Mark’s closing speech and toast, Pickle Night 2019

*(You are welcome to adapt this for your own event!)*

First of all, can I say a big thank you all for coming tonight, I hope you are all having an enjoyable evening.

Before I go on could I ask you all to show your appreciation for those who have delivered despatches and more importantly to Pam for her drive and enthusiasm for Pickle Night and her wonderful efforts in the Galley?

This is the 214th Anniversary of the Battle at Trafalgar. Nelson and his part in the Battle is well documented, as is our Captain’s journey, on board HMS Pickle to deliver the despatches to the Admiralty. What is often overlooked and understated is the efforts of both sides to simply stay alive after the Battle, because for 3 days and nights after that bloody battle both victors and the defeated combined together with the common aim of surviving possibly the worst storm of the 19th Century to hit the area.

The great storm lasted for over a week and the aftermath of the hurricane presented a far bleaker picture of tragedy and devastation than the battle had done.  Only one ship, the French *Achille*, had been destroyed during the battle.  In the week that followed, 14 of the prizes taken by the British were destroyed.  The loss of life was horrendous, far more than during the battle.  Even as long as 10 days after the battle, bodies and wreckage were still being washed ashore at Cadiz and the hospitals were soon full of British, French and Spanish wounded. Only four of the prizes taken remained in possession of the British but in the end, Nelson almost got his wish of 20 enemy ships destroyed or taken.

It is testament to the discipline of the British seamen who overrode their exhaustion, getting to work clearing the decks, throwing bodies overboard and making temporary masts and rigging to replace those lost in battle. This was to the amazement of French officers who were used to their seamen frequently being 'drunk or disabled' after a battle.

But what did these men feel when the adrenaline was gone and fight to survive was won? I am sure that they will have reflected on their good fortune to have survived but also lament for the loss of those who they were close to.

So, with this in mind I would like to ask you to raise your glasses one final time.

Ladies and Gentlemen – Absent friends