



*Help us secure the future of the
Hilton Trafalgar Flags*



The Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October, 1805, Joseph Mallord William Turner, 1822-24, BHC0565 National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Greenwich Hospital Collection

HMS *Victory* (centre) still flying the flags of Nelson's famous signal, 'England Expects That Every Man Will Do His Duty'. To the left of *Victory's* main mast is the Union flag, which has been loosened by the French ship *Redoutable* which was dismasted.

The Hilton Trafalgar Flags of St. Mary's Church, Selling

The National Maritime Museum has the rare and exciting opportunity to acquire two surviving flags from the Battle of Trafalgar, October 1805.

The first is a Union Flag, from HMS *Minotaur* and was, we know, flown at the battle. The second is an Austrian ensign and is as interesting as the Union Flag. It is believed to have come from the *Neptuno*, the Spanish warship jointly captured at Trafalgar by *Minotaur* and *Spartiate*.

Following the high profile sale of the Union Flag from HMS *Spartiate* in 2009, St. Mary's Church, Selling in Kent approached the National Maritime Museum with an offer for the museum to purchase the two flags for £175,000. The Union Flag has been valued at £150,000 and the Austrian Ensign at £25,000.

The National Maritime Museum is the preferred choice for the church - recognising the museum's unique ability to care for such rare objects, to display them appropriately and to tell their amazing stories to our visitors.

The National Maritime Museum has now launched a campaign to raise the **£175,000** to acquire and conserve these incredible items and we are seeking support to assist with this important purchase. We are delighted to announce that a foundation has generously pledged a grant of £50,000 and with individual donations being received we have just under £120,000 to raise.



Conservator's photograph of detail of the Union Flag from HMS *Minotaur*



Conservator's photograph of the detail of the Austrian Flag

The Provenance of the Flags

It is known that the Union Flag from HMS *Minotaur* was flown at the Battle of Trafalgar in October 1805. Nelson specifically issued an order on 10 October 1805:

‘When in presence of the Enemy, all the ships under my command are to bear White Colours and a Union Jack is to be suspended from the foretopgallant stay.’

This was to avoid the confusion with the French and Spanish colours. Allowing for losses, the Union Flag is the right size for a jack of a 3rd rate.

The Austrian Ensign is likely to have been obtained on board *Neptuno*, the Spanish warship, as a prize having been captured directly from the ship's flag locker. It is apposite to remember that until the end of the First World War, Austria was a significant naval power in the Mediterranean.

A Spanish ship would be carrying Austrian colours because at this time, Austria was in alliance with Britain against Napoleon and it was common practice to carry the colours of unfriendly nations as ruse de guerre to escape if one were outnumbered by the enemy in battle. British Commander Thomas Cochrane regularly flew French colours to get away from disadvantageous situations.

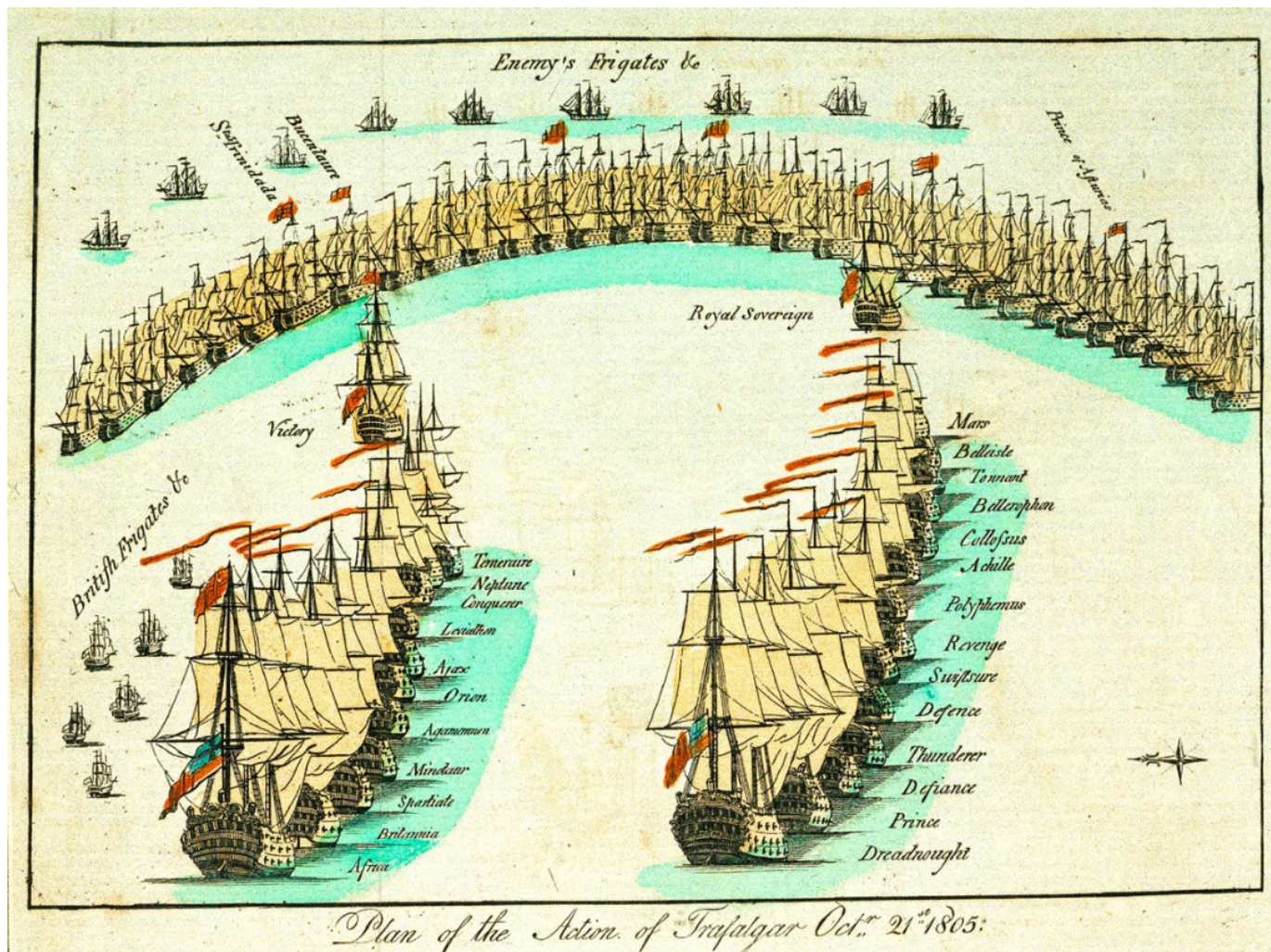
The flag also demonstrates the truly international nature of the Trafalgar and the mesh of alliances and dynastic connections that it encompassed.

Both flags were the prizes of Stephen Hilton, who was the Master's Mate on *Minotaur*. It was very usual at the time for warrant officers (such as Hilton) or junior officers, Lieutenants and Midshipmen to take such prizes after battle. (The NMM holds two Spanish ensigns that were taken after the Bombardment at Algiers in 1816 by young Midshipman James Everard.)

At the close of the Napoleonic Wars Hilton returned to Selling and bought a property with his prize money from Trafalgar, which he renamed Trafalgar House. He is buried in the churchyard of St. Mary's, Selling having died aged 85 in 1872.

His descendants owned property nearby and presented the flag to the church in the 1930's.

Given the shared history of the flags and that both prizes were kept by Hilton, it is important to keep them together to maintain the integrity of Hilton's prize collection.



Plan of the Action of Trafalgar Oct. 21st 1805, print, PAD5730, National Maritime Museum Greenwich.

This print illustrates the position of HMS *Minotaur* at the Battle of Trafalgar. The *Minotaur* is in the column on the left, led by HMS *Victory*. *Minotaur* is fourth from the bottom.

The Condition of the Flags

The Union Flag measures 2240 x 2860mm and the Austrian Ensign 2350 x 4140mm.

The Union Flag appears generally in good condition overall although there is approximately 600mm missing at the fly and an oblong section missing at the lower fly corner, all edges in this area are fraying.

The flag has been previously supported by stitching it onto a fine cotton net, the stitching has been run in lines right across the flag approximately 30mm apart giving a quilted appearance. This is causing creasing and cockling of the flag overall and would probably need to be released during conservation. Ingrained and surface dirt is very evident throughout with noticeable layers of surface dust visible on the face.

Various small holes are noticeable particularly in the upper hoist corner these are consistent with insect damage. A number of small holes and losses throughout the flag have been repaired with areas of denser stitching onto the net. The original seams of the Union Flag appear tightly stitched which is causing further cockling. The Hoist strip is complete and appears in quite good condition.

The Austrian flag is also in good condition overall. It has been supported in the same way as the Union Flag which is causing creasing. It does have some heavier lines probably due to folding during storage.

The colour of both flags is good and little fading appears to have occurred over the years.



Conservator's photograph of detail of the Union flag from HMS Minotaur

Recommended Conservation

Upon acquisition both flags with require a further and more thorough examination in the conservation studio. Documentation and photography would be followed by surface cleaning and testing of the dyes to establish of the flags would benefit from wet cleaning and to ascertain if the dyes are fast.

The previously applied support fabrics and stitching would be removed as they are distorting the flags.

Depending on the outcome of the tests it is hoped that flags could be wet cleaned and then the weaves re-aligned. New support fabrics (probably a fine nylon net) would be dyed to blend with the original colours and then stitched to the verso and possibly the face of the flag to provide sufficient support to allow them to be displayed.



Fragment of a wool bunting, hand-sewn flag, From HMS *Victory*



Double-sided linen banner painted with a coloured bust of Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson

The Flags at the National Maritime Museum

The National Maritime Museum is working on a major new permanent gallery – ***Nelson, Navy, Nation***. Opening in summer 2013, this flagship gallery will take full advantage of our unrivalled collections to explore the Royal Navy, and its relationship with Britain, from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the Napoleonic Wars.

The gallery will reveal the realities of naval warfare and life afloat and will demonstrate the profound influence of naval events on British national identity. The result will set the benchmark for bringing the eighteenth century naval world to life, and the union flag of the *Minotaur* will be an extraordinary centrepiece for museum visitors.

At the heart of the gallery's story lies the life and career of a man who shaped navy and nation as no other: Admiral Lord Nelson. Our impressive Nelson collections will harness the immense interest his name continues to generate and it is in this context that the flag of the *Minotaur* will play such an important role.

Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar will form the crescendo of the gallery's displays. It is an engagement for which the Museum has especially rich resources, including the uniform worn by Nelson (and an array of his personal possessions), celebrated paintings by West, Devis, Dighton and others, weapons and projectiles used during the battle and first hand accounts and letters written immediately after.

The Union Flag from the *Minotaur* will make a spectacular centrepiece within this key section capturing the symbolism of navy and nation. It could be displayed with the presentation sword and gold medal awarded to Charles Mansfield, captain of the *Minotaur*, following the action.

The Austrian Ensign will feature on our Collections Online initiative which enables researchers, students, and professional writers etc to access our collections remotely and electronically.



Creating replicas of the flags

As part of the contract of sale the museum is committed to creating and supplying excellent quality replicas of the Union Flag and the Austrian Ensign for St Mary's Church to replace the originals.

The replicas must be full sized and made to the highest standard i.e they must be hand stitched rather than printed.

The Union Flag is a post 1801 Union Flag and measures 2240mm x 2860mm.

The Austrian Ensign's measurements are 2350mm x 4140mm.

Royal Museums Greenwich would very much like to explore the sponsorship opportunities of this unique appeal with a flag making company. Such support would make a very real difference to the our campaign. In return for sponsorship in kind we would be proud to offer our 'flag making partner' a package of benefits to recognise and thank them for their generous support.

Acknowledgements would include but not necessarily limited to:

- A written credit on the display of the Union Flag in the new flagship gallery Nelson, Navy, Nation at Royal Museums Greenwich
- A written acknowledgment at St Mary's Church in Selling, Kent
- Invitations for clients and employees to the VIP opening of the Nelson, Navy, Nation gallery
- Complimentary membership for one year of the Museum's Patrons programme for one year – creating valuable networking opportunities
- An opportunity to view the flags undergoing conservation treatment, guided by the museum Curator of Decorative Arts & Culture
- An opportunity to view other historic flags from the museum's collection guided by our curators and experts

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