

THE SLOVENIAN CONNECTION

By Sue Morris

The article by Keith Miles in the Summer 2020 *Nelson Dispatch* 'Three Slovene Admirals and Lord Nelson' and my 'Additional notes on Baron Jeffrey de Raigersfeld' seem to have sparked some interest in related matters.

At Keith's suggestion we sent a copy of the Summer *Dispatch* to the Slovenian Ambassador H E Simona Leskovar, newly arrived in London, and we would very much like to maintain a link with her and also the British-Slovene Society. I was reminded that former Chairman of The Nelson Society, Dr Nick Slope, was the guest speaker at a reception hosted at the Slovene Embassy on 20 October 2005, the eve of the 200th Anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. Dr Slope related the Battle to the history of Slovenia, and having researched foreign names in Nelson's fleet he found one or two names of Austro-Hungarian origin that could easily have been Slovene or Croatian. He also mentioned the naval battle of Vis (Lissa) in 1866, where the Slovene-born Admiral Wilhelm Baron von Tegetthoff had used similar tactics to Nelson at Trafalgar.

I received some interesting correspondence from Edmund Phillimore RN Rtd, (who jointly authored the original lecture/article in SLO) regarding his great grandfather Sir John Phillimore:

'I was interested to read your 'Additional Notes' on my great great grandfather, Jeffrey de Raigersfeld. You mention his daughters, one of whom married my great grandfather Captain Sir John Phillimore. I wondered if you had come across a full account of his career published by Captain Andrew Drew in the United Service Magazine c 1850, which is on the internet. Having read both Raigersfeld's book and Drew's memoir, I think that Sir John had a more interesting and successful career, being at sea for much of his service between 1795 and 1826, and commanding more ships.

'Drew gives a charming insight into his marriage aged 49 to the young Catherine de Raigersfeld aged c 22 in 1830. Sadly he died in 1840 and illness struck Catherine down and she died aged 33 in 1841. I have a diary of 1840, begun by him but completed by her following his death in March, in which she records the onset of illness. I have an original copy of Raigersfeld's book inscribed to his eldest grandson, who died without issue.

'As a midshipman, John Phillimore was embarked on Admiral Hyde Parker's flagship at the battle of Copenhagen in 1802 in order to take his Lieutenant's examination. Drew confirms the family tradition that he was acting as signal midshipman and would have hoisted the famous recall signal that Nelson refused to see. Curiously on my mother's side I am descended from the Admiral's niece!

'Last year I visited the Royal Armouries museum on Portsdown which has on display two Danish cannons, which were presented to John Phillimore when in command of the *Bellette* in 1807, by the future Duke of Wellington. Drew tells the story in some detail. One of the cannons is shown below.

‘My grandfather, Henry Bouchier Phillimore, who rose to Admiral on the retired list, had an interesting career. He was at the Crimea, was the first 1st Lieutenant of HMS *Warrior* in 1860, and, when in command of HMS *Esk*, distinguished himself in the New Zealand war of 1864. In 1877/78 he was NOIC in Ascension Island when a famous astronomer, later Sir David Gill, spent 6 months observing Mars as part of a scheme to measure the sun’s distance’.

Edmund Phillimore

I am grateful to Edmund Phillimore for sharing this information.



Sir John Phillimore and his wife Catherine



Danish Bronze 3-pounder presented to John Phillimore in 1807

I was still curious to know more about Nelson's visit to Slovenia in 1800 as part of his overland journey home from Italy via Vienna, and with the help of Keith and his academic contacts in Ljubljana, found out more about the hotel where Nelson and his party stayed the night of 14 August, and the theatre where they attended a concert that evening, before their onward departure the next morning for Vienna.

The Hotel Elephant was in 1800 the best hotel in Laibach (as Ljubljana was then known) the capital of Krain province (modern Slovenia) and it is highly likely that Nelson stayed here (though he was miffed not to be invited to stay in the Bishop's Palace, where Queen Maria Carolina and her party, journeying two days ahead of them, had stayed). It was named after an elephant that in 1552 belonged to Maximilian II Archduke of Austria, who, about to become the Holy Roman Emperor, had recently married and was bringing the elephant - one of his wedding presents - back from Spain. Maximilian stopped at the best inn in Laibach with his escort and this wonderful animal - called Suleiman - which impressed the population tremendously. The Hotel Slon was later built on the site of this inn. The memory of Suleiman the elephant was still very strong in the city, so the guesthouse, and later the hotel, were named Slon (the Slovenian word for elephant). No doubt during their stay Nelson and his party would have been amused and entertained by the story of the elephant.



HÔTEL ELEFANT

The hotel that Nelson stayed in was rebuilt in the 19th century and again in the 1930's. Today a modern hotel stands on the site but it is still called Slon; and is still one of Ljubljana's top hotels. We hope to organise a trip to Ljubljana and stay in the Slon, in the not too distant future when travel restrictions are lifted, to commemorate Nelson's visit there.

What of the concert which Nelson and his party attended on the evening of 14 August 1800? O E Deutsch in 'Admiral Nelson and Joseph Haydn' gives a good description of the musical programme which entertained them, including the aria 'La vertu britanna' (British Virtue), and which was organised by the Laibach Philharmonic Society, founded in 1701. The venue would have been the beautiful State Theatre (Stanovsko gledališče). Unfortunately this building was completely destroyed by fire in 1887, but was quickly rebuilt in 1891. The building was restored in 2001 and is a magnificent home to the present Slovenian Philharmonic which celebrated its tercentenary in 2001.



State Theatre as it looked in 1800



The Slovenian Philharmonic today

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