



PRESS NOTICE

12 MAY 2004

DEAN OAK TIMBER TO RESTORE HMS VICTORY

Oak timber from the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire has been felled to help restore Nelson's flag ship HMS Victory. The Commanding Officer from HMS Victory will be in the Forest of Dean on Wednesday 19 May to witness the start of the journey of the 200 year old trees. At 11am the timber will be hoisted onto a lorry for the first stage of the journey to Britains most famous warship.

Historically, Dean timber destined for naval fighting vessels was marked using a distinctive hammer. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander Frank Nowosielski will swing one of those original hammers to stamp this very special naval timber before it leaves the Forest. The local Dean Heritage Centre has loaned the hammer for the occasion.

The old oak trees have a strong link with Admiral Lord Nelson. He visited the Dean area in 1802 and later recommended to Parliament the re-planting of oak trees in the Forest in order to provide sufficient timber for building wooden warships for the future of the Royal Navy. Nelson was not to know that in less than a hundred years wood and sail would be superseded by steel and steam.

MORE.....

He died in the famous Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805, but his legacy to the Dean lives on.

By 1808 an Act of Parliament had been passed following on from the report and the resulting re-planting of the Forest was going great guns. Today the Dean has the largest area of old oak trees in Britain. The restoration oaks date back to that re-planting.

Two were carefully selected and they have now been felled by local contractor, Terry Wilce, who has had many years experience of felling hardwood timber in the Forest of Dean.

For the specialist work on HMS Victory long lengths of large oak are needed and the Dean trees meet those requirements. Like all Forestry Commission timber in the UK, this oak comes from a sustainably managed woodland and can bear the FSC logo.

The shipwrights have already ordered the tree to be cut into the correct lengths to replace certain timbers. The shaping will take place at Wests Sawmill, before finally reaching Portsmouth Dockyard and The Victory.

The Victory's keel was laid down in 1759 and was eventually launched in 1765. She was constructed from approximately 6000 trees, 90% of which was oak. That amounts to 100 acres (40 hectares) of woodland to build a single First Rate warship.

No wonder Nelson was concerned when his report, published in 1803, claimed that only 3500 loads of ships timbers were available in the Dean.

MORE.....

As a result of the report the timber growing practices in the Forest were improved and the great re-planting began. The resulting trees are known locally as the Napoleonic oaks because they were planted following the wars between England and France.

It is hoped that the restoration will be almost complete by the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar in 2005. Certainly elements of the Dean oak timber will be in place for the celebrations.

The aim of the continuing restoration of HMS Victory is to bring the old war ship back to its 1805 design and condition when she was Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar. Her excellent sailing qualities as a First Rate Ship of the Line made her the popular choice by many Admirals as their flagship and her active career spanned 34 years.

The Royal Navy and the Society for Nautical Research who manage 'The Save the Victory Fund' have been working together on the restoration programme and the Forestry Commission are delighted to be able to assist in this vital work.

"During the 18th Century much of the naval timber was shipped out from the Dean along the Severn estuary and around the coast as far as dockyards in Dartford. This timber will be transported in a modern way but it comes from the same source," said Rob Guest Deputy Surveyor.

"It is particularly rewarding to be able to provide timber from one of the former Royal Forests from which oak timber was traditionally supplied to the naval dockyards."

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

- 1 You are invited to send a representative to the photo opportunity when the naval timber is marked and lifted onto the lorry for the first stage of its journey to HMS VICTORY:

11am Wednesday 19 May

Boys Grave (near Speech House)

Forest of Dean

- 2 Directions – from the B4226 Coleford to Cinderford road, turn south beside the Speech House hotel. Boys Grave is on the right hand side approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ along this minor road.

- 3 For further information please contact:

Rob Guest Deputy Surveyor 01594 833057

- 4 Commanding Officer Nowosielski from HMS Victory and Rob Guest, Forestry Commission will be available for interview following the timber lift.

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