle of Trafalgar."

*SWIFTSURE* (74 guns). Captain William George Rutherford was voted a sword which was until quite recently exhibited at the Royal United Services Museum, Whitehall, London (No. 3105). This museum is now unfortunately closed and its contents dispersed.

*DEFENCE* (74 guns). Captain George Johnstone Hope was voted a sword. In a letter dated 11th June 1806 he writes, "Having this day the honor of receiving the sword voted to me at a special general meeting of the Committee for managing the Patriotic Fund, on the 3rd Decr last. I have to request you will assure the Committee how highly sensible I am of this honorable mark of their approbation of my conduct in the Service of my Country," (L.N.C.-P.219). Captain Hope's sword is now in a private house in Buckinghamshire, England.

*THUNDERER* (74 guns). Lieutenant John Stockham was in command at the battle owing to the absence of Captain Lechmere, who had returned to England to attend a Court-Martial on Sir Richard Calder.

Stockham's sword is now exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, on loan from the National Maritime Museum (Sword 44). His letter of "warmest thanks and acknowledgements for the honor you have conferred on me" is at Lloyd's, (L.N.C.-P.265).

*DEFIANCE* (74 guns). Captain Philip Charles Durham was voted a sword. He is shown wearing it in a portrait of him painted by John Wood in about 1845. This portrait is now in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich Hospital Collection.

*PRINCE* (98 guns). Captain Richard Grindall was voted a sword which has now returned home and is exhibited in the Nelson Collection at Lloyd's. In a letter to Lloyd's dated 1st September 1806 he writes, "I have to acknowledge the receipt of the Sword from Mr. Teed (the maker) this day, presented me, by the Committee of the Patriotic (sic) Fund, for which I beg leave to return my best Thanks," (L.N.C.-P.95).

*DREADNOUGHT* (98 guns). Captain John Conn was voted a sword. "I beg to inform you that I have this day recd the Sword which the Patriotic Fund did me the Honour to vote me." His letter to Lloyd's was from Liskeard in Cornwall and dated 6th December 1806 (L.N.C.-P.93). His sword was sold by Spinks of London in 1970.

#### OTHER SHIPS

*EURYALUS* (36 guns). Captain Hon. Henry Blackwood was voted a sword. In a letter to Lloyd's dated 5th July 1806 he writes, "I must beg to acknowledge the receipt of the Sword sent to me by the Patriotic Fund; which I hope as long as I live I shall have frequent opportunities of turning to the Defence of my King and Country," (L.N.C.-P.284). Captain Blackwood's sword is numbered 171 in the Collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

*NAIAD* (36 guns). Captain Thomas Dundas was voted a sword. His letter dated 30th June 1806 says, "On my return to Town, I found at my house a Sword



Fig. 10—Gilt bronze belt clasp worn with the £100 and Trafalgar swords.

you have done me the favour to present me with, I beg you will rest assured I shall ever consider it as the greatest possible honour in having so particular a mark of attention conferred on me by so respectable (sic) body as the Committee for the Patriotick Fund at Lloyds," (L.N.C.-P.286).

*PHOEBE* (36 guns). Captain Hon. Thomas Bladen Capel was voted a vase of £100 value which is now on exhibition at the Nelson Collection at Lloyd's. It was also exhibited as item 1919 in the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891.

*SIRIUS* (36 guns). Captain William Prowse is believed to have been voted a sword.

*PICKLE* (10 guns) Lieutenant John Richards Lapenotière was voted a sword which is now at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (Sword 45). H.M.S. Pickle was sent home with Collingwood's Trafalgar dispatches.

*ENTREPRENANTE*. Lieutenant Robert Benjamin Young in a letter to Lloyd's dated 5th May 1805 asked, "Having heard since my arrival that your Board has liberally bestowed a Sword to each of the Commanders in the Trafalgar action, I hope to excite the munificence of the Committee to grant me the like," (L.N.C.-P.289). His cheek paid off for a sword was in due course awarded him.

Whether an officer received a sword or a vase would appear to have been a matter of individual choice, for if any officer had received a presentation sword before Trafalgar, a piece of plate may have been more acceptable than another sword. The answer may be found in a letter (L.N.C.—P.211) written by Captain Lawrence Halstead to the Fund in December 1806. "Having been informed that several of the Captains who had been voted swords for the action off Trafalgar and the action of the 4th Novr. under Sir Rich. Strachan, had been offered their choice, either to receive a sword or piece of plate of equal value, I shall be obliged By your giving me a line on the subject." Captain Halstead subsequently received a vase of £100 value for his part in the engagement off Ferrol.

The Patriotic Fund ceased awarding swords in May 1809, continuing to award both heroic deed and injury alike by a payment of money. Nevertheless, a few swords do exist which bear dates later than May 1809; it is possible that some officers used their cash payments to purchase suitable swords from Teed, who probably assembled them from parts he must have had still in stock. Indeed, these late swords do have the appearance of assembled pieces, differing in many ways from the standard sword. A £50 sword inscribed as voted to Lieutenant Robert Pye of the Royal Marines for an action in September 1809 has the following differences (Fig. 5): the blade, although curved, is unfullered, whereas the early blades had one broad fuller on each face; the etched decoration is inferior, lacking both in quality and quantity; and the scabbard, instead of having cabled rings for suspension, is fitted with the £100 curling serpents.

Another late £50 sword also to a Royal Marine officer, Lieutenant Thomas S. Cox, for an action in August 1810 is on exhibition at the Royal Marines Museum in Portsmouth.

Should any reader of this article know the whereabouts of any Lloyd's presentation sabres, especially those in America, the author would be delighted to know of them.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Figure 1	Author's Collection
Figure 2	By courtesy of Wallis & Wallis, Lewes, Sussex, England
Figures 3, 4, 5 & 10	By courtesy of Peter Dale, Ltd., London
Figures 6 & 7	By courtesy of Christie, Manson & Woods, London
Figure 8	By courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London
Figure 9	By courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England