

The playing cards celebrating

Maritime Heroes

By Rachel Sloane

A family history of seafaring, a fascination with maritime heroes and a hobby of collecting have all combined to lead one well-known speaker to produce a set of pictorial playing cards.

Maritime speaker Cathy Shelbourne holding her pack of cards at Lowestoft with the statue of Triton, son of the sea god Neptune.

Photo: Freya Shelbourne

Cathy Shelbourne laughed as she admitted she didn't actually play card games much but, wanting to share the stories she had extensively researched around the world, it seemed to her the natural progression to devise a set of cards celebrating maritime heroes. Heroes like Horatio Nelson from Burnham Thorpe, Norfolk, Thomas Cavendish from Trimley, Suffolk, Bartholomew Gosnold, from Grundisburgh, Suffolk, and George Vancouver, from Kings Lynn, Norfolk.

"Everyone publishes books, and I had a desire to be different! Also, I collect unusual things, including playing cards. It is a niche hobby but there are organisations such as the English Playing Card Society and websites where you can deal in card collecting," Cathy explained. "I have about 150 packs of cards in my collection. I buy two packs at a time and keep one in mint condition, still in its cellophane packaging, should I eventually wish to sell it."

The cards are all individually illustrated, and Cathy's collection includes advertising cards from Qantas, Guinness and Channel Four. With beautiful artwork, other sets portray countries, wildlife, castles or flowers. There was not a set for maritime heroes, however, and Cathy saw an opportunity.

Born in Norfolk, now living in Suffolk, Cathy is a keen sailor herself, and the sea is in her blood as her mother was a ship's purser in the 1950s, and her father took part in Olympic sailing trials off Lowestoft. Having studied history at university, it was a chance comment from a yachtsman in Montenegro that initially sparked Cathy's interest in maritime heroes.

"In 2013 I was chatting to this chap in Montenegro who said, 'Did you know it's the 200th anniversary of Sir William Hoste, a protégé of Nelson, who rescued the beleaguered city of Cattaro (now Kotor) and Ragusa (now Dubrovnik)...and no-one knows anything about it?' It was a significant moment in Montenegrin history, and even they didn't realise it."

Fascinated by this neglected son of Norfolk, Cathy set about researching Hoste, and eventually wrote an article about him for *Suffolk Norfolk Life*.

As Cathy's interest in maritime heroes grew, she devised a series of talks about both famous, and less well-known, maritime heroes which she gives on cruise ships, to sailing clubs and to groups such as Probus and the WI.

"There is always a lot of interest on ships, and people come up and tell me



ABOVE: Vintuurn
LEFT: Zimley St Martin. Photo: Freya Shelbourne
BELOW: Nelson, Norwich Cathedral



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about the maritime heroes in their own families! One woman said her many-greats-grandmother was Belle Moutray, who Nelson eloped with. I didn't actually know Nelson did elope with Belle Moutray! People's stories give so much colour to the generally accepted national maritime history."

To illustrate her talks, Cathy began seeking out the monuments to her maritime heroes, to photograph.

"As I travel around the world on cruise ships, I take photos of everything and I realised there are a colossal number of monuments. Not just the

conventional statue, but columns, such as the one to Nelson in Gt Yarmouth (that was built decades before the one in Trafalgar Square), and also pub signs, of which there are many to Lord Nelson!

"I found that North Norfolk was, curiously, a breeding ground for admirals. Then I looked at Suffolk, and found that not only did Nelson have connections there and they also had plenty of maritime heroes too but, further back, there were a lots of explorers, like Cavendish and Eldred, who sailed around the world. I found that many had literary influence with

writers such as Defoe and Swift. If you go to a port like Lowestoft, the sailors who were coming in and out had amazing stories to tell of shipwrecks and deserted islands. In King's Lynn there's a church and, on the floor, you can see a grave-plate to Robinson Crusoe! So, there was a local family called Cruso, and did Defoe name his hero after them, or was it the other way around? Who knows?"

Having a set of talks about a band of heroes is very different to finding 52 characters (plus two jokers) to feature on a set of playing cards.

"There are hundreds of heroes, and this is my personal choice. They are either a hero, or I've discovered something a bit different about them that I like. It says on the presentation box that they are an eclectic mix!"

The fascinating stories alluded to on each playing card are supported by a leaflet that comes with each pack, and there is a time-chart for the age of sail (roughly 1400s to mid-1800s), to show where each hero slots in.

The designer of the cards, commissioned by Cathy, is the graphic designer and artist, Andrew Oliver.

"The photos are mine that I have taken all around the world," Cathy explained. "Andrew came up with these amazing dynamic and lively designs using backdrops he'd collected over the years. Being passionate about pirates he started with those. They are not so much my interest, as some of them weren't real, so very hard to find a monument to, and awful things happened to them... so we have William Kidd hanging from a gibbet!" she laughed. "Andrew has done a fantastic job with his designs for all the cards. I love them!"

Choosing which monument would be on each card was another huge task. The hearts are all heroes, the clubs are navigators and explorers, the pirates are



The Monumental Maritime Heroes cards

spades and the ships are diamonds.

"Nelson is the Ace of Hearts (as ace is high) and is also on the back of every single card. The choice for the two jokers was rather interesting as I was in Lowestoft to take photos of Christopher Columbus's ships, which are portrayed in a mosaic on the Columbus building and, wandering on the seafront, saw these two incredible statues of Triton, the sea god, son of Neptune. They were commissioned by Samuel Morton Peto, who designed Lowestoft seafront.

I knew Triton was perfect for one of the jokers. The other joker is Britannia, who rules the seas and is on the top of the Norfolk Naval Pillar, in Gt Yarmouth."

What next for Cathy and her maritime heroes?

"Sadly, I found there were very few maritime heroines although I've included a few pirates, so I want to bring out a second pack of playing cards - of Monumental Women! The whole issue of placing people on monuments is quite controversial, but when studying history, you always have to be aware that you are looking at something with a modern eye and, in a hundred years' time, ideas will have changed."

Cathy is now starting the research, finding monuments to women and their achievements and taking the photographs she will need for her next set of playing cards.

■ The Monumental Maritime Heroes cards are available from Cathy Shelbourne, priced £10 plus £3pp from www.seashellcommunications.co.uk



ABOVE: Lowestoft Columbus Building. RIGHT: Norfolk Naval Pillar, Great Yarmouth

