

Lord Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar



Lord Nelson and the early years

Horatio Nelson was born in Norfolk in 1758. As a young child he wasn't particularly healthy but he still went on to become one of Britain's greatest heroes. Nelson's father, Edmund Nelson, was the Rector of Burnham Thorpe, the small Norfolk village in which they lived. His mother died when he was only 9 years old. Nelson came from a very big family – huge in fact! He was the sixth of 11 children. He showed an early love for the sea, joining the navy at the age of just 12 on a ship captained by his uncle. Nelson must have been good at his job because he became a captain at the age of 20. He was one of the youngest-ever captains in the Royal Navy.

Nelson married Frances Nisbet in 1787 on the Caribbean island of Nevis. Although Nelson was married to Frances, he fell in love with Lady Hamilton in Naples in Italy. They had a child together, Horatia in 1801.

Lord Nelson, the Sailor



Britain was at war during much of Nelson's life so he spent many years in battle and during that time he became ill (he contracted malaria), was seriously injured. As well as losing the sight in his right eye he lost one arm and nearly lost the other – and finally, during his most famous battle, he lost his life.

Nelson's job helped him see the world. He travelled to the Caribbean, Denmark and Egypt to fight battles and also sailed close to the North Pole. Nelson was considered a great sailor so it's hard to believe he suffered from seasickness all his life. Nelson was injured a number of times. During one battle, he was shot in the right elbow and had to have his arm amputated without anaesthetic by the light of a lantern!

Nelson didn't always obey orders! Apparently during one battle he ignored orders to stop attacking the enemy. He used his bad eye to look through the telescope and claimed he couldn't see the signal to withdraw. However, he was a very clever sailor. One of his best victories was during the Battle of the Nile in 1798 where he tricked the French ships by sailing between the fleet and the shore and attacking them. During the Battle of the Nile, Nelson destroyed Napoleon's forces. Napoleon was the French military leader – and probably Nelson's greatest and most famous enemy!

Battle of Trafalgar



The Battle of Trafalgar is undoubtedly Nelson's most famous battle – even though it turned out to be his last. On 21 October 1805 the French and Spanish fleets took to the sea and off the southern coast of Spain the Battle of Trafalgar took place.

Nelson's greatest-ever victory at the Battle of Trafalgar, which stopped Napoleon from invading Britain, was also his last. He was hit by a bullet and died hours later on the 21 October 1805. After he was killed, his body was preserved in brandy and transported back to England where he was given a state funeral.

What Happened?

Between the years of 1794 and 1805, the French and the British navies were engaged in the struggle for superiority at sea, culminating in the Battle of Trafalgar. Nelson led a fleet of 27 ships in the Battle of Trafalgar, at the head of which was HMS Victory. Napoleon Bonaparte was the hugely determined leader of the French forces.

The battle took place at the Cape of Trafalgar in the Atlantic Ocean and saw Nelson not only defeat the combined French and Spanish fleets but also chase them all the way across the Atlantic to the West Indies and back again.

It was before this battle that Nelson uttered his famous words: “[England expects every man will do his duty.](#)” These words would prove prescient as he later lay dying from a French sniper wound and he spoke his last words, “[Thank God I have done my duty.](#)” He was 47 years old.

Lord Nelson's Legacy

Nelson died in 1805 and was given a state funeral and buried at St Paul's Cathedral. Nelson is regarded as one of Britain's most heroic figures, an inspirational leader and naval officer. **Trafalgar Day** is celebrated each year on 21st October to mark the victory of Lord Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, this meant that Britain's sea power would be unchallenged for another hundred years. A ceremony was held on board HMS Victory in Portsmouth, (the oldest warship in the world), to remember the men who fought on both sides of the battle.

Nelson's Column is a very famous landmark in London's Trafalgar Square. It was built to commemorate all that Nelson achieved. The work to build it started in 1840 and finished three years later in 1843. It cost £47,000. The famous monument was refurbished in 2006 at a cost of £420,000. The column is 51.6 metres tall from the bottom of the pedestal to the top of Nelson's hat.

Challenge:

Many stories have been told about Lord Nelson's travels around the world. One tale is he actually fought a polar bear! Can you find out about what actually happened by searching safely on the internet?