

CHAPTER 11

London's Plaza Mayor

Es de advertir que la marina subsistente a Inglaterra, no es otra que la antigua española.

One is to observe that the navy that England sustains is none other than the old Spanish one.

Joaquin Aguirre, early nineteenth century

IT WAS AT THE 'HEART OF EMPIRE'. It has been the place to celebrate everything from international football victories and the New Year to the ending of world wars. It is the scene of mass meetings and demonstrations. Yet this most British of places has an Andalusian name, that of a cape that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean some thirty miles south-east of Cadiz. Completed in 1843, Trafalgar Square, with its fountains and four huge bronze lions, is dominated by a 185-foot-high column on the top of which stands the 18-foot statue of Admiral Lord Nelson. We tend to think of the Battle of Trafalgar as a great British naval victory over just the French, but the fleet that was so decisively defeated on that autumn day in 1805 was in fact Franco-Spanish.

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THE GREAT SPANISH SHIPBUILDER Jorge Juan y Santacilla took advantage of a rare period of peace to visit England in 1749 to research naval design and defences. He persuaded some English shipbuilders to return to Spain with him at the end of his visit. Among them was Matthew Mullan who later designed the largest warship to be built anywhere in the world in the eighteenth century. Launched from the Spanish colonial dockyard in Havana, Cuba on 3 March 1769, the enormous four-thousand-ton *Santisima Trinidad*, held together by iron bolts six feet long, was built to carry eleven hundred men and 136 guns.

Twenty-eight years later she faced the British at the Battle of Cape St Vincent. After the battle, during which she was almost totally dismantled, Vice Admiral Mazarredo recommended beaching her at Cadiz as a stationary gun platform. He was ignored and she was overhauled.