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I've Said It Before...

Unpublished Letters to the Daily Mail

Written by Andy Simpson

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I've Said It Before...

UNPUBLISHED LETTERS TO THE
Daily Mail

Compiled and edited by
ANDY SIMPSON

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Introduction

To those who aren't in the know, writing a letter to the *Daily Mail* may seem like turning into 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells', but the breadth of this collection shows just how eclectic and varied the *Daily Mail* readership is.

From politics and culture, to sport, media and history, our readers have an opinion on everything; and by letter, fax or email they endeavour to be heard. Deep philosophical musings, barbed critiques and humorous asides, which all make up the fabric of the *Daily Mail*'s Readers' Letters page, come from all ends of the country – even Tunbridge Wells, Llandrindod Wells, Pannanich Wells and Struell Wells.

Although the *Daily Mail* does dedicate more space to Readers' Letters than any other national newspaper, we can't publish all the marvellous letters we receive and there are many would-be contributors who don't quite make it into the paper. We have produced here, for your education and entertainment, a dedicated selection of their intelligence, feeling, experience, insight and wit, as a token of our appreciation for the many letters received each week.

Andy Simpson, Readers' Letters editor

All at sea

The navy lark

What sort of navy have we got these days? I had a good laugh at HMS *Manchester*, in the Caribbean, failing to sink what appeared to be an unmanned, motionless, fibreglass motor boat at reasonably short range, on a calm sea, using a four-and-a-half-inch gun and heavy machine gun, etc.

Next, they put a matelot armed with an axe and handsaw on board, who attacked the bottom of the boat – but still it wouldn't sink. So they tried pouring petrol and igniting it. And all this was on 21 October – enough to make Lord Nelson (God rest him) turn in his tomb.

How will they manage when a suicide boat, laden with explosives, approaches at full speed?

Mr N. S. Nevard, Orpington, Kent

To the enormous relief of the Admiralty, my mates and I have saved the Royal Navy from the embarrassment of having two shiny new multibillion pound aircraft carriers but no aircraft. In true Dunkirk spirit, every member of our local microlight aircraft club has volunteered to fly his 'trike' off the navy's mighty 60,000 ton carriers – and it's more than likely that the

guys from Little Snodingham's club will join us, making nine planes in all.

What a stirring sight and sound that will be – our little two-stroke engines buzzing like a swarm of angry lawnmowers as the colourful wire and fabric contraptions leap from the heaving deck of the *Queen Elizabeth* and soar skywards to strike fear into the hearts of Britain's enemies. If the sheer spectacle of these avenging butterflies does not terrify any pestilential terrorists, we might paint threatening slogans under our wings or tow banners saying, 'Go Away!' or 'Stop that immediately!'

If we meet an especially recalcitrant enemy, our brave pilots will buzz them (at their maximum speed of forty-five miles per hour), shake their fists and glare fiercely. Naturally, the lethal weaponry carried by these 'trikes' is a state secret but if I mention the code words 'custard pies' and 'rotten eggs' you'll get some idea of the immense embarrassment these little planes can cause.

So, just as the 'little ships' rescued the British army at Dunkirk, these 'little planes' will save the Royal Navy from becoming an international laughing stock.

David H. Lewis, Caerphilly, South Wales

If I were the President of Argentina, I'd make an offer our cash-strapped government couldn't refuse for the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* and its Harriers, along with a few low-mileage frigates and destroyers, and park them off the Falklands Islands.

John Wright, Duston, Northamptonshire

Having lived through the whole Cold War, I never thought that I would raise three cheers for the Russians – for the robust way in which they tackled the Somali pirates. Lessons to be relearned?

John Dixon, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire

Admiral Horatio Nelson was dead before the Battle of Trafalgar was won. It was his second in command, Vice Admiral Lord Cuthbert Collingwood who was the master of naval gunnery – with three broadsides every three and a half minutes, which was never equalled.

Collingwood took command and successfully annihilated the Spanish and beat the part of the French fleet that was at Trafalgar. Between 1805 and 1810, Collingwood defeated the remainder of the French navy before he died on his way home.

England desperately needed a hero in 1805 and Nelson-mania took hold after the pamphleteers – the spin-doctors of their day – took control.

The long chase across the Atlantic that preceded Trafalgar was a ruse by Napoleon. He ordered the French admiral Villeneuve to take the French fleet to the West Indies knowing that a large part of the blockade would follow. The weather, however, prevented Villeneuve from returning in time for the planned invasion of England and Napoleon went for Austria instead. Villeneuve knew he was to be replaced and decided to set out from Cadiz before it happened. France and Spain were now fighting the Royal Navy at Trafalgar and the rest is history, as they say.

As far as Nelson was concerned, he wasn't very good at taking orders (as the battles of Calvi, Santa Cruz and

Copenhagen bear witness). Was he a hero? We all know how heroes are better reported on once they're dead.

Edmund Futers, Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire

HMS *Victory* in Portsmouth Dockyard is still a commissioned warship. If the Royal Navy has to share ships with the French, will the French sailors occupy the fore or aft of this vessel?

E. Barker, Southampton, Hampshire

It's comforting to learn that, should I ever be lost at sea, I might be rescued by none other than Prince William in his See King helicopter.

Frank Skorrow, Barnsley, South Yorkshire

Prince William is on record as saying that he would fight for his country – but would he fight for the Americans?

Gareth Boote, Leigh, Lancashire

Life on the ocean wave

After making a few calculations, we've decided never to go into a care home – we're going on a cruise instead.

The average cost of a care home is about £69 a day. A cruise-liner berth, over a long period, with senior citizens' reductions, works out at about £47 a day, leaving us with roughly £22 a day, which can be spent on drinks and tips.

Drinks are only about £8 a day. You can have up to ten free

lunches a day if you want to stay and gorge in the restaurant or you can use room service and have lunch in bed every day. Cruise ships have swimming pools, a gymnasium, a laundry service and there's entertainment every evening.

The cabin bathroom is provided with free dentifrice, razors, soap and shampoo, and clean sheets and towels appear daily without you having to ask. The crew will treat you as a client, not a number. If you tip them about £5 a day, they will look after you very well.

Your phone breaks down? A lamp blows? Your mattress needs changing? No problem: there will always be someone to put it right and to apologise for the inconvenience.

If you fall and hurt yourself, instead of having to rely on the NHS, you'll be treated on board and probably get a better cabin for the rest of your life. And if you die on board, you can be buried at sea at no additional cost.

You'll meet new people about every seven or ten days. Meanwhile, you get to visit South America, Panama, Tahiti, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, etc.

So when I've got my pension, don't go looking for me in a care home.

T. H. Southgate, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire

It's a mistake to think that there are no recorded incidents of pirates attempting to board a cruise ship. On Saturday, 25 April 2010 at 23.30, MSC *Melody* came under attack from Somali pirates about 150 miles north of the Seychelles.

The pirates made a strong, prolonged attempt to board the vessel from the starboard aft side, using lightweight ladders from a small boat. The next morning, our captain claimed that

the crew had repulsed the pirates but in fact they were driven off by passengers who, disturbed during a balmy Indian Ocean evening on the aft deck, threw tables and sun loungers at them.

The pirates weren't impressed and steered away at high speed, firing AK-47s at the ship. The pirate vessel rounded the ship's stern and raked it from stern to stem on the port side, firing numerous rounds that smashed windows and punched holes through the ship's steel-plated side.

My wife and I were sitting in the piano bar after ordering fresh drinks when the bullets started to whizz through the bar. We were ordered back to our cabin before we could finish our drinks, which we'd already signed for. I'm still annoyed that the Captain didn't replace my malt whisky the next day.

Anthony Coleman, Canvey Island, Essex

Rail and road

On the right track?

The professor who was fined £155 for leaving a train early had no excuse and I propose that similar punitive fines should be made mandatory in all circumstances, including: leaving a theatre or cinema before the end of the performance; leaving a sports ground before the end of the match; removing a vehicle from a car park before the ticket has expired; vacating a hotel room before check-out time; leaving a stately home before viewing all of the rooms; leaving a theme park before completing all of the rides; leaving a zoo before seeing all of the animals; returning a rowing boat within the hour; and vacating a deckchair prematurely.

The professor is fortunate in having made at least part of his journey. He would presumably have received a considerably higher fine had he failed to use his ticket at all.

David Birnie, St Ives, Cambridgeshire

I sympathise with the disabled lady who has to travel twenty extra miles by train just to be able to cross the twenty yards to the opposite platform. Some years ago, I was travelling from London to Staplehurst, Kent, by train and knew I would have

to travel on to Ashford to cross the line by lift and then back to Staplehurst as my daughter was in a disabled travelling buggy.

After a long day at a London hospital, however, I couldn't face the thought of an extra hour's travel and decided to attempt to drag the buggy up the stairs myself.

On reaching the stairs, I realised my mistake: I wasn't physically strong enough to do it. As I stood and thought about my dilemma, the train driver left his cab, picked up both buggy and child and climbed the stairs and crossed the bridge. I never wrote a letter of thanks to the train company as the driver might have been in serious trouble but I remain very grateful.

Mrs Margaret Boutell, Northiam, East Sussex

I watched Jeremy Clarkson take his ride on the steam engine *Tornado* from London to Edinburgh. I imagine it must have been a very unusual trip for him and very dirty compared with the cars he's used to. There were five men on the footplate, including three firemen, so Jeremy had a few rests.

There's nothing to compare with those big steam engines and no comparison anywhere else to the smell of steam and oil. I lived in Crewe, Cheshire, where engines were designed and built, and worked from 1947, firing all types of steam engines. I fired them from Crewe to London, Glasgow and many other places. In those days, there were just two of us on the footplate – the driver and the fireman – and on those trips to Glasgow and on to Perth, I shovelled ten tons of coal.

Nobody these days knows what ten tons means – only a fireman knows, and he alone notices if it's good coal or not, the difference making a journey easier, or terrible.

The only food we had on those trips was sandwiches, covered

from the coal dust flying around in the cab. And when it was time to eat, there was nowhere to wash our hands. There were no toilets either – don't ask.

The *Tornado* is new and was very clean compared with the filthy engines I knew, but I was used to it and loved it all. My father worked there for forty-nine years. In 1936 he fired the Royal Train from Crewe to Carlisle and was given ten shillings (fifty pence) for shovelling all the way.

Geoff Hillyard, Sandbach, Cheshire

The ninth 'most charismatic' railway line in the country was listed as the Blackpool to Preston and Colne line. This should read Blackpool to Preston and Leeds (or more accurately between Burnley and Halifax), taking in the Copy Pit line through the South Pennines and running from Burnley through to Hebden Bridge, with its original station signs and flower decorations.

Burnley has enough bad press. This section of the line runs through the Calder Valley, once home to a rich industrial heritage, nestled deep within the South Pennines. This is still evident, with former quaint textile communities juxtaposed against the backdrop of the famous and spectacular Cliviger Gorge. I live in Burnley, just a few metres from the line and regularly use it to commute to work in West Yorkshire. The wonderful South Pennines is rich in wildlife and industrial heritage.

Dr Martyn Walker, Burnley, Lancashire

A couple of years ago, I took my long-suffering wife on a railway tour of Scotland, the itinerary of which was as follows:

Glasgow to Fort William, passing alongside the Clyde, turning north via Gairloch and then overlooking Loch Lomond;

Fort William to Mallaig and over the Glenfinnan Viaduct now made famous by the Harry Potter film;

A short ferry journey to Skye and a bus ride to Kyle of Lochalsh, and then back on the train to Inverness – surely the most picturesque railway journey in the country;

Inverness to Edinburgh, through Blair Atholl, Kingussie, Aviemore, and eventually over the magnificent Forth Bridge – in close second place for the picturesque railway journey.

We had probably travelled along four of the top half-dozen best routes in the country.

Chris Pate, Worcester

The other day my seventeen-year-old son booked and undertook a 170-mile train journey through France. Unfortunately, due to a train breakdown, a connection was missed, which meant he had a two-hour wait at the station. Nothing unusual in this, except while the ticket cost only €24, because the connection was missed a three-course restaurant meal was provided by the French rail authorities to all affected passengers.

Do British railway operators have similar contingency plans?

Mike Sinstadt, France

Risking the road

Tony Blair used to like to appoint a 'tsar' to overcome any problem. To tackle road congestion, should we have a 'Tsar of all the Rush Hours'?

Eveleigh Moore Dutton, Malpas, Cheshire