

Conservators restore valuable maritime logbook

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Experts have painstakingly restored the logbook from a celebrated warship from the era of the Napoleonic Wars which Nelson himself sailed upon.

The log, recorded aboard the HMS Medusa, dates from 23 March 1802, when one of its sailors, Andrew Service, began the journal. Service sailed on the Medusa to places such as the Falklands, Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean. He wrote about sea and land battles, encounters with local inhabitants and other ships, and life on board the Medusa. A new [online exhibition](#) gives full details including photos of the logbook.

The Napoleonic Wars took place between 1792 and 1815. During the time of these conflicts, the number of men in the British Navy increased

from 16,000 to 140,000.

Andrew Service, originally from Port Glasgow, joined the HMS Medusa in 1801 at the age of 20. He is registered in the muster rolls as entering the ship as 'LM', landsman, which suggests that he had no previous seafaring experience.

The journal indicates that he remained unscathed on these journeys until November 1808, when lost a finger after an accident on the ship. He was invalided at Plymouth Hospital and discharged, receiving an annual pension of £10 for life. He returned to Scotland, arriving at Greenock on June 6th, 1810 after nine years and 12 days away.

The past two centuries had taken its toll on his logbook, which is held in the University of Glasgow's archives department. The parchment cover and paper pages were coated with a great deal of dirt, while damage had also been sustained to the binding structure. Experts from the Book & Paper Conservation Studio at the University of Dundee were called in to help restore this important artefact to a condition approaching its original glory.

Emma Fraser, Book Conservator at the Dundee studio, who worked on the logbook, explained the restoration process and the historical value of the text.

“In terms of the conservation, we were looking at the fact the book was in its original binding and how to maintain as much of the original material as possible during the work,” she said.

“In that respect, we were very successful. It was actually a well made book to start with, which helped as there was a lot of material left intact. This is perhaps surprising when you consider it was kept on a boat, and therefore the potential for damage from water and other contaminants.

“Initially, we engaged in cleaning to remove surface dirt. One problem we encountered is that there were pages missing. That is not unusual for a book of this age as blank pages were often removed to be used elsewhere.

“We had to add new pages to build up the book to its original size and prevent further damage to the spine. The original cover is parchment, which tends to shrink. We then humidified and flattened it so that it returned to its previous shape.

“From the point of view of us, as conservators, what was interesting was the fact the logbook was still in its original binding. As it was not a re-bind, it also allowed us to learn more about how books were made in those times, and study the process for future restorations. For historians, the book reveals a lot about the time, and is a fascinating, first-person account of well known and vital incidents in the Napoleonic Wars.”

The gun frigate Medusa was launched in 1801, when a French invasion was believed to be imminent. Admiral Nelson sailed on her in August 1801. Andrew Service’s logbook begins on March 23rd, 1802, after Nelson had left the ship.

In October 1804, the British received information that Spanish ships, carrying money to the French, were expected to arrive at Cadiz. British frigates, including the Medusa, engaged them off Cape Santa Maria and this incident contributed to Spain declaring war on Britain later that year.

Medusa was also involved in an attempt by the British to capture Buenos Aires. The logbook records that, on 22 January 1806, “enemy gun boats were firing on our Army”. Bouverie, the commanding officer of the Medusa, kept up a “constant fire” on the offenders, and helped British troops to capture nearby Montevideo as a precursor to the ultimately unsuccessful attack on Buenos Aires.

In November 1807, Medusa returned home to England to refit before being deployed in home waters. On January 14th, 1810, she captured the privateer L'Hirondelle, and also engaged with the French store ship Dorade two years later. In 1813, the Medusa was paid off at Plymouth and turned into a hospital ship before being broken up in 1816.

More information: More information about the Medusa logbook, and the conservation project, can be found at www.gla.ac.uk/services/archive...ns/onboardhmsmedusa/

Provided by University of Glasgow

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