



## ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

### Art Treasures of the Squadron

#### **HMS Victory**

**Oil painting by John Allcot**

**Hangs over the fireplace in the Neutral Bay Verandah Lounge**



*HMS Victory*

This is the story of *HMS Victory*, the great sailing battleship commanded by Admiral Nelson in the Battle of Trafalgar – at the pinnacle of his fighting career. By winning this battle in 1805, Britain was saved from an invasion by Napoleon.

*HMS Victory* is painted by John Allcot, a first-class marine artist, who excelled in depicting historic boats due to his research, attention to detail and love of the sea.



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The painting was presented to the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron by Carl Halvorsen in 1998. Kari Svensen, a Squadron Member and Carl Halvorsen's niece, generously shared her time and family stories with me about this and said that:

'The painting of *Victory*, which hangs above the fireplace, was donated to the Squadron when Uncle Carl's wife, Glenagh, died - as he told me they always sat in that spot with their pre-dinner drinks.'

HMS *Victory* was launched in 1765 as a 104 gun first rate ship of the line of the Royal Navy. She is the world's oldest naval ship still in commission, with 243 years of service as of 2021, although these days, she is in a permanent dry dock in Portsmouth. She is best known for a role as Lord Nelson's flag-ship at the battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805 when 27 British ships attacked a combined French and Spanish fleet of 33 ships.

Nelson's plan was to break the enemy lines some two or three ships ahead of their commander-in-chief in the centre and achieve victory before the remaining ships could come to their aid. Nelson had ordered the British fleet to split into two columns. Fitful winds made it a slow business and for more than six hours, the two columns of British ships slowly approached the French line before *Royal Sovereign*, leading the leeward column, was able to open fire on *Fougueux*. Around 30 minutes later, *Victory* broke the line, firing a triple shot at *Bucentaure* into the stern. At 1:15pm Nelson was shot, the fatal musket ball entering his left shoulder and lodging in his spine. He died at 4:30pm. In all, some 20% of *Victory's* 820 man crew were killed or wounded during the battle.

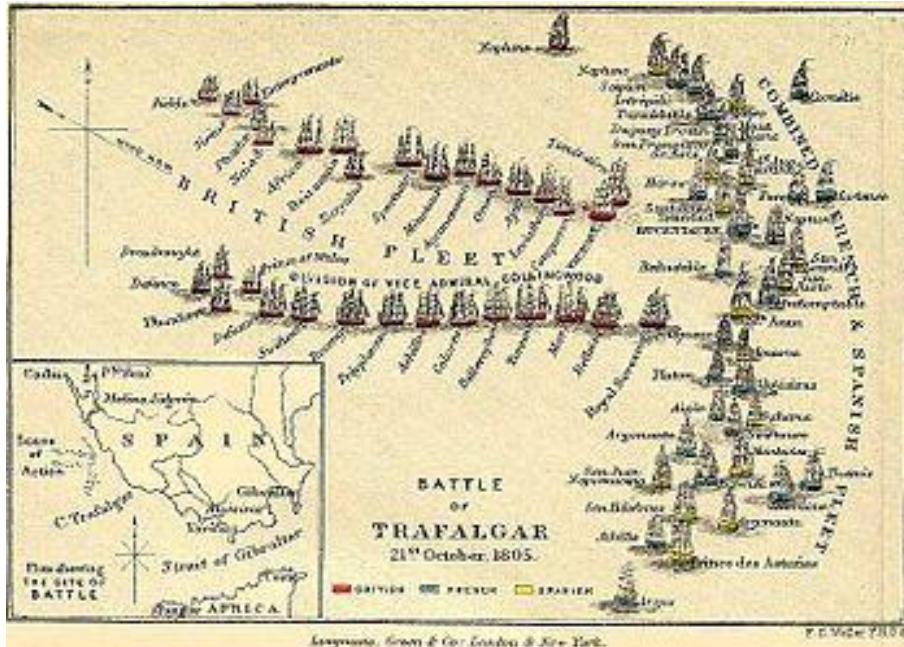
Sailing warships in the early 1800s was a challenging task and fighting in them was even harder! A square-rigged ship could not sail within 67.5 degrees either side of the wind. If the wind was coming from the north, the closest it could sail was ENE or WNW. In order to travel in that direction, it had to tack; however, because of the huge distance a square-rigger had to sail to fill its sails, the most efficient way of working to windward was by gybing. In addition, sailing with the wind from directly behind or abeam was difficult and inefficient. Ideally, these ships needed to be sailed with the wind on their stern quarters.

Nelson's battle plan for Trafalgar was not conventional. Sailing warships were at the mercy of wind and wave and risked hitting one of their own when sailing 'broadside in a line' to the enemy. Nelson's 27 ships would attack going directly for the enemy line but only the front of the attacking column would engage. They would attack in two columns, break the enemy line and then take the enemy piecemeal.

The battle progressed largely according to Nelson's plan as shown below, with *Victory* leading the northern column of British ships heading eastwards to split the combined French and Spanish fleets in half. The wind was blowing from the North West and the French and Spanish ships south of the point of Nelson's attack tried to sail back to windward to engage the British ships but had considerable difficulty in doing so, thereby giving the British ships an advantage.



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A Map of the Battle of Trafalgar

During the battle the following scene unfolded:

‘His Lordship came to me on the poop, and after ordering certain signals to be made, about a quarter to noon he said “Mr Pasco I wish to say to the fleet, ‘England confides that every man will do his duty’” and he added “You must be quick, for I have one more to make which is for close action.” I replied “If your Lordship will permit me to substitute “expects” for “confides” the signal will soon be completed, because the word ‘expects’ is in the vocabulary and ‘confides’ must be spelt. His Lordship replied, in haste, and with seeming satisfaction, “That will do, Pasco, make it directly.” This led to the famous flag signal sent out at 11.45am on 21 October 1805: ‘England expects that every man will do his duty.’ (Source - *The Nelson Society*)

In this painting Victory is depicted in full flight with her square-rig sails fully hoisted on port tack with the North West wind blowing from her port quarter – exactly as she was when leading the British fleet into the Battle of Trafalgar. She is accompanied by the warship *Temeraire* on the left and the frigate *Euryalus* on the right. She is painted from the point of view from her port bow at the waterline in a fairly fresh breeze on an overcast day. There are threatening clouds on the right-hand side of the painting, heralding a storm after the battle. The focus is on the full set of sails on Nelson’s flagship leading the British fleet into a great battle.

At the time of the Battle of Trafalgar, Napoleon had been steadily conquering Europe by land and dominated Europe for the next 10 years. The colours are captured by Allcot of the distinctive stripes of black and yellow paint – ‘Nelson Chequer’ - on the side of his flagship to distinguish him from the enemy. After the Battle of Trafalgar, all Royal Navy ships adopted this insignia.



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The deep blue tones in the waves contrast beautifully with the whites of the wash. They are completed in thick oil strokes. Allcot also used the white-wash to emphasise the waterline of the dark ship. The attention to detail is superb in the rigging, indicative of his level of research and accuracy.

The flags indicate that the wind is coming from the port quarter of *Victory*. The atmosphere is dramatic, historic and momentous. The seagulls trailing her soften the scene which was to be Nelson's last great battle.

Allcot has captured the majesty of this beautifully built first-class warship. She was capable of carrying 104 guns, 850 crew, at a height of 205 feet from the waterline to the top of the mainmast and weighing 3,500 tons. Her restoration over the last 243 years has revealed the high quality of her original workmanship. In 1922, she was moved to dry dock in Portsmouth, England and preserved as a museum ship. She has been the flagship of the First Sea Lord since 2012.

Allcot has captured a great war ship, *Victory* at a significant moment in history charging into the Battle of Trafalgar which established the English as the dominant Navy in the Colonial world in the 1800s. Carl Halvorsen's generous donation of the painting to our Club lets us all enjoy this great work.

**Robyn Coleman**  
**Exhibiting Member Royal Art Society**

### *Acknowledgements and Thanks*

Kari Svensen for her time and stories about her famous Halvorsen family  
Squadron Archives and History Committee  
Nelson Society

### *Photographs and Images*

'Victory' image by Robyn Coleman

Map of Battle of Trafalgar is a reproduction of Weller, F.S. (1892). "Battle of Trafalgar, 21st October, 1805". In Gardiner, Samuel Rawson (ed.). [A School Atlas of English History](#). London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co. p. 84.. Gardiner says in the "Preface," however, that No. 84 was taken from another work, Johnston, Alexander Keith (1850). Alison, M.R. (ed.). [Atlas to Alison's History of Europe](#). Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons. p. 34. (In the public domain)