

Trafalgar Day on Calton Hill

The Nelson Monument on Calton Hill became the talk of the town after it raised a eyecatching signal to celebrate Trafalgar Day.



The historic monument was adorned with a series of brightly coloured flags to replicate the 'England expects every man to do his duty' signal flown from Admiral Nelson's ship 'Victory' on 21 October 1805.

Councillor Ron Cairns, Vice Convenor of the Culture and Leisure Committee, said: "The Nelson Monument is a beautifully striking landmark all 365 days of the year; on Trafalgar Day, resplendent with its colourful signal of flags, it manages to become even more stunning. I'm sure lots of people will have noticed the eye-catching display yesterday and wondered what it was all about. Although the Battle of Trafalgar was more than 200 years ago, a huge amount of Scots fought and lost their lives in it, and the Nelson Monument stands in permanent memorial to their courage and sacrifice."

The Battle of Trafalgar took place off the coast of Spain in 1805. Bold tactics enabled the commander, Admiral Lord Nelson, to win a convincing victory over the combined French and Spanish fleets, thus ensuring that Napoleon would not have enough ships to launch an invasion of Britain. The country was safe, but sadly Nelson himself was fatally shot during the battle.

The whole of Britain mourned the charismatic Nelson. Just over a month after the battle, there was a meeting in Edinburgh at which it was decided to erect a monument to Nelson and to set up a fund for the benefit of wounded sailors. The Nelson Monument on Calton Hill was begun in 1807, though it was not completed until 1816.

The Monument was built to be a practical building as well as a memorial, with a viewing platform which still affords spectacular views of the city, and from its earliest days it was used for signalling.

At the start of the battle of Trafalgar, Nelson asked his signals officer to run up a signal "Nelson confides that every man will do his duty". The officer asked to change the wording to use nine fewer flags and Nelson agreed. On Trafalgar Day we still run up the signal "England expects that every man will do his duty" on the Nelson Monument, just as it was flown on board Nelson's ship Victory on October 21st 1805.

Estimates of the number of Scots at Trafalgar vary. It is possible that around a fifth of the soldiers and sailors on board that day were Scots. The youngest person to serve at Trafalgar was ten year old John Doig, from Leith.