



GIBRALTAR HERITAGE TRUST

THE MAIN GUARD, 13 JOHN MACKINTOSH SQUARE

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CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT, 2002/2003

By JOE DESOISA

1. INTRODUCTION

Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen and thank you all for being here. I offer a particular warm welcome to the Honourable Keith Azopardi, caretaker Minister for Heritage, who for the second year in succession is here to address our Meeting and I thank him for giving of his valuable time. I hope that the presence of a Minister at the Trust's AGM will now become an established custom. I suggest that we defer questions from members until after the Minister's address, since we may both wish to comment on similar issue.

2. THE PAST YEAR

This year the Trustees' major effort has been devoted to the production of the 2004 Tercentenary Calendar for celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Anglo-Dutch capture of Gibraltar in 1704. The Calendar gives an account of the events leading to the War of the Spanish Succession, one consequence of which was the capture of the Rock on behalf of the Austrian Pretender to the Spanish throne. The Calendar is copiously illustrated with historical material, which we have gone to great lengths to obtain, including a portrait from the Queen's Royal collection. It is here on sale at a very modest price to members.

I am sure that you will find it of great interest and consider it not merely as a calendar but also as a souvenir of that momentous event which was the precursor to the founding of our own Gibraltarian identity. We have also used some of the material from the Calendar as Christmas Cards and they are also on sale here.

In early December we plan an exhibition at the John Mackintosh Hall of all the material that we accumulated during our researches for the Calendar and we also hope to have on sale other related souvenirs. This exhibition will be the opening event in the various celebrations and other happenings that are planned for next year.

Another very notable achievement for the Trust was the definite acceptance by Government of our proposal to erect a statue of Lord Nelson here in Gibraltar as, indeed, was anticipated by the Minister in his address to us last year. This is now very much a Government project, but it is pleasing to report that the Government also agreed with the Trust's choice of Mr John Doubleday as the sculptor to undertake this major commission. Not only is Mr Doubleday a

sculptor of international repute; he has shown great enthusiasm and empathy for this task and, moreover, has decided to contribute his professional fees to charities in Gibraltar and in England.

I believe that the first ever statue of Nelson was unveiled in Glasgow in 1806. Without doubt Gibraltar can claim much closer connections with the Nelson legend than Glasgow and a Nelson memorial in the place where the Admiral last stood on firm ground before his death is long overdue. So we can now look forward to having a seven foot bronze statue of the great man to be situated just south of Southport Gate, and to be unveiled in June 2005 to mark both Nelson's last visit to Gibraltar and the bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar.

The Trust also played an essential part in the marking of the 60th anniversary of General Sikorski's death in an aeroplane crash at North Front in 1943. This we did by seeking out the original memorial plaque that was first unveiled in 1945 and first sited near the eastern end of the runway. The RAF very generously refurbished the plaque and gifted it to the Trust and I wish to record our appreciation to Wing Commander Blount and to RAF Gibraltar. On the 4th July this year this plaque was the centre piece of the ceremony presided over by the Chief Minister at the World War II Propeller Site near Eastern Beach, which was attended by many Polish nationals, including former comrades of General Sikorski.

The major disappointment that we experienced was our inability to complete the restoration of the former Christian Brothers' Chapel at Sacred Heart School. The first phase of this project, which was the repair of the stained glass windows was completed almost a year ago, with almost two-thirds of the cost being generously donated by the Minister and his colleague the Minister of Education.

Before re-instating the restored windows it was considered necessary to carry out some repairs to the interior walls of the Chapel, which the Trust and the Friends are eager to progress and fund. However, before tackling the interior work, the exterior rendering must be renewed. This, being more in the nature of basic building maintenance, I have been hoping that Government will undertake. With the exterior remaining as it is, any inside work would be a waste of money and effort.

I am still awaiting a reply from Government but, being ever hopeful, we are delaying re-installing the windows for a little while longer. Whilst we wait, the priority now is to ensure that the window openings are made weather proof, a task for which the Headmaster has submitted requisitions. Once the winter sets in and these openings remain unprotected, we risk leaving the Chapel in a worse state than when we began this project.

In most other respects, the work of the Trust this year, has been similar to that in former years. The site of this year's Art Competition was Catalan Bay and, although the number of entries fell short of last year's record, it was a notable and enjoyable event. The Annual Visit of the Friends achieved its now to be expected success – thanks entirely to the efforts that David devotes to its planning. As you have just witnessed, the Trust is still in the business of rewarding the efforts of those who keep alive our heritage and I congratulate all those who received Heritage Awards in the ceremony which preceded this Meeting.

The Gibtelecom Heritage Journal Number 10 is expected before the end of the year, under the editorship of Paul Baker. The Trust wishes to record its thanks to all the contributors, to

Gibtelecom for its generous sponsorship and to all our advertisers. As in previous years, the programme of tours and visits organised throughout the year have proved very popular with our members and my thanks are due to Tito Vallejo and to John Murphy who put in so much work to ensure the success of this particular aspect of the Trust's activities.

We continue our cooperation with the Government's Heritage Division and Trustees serve on three government committees. The Trust's presence on the Development and Planning Commission and on the Heritage Action Committee gives us the opportunity of keeping abreast with Government thinking on heritage matters and also voicing concerns on anything pertaining to heritage. One of these concerns relate to the pandemic of illegal building works that is steadily eroding the heritage and historic character of many of our buildings and streets. It is a matter that is taken seriously by Government and because of the expertise possessed by our immediate past Chairman, the Trust has been able to contribute positively to a Working Group set up to tackle this problem. It is a fact, however, that illegal works can appear almost overnight yet take an eternity to remove – making a mockery of our laws and our heritage.

Whilst on the subject of illegal works, some of you may recall that at last year's AGM, I poked gentle fun at the Cable Car Company's attempt to brighten up the Upper Rock by painting the Top Station in a vivid hue of salmon pink. I wish to thank and congratulate the Company for repainting the Station in a shade of green which perfectly matches the vegetation on the Rock and camouflages the presence of the Station when viewed both from the West and even the East.

The Trust has also taken part in the planning for next year's Tercentenary celebrations. It is a great pity that the neither the notion of establishing a walk along the City Walls nor the suggestion of erecting a bust of Admiral Rooke came to fruition. Thus, although there are a great many events planned for next year's celebrations, it is unfortunate that we lack a central commemorative project that will provide a solid permanent marker of the Tercentenary. Still, we have the on-going Government restoration of John Mackintosh Square and the newly commenced restoration of Orange Bastion which may provide acceptable substitutes. I am, however, certain that anybody interested in our heritage would have welcomed a start on the clearing of the King's Bastion as a truly worthwhile and ambitious Tercentenary project. All we can do is hope that it will be accomplished by the year 2082!

It would in fact still be possible to erect a bust of Admiral Rooke in time for August 2004 if only enough enthusiasm can be generated for the project. I recently participated in the 10th International Conference of National Trusts attended by representatives from over forty different countries and which, as one of its conclusions, declared that '**many of the most successful efforts of heritage value have been achieved through close collaboration between the governmental and voluntary movements**'. I therefore commend the idea of a bust of Admiral Rooke to the Minister for consideration, assuring him of our desire to share the cost of the project between Government, the Trust and (I am confident) the Friends.

Admiral Rooke was almost certainly the only person in 1704 with any conviction of the value of Gibraltar to the British Crown and history has proved him right. Yet he was shabbily treated at the end of that conflict and was never given another command. His only memorial is a marble bust in Canterbury Cathedral, and in Gibraltar he is remembered by HMS Rooke

and the remains of a World War II fire control centre called Rooke Battery. It would be most appropriate to commemorate him with due ceremony during the Tercentenary Year.

Very recently the Trust suffered a great disappointment by the departure of Alan Lieb who for so many years has looked after Parson's Lodge, seven days a week, on a virtually voluntary basis – because we could not afford to pay him a salary. The Trust, and indeed Gibraltar, is indebted to Alan for his dedicated service and his departure will leave a site of great heritage value vulnerable once again to vandalism. I shall be writing to Government asking at least for some assistance in providing a caretaker for the site.

The care and maintenance and occasional improvements of this very large site are carried out by other groups of volunteers, namely the groups of service men and cadets who regularly come to Gibraltar as part of their training. The Trust is immensely grateful for their efforts and to recently retired Colonel Eddie Guerrero and will in future confidently rely on his successor Major David Seed.

Many of you who knew Sir Hugo White when he was Governor and know that some months ago he suffered serious injuries following an accident at his home will be pleased to learn that he is now out of hospital and has begun what is bound to be a slow recovery. I have sent the Trust's good wishes to him and to Lady White through Sir Derek Reffell, Chairman of the Friends.

I am happy to report that the Trust's membership continues to increase and is now even nearer to the 600 mark than it was last year. This must represent a significant total since our records refer to many family memberships, and I thank all our members for the constancy of their support. We rely totally on the strength of numbers to back up the advocacy of the Trust when issues arise that appear to threaten our heritage.

I would also at this point wish to thank all the members of the Board of Trustees for all the work and long hours that they put into their voluntary commitment. It would be invidious to select particular individuals, but I must mention Brenda who, although nominally our secretary, really holds the Trust together and functioning. I also wish to mention Paco Galliano, a very long serving member of the Board, who for the past year and longer has suffered from health problems and is currently in hospital. We wish him well and an early recovery. We are also fortunate in now having a very efficient Honorary Treasurer.

3. PROBLEMS?

So do we have any problems? Well, life will certainly be easier when the new Ordinance is on the Statute Book. Not only will it bring the supposed duties of the Trust more into line with its capabilities - currently the law is honoured more in the breach than in the observance – hopefully it will also result in the Trust being more adequately funded by Government.

Over the past ten years the Trust has received a small direct grant from Government. But it is a fixed fairly modest amount and so, in real terms, it has decreased over the years. Over those same ten years, however, the activities of the Trust have increased very significantly, yet the only change in our man-power resources is that our then part-time Secretary is now

employed full-time on what are much more than secretarial duties and there is a need for some clerical assistance.

Currently we raise funds principally from donations and subscriptions and our capital position is secure. We can muddle along for some while longer yet but redefining the Trust's duties and means with more realism, deciding the future of those few sites for which it is responsible and even deciding where its Offices are to be sited are all factors that need consideration – not in isolation but as an integrated assessment of the functions of what is, after all, an organisation instituted by Government.

There is another problem on the horizon which must be tackled before it becomes acute – and that is the need for new and younger members of the Trust to serve on the Board of Trustees. Many of the current members of the Board have given years of valuable service, but time advances and I for one am rapidly approaching my sell-by date. Again, we can muddle along for some while longer yet, but I do recommend all members to seriously consider this question if a public body which accords the defence of our heritage the highest priority is to continue its activities.

4. THE PROPOSED FUNICULAR

On the 26th September a letter was published in the Gibraltar Chronicle expressing concern about the proposal to build a funicular railway going from the Grand Battery up to Rock Gun and enquiring why the Heritage Trust, amongst other public bodies, had not made its views known. I was not in Gibraltar at the time, but even had I been I would have refrained from entering a public debate on this issue, although I agree with the comments of Tony Loddo in the Talk About Town GBC programme that if this proposal progresses further, a public debate is essential.

It is my duty, however, to inform Trust members of the Board of Trustees' thinking on this issue and I consider that this AGM is the most appropriate forum in which to do so. I hope that my comments will reflect and find a resonance with the views of the membership at large. Firstly, however, I would like to make it clear that my comments are in no way binding on those members of the Board who attend the meetings of the DPC. They sit on the Commission by virtue of nomination by the Minister and not to represent the views of the Trust. This much was made clear in a legal opinion that was recently sought in connection with another matter. Therefore, what I have to say in no way compromises their right to express contrary opinions within the confidentiality of the Commission nor the right to exercise their vote. It is nice point, but it is the law.

The proposal to build a funicular railway raises a wide range of issues, from the safety concerns of the residents of the Moorish Castle, the probable imbalance that it will produce in the retail trade of Main Street and to the increased levels of pollution that it will give rise to in the Nature Reserve. It will add to and not reduce the pressures on the environment of the Upper Rock.

But my brief is to comment on the heritage implications of the proposal and I shall begin by pointing out that the building of any structure on the Grand Battery and on the Northern Defences would be inconsistent with the declared long term aim of Government of eventually

clearing the walls of our City of obstructions, and in pursuit of which the Linares building was demolished.

Further, the building of any structures on these Defences is contrary to law and under the current Ordinance, the Trust is legally empowered to prevent it and would, if necessary, do so with vigour. Additionally, the funicular proposal is incompatible with Government plans, already embarked upon, to open up the Northern Defences and give this unique heritage asset easier public access and enhance the historical attractions of Gibraltar to visitors. The construction phase of the railway, in particular, would also have a very adverse, perhaps irreversible, effect on the environment of the Upper Rock and the mooted 230 metre long tunnel would be driven through historically important areas.

Of course, the Trust is not in principle against some method of accessing a viewing platform situated at the Northern summit of the Rock, but it is fundamentally, irrevocably and implacably opposed to the proposed western approach, which would be akin to a cultural Chernobyl for Gibraltar. The proposal would be destructive of both our built and natural heritage, would demean us in the eyes of the world and would sully, debase and violate the very emblem of our Gibraltarian identity.

I do not know who will be the final arbiters in this matter - whether the DPC or the Council of Ministers. But whoever they are, I would ask them ponder the sentiments expressed in the lines:

**'Breathes there the man with soul so dead who never to himself hath said,
this is my own, my native land?'**