**L1 – 001 to L1 – 005, A letter by John Wells to his parents, 30th October 1805, after Trafalgar**

***CONTEXT:***

*John Wells was on board HMS Britannia, towards the mid-to-rear section of Horatio Nelson’s column as it approached the Combined Fleet, so he had a very good view of the Battle of Trafalgar as it unfolded, initially describing the Leeward column opening the action with Vice-Admiral Collingwood on HMS Royal Sovereign. Describes his own role, casualties and the loss of his friend, killed next to him with bar shot. He recounts the fire and explosion on the French ship Achille, the only ship lost in action at the battle. Also describes the storm immediately after the battle and loss of some prize ships captured previously.*

**L1-001**

H M Ship *Britannia* off Cadiz

October 30th 1805 –

Dear Parents,

Before you receive this I am afraid you will be

uneasy at not hearing of my safety during our late glorious contest

with the Combined Fleet of France & Spain which took place on

Monday 21st of October as follows. At Day-light we had the

satisfaction of seeing our Enemy about 8 or 10 miles to Leeward of us

Lord Nelson immediately made the signal to close the enemy and

prepare for Battle and about 12 o’clock we were close up with

them ~~37~~ 43 Sail in number 33 of which were of the Line and we

27. The *Royal Sovereign* [my italics] Vice Admiral Collingwood first opened

the fire on the enemy which was most gallantly maintained

by the whole fleet for upwards of 6 hours successively when

we found ourselves in possession of upwards of 20 sail of the

Line of their ships, one of which was then on fire and shortly

**L1-002**

after blew up with a most terrible explosion yet a grand

but awful sight as some hundreds of souls must have

perished with her. Night coming on we found a difficulty

in securing our Prizes but which we did as well as possible

not knowing in what state our own ships were in or whether

our Noble Commander had outlived the glorious Action when

it was with heartfelt sorrow we shortly after heard he had

expired of his wounds got in the contest. I am very happy to say

that the *Britannia* [my italics] was certainly a very fortunate ship

during the whole time as we had not above 10 killed & 41 wounded

although we were the 4th ship in Action and the last out of

it and I doubt not but it will be found that She does honour

to all who belongs her, as our fire was not directed [at] any particular

ship but as soon as one had struck to us we immediately made

to others and at one time had 5 ships blazing away upon us

but we soon tired them out.

**L1-003**

As I told you before I was stationed at the Signals & Colours in

the time of Action and being on the Quarter Deck I had an

opportunity of seeing the whole of the sport which I must

own rather daunted me before the first or second broadside

but after them I think I never should have been tired of

drubbing the Jokers particularly when my ship mates began to

fall around me which in the room of disheartening an

Englishman only encourages him, as the sight of his Country

man’s blood makes his heart burn for Revenge.

I am very sorry to inform you that my worthy

friend our Signal Lieutenant was knocked down by a double

headed shot close by my side & immediately expired much

lamented by his brother officers & every one in the ship, I had

several very narrow escapes from the Enemy’s shot but thanks

be to the Lord he has still spared me thro’ his great goodness.

**L1-004**

Private Gentlemen came out of Cadiz as passengers on

purpose to see the Action and have the pleasure of towing

us in but they were once more deceived in our Wooden Walls.

Amongst the prisoners in our ship they are 5 or 6 of these

Gentlemen of Pleasure and I think they are in a fair way for

seeing an English prison before they return to Cadiz again.

I am very sorry to inform you that before we

could get our Prizes off the Enemy’s coast it came on so

heavy a Gale of Wind that it was with difficulty we could

keep our own disabled ships off the Lee Shore and I am

greatly afraid that has been the cause of us loosing several of

our prizes but as yet can say nothing respecting the

consequences of the Gale, tho it is now coming on fine

weather again and I hope shall be able to give a better

account of the prizes than we had reason to expect during

the Gale.

**L1-005**

We do not yet know what has become of the

Remainder of the Enemy’s Fleet who took to there [sic] heels as

soon as they saw we had got so many of their ships in our

possession and I am sorry to say we could not follow them our

own fleet being so much disabled.

I hope it will not be long before our ship

returns to England that I may have the pleasure of hearing

from you which I have never done since we left the Channel

& in hopes that this gallant Action will be the means

of restoring Peace to England and that we shall soon meet

together again. I remain in good health hoping this will

find you all in the same state and relations

& friends to whom give my kind love & accept the same

yourselves from your truly affectionate & loving Son

John Wells

You must excuse this scribble as really I

was so anxious to let you hear from me

that I had not time to take much pains

in fact we are yet in a very confused & fatigued state.