

**THE MID-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY NAVY
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF CAPTAIN THOMAS BURNETT AND HIS PEERS**

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to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the concerns of mid-eighteenth century naval captains through the careers of Captain Thomas Burnett and the cohort of thirty five officers who were posted captain in 1757 soon after the start of the Seven Years' War. A subsidiary cohort, that of the 129 lieutenants who were, like Burnett, first commissioned in 1744 is used as a control against which to measure the statistical worth of the smaller cohort. Examination of the day to day concerns of the captains has been made possible through the rich and varied resource of their letters to the Admiralty, which have hitherto been little used as a source by historians. Despite the formality of these letters not merely the concerns but also the personalities and characters of the writers are vividly conveyed.

After tracing the career of Thomas Burnett this thesis examines the 1757 cohort and its progression to the rank of master and commander. At this point the correspondence with the Admiralty begins. The influences, 'interest' and formative experiences behind their appointments are considered. The duties of the mid-eighteenth century captain are outlined, as their relationship with the Admiralty is analysed and the extent to which they were kept under strict Admiralty control by precedent and financial scrutiny is demonstrated. All aspects of manning are shown to dominate the daily concerns of captains. The extent to which 'interest' or chance gave them the opportunity to display their professional expertise and increase their standing within the active naval corps is weighed. Tracking this cohort beyond the war into the years of peace and subsequent wars has revealed the extent to which the timing of being made post captain was crucial and that 'interest' was more significant than merit in accelerating and promoting active careers.

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Abbreviations

NMM = National Maritime Museum

SNR = Society for Nautical Research

ODNB = Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. In this study throughout the edition used has been that available online at www.oxforddnb.com

Bibliography

Introduction

This thesis is the result of a voyage of discovery which began ten years ago. A family tree prepared for a Victorian ancestor of the author's husband contained a tantalising entry: 'Captain Thomas Burnett, later Admiral'. Hours of work at the National Archive at Kew followed in an attempt to find out about the man to whom this referred. The oldest, fragmented copy of Steel's Navy List of 1782 contained the entry, at the bottom of a page: 'Captain Thomas Burnett *Prudent* North America.' Gradually the Public Record Office's filing system became more familiar as the outlines of Burnett's career were filled in. By the time a rough chronology had been established it was obvious that there were many empty spaces and blanks which the resources of the Archives did not seem able to fill. It was also obvious that knowing about one man in isolation was not enough. To understand the man and his career, a course of reading began, centred on Burnett's period in the navy. The bibliography from N.A.M. Rodger's *Wooden World* was the initial guide, and as books accumulated on the author's shelves and other bibliographies were studied the net spread more widely.¹ Almost every book listed in the bibliography can now be referred to at will instead of during a visit to the Caird Library at the National Maritime Museum. Statements which were once accepted can now be challenged.²

Eventually retirement offered time for serious work. Armed with a master's degree in maritime history, computer skills, a digital camera and a lap top computer, the author was ready to begin this study. Did it require the gravity and intellectual rigour of a thesis? There was no question of it. This was not intended to be a merely a pastime, but a serious study with an outcome which would illuminate Thomas Burnett and the world in which he lived and worked.

The decision had to be made to identify the men against whom Burnett's life would be compared. There were two possible cohorts: firstly the 129 men who were first commissioned in 1744; secondly the thirty five men who were posted in 1757. If the 1744 cohort had been chosen a very different thesis would have resulted. Lieutenants' letters were

¹ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World* (Fontana 1986).

² Like the claim that half the fleet was useless as it had been built too quickly of unseasoned wood, and that the bottoms would drop out as had happened to the *Royal George*. Christopher Lloyd, *The Nation and the Navy* (London Cresset 1954) 118

culled from the Archive in a previous century, so that no useful study would be possible until the men achieved command. Little or no evidence therefore survives for 94 men, 73 per cent of the cohort. Thirty five men from this cohort were eventually made post, but across a range of years, so that they did not share the experience of the outbreak of war at the start of their careers. It seemed that no useful purpose would be gained from studying this group of men in detail, although looking at their careers in broad outline would give a useful control against which a different cohort could be measured. This group is discussed in Chapter 2, and summarised in Appendix 1.

Consequently, the decision was taken to concentrate on the thirty five men who achieved post rank in 1757, during the expansion of the navy for the Seven Years' War. Their names and dates of promotion are summarised in Appendix 2. The experiences of these men could be compared directly, and a measure of success arrived at. If Thomas Burnett had been brought to the Admiralty's attention in 1755 when only sixteen men were posted this thesis would not have benefited from the breadth and depth of the 1757 cohort. Was thirty five a reasonable number on which to base a study? It is surprisingly difficult to count the number of active captains in the navy, but counting the ships is a start. The establishment lists in ADM 8 give the numbers of ships on different stations, but some of those ships were in fact not in commission and did not have active captains. Despite this caveat, the number of sloops taken from ADM 8 for the years 1756 and 1757 was averaged to give a figure of 45. This is also the figure given by Jan Glete in his magisterial study, where the total number of sloops for 1755 and 1760 are 34 and 57, averaging 45 between those years.³ Thirty three of Burnett's peers were in these sloops at the outset of their careers, giving a proportion of 73 per cent (33/45), statistically significant. Taking Glete's figures for the total number of vessels from 1st rates to sloops in 1755 and 1760 as 225 and 307, Burnett's peers form 15 per cent or 11 per cent of these totals, giving an average of 13 per cent, also statistically significant.⁴

³ Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America 1500-1860* 2 Vols. (Almquist & Wiksell International 1993) 267-9. As sloops spent very little time in dock, and were never taken out of commission into 'ordinary', this figure was likely to be that of real vessels, not part of the 'phantom navy'.

⁴ Glete, *Navies and Nations* 268.

	1755	1760	Average i.e. 1757	Per cent commanded by Burnett's peers
Sloops	34	57	45	77
Total vessels	225	307	266	13

Table 1: Burnett's peers as a significant proportion of active captains

The initial research into Burnett was through his letters. They were few and far between, but handling the volumes showed that other men generated more letters. There was a chance therefore that the gaps and silences in his correspondence would be filled in by looking at those of Burnett's peers who were his exact contemporaries and, like him, owed their careers to the outbreak of the Seven Years' War.

Was this worth doing? The reading done in anticipation of this study had shown that apart from *The Wooden World* there was little in print about captains during the Seven Years' War. The contemporary historian John Charnock gave the names and a short biography of all post captains, having derived his information from the Admiralty itself.⁵ Robert Beatson's contemporary history mentioned some of them, but derived his information through the filter of official sources such as the *London Gazette*.⁶ Historians have not written about 'the view from the quarterdeck', the world as the captains saw it, choosing instead exemplary admirals as subjects.

Secondary sources for the eighteenth century centred on Daniel Baugh's work on naval administration, covering the Walpole era, which had followed John Ehrman's work on the previous century.⁷ The end of the eighteenth century was well served by historians eager to take advantage of the public interest in Nelson. Despite John Brewer's account of the way in which finance made possible the administration of war, the mid-eighteenth century seemed to

⁵ John Charnock, *Biographia Navalis: or Impartial Memoirs of the Lives and Characters of Officers of the Navy of Great Britain from the Year 1660 to the Present Time* VI Vols. (R. Faulder 1798, facsimile repr. N&M Press 2002).

⁶ He also wrote to the Admiralty for information. His letters were catalogued in ADM 1/5118/21 but have since disappeared. Robert Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain from 1727 to 1783* 6 Vols. (London 1804).

⁷ John Ehrman, *The Navy in the War of William III 1689-1697* (Cambridge 1953); Daniel Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Time of Walpole* (Princeton 1965).

be a period about which not enough had been written.⁸ Moreover, none of the writers seemed interested in the concerns of the captains. Technical understanding of the ships was available in minute detail, thanks to David Lyon, Rif Winfield, Brian Lavery and contemporary writers ranging from William Falconer to David Steel.⁹

So it seemed that this line of research would profit the academic world as well, if the captains' letters covered a sufficiently broad range of subjects. Only reading them would make that clear, so the study was embarked upon. There were no pre-conceptions, no hypothesis to be proved by this study. What came out of the letters was going to shape the results.

Days of photographing letters at The National Archive and downloading the images to the laptop were followed by weeks at home transcribing the letters and their 'turn-backs'. Each image was identified by its writer, the year and the image number. Individual letters could therefore be returned to instantly if a gap, which had been left in transcription through a difficulty in deciphering handwriting, could be filled in once familiarity gave greater facility. As more and more letters were transcribed common themes became clear, and a system of 'keywords' established on the computer so that the content of individual letters could instantly, at a later date, be gathered together and studied as a group. These 'keywords' were listed separately, and over the months it became clear that they were reading like the index of a book which had not yet been written.

Eventually the letters from captains and those who progressed to the rank of Commodore and Admiral had all been read and transcribed. At an early stage the decision had been taken that although the Admiralty Out letters would be read they would not be recorded in the same way as their language was so stylised, and the import of their replies had already been conveyed through the 'turn backs' on the captains' letters. There were still silences. For some men, for

⁸ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Harvard University Press 1990).

⁹ David Lyon, *The Sailing Navy List: All the Ships of the Royal Navy Built, Purchased and Captured 1688-1860* (Conway 1993); Rif Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail 1714-1792: Design, Construction, Careers and Fates* (Seaforth 2007); Brian Lavery, *The Ship of the Line Vol. 1 The Development of the Battlefleet 1650-1850* (Conway 1983); Brian Lavery, *The Arming and Fitting of English Ships of War 1600-1815* (Conway 1987). David Steel, *Naval Architecture* (London 1777 Sim Comfort Associates repr. 1977) ; William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (David and Charles Reprints 1970); William Hutchinson, *A Treatise on Practical Seamanship 1777* (Scholar Maritime Library reprint 1979); Darcy Lever, *The Young Sea Officer's Sheet Anchor: or a Key to the leading of Rigging and to practical Seamanship* (London 1819 repr. Dover 1998).

some years, half pay took them out of view. For other men, a return from Gibraltar or New York would explain an absence of months or years. Reading the letters of the Commander-in-Chief in these stations sometimes gave details, but more often did not. It seemed that only a study of the logs of each ship would reveal the exact location and actions of individual captains. A decision was taken that to read all the logs would be outside the scope of this study: enough had emerged from their letters to reveal the characters of the individuals, and some silences would be accepted with regret.

Over a period of months the questions summarised below were finalised. It was still not clear what the final shape of the thesis was to be, or the titles and the content of the chapters. The title of the thesis itself required some thought: the concerns of the captains were the core of the work, but did they serve in the ‘Navy’, the ‘English Navy’ or the ‘British Navy’? The final decision was that the Scots and Irish amongst them would be happiest with the simple ‘Navy’. The captains themselves always referred to it as ‘the Service’.

Once the list of ‘key words’ was studied, the scope of the material became evident. An electronic cut-and-paste exercise through the individual captains’ letter files brought all interesting material together to be ‘bundled’ into files. Only then was there confirmation that the themes provided valuable material. The final outcome is outlined below.

1 The questions to be answered in this thesis

- 1 Can a greater understanding of the life of Thomas Burnett, about whom very little was known, be gained from studying him in the context of his peers?
- 2 Can our understanding of the mid-eighteenth century navy be enhanced by such a study?
- 3 Do the captains’ letters give a sufficiently broad sweep of matters of interest to make this study worthwhile?
- 4 Have any general assumptions been overturned by this study?
- 5 Do significant areas of silence emerge, and can these be accounted for?
- 6 Given the formality of mid-eighteenth century correspondence, can individual voices be heard?
- 7 Can a sample of thirty five captains be taken as representative of the captains of the mid-eighteenth century navy and can this method of study be justified?

2 The current state of knowledge about the mid-eighteenth century navy

Knowledge of the mid-eighteenth century navy used to be derived from a political analysis of the creation and reduction of groups in government with some reference to the implications for the navy. The typical study of high politics is exemplified by historians such as Lewis Namier, whose writing about the navy resulted from his interest in why individuals entered politics.¹⁰ Namier's introduction to his parliamentary history makes clear the continuing importance of the navy within the political scene.¹¹

The history of the Admiralty during the time of Samuel Pepys lives through his writings, and J.R. Tanner's transcriptions show the principles of administration which were still in use throughout the eighteenth century. It is typical of Thomas Burnett's navy that the procedures established by Pepys should still be recognisable a hundred years later. Present day researchers are grateful for the 'studied histories' of writers such as Ehrman and Baugh who have built on Pepys's work. Ehrman examined Pepys's legacy in detail for his study of William's navy, tracing the reforms in the navy during the years after Pepys' stewardship, particularly the changes which resulted from the establishment of the Bank of England in 1694 and the consequent credit made available to the navy.

The study of the administrative systems of the Admiralty and the Navy Board in the age of Walpole was developed by Daniel Baugh in the twentieth century.¹² Any work on the first half of the century will be retracing these footsteps. Baugh trawled through thousands of primary documents and all secondary sources then in print in his search for the truth about his period and his subject, although he did not use the captains' letters of his period.¹³ A suggestion that only errors and misfortunes were detailed in such correspondence is not borne out by the experience of the current research. As will be seen in the later sections of this chapter, the requests made by captains in their letters do not merely underline what was going wrong. Amongst other matters they make clear the routine required by the administrators,

¹⁰ Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London 1961).

¹¹ Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, eds *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754-1790* (HMSO 1964).

¹² Baugh, *British Naval Administration*.

¹³ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 535.

and it is of interest to historians that this follows precedents set in the time of Pepys nearly a century earlier, as outlined in Chapter 4 below. Baugh did, however, note that ‘for guidance, the men who directed naval affairs tended to look, not to the present, but to the past’.¹⁴

Naval history has benefited from the sequence of researchers, each of whose work can be seen to have instigated the subsequent study. The sequence which began with John Ehrman and continued with Daniel Baugh brought the study out of the arena of high politics and began to involve lesser individuals, who had to carry out policy and who got their hands dirty. This dynasty culminates with N.A.M. Rodger’s *The Wooden World*, which was the ground-breaking social study of the mid eighteenth century navy. A very brief study of the Admiralty by N.A.M. Rodger went on to cover the evolution of the Admiralty to 1964 when it ceased to exist.¹⁵

David Syrett has left a wonderful legacy to naval historians. His books and articles which form a background to this study, particularly for Chapter 6, cover the rôle of the navy in the Mediterranean and European waters but really concentrate on the American scene. Syrett’s edition of the Havana documents for the Navy Records Society has been of great value in elucidating the part played by Burnett, and use will be made later of that understanding.¹⁶

David Starkey is responsible for the little that has been written on the question of prizes, prize money and privateering.¹⁷

¹⁴ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 28.

¹⁵ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Admiralty* (Terence Dalton 1979).

¹⁶ David Syrett, ‘The British Landing at Havana: An Example of an Eighteenth Century Combined Operation’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 55 (SNR 1969) 325-331; David Syrett, *Shipping and the American War 1775-83* (Athlone Press 1970); David Syrett, ‘The Methodology of British Amphibious Operations During the Seven Years’ and American Wars’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 58 (SNR 1972) 269-280; David Syrett, ‘Home waters or America? The Dilemma of British Naval Strategy in 1778’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 77 (SNR 1991) 365-378; David Syrett, *The Royal Navy in European Waters During the American Revolutionary War* (University of South Carolina 1998); David Syrett, *The Royal Navy in American Waters 1775-1783* (Scholar Press 1998); ‘Maritime Strategic Mobility in the Seven Years’ War: The Conveyance of British Forces to Emden, 1758’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 93 (SNR 2007) 83-91; David Syrett, *Admiral Lord Howe A Biography* (Spellmount 2006); David Syrett, *Shipping and Military Power in the Seven Years’ War* (University of Exeter Press 2008).

¹⁷ David Starkey, ‘British Privateering against the Dutch in the American Revolutionary War 1780-1783’ in *Studies in British Privateering, Trading Enterprise and Seamen’s Welfare, 1775-1900* (University of Exeter Press 1987); David Starkey, ‘The Origins and Regulation of Eighteenth century British Privateering’ in *Pressgangs and Privateers* ed. Tony Barrow (Bewick Press 1993) 40-51.

The question of manning, developed in Chapter 5 below, is one in which secondary sources provide sharply conflicting conclusions. Writers from both sides of the Atlantic and the Channel have used sources other than those used by N.A.M. Rodger to illuminate the problem, with very different conclusions. Byrn's study of crime and punishment in the Leeward Islands separates the Masefield-inspired condemnation of the navy's practices from the realities of a service within the eighteenth century society. Markus Eder's study contrasts the naval system of justice with that on shore, comparing the relative severity or otherwise of judgements for the same crime. The real value of Stephen Gradish's study of manning during the Seven Years' War has been questioned as it was published after his death, without the final editing that he would certainly have carried through had he lived. A more recent work, Nicholas Rogers' *Press Gang*, approaches the same subject from a different perspective, and some of his conclusions are not borne out by the evidence from this study.¹⁸ The popular view of the inhumanity of life on board in the eighteenth century is repeated in Dr Friedenbergs' study of medicine at sea.¹⁹ His carefully researched study has picked out the worst examples of bad practice, whereas the reality is revealed in an analysis of the huge efforts made by the Admiralty to feed the men only the best.

The immense study by Jonathan Dull of the French navy during the Seven Years' War does not mention human details such as diet or manning.²⁰ In contrast to this approach Louis Pritchard's study of the French navy gives an understanding of the details of the French financial straits during this period and the consequences for the captains and crews of French ships.²¹

The development of ship building during the eighteenth century has been well served, with a wealth of research by David Lyon and other writers stimulated by his example. *The Sailing Navy List* provides a meticulously researched source of information about all the vessels into which Thomas Burnett and his peers were commissioned.²² It is possible, using the data in the *List*, to compare the characteristics of the ships and come to some understanding of their

¹⁸ John D. Byrn, *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy* (Scolar 1989); Markus Eder, *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy of the Seven Years' War, 1755-1763* (Ashgate 2004); Stephen Gradish, *The Manning of the British Navy during the Seven Years' War* (Royal Historical Society 1980); Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and its opponents in Georgian Britain* (Continuum 2007).

¹⁹ Zachary B. Friedenbergs, *Medicine Under Sail* (Naval Institute Press 2002).

²⁰ Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War* (University of Nebraska 2005).

²¹ Louis Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy 1748-1762: A Study of Organisation and Administration* (McGill-Queens University Press 2009).

²² Lyon, *Sailing Navy List*.

relative desirability, developed in Chapter 3 below. Winfield's *British Warships* also contains a huge amount of data, following on from Lyon's study. Winfield is useful in that he gives the history of each ship, with costs, captains and captures, although this has to be used with caution.²³ Shipbuilding itself demands a technical library of its own, and the present author is indebted to her husband's passion for the ships of the eighteenth century navies for such technical sources ranging from David Steel's *Naval Architecture*, Darcy Lever's *Sheet Anchor* to modern writers such as Brian Lavery's *The Ship of the Line* and *Arming and Fitting of English Ships of War* and Jean Boudriot's *The 74 Gun Ship*.²⁴ An understanding of the concerns of the captains could only be reached through sources ranging from William Falconer's *Universal Marine Dictionary* and William Hutchinson's *Treatise on Practical Seamanship* (referred to by Richard Kempfenfelt).²⁵ Burnett, along with five of his peers, is listed amongst the subscribers to Thomas Riley Blankley's *Naval Expositor*, published in 1750.²⁶ The captains' preoccupation with combat demanded an understanding of gunnery as well as ship handling, and sources such as Peter Padfield's *Guns at Sea* were invaluable.²⁷ This thesis did not have room to include more than a brief summary of this work, another thread to be taken up later.

A wonderful archive of scholarship is available to researchers in the articles written for *The Mariner's Mirror*. These little gems are on occasion the culmination of years of work by an expert, and provide detail in areas not covered by lengthier publications.

A wide range of sources was consulted for Chapter 6, in an attempt to put the professional careers of the captains into context. The contemporary historian Robert Beatson was an army officer and so gave at least half his attention to the military highlights of the century.²⁸ Other contemporary histories were valuable as providing detail in areas not now considered worth elucidating. A conference in Huddersfield in 1987 resulted in a collection of valuable papers

²³ Winfield, *British Warships*.

²⁴ Lavery, *Ship of the Line*; Lavery, *Arming and Fitting*; *The Seventy-four Gun Ship*: Jean Boudriot, *A Practical Treatise on the Art of Naval Architecture* 4 Vols. Translated David Roberts (Jean Boudriot 1986-8).

²⁵ D. Steel, *Naval Architecture*; Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary*; Hutchinson, *Practical Seamanship*; Darcy Lever, *Sheet Anchor*.

²⁶ **Thomas Burnett, William Fortescue, John Elliot, William Hotham, Thomas Knackston, Alexander Schomberg.** Thomas Riley Blanckley, *Naval Expositor*, (London 1750).

²⁷ Peter Padfield, *Guns at Sea* (London 1974).

²⁸ Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs*.

on naval power, most of which fell within the time frame of this thesis.²⁹ Authors included Middleton, Baugh, Syrett and Breen, all of whom consolidated their work in later publications. Work has been done on the significance of the West Indies by Duffy and Pares.³⁰ Syrett's work on every aspect of the naval involvement in the American war has not been surpassed. Also from America comes Richard Buel's study, *In Irons*, of the economic maritime dimension of the American war.³¹ Jan Glete's work on international ship design illuminates the ways in which different tactics of offence and defence determined ship design.³²

3 The justification for writing this thesis

There are two reasons why this study is justified. The first is that captains have been given a chance to speak for themselves. Their letters have revealed wide-ranging and universal concerns which illuminate the problems facing the mid-eighteenth century navy. It appears that previous researchers used different resources of the National Archive in order to find material to satisfy their questions. This study began without knowing what questions to ask, and waited to see what material emerged from the files in ADM1. The sheer range and variety of the concerns expressed by the captains was unexpected, and it became obvious that no previous researcher had used this material as the primary source of their work.

The second reason did not emerge clearly until towards the end, when conclusions were being drawn from the work. The careers of these men were of varied lengths, some so short as to escape study altogether, others lasting for half a century. But for most of their careers promotion was limited to commissions in larger ships. The study made clear that success was measured by employment, and eventual flag rank was limited to those captains who were still alive and active in 1787. This was unexpected, and overturns the comfortable expectation that in time all captains were rewarded for their service.

²⁹ Jeremy Black and Philip Woodfine eds. *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century* (Humanities Press Inc 1989).

³⁰ Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford 1987); Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1763* (Frank Cass & Co 1963).

³¹ Richard Buel, *In Irons: Britain's Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy* (Yale University Press 1998).

³² Glete, *Navies and Nations* 38-48.

4 The material used to answer the questions posed above

The names of the men posted in 1757 were derived from David Syrett's *Commissioned Sea Officers*, and the dates of their commissions checked in the ADM 6 series of Commissions and Warrants books in the National Archive.³³ Robert Beatson used the Admiralty as a source of information but resorted to making up details and has been used with caution.³⁴

The correspondence of these men with the Admiralty, held at the National Archive under ADM 1, Captains' Letters, forms the foundation of this study. This enabled the researcher to know as much about the captains as the Admiralty did, officially at least. Also photographed was the 'turn back' in which the Admiralty Secretary recorded the response of the Lords for the benefit of the clerks who managed the correspondence. The Secretary to whom all correspondence was addressed during the Seven Years' War was John Cleveland, succeeded by Philip Stephens in 1762. Deciphering these 'turn backs' became routine, although Stephen's jotted notes at times are beyond comprehension.

Once the letters had been harvested the other sources of information in the National Archive were also explored. Letters written by the Commanders-in-Chief from various stations were checked for information about the individuals who disappeared from the Admiralty's correspondence, with almost universally disappointing results. ADM 2, Admiralty Out letters, were checked for the full response set in train by the 'turn back', although these letters are not quoted in this thesis. They are formulaic and do not contribute to an understanding of the individual captains. ADM 6, Commissions and Warrant Books, were checked for the professional progress of the men themselves and the officers mentioned in their letters. Their periods between commissions were checked in ADM 25 Half Pay Books. Pay books and muster books were searched for the details of those on board the vessels commanded by

³³ ADM 6/15-22 Commissions and Warrants Books 1735- 82; David Syrett, ed. *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660-1815* (Navy Records Society 1994); doubts have been thrown on the accuracy of this source, but at the time of writing no better has been offered. Charles Consolvo, 'A Career in the Royal Navy in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Progress, Promotion and interest. Based on a sample of officers.' Unpublished MA Dissertation Greenwich Maritime Institute 2003. Syrett was used as a source by N.A.M. Rodger in his study of commissioned officers' careers, and he lists the caveats necessary early in the century when information was not consistently gathered or recorded. N.A.M. Rodger, 'Commissioned Sea Officers' Careers in the Royal Navy, 1690-1815' in *e-Journal for Maritime Research* (NMM June 2001).

³⁴ Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs* Vol. 2 82, 571.

Burnett.³⁵ Logs written by captains and masters provided hour by hour records of the ships and their crews. Not every log book was retrieved, but those which chronicled particularly interesting incidents were read to give further understanding of the circumstances in which engagements took place, for instance. There are incalculable numbers of manuscripts to be consulted: the difficult decision is where to draw the line. Tom Wareham, in his study of frigate captains of the Nelson era used the Admiralty List Books ADM 8 to identify the commands of his captains.³⁶ Experience has shown that the List Books often recorded a situation which had changed months earlier, or represented a ‘wish list’ which was not realised in fact.³⁷ For the purposes of this study the Commissions Books have been used instead.

Letters written to the Victualling Board or the Sick and Hurt Board have not been used. It was clear from very early in this study that, interesting as this correspondence would have been, it would lead beyond the scope of Chapter 5 and the problem of manning.

This thesis has benefited from the cache of personal letters written by **John Elliot**, who emerges as a complex character from his private letters home.³⁸ Someone at Minto, perhaps one of his beloved sisters, kept enough of his letters for a fuller picture to emerge in addition to that drawn by his official correspondence. It is a great pity that only Elliot and, to a lesser extent **Richard Kempenfelt**, left behind both the public persona as identified in the Admiralty letters, and a personal identity. Kempenfelt’s letters to his close friend Charles Middleton were unguarded and personally revealing.³⁹ Perhaps more letters are still to emerge from private archives.

Some of the secondary sources studied for this work have been mentioned above; the others are listed in the bibliography. It became clear that a study of this kind is a new departure, and only a limited number of writers have made use of the primary documents listed above.

³⁵ Space did not permit reference to all the records for Burnett’s peers.

³⁶ Tom Wareham, *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic War* (Naval Institute Press 2001).

³⁷ **William Shurmur** is recorded in ADM 8/32 on 1 December 1757 as being 1st lieutenant in Maurice Suckling’s *Dreadnought* despite having been made post on 12 March 1757. **Thomas Burnett** does not appear in *Worcester’s* list of lieutenants in 1746 despite his having been commissioned to her in 1745 while in the Mediterranean.

³⁸ NMM ELL/400.

³⁹ Sir John Knox Laughton, ed. *Letters and Papers of Charles, Lord Barham Admiral of the Red Squadron 1758-1813* Vol. 1 (Navy Records Society 1907).

Some writers have attempted to provide a human dimension, but it is unnecessary to make up details not found in the sources.⁴⁰ The contemporary writer Edward Ward had his own agenda, and the picture he painted of ‘the wooden world’ has not been replicated in the documents used for this study.⁴¹

It is regretted that so little personal material has been found relating to the men in this survey. There has not yet come to light a cache of memoirs such as that which provided the source for Wareham’s study of Captain Graham Moore.⁴² It is tantalising to know that these men, having in many cases shared midshipmen’s and lieutenants’ berths on the way to the isolation of their captain’s accommodation, communicated not just on paper but over the dinner table or at Will’s Coffee House, conversations to which we are not privy.⁴³ The wills of Thomas Burnett and many of his peers throw light on the personal circumstances of these men at the ends of their lives, but have to be interpreted with caution, as discussed in Chapter 7.

5 The development of the argument

Having examined every captain’s life, from entry into the navy and serving as a lieutenant, the argument will proceed through the subsequent chapters by looking in turn at the concerns which fill the letters of commanders of ships. It is intended that the questions posed above will be answered from the evidence provided by the thirty five men.

Chapter 1

This chapter establishes the career of Thomas Burnett, so that his experiences can be compared to those of his peers in subsequent chapters. The first facts were derived from the Commissions Books which gave an outline of his career from his first commission in 1744 to his death in 1783. Finding his passing certificate gave details of the eight years he spent at

⁴⁰ Mackay described the widower Governor William Burnett departing for New York accompanied by his only child, with the sailors ‘threading their way through the Governor’s progeny’. Ruddock F. Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* (Oxford 1965) 5.

⁴¹ Edward Ward, *The Wooden World Dissected: in the character of a ship of war. As also the characters of all the officers, from the captain to the common sailor.* (London 1795 repr. La Vergne 7 June 2010)

⁴² Tom Wareham, *Frigate Commander* (Pen and Sword 2004).

⁴³ Cornwall to Middleton 27 August 1780. Sir John Knox Laughton ed. *Letters and Papers Charles Lord Barham Admiral of the Red Squadron 1758-1813* Vol. I (Navy Records Society 1907) 367.

sea from his first appearance as a volunteer in 1736. Once Captain Matthew Norris was identified as the individual prepared to take Thomas Burnett on board, research in New York was needed to identify the link between the Burnett family and the Norris/Morris connection.

Thomas Burnett had an extremely unpromising beginning. His father had been transferred from his position as Governor of New York by the new King George II and died a year later, in 1728. Despite this, Burnett's courage and professional skill brought him to the attention of the Admiralty at exactly the right time to benefit from the outbreak of the Seven Years' War.

Very few sources outside the Admiralty are referred to in this chapter, as Thomas Burnett was too undistinguished to merit concern from any earlier historians apart from John Charnock and Robert Beatson. As discussed in Chapter 6, it was only when Burnett took part in fleet actions that his ship was identified and his name recorded by historians such as Laird, Clowes or Julian Corbett. The tantalisingly few letters Burnett wrote to the Admiralty revealed less about the man and his professional standing than was the case with some of his peers. It was not until the careers of his peers were compared with Burnett's that the significance of his commission to the *Boyne* in 1770 became clear. Similarly, the fact that he had been able to invoke Lord Rochford, Secretary of the Southern Department, to procure for him a commission in 1779 assumed a quite different significance.

Chapter 2

This chapter begins to answer the question as to whether our understanding of the mid-eighteenth century navy can be enhanced by a study of Burnett's peers. As mentioned above, a decision was made not to follow the careers of the men who were first commissioned together in 1744. Once the 1757 post captains had been identified as the group of men against whom Burnett was to be measured, an attempt was made to quantify the influences and 'interest' which lay behind their careers, with interesting results. The paths which led lieutenants to independent command are identified, and the different experiences of Burnett's peers discussed.

This chapter used the volumes of the *History of Parliament* prepared by Sedgwick, Namier and Brook to disentangle the relationships and sources of 'interest' for many of the young

men.⁴⁴ The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* was also referred to, as several of the captains studied were judged by Sir John Knox Laughton to merit entries which were revised in the edition of 2004 to bring them up to date. It is of interest that when N.A.M. Rodger determined whether any additional entries were justified Admiral Joseph Peyton was still not included.

Protection of ‘the trade’ is explored in this chapter, as it was a major preoccupation of the eighteenth century navy, and almost every master and commander began his career engaged in convoy protection. The unique relationship between the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers and the Admiralty is revealed in the correspondence of the men ordered to protect ‘the trade’ in and out of the Bristol Channel. Evidence from the Society’s Minute books was used by J.S. Bromley in his ‘study for an unwritten history’.⁴⁵

Chapter 3

This chapter further expands our understanding of the mid-eighteenth century navy, as the captains’ letters give a broad sweep of matters of technical interest. It is of interest to the historian that in Falconer’s list of the duties of a captain, he took it for granted that a captain in the mid-eighteenth century navy would obey the dictates of the Admiralty.⁴⁶

A large proportion of the captains’ letters were concerned with the importance of frequent docking. For some captains the few days during which the ship was in dock were their only periods of leave from the ship, but even this leave had to be negotiated with the Admiralty. The captains were professionals concerned with every detail that would improve their performance, and their letters reveal their constant concern with every detail of the construction and rigging of their ships and of the ordnance with which they engaged the enemy. There is evidence from the letters that innovation in the use of gun locks was already being made in this period. There is no doubt that the captains were constantly striving to make their ships more effective fighting platforms.

⁴⁴ Romney Sedgwick, ed. *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754* (HMSO 1970); Namier and Brooke, eds. *House of Commons*.

⁴⁵ J.S. Bromley, ‘The British Navy and its Seamen after 1688’ in Sarah Palmer and Glyndwr Williams eds *Chartered and Uncharted Waters* (Queen Mary College 1981).

⁴⁶ Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary*.

The letters reveal a constant need for repair resulting from wear and tear, bad weather, accidental damage or enemy action. Very rarely did the captains resort to docks for repairs: they were resourceful men who could rely on their highly trained warrant officers to carry out repairs at sea. The captains' correspondence provides insight into the continuing attempts by the Admiralty to improve navigational tools and improve charts.

The involvement of these captains leads to a discussion in this chapter of the advantages and disadvantages of the Admiralty's strategy of building frigates from fir, and of buying French captures for use in the navy.

Chapter 4

Historians dependent upon contemporary writing will know that matters which were taken for granted were often not reported, that it was matters which were out of the ordinary which seemed worth writing about. For example, the fact that every warrant and commission had to be paid for is not mentioned in the thousands of captains' letters read by the author: it is only from the letters of Commanders-in-Chief who had to account for the money received that this detail can be confirmed. The question of stamped paper for commissions and warrants would need a separate study. On the other hand, this thesis has revealed that the mid-eighteenth century navy took completely for granted a degree of bureaucratic control never before suspected.

This chapter has concentrated on the ways in which the administration of the Navy impinged on the captains' lives, and attempts to show the degree to which this was based on precedent set in the Restoration Navy of Samuel Pepys. This outcome was not anticipated, and not one discussed elsewhere. Captains had to ask for their pay, expenses, allowances, leave, officers or followings. There are dozens of letters from recently posted captains asking for pay for the later years during which they served as lieutenants, and scores of letters asking for orders to have their accounts accepted by the Navy Board. It becomes clear that money, and not the prospect of promotion, is the prime factor by which the Admiralty maintained discipline amongst the captains. By the end of this chapter answers have begun to emerge as to whether assumptions have been overturned by this study.

Baugh admits that he ‘scarcely touched’ the captains’ letters so that none of his conclusions, for a slightly earlier period, can be directly compared with the results of this thesis.⁴⁷ He suggested that even though only a handful of British naval officers were of noble lineage, and a large number could make no claim at all to gentle birth, ‘if an officer was of good family or had .. political influence .. he was very likely to be touchy about Admiralty dictation.’⁴⁸ Evidence from the captains’ letters does not bear out this suggestion.

Chapter 5

This chapter provides insights into the most vital element of the mid-eighteenth century navy, that of manning, from the point of view of the men actually responsible for taking the ships to sea. This chapter contains a distillation of the hundreds of letters dealing with the vexed business of the manning of the navy. Every captain was involved to some extent in the problems of recruitment, either directly through sending off lieutenants to establish a rendezvous, through stopping merchant ships on their return to England, or through having to maintain an efficient fighting unit without its full complement of men. The seething injustices of the mid-eighteenth century did not come to a head until the end of the century when reforms were finally introduced. A warning of the feelings which led to the mutinies of 1794 can be found in many letters during this period.

It is clear from the captains’ letters that there was no alternative to impressment as the means of manning their ships, but that once the men had been put on board humanitarian considerations came to the fore. The captains were concerned to keep the men as clean and as dry as possible, and the logs reveal their constant preoccupation with the quality of food taken and served on board. The Admiralty was prepared to try innovative means of ventilating the lower decks and many captains took part in anti-scorbutic trials.

⁴⁷ ‘The captains’ letters which form the bulk of this collection I have scarcely touched.’ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 535.

⁴⁸ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 6.

The captains' letters refute the popular, emotionally charged image of sailors as being 'poor illiterate, scurvy-ridden men, kidnapped and driven by the whip' which destroys the credibility of otherwise impeccably sourced literature.⁴⁹

Chapter 6

A brief overview of the history of the period was necessary to give the context in which took place the operations and engagements in which the captains demonstrated their professional expertise. This chapter relates some of the episodes, and shows how these engagements and evidence of their courage affected their careers. Many of the incidents recounted in the letters appear in contemporary accounts of the Seven Years' War, but have not been included in secondary sources since. Amphibious operations on either side of the Atlantic and in the Pacific were a most important element of this war, and the details revealed by the captains enhance established history.

The training in single-handed combat which convoy protection had provided was further honed by cruises against French privateers. The natural progression for captains was from sloops to frigates and then to ships of the line, and this chapter contains material from those who made the transition effortlessly. Through their careers these men progressed from the frigates which brought news of the approach of enemy forces to taking part in subsequent fleet actions in ships of the line which made a crucial difference to the outcome. Spanning the thirty years from the Seven Years' War to the American War, the careers of the survivors amongst these men represent a microcosm of the navy.

It became clear that there was not time or space in this study to attempt to follow through the hundreds of vessels taken by Burnett's peers throughout their careers to establish their financial rewards for prize taking. The pursuit of prize money is a thread which can be followed up separately at a later date.

The fifth question posed above asked whether significant areas of silence emerge which can be accounted for. Once a captain joined a fleet or even a squadron under a Commodore his

⁴⁹ Kelly's comment is derived from John Masefield's view of the Victorian merchant service – very different from the eighteenth century navy. Jack Kelly, *Gunpowder: a history of the explosive that changed the world* (Atlantic Books 2004) 107.

letters were no longer addressed the Admiralty. A ‘mention in despatches’ was evidence of patronage, but silence was more usual.

Chapter 7

Not all of Thomas Burnett’s peers were still in employment after the Seven Years’ War, and this chapter examines the reasons behind this fact. By comparing the careers of Thomas Burnett’s peers from their first commissions to their deaths it has been possible to establish the importance of factors such as health, ‘interest’, timing and luck. As shown in Appendix 5, most of Thomas Burnett’s peers did not survive the war as active captains and spent the rest of their lives (some short, some until the end of the century) on half pay. An attempt is made to elucidate why some captains succeeded in gaining employment during the peace or who returned to employment during the re-mobilisations in 1770 for the Falkland Islands dispute and 1779 for the American War. Others were simply unlucky.

This chapter also examines what the captains might have hoped to get out of the navy, and to what extent they succeeded. An examination of a range of wills reveals the status achieved by the end of their careers.

In these final chapters there was progression from the Captains’ letters to the Commander-in-Chief’s correspondence for the men who were promoted to this status: **Affleck, Elliot, Harrison, Kempenfelt, Peyton and Walsingham**. In attempting to establish the characteristics of success Alfred Thayer Mahan compared the abilities of naval officers using exemplars such as Hawke and Rodney.⁵⁰ A more recent work by Mackay and Duffy identified twelve key qualities required by a naval leader.⁵¹ A wider set of circumstances determined the career paths of Thomas Burnett and his peers, and consequently different attributes had to be used in order to rank them. Very few of them achieved leadership, **Richard Kempenfelt** and **William Hotham** being the only Admirals to lead a fleet into action. However, the conclusion of this chapter is that they were not the only successful men of this cohort, as success, like luck, has to be taken as a whole.

⁵⁰ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Types of Naval Officers drawn from the History of the British Navy* (Books for Libraries Press 1901).

⁵¹ Ruddock Mackay and Michael Duffy, *Hawke, Nelson and British Naval Leadership 1747-1805* (Boydell Press 2009).

Chapter 1 The influences on the life of Captain Thomas Burnett c1724 – 1783 and the main events in his professional career.

1 The court connection which could influence the life of a naval captain

Thomas Burnett was so undistinguished that, apart from Charnock, no previous historian has been inspired to chronicle his life, although many members of his family were subjects of entries in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.⁵² A Burnet family tree is summarised as Appendix 3, showing the four generations over which this narrative extends.

The Burnet family was ‘of considerable antiquity and interest in Aberdeenshire.’⁵³ Robert Burnet was a younger son of Lord Cramond who trained as a lawyer and educated his three sons himself before becoming a judge. The eldest son Thomas became a physician, the second, Robert, a lawyer while the youngest son Gilbert chose to become a clergyman. Not content with a quiet life in Scotland, Dr Gilbert Burnet was drawn to life in London. In 1670 Burnet met William of Orange on his first visit to England, and their relationship was close enough for the young prince to have confided in Burnet the conversation he had had with his uncle King Charles II about his religious beliefs.⁵⁴ William was accompanied on this voyage by his friend and advisor Frederick van Nassau van Zuytlestein, later Lord Rochford. Burnet was closely associated with Charles from 1673 when he was appointed chaplain, until he

⁵² Charnock, *Biographia Navalis* Vol. 6 216-220. Communication was made with the authors of two entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, respectively Professor Mary Lou Lustig of the University of West Virginia for Governor William Burnet and Professor David Lemmings of the University of Adelaide for his brother Sir Thomas Burnet. For these academics the individual had been the subject of their doctoral thesis, and both were extremely generous in sharing their findings, outside their entries in the *ODNB* (Oxford University Press 2004 online edition 2004-8).

⁵³ Osmund Airy, ed. *Burnet's History of My Own Time* Vol. I (Oxford at the Clarendon Press 1897) 452.

⁵⁴ Airy, *Burnet's History* Vol. I 494-5.

tried in 1680 to turn Charles from his personal immorality. ‘After this the king spoke of me with great sharpness.’⁵⁵

Burnet began his *History of the Reformation*, and wrote many other accounts of the history of his own time. In 1683 Burnet was involved in the scandal of the Rye House plot against Charles II. His friends Essex and Russell and cousin Robert Baillie were imprisoned and after Russell’s execution Burnet judged it safer to travel abroad. Burnet spent ten months in France, Italy and Switzerland before settling in Utrecht. He was invited by William III of Orange and his wife Mary, daughter of James II, to come to The Hague. Burnet advised the Prince to prepare his fleet for action, and worked with him and his advisors, chief amongst whom was van Zuylestein, as they corresponded with Protestants in England.

Burnet married Mary Scott, the sole heiress of a wealthy Dutch family of Scottish extraction. She was very accomplished, speaking French, Dutch and English equally well. Their first child was born in March 1688, originally named James Robert but baptised William on 2 April, with the Prince and Princess as sponsors.

Dr Gilbert Burnet travelled with William and Mary when the Dutch fleet made its way down the Channel to Exmouth. Burnet wrote the English translation of William’s proposition to the leading English Protestants, and after the negotiations had been completed and the dual monarchy of William and Mary was proclaimed in February 1689, Burnet delivered the sermon at their coronation in April. Burnet’s reward was not just an appointment as a royal chaplain and clerk of the royal closet, but the see of Salisbury. Three days after his consecration he was sworn in as chancellor of the Order of the Garter, as Windsor fell within his see.

In addition to honours for Bishop Gilbert Burnet there was on-going royal favour for the Burnet family. Bishop Burnet’s brother Sir Thomas was a physician, a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians from 1681 and President from 1696-8. He was physician to Charles II and James II, and then to Queen Anne. Further evidence of royal favour was the appointment

⁵⁵ In the *ODNB* account of Burnet’s life this incident is described using the words: ‘he subsequently spoke of Burnet “with more than ordinary sharpness” .’ James Moore *ODNB* (Oxford University Press 2004 online edition 2004-9); Airy, *Burnet’s History* Vol. II 300.

of Bishop Burnet's eldest son William first to the post of Commissioner of Customs and then as Governor of New York in 1720.⁵⁶ Later favours were detailed in William's will.⁵⁷

On William Burnet's death at only 40 years of age his eldest son Gilbert, child of his first marriage to Mary Stanhope, was sent to England to the care of his aunt Mary and her husband David Mitchell.⁵⁸ William and Thomas, the orphaned sons of his second marriage to Anna Marie van Horn in New York, were sent back to the care of their lawyer uncle, Thomas Burnet.

'Uncle' Thomas Burnet was a courtier named in Pope's *Dunciad* who devoted his time to politics and pamphlet writing, and after his father died had to resort to court attendance to achieve a place. His confidence was not high: 'I know so much of courts as to think nothing sure till I have it in my hands.'⁵⁹ However his solicitations resulted in the position of consul in Lisbon, a post he held from 1719 until 1728. When he returned to England Thomas Burnet applied successfully to Sir Philip Yorke the attorney-general for employment. He had to support his nephews as well as settle his brother William's financial difficulties. Knighted in 1745, Sir Thomas left his name-sake, the younger nephew, Lieutenant Thomas Burnett, a legacy of 'one hundred pounds forgiving him all the sums I have lent him being above two hundred pounds more'.⁶⁰ This younger brother, as in many aristocratic families, had to make his fortune at sea. Chapter 2 will give some indication as to whether Burnett's experience was typical or not.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Governor William Burnet travelled to New York in the *Seahorse*, Captain Thomas Durell. Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 5.

⁵⁷ '... gold and silver medals bearing the images of King George the first, of the Princess Sophia and of King George the Second and the gilt tea table plate, both of which were given to my father by the Said Princess Sophia, late Electress Dowager of Brunswick, which Medals and plate I leave to my said Son, and after him to my male heirs forever, who are hereby charged to keep the same as a perpetual memorial that my father's faithful services to the Protestant Succession in that Illustrious House were well accepted before their accession to the Throne of Great Britain, as they have been since aptly rewarded by King George the First to my father's children.' Will of Governor William Burnet subscribed and sealed at New York 6 December 1727, proved 9 July 1730. Only one object from this period, a napkin from Queen Anne's table, has come down to Captain Thomas Burnett's McLeod descendants.

⁵⁸ David Mitchell was the nephew of Admiral Sir David Mitchell.

⁵⁹ David Nichol Smith, *The Letters of Thomas Burnet to George Duckett 1712-1722* (Oxford University Press 1914) Letter LXXIV 11 August 1717.

⁶⁰ Will of Sir Thomas Burnet Prob. 11/799.

⁶¹ The younger Thomas added an extra 't' to his name. His spelling was always idiosyncratic.

2 The extent to which going to sea as a 'young gentleman' was evidence of family influence

It is not known whether Thomas Burnett's uncle made use of his understanding of the workings of the Admiralty or used a personal connection with the Norris family, but it is likely that it was a combination of the two which took Thomas Burnett to sea, aged about twelve.⁶² His career began in 1736 when he arrived in Plymouth to volunteer in the 6th rate *Tartar*.⁶³ Why was her captain prepared to take on this particular 'young gentleman'? The families were linked through New York. Matthew Norris was the son of Sir John Norris, already admiral of the fleet and commander-in-chief, with a long association with North America.⁶⁴ Matthew Norris was appointed to the New York station as a result of being a Freeman of the City since 1734, and married to Euphemia Morris, daughter of Lewis Morris, governor of New Jersey.⁶⁵ Morris became acting Governor of New York only three years after William Burnet's death, having worked with him on the governor's council for New Jersey. Matthew Norris was granted land by his in-laws in New York.⁶⁶ In every letter that Lewis Morris wrote to his daughter 'Affy' in England, he asked after Sir John and Lady Norris.⁶⁷

In Thomas Burnett's case the influence of his family at the outset of his career appears to have extended only as far as his initial appearance as a 'volunteer' in Captain Matthew Norris' following. Matthew Norris returned to England as Commissioner in Plymouth in 1737 and died a year later. When *Tartar* returned from New York she was refitted with a 'middling repair' in Plymouth. Burnett, with the rest of her crew, was turned over into *Strafford* under Captain Thomas Durell, with whom Governor Burnet had travelled to New

⁶² Burnet wrote to his friend George Duckett, 'The method of getting a *King's Letter* is by writing to any of the Lords of the Admiralty, or to Burchett, their Secretary, who must give it.' Nicol Smith, *Thomas Burnett* 169; G.F. James, 'Josiah Burchett, Secretary to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 1695-1742' in *The Mariner's Mirror* XXIII (SNR 1937) 477-498.

⁶³ *Tartar* 28 gun 6th rate O 1755 K 1755 L 1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85. ADM 36/4176 *Tartar* pay book 176/7.

⁶⁴ Matthew Norris was made post in 1724. He succeeded his father Sir John and brother John as MP for Rye 1733-4. Matthew Norris was elected a Freeman of New York on the grounds of his marriage there and his vehement opposition to the bill in favour of the sugar colonies. Sir John died in 1749, Matthew in 1738 and John in 1767. Sedgwick, *House of Commons* Vol. II 298-9.

⁶⁵ There is no doubt that the Morris family members would have known the Burnet family and would have sympathised with the orphaned boys.

⁶⁶ [977] Capt. Matthew Norris New Jersey Historical Society.

⁶⁷ Sheridan, Eugene R. ed. *The Papers of Lewis Morris* Vol. 3 1738-1746 (New Jersey Historical Society 1993) May 14 1742, August 26 1743, January 22 1744, June 3 1744.

York. Durell's 1st lieutenant was the Hon. George Townsend and when *Tartar* was recommissioned it was under Townsend, who took Burnett with him. Although Burnett was apparently unlucky to have been left on Captain Norris' death to make his own way, he accompanied the Hon. George Townsend into his first independent command as part of his following in *Tartar*.

On 3 March 1742 Thomas Burnett took the examination which earned him his 'passing certificate' in front of Captain Curtis Barnett of the 4th rate *Dragon* and Captain William Dilkes of the 3rd rate *Chichester* and satisfied them that he had the requisite knowledge of navigation and ship handling.⁶⁸ Burnett was not immediately commissioned, however: he had to wait for two years for a suitable vacancy. When Admiral Mathews had to return to England to answer the charges brought against him by his second-in-command Lestock, on 20 August 1744, the last day of frantic efforts by his clerks, he issued a commission for Thomas Burnett into the 3rd rate *Cambridge*.⁶⁹ This was an extraordinary mark of favour, and it may be that Mathews was fulfilling an earlier promise to Sir John Norris that he would take care of Thomas Burnett. Mathews may have chosen him on his merits from the thirteen young men ordered on board the flagship earlier in 1744. The commission marked the first step on the ladder of promotion. The achievement is discussed in Chapter 2, where an analysis is made of the future careers of the other 127 men commissioned in 1744.

Thomas Burnett was not long as fourth lieutenant under Captain Charles Drummond.⁷⁰ He was promoted into the 3rd rate *Worcester* as second lieutenant on 27 July 1745, by order of Vice Admiral Rowley.⁷¹ Burnett's next commission was as second lieutenant in the 3rd rate *Berwick* under Captain James Douglas on 18 March 1747.⁷² In July 1748 *Berwick*, by this time under Captain Hugh Bonfoy, was overtaken by the peace which forced a reduction in the

⁶⁸ ADM 107/3, 492. There should have been three captains.

⁶⁹ *Cambridge* 80 gun 3rd rate K 1713 L 1715 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 33.

⁷⁰ Charles Drummond was made post in 1736 and after giving evidence at the Lestock and Mathews courts martial was retired as a Rear Admiral in 1747. A member of the ancient Scottish family, Drummond's 1st lieutenant in *Chatham* was James Strachan and his 3rd James Blair, both Scottish born. There was animus in England against the 'Scottish navy', and perhaps this is an example of the Scottish connection working together. Correspondence would prove this, but conversation is more likely to have been the means of communication. A connection between the Burnett family and all their Scottish relations and the Drummond families has not been found.

⁷¹ *Worcester* 50 gun 4th rate K 1713 L 1714 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 35.

⁷² *Berwick* 70 gun 3rd rate O1740 K 1741 L 1743 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 43. No connection has been found between the Burnett and Douglas families either.

navy.⁷³ Her complement was reduced to 140 men, all she needed to be a guard ship at Portsmouth, and was paid off in November 1752.

In March 1753 Thomas Burnett was taken back into the service as first lieutenant in the 5th rate *Penzance*, under Captain Hugh Bonfoy.⁷⁴ This is the second occasion on which Burnett was inherited with a ship but then taken by the captain into another commission, and it seems likely that Bonfoy asked for Burnett as his first lieutenant when he took on a new commission in *Penzance*. Bonfoy had been appointed governor of Newfoundland, and together they took *Penzance* on one trip to Newfoundland before Bonfoy retired, in effect, to *Dorset*, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland's yacht.

Penzance's next captain, from February 1755, was Richard Dorrill, the new governor of Newfoundland.⁷⁵ On their return from Newfoundland they were in Lisbon at the time of earthquake there in December 1755. (These visits are discussed in Chapter 2, Section 7.4) In February 1756 Richard Dorrill was commissioned into the 1st rate *Royal George*, which was still building at Woolwich.⁷⁶ This was the third occasion on which Burnett, inherited with a ship by a captain was taken with him to a new appointment. Dorrill took Burnett with him as his first lieutenant in the navy's newest 1st rate. It may have been that Dorrill's commission to the *Royal George*, like that of Burnett, was only for the purpose of fitting her out, as John Campbell who had been in *Centurion* with Anson was then commissioned into *Royal George*.⁷⁷ As an eminent captain he would have expected to appoint his own first lieutenant, which meant Burnett had to be given another commission.

Burnett was 'poised for preferment' and achieved it on 12 May when he was appointed to the Channel Islands squadron as master and commander of the *Happy*, one of the three smallest

⁷³Hugh Bonfoy was a protégée of Admiral Nicholas Haddock and then of Sir Edward Hawke. Charnock *Biographia Navalis* 364.

⁷⁴*Penzance* 44 gun 5th rate O 1746 K 1746 L 1747 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 79.

⁷⁵Richard Dorrill was very little older than Burnett, and was made post in the *Penzance*. He made only the one visit to Newfoundland. Dorrill was only in *Royal George* for three months before being commissioned to the *Lowestoft*. Michael Godfrey (Dictionary of Canadian Biography). Charnock *Biographia Navalis* (Vol. 6) 34, Winfield, *British Warships* 5.

⁷⁶She had been ordered as the *Royal Anne* in 1746, her keel laid down in 1747 and she was completed and launched on 18 February 1756. *Royal George* 100 gun 1st rate O 1746 K 1747 L 1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 62.

⁷⁷The log tersely records the major steps in rigging her. Darcy Lever explains exactly how it was done. But one is left to imagine the steely nerves of those, for example, standing on the tressel trees to which they will fix the tops when these have been got over the mast head above their heads and lowered. Darcy Lever, *Sheet Anchor* 23; ADM 52/863 Master's log *Royal George* 1756.

sloops in the Navy.⁷⁸ Burnett was stationed off Guernsey, but he had to be familiar with the dangerous waters around all the Channel Islands as he carried out the standard order ‘to protect the trade and annoy the enemy’. During his first month in these waters he intercepted a Dutch fly boat loaded with masts and spars from Riga intended for the armoury at Brest, and took her to Portsmouth. This was only the beginning: in action packed days and nights, trade through the Channel was intercepted and identified, and the French element taken in hand. In addition to a smuggler ‘laden with brandy tea and tobacco’, *Happy* took a French privateer of 12 guns; a snow which had been taken and retaken and therefore had only a small prize crew on board and a second snow which gave in without a fight as the Commodore in his 3rd rate was in sight.⁷⁹

3 Being ‘made post’ as the result of courage and enterprise in his first independent command

At 3.00am in the morning of 10 March 1757 the French privateer *Infernal* was sighted. After a seven hour chase Burnett engaged, boarded and took her, closing the much more heavily armed privateer as fast as he could to minimise the time during which he could expect to receive fire. *Infernal* was armed with 14 guns, six 6 pounders and eight 4 pounders with six swivels, *Happy* only eight 3 pounders. There were no fatal casualties on board the tiny *Happy*, whose small complement had been supplemented on this voyage by 20 picked soldiers being taken back to the mainland to become corporals in Bocland’s Regiment. Burnett kept the soldiers on board *Happy* to give covering fire while he and his men boarded the privateer. His share of the £800 received for the prize, sold instantly in Guernsey, would have provided the money he needed for his next step.⁸⁰

Burnett demonstrated in this engagement, following those earlier in the year, that he was courageous, determined, able to make good use of resources and keep his crew focused.

⁷⁸ *Happy* 8 gun sloop O 1753 K 1753 L 1754 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 92.

⁷⁹ Burnett’s log does not name the snow, but eight months later the questions of the insurance and ownership of the *Baltimore* had been resolved, and the *London Gazette* reported that *Happy*’s crew would be paid immediately in Portsmouth. For Thomas Burnett and the men he took with him into *Cambridge*, their attorneys would have received the money at Crutched Friars i.e. the Navy Board. *London Gazette* Issue No 9758 17 January 1758.

⁸⁰ *London Gazette* March 19-22 1757 under ‘Ship News: Yesterday arrived the *Happy* sloop of war Capt Burnett from Jersey. They have sold the *Infernal* privateer for 800l.’

Above all he was successful, and the Admiralty was always on the lookout for achievements which could be rewarded by promotion. Lord Anson had written in 1751: ‘my constant method... has been to promote the lieutenants to command whose ships have been successfully engaged on equal terms with the enemy, without having any friend or recommendation, and in preference to all others – *and this I would recommend to my successors, if they would have a fleet to depend on.*’⁸¹ Anson’s advice was obviously still being heeded by the Admiralty, although he did not return there until September 1757.⁸² Burnett, without any obvious friend or recommendation, did not have long to wait.

Two months after taking *Infernal*, on 5 May 1757 Burnett was rewarded with the commission as flag captain to Commodore John Moore in the two-year old *Cambridge*, launched in 1755.⁸³ No correspondence has yet been found to explain why Moore asked for Burnett. Captain Burnett took with him into *Cambridge* his son John, as well as his personal servants. They sailed immediately to the Leeward Islands, and *Cambridge* was one of the ships ordered to attack the citadel and fortresses of Basse Terre, a foretaste of the attack on the Morro two years later. Guadeloupe surrendered, as did the smaller islands of Marie Galante, the Saintes, La Desiderade and Petite Terre. The French did not attempt to interfere, so that the rest of the year was without interest for Burnett.⁸⁴ *Cambridge* was ordered back to England to be part of the protective fleet against a possible French invasion.⁸⁵

On his return to England in 1760 Burnett was commissioned to the 50 gun 4th rate *Rochester* and took her to North America.⁸⁶ Part of the squadron which relieved Quebec, Burnett guarded the mouth of the St Lawrence before being sent to the West Indies.

When Burnett arrived with *Rochester* the commander-in-chief, Sir George Pocock insisted on exchanging her for Rodney’s flag ship, *Marlborough*. Burnett transferred to her with his following on 1 May 1762. Writing to Cleveland, Rodney accepted Pocock’s action, saying that ‘success so much depends upon the Commander in Chief having those officers about him

⁸¹ Captain W.V. Anson, *The Life of Lord Anson* (John Murray 1912) 115.

⁸² There is a connection between Anson and Burnett, but a very tenuous one: Sir Thomas Burnett’s patron was Lord Hardwick, whose daughter was Lady Elizabeth Anson.

⁸³ *Cambridge* three-decker 80 gun 3rd rate O 1750 K 1750 L 1755 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 66.

⁸⁴ Marshall Smelser, *The Campaign for the Sugar Islands, 1759: A Study of Amphibious Warfare* (University of North Carolina Press, 1953).

⁸⁵ Dull, *French Navy* 138-140.

⁸⁶ *Rochester* 50 gun 4th rate O 1747 K 1747 L 1749 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 47.

whom he most approves.’⁸⁷ Pocock had thus chosen to give Burnett the opportunity of taking part in the attack on the Havana, which more than compensated for commanding the aged, cut-down, rebuilt and already leaky *Marlborough*.⁸⁸

The attack on Havana was Pocock’s chief concern. Spain had entered the Seven Years’ War in 1762, and plans were immediately drawn up to capture Havana, the capital of Spain’s possessions in the West Indies. The amphibious operation was enormously complex and involved transporting more than 16,000 troops to Cuba, supplying them while they were there, providing hospital ships for the injured and returning them home after the fall of the City of Havana together with the tons of booty.

Sir George Pocock took his force through the less orthodox Old Bahama Channel, which had only just been charted by the *Richmond*. Thanks to this survey work every shoal was marked and lights guided the ships through the dangerous narrows, bringing the fleet to Havana from the ‘wrong’ direction and taking the Spaniards completely by surprise. It was a magnificent feat of seamanship and Burnett was responsible for the sixth division of the fleet.

In July 1762 the army’s storming of ‘El Morro’, the fortress castle at the mouth of the harbour was the key to capturing Havana. Burnett’s *Marlborough* was one of the ships chosen to cover and direct the landing of the troops, artillery and tons of supplies. Men from the *Marlborough* helped manhandle guns over difficult terrain and then construct batteries to breach the walls. When this proved difficult Augustus Hervey of the *Dragon* suggested diverting the attention of the defenders of El Morro by bombarding the castle from the sea. Two vessels, the heavy *Cambridge* and the old *Marlborough* were sent in with him to bombard the towering walls of the castle.⁸⁹ After some hours of furious but one-sided fighting they were brought off again when it was obvious that nothing more could be achieved, Captain William Goostrey of the *Cambridge* having been killed in the attack. Pocock reported to the Admiralty that, ‘the captains behaved becoming gallant officers.’⁹⁰

⁸⁷ David Syrett, *The Rodney Papers Vol. 1 1742-1763* (Navy Records Society 2005) 453.

⁸⁸ He was of course paid at the higher rate. *Marlborough* 90 gun three decker, O 1725 K 1725 L 1732; 1756 3rd rate 80; 1761 3rd rate (two decker) 68 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 40.

⁸⁹ Keppel to Pocock, ‘two or three of your very old ships and heavy ones could be anchored off El Morro’ 10 June 1762. David Syrett ed., *The Siege and Capture of Havana 1762* (Navy Records Society 1970) 179.

⁹⁰ Pocock to Cleveland 14 July 1762 Syrett ed., *Havana 1762* 237.

Burnett's share of the Havana treasure continued to be paid out in stages until 1772, to give a final total of £1,600.

While engaged at the Morro John Burnett left the *Marlborough* for a career in the Army.⁹¹ Presumably his father purchased his first commission as an ensign in the 28th Regiment of Foot. This Regiment had taken part in the capture of Louisburg and Quebec, and was sent to the West Indies in 1761. The close liaison between the army and the navy during the expedition may well have tempted the young man to join the army's very different officer corps. Subsequent commissions, the earlier ones at least presumably purchased by his father, saw John Burnett's career in the Army progress until his death in London in 1817, having retired as Major General serving in the 'Army of Armagh', where he organised recruitment for the Peninsula campaign. He had previously served as Colonel of the Royal Scots, the First of Foot.⁹²

Burnett was ordered back to England. A series of gales separated *Marlborough* from the rest of the fleet, and the aged *Marlborough* began to fall apart. Guns were thrown over board, the captain and officers worked in the bucket chain and the men were too exhausted to sail the ship. Fortunately the Newfoundland fishing fleet was crossing the Atlantic in the same gales, and the *Antelope* under Captain Thomas Graves came across the *Marlborough*. Every man was rescued and taken to Lisbon although a desperate shortage of water caused severe hardship for everyone on board the overcrowded vessel.

Thomas Burnett had to face a court martial after losing the *Marlborough* at sea, and was desperate to put this formality behind him so that he could have another commission before the end of the war. He returned to England in the *Hanover* packet without waiting for a transport: 'having fallen in with the Land to the Eastward of Falmouth, I was put on shore by a Fishing boat at a place called Mevagisey about thirty miles to the Westward of Plymouth,

⁹¹ ADM 36/6065 Muster book *Marlborough* 1762 '1 October 1762 On preferment in the Army'.

⁹² John Burnet's Army career began as Ensign with the 28th Regiment of Foot in 1762; Captain Lieutenant December 1781, Brevet Major March 1794, Lt Colonel 17th Foot September 1797, Colonel 1st Foot October 1805, Major General June 1811, posted (to his regret) to Armagh instead of the Peninsula. Army Lists 1762-1812; Letter from Major-General John Burnet to Sir Isaac Brock, 11 October 1812 <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/4/4/2/14428/14428-8.txt> downloaded 1 September 2010.

for which place I intend to set out tomorrow and shall thare <sic> wait thair <sic> Lordships directions for my further proceedings.⁹³

The court martial exonerated Thomas Burnett but he went onto half pay from the date of the loss of the *Marlborough*. The end of the war meant that all his peers were being put onto half pay as their ships were paid off, and Burnett had to wait until 1770 before he served again.

4 The continuing need for ‘interest’ during and after the peace which ended the Seven Years’ War

During the peace Thomas Burnett lived in the village of Longford, in Middlesex. Longford was on the coach road from Bath to London so that he had easy access to Portsmouth and to London, which may explain why Burnett collected his own half pay twice a year instead of having it collected by an agent as many men did. Burnett was recalled to active service when the Spanish crisis of 1770 prompted a mini-mobilisation. His commission was dated 20 October 1770, and on 25 October the marriage register in St Mary’s Church, Harmondsworth, records a marriage between Thomas Burnett and Mary Hinchley. The local church, St Mary’s, is half a mile from the village of Longford, and it is where the christening of an illegitimate baby Ann had been recorded in 1765, the father being named as Captain Thomas Burnett.⁹⁴

Mary Burnett née Hinchley was obviously not of her husband’s social standing: an aristocratic family would never have permitted the couple to live together for five years before their marriage.⁹⁵

In 1769 when the Falkland Islands mobilisation was taking place the First Lord at the Admiralty was Sir Edward Hawke. No documentary evidence has yet been found to show the influence which moved Sir Edward to appoint Burnett to one of the coveted posts, although it existed a decade later as detailed below. This mobilisation was a small one and

⁹³ ADM 1/1493 Captains’ Letters B 1762-3 **Burnett** 31 January 1763.

⁹⁴ Ann’s great grand daughter was the author’s husband’s great grandmother.

⁹⁵ The widowed Mary Burnet was married again, to Thomas Rock, a wealthy businessman, and her will disposed of a considerable sum of money, some of which may have been from her second marriage. But Ann Burnett was her father’s heiress, a sufficient ‘catch’ to be a suitable wife for Simon Biddulph.

took very few men off half pay, an indication that Burnett had powerful influence behind him. Eventually the *Boyne* sailed for Jamaica in June 1771, returning in October 1772. The *Boyne* was briefly a guard ship at Portsmouth, itself a coveted position as it was almost a sinecure and the captain was not required to live on board. Burnett went back onto half pay until the American War of Independence created a demand for full employment again amongst naval personnel. He had been one of the lucky few to be re-employed during the years of peace. Others of Burnett's peers never returned to active service, although his younger contemporaries took advantage of the next active involvement of the Navy in North American waters at the end of the decade.

Although the reasons behind Burnett's appointment in 1770 are unclear, there is no doubt about the 'interest' behind his appointment to the *Prudent* in 1779. The Appointment Books maintained by Lord Sandwich and his clerks provide evidence of Sandwich's meticulous administration and provide evidence in detail of the whole range of employment available.⁹⁶ The names of all of Burnett's peers appear in the pages of Sandwich's books, some on many occasions. Burnett wrote asking for employment: an addition has been made to his entry, in Sandwich's hand: 'Ld. Rochford'.

Sandwich and Lord Rochford were friends and cabinet members who worked together closely and would often have been in each other's company. A verbal request from Rochford is suggested by the fact that Sandwich himself noted Rochford's name. A letter would have involved a clerk who would then have made the entry. William Henry Nassau van Zuylenstein, fourth earl of Rochford, was the grandson of the man with whom Bishop Burnet had travelled to Topsham in 1688. His father and Burnett's were Anglo-Dutch courtiers together. Rochford was a diplomat and politician, appointed Secretary of State for the Northern department in 1768, and of the Southern department in 1770. There is no written evidence to support the idea that Lord Rochford might have intervened with Sir Edward Hawke in 1770. No Appointment Books survive. On the other hand, conclusively, the outcome for Burnett on the second occasion was his commission on 7 June 1779 in the 3rd rate *Prudent*.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ National Maritime Museum Sandwich Papers SAN/1, 2, 3, 4.

⁹⁷ *Prudent* 64 gun 3rd rate O 1761 K 1765 L 1768 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 73.

First commissioned by Alexander Schomberg for the Falkland Islands dispute, *Prudent* made one voyage to the East Indies before being used as a receiving ship at the beginning of 1779. She was considered to be slow, ‘a dull sailor’.⁹⁸ Sir Charles Hardy sent Burnett to Leith in search of the American privateer commanded by John Paul Jones, and he spent the autumn there fruitlessly. For the first time Burnett had charge of a station, albeit a small one, and had to communicate to the Admiralty the comings and goings of a squadron of naval vessels. He also had to make use of intelligence gathered from all sources to try to locate the American privateer. The magistrates of Scarborough would have clamoured for Burnett’s presence to protect their local shipping, but John Paul Jones was elsewhere, and eventually Burnett was recalled to Spithead ‘with the frigates under my command’.⁹⁹

Prudent was sent to North America to serve under Arbuthnot. The French fleet was in strength off the coast, and both forces were intent on denying the Chesapeake Bay to the other. Arbuthnot took his ships south either to prevent the French entering the Chesapeake, or to fight them there, and when they sighted the French on the 16 March both fleets manoeuvred with some difficulty in the high sea and squally conditions. There was some ambiguity in the signals thrown out by Arbuthnot, so *Robust*, *Prudent* and *Europe*, which were in the van, took the brunt of the enemy fire and were then fired upon in turn by each of the French ships as they escaped to the east. *Prudent* had to be towed into the Chesapeake Bay after the engagement. Burnett was refitting in New York during the subsequent battle of the Chesapeake.

On 1 October 1781 Burnett was transferred to the 3rd rate *Royal Oak*.¹⁰⁰ This had been the flag ship of Vice Admiral Arbuthnot, but he returned to England leaving command at New York to Vice Admiral Thomas Graves. Burnett was assigned to Hood’s squadron and joined in the proceedings in the West Indies in the *Royal Oak*.

On 9 April 1782 there was an attempt by the French under de Grasse to prevent Rodney’s interfering with their plans to occupy Jamaica. Sailing in the narrow waters between Dominica and the Saintes, strong currents and calms and light airs affected first one fleet and

⁹⁸ William Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present* Vol. 3 (Sampson Low, Marston and Company 1898-1903) 513.

⁹⁹ ADM 1/1499 Captains’ Letters B 1779 **Burnett** 30 September, 6 October 1779.

¹⁰⁰ *Royal Oak* 74 gun 3rd rate O 1765 K 1766 L 1769 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 70.

then the other. The French long range bombardment of a portion of the English fleet damaged some ships: the *Royal Oak* had to replace her main top mast, but repairs were carried out overnight at sea.

Two days later Rodney defeated the French at the Battle of the Saintes. Just as at the Chesapeake, Burnett as the most senior captain in the *Royal Oak* was in the van. The French fleet was widely dispersed, and Rodney was able to make better use of the variable winds. He had the advantage of leading a group of captains who were confident of their superiority and used their initiative. When opportunity presented itself the French line was broken by two groups of ships. The dense pall of smoke, unable to disperse as a result of the concussion of the heavy bombardment, hid the rest of the fleet from each group of ships and blackened the ships inboard and out. The French fleet suffered horrific casualties. Burnett's first lieutenant, John Gwatkin was killed. Recriminations followed for years as to whether or not Rodney should have followed the French fleet during the night to make certain that there would be no further French naval action.¹⁰¹

Burnett emerged from the battle with the French prize *Glorieux* in tow, a fitting end to his career. At the beginning of May he went on board Rodney's flag ship *Formidable* and resigned his commission. Rodney gave Burnett a copy of his despatches to the Admiralty and on 5 May Burnett returned to London in the frigate *Eurydice*. Burnett took back with him Rodney's letter:

Captain Burnett the oldest and most experienced officer of the Fleet I have the honour to command and whose exertions in both actions did honour to himself and his Country, being in a bad state of health, and this climate never agreeing with him, it will be cruel in me if I suffered him to remain longer in the West Indies.

I therefore charged him with my despatches to their lordships, and must beg leave in the strongest manner to recommend him to their consideration for his long gallant and faithful services. ...¹⁰²

Although there is no indication beyond Rodney's letter to suggest that Thomas Burnett was terminally ill, he died on 4 June 1783. His will left everything to his wife Mary and daughter Ann.

¹⁰¹ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783* (Little Brown and Company 1944) 480-489; N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain 1649-1815* (Allen Lane 2004) 353-4; Peter Trew, *Rodney and the Breaking of the Line* (Pen and Sword 2006).

¹⁰² ADM 1/314 Commander-in-Chief's letters Leeward Islands 1781-1788 Rodney 410.

5 Thomas Burnett's peers: a bench mark against which to measure his career

To what extent was Thomas Burnett a successful captain? Measuring him against his peers is the only way to answer that question, and this will be done in subsequent chapters. At first sight his life looks unpromising: being left an orphan in New York dependent upon his Dutch grandparents was not a good beginning. Burnett's education was limited, which is reflected in his idiosyncratic spelling which again probably reflects his accent.

Burnett had the good fortune to become part of the following of Captain the Hon. George Townshend, after the death of Captain Matthew Norris robbed him of the one naval individual who had a personal link with the Burnett family. Burnett stayed with Townshend and then with Bonfoy and Dorrill, in each case progressing up the ladder of promotion during peace time which affected every one of his peers. On each of these three occasions the fact that Burnett came to the captain with his ship, but was taken on by that captain and promoted, appears to indicate that he was highly competent.

The exploits in *Happy* culminating in the attack on *Infernal* in 1757 demonstrated Burnett's courage and professional ability, and he might have hoped for a frigate for his first commission as a post captain. Instead his posting as flag captain in *Cambridge* meant that he spent three years of the war as Sir John Moore's flag captain. While he would have benefitted financially from this relationship, he would have had very different opportunities as captain of a frigate in the Western approaches. These implications are discussed in future chapters, as are the other elements of his active life, outlined above.

Prize money was always the *eldorado* for naval personnel. Burnett's will contains the words 'all my worldly estate real or personal wages prize money in short of whatever kind and nature...' ¹⁰³ Some men made fortunes out of their prizes, and their crews had huge incentives to try harder in engagements at sea. Other men were rarely in the right place at the right time or did not have the stomach for fighting, and did not achieve prizes. In Burnett's experience his courage is without question, and he demonstrated his seamanship and ability to make the most of opportunities as they presented themselves. The ships in which he

¹⁰³ Thomas Burnett's Will written July 16 1779, proved 27 June 1783. PROB 11/953.

served and the waters in which he sailed determined the limited opportunities he had for taking prizes. He certainly benefitted from the capture of Havana.

Burnett's ships reveal the extent to which he was unfortunate at sea. From the tiny sloop *Happy* through the 'crank' 3rd rate *Cambridge*, the cut-down two-decker 2nd rate *Marlborough*, the undistinguished 3rd rate *Boyne*, the poor sailor 3rd rate *Prudent*, Burnett only had the 4th rate *Rochester* very briefly, and the 3rd rate *Royal Oak* at the very end of his career.¹⁰⁴ In his last command he was not a free agent, but constrained within Rodney's fleet. Some of his colleagues enjoyed frigates and the benefits which resulted from them throughout their careers.

It is impossible to say whether or not Burnett was unlucky in the ships, or whether they are a measure of low regard by the Admiralty. It is only by looking at the careers of his peers that this can be judged. Subsequent chapters will show whether he was lucky or not. He was certainly a survivor: his professional career extended almost to the end of the American war by which time few of his peers were still serving officers. The greater understanding of Burnett's life, a desired outcome of this work, will be gained from the larger study of the careers of his 34 peers, against which his achievements will be measured.

¹⁰⁴ While the *Royal Oak* was the best of his ships, she was the first of Sir John Williams' 74s. In an attempt to improve her speed, he gave her too fine a run aft, so that she 'fore reached on <i.e. passed> most other ships, but they all weathered on her'. Lavery, *Ship of the Line* 109.

Chapter 2 The cohort of ‘young gentlemen’ who were commissioned as lieutenants and their progress through the rank of master and commander to post captain in 1757

A ‘young gentleman’ had to be taken on by a serving captain to begin his time at sea. It was customary for several such young men to be on the ship’s books. He was initially usually rated as servant or able seamen rather than as midshipmen, and was expected to spend at least six years at sea literally ‘learning the ropes’ and acquiring professional skills such as navigation. During this period he could be entered on the books as secretary, servant, ordinary or able seaman or midshipman at the Captain’s discretion.¹⁰⁵ The reality of his position was that he was an apprentice until he had learned his craft and earned the right to his first commission. For two of these years he needed to be rated as midshipman or mate before being examined for his passing certificate.¹⁰⁶ During this period the young man depended on his parents for necessities such as clothes, as he was not paid until he was commissioned: the allowance given by the Admiralty for ‘servants’ went to the captain.¹⁰⁷ Taking to sea the son of a gentleman was one link in the chain of patronage. As many of the boys were very young and had had little formal education, it was possible for them to catch up on academic skills at Watt’s Academy in Portsmouth, where for a few guineas they could be usefully occupied while their ship was being docked.¹⁰⁸ Not every ship with young gentlemen on board would have carried a school master, and he would have had a hard task to turn unlettered boys into gentlemen who could write with style and polish.¹⁰⁹

1 The ‘interest’ which took Thomas Burnett to sea

As outlined in Chapter 1, **Thomas Burnett**’s uncle knew exactly how to set about getting his nephew taken to sea. By 1736 the young Thomas no longer needed a warrant as a King’s Letter Boy, but the patronage of Captain Mathew Norris launched Thomas Burnett’s naval career in the 20 gun 6th rate *Tartar*. The sum of two hundred pounds from his uncle would

¹⁰⁵ Baugh suggests that it was only the ‘incompetent or ill-favoured boys’ who were rated as servants, and that officer material was favoured with the higher rates. *British Naval Administration* 97.

¹⁰⁶ Rodger, *Wooden World* 263.

¹⁰⁷ NMM ELL 400 John **Elliot** letter to his father 4 December 1745.

¹⁰⁸ NMM ELL/400 John **Elliot** letter to his father 19 July 1747.

¹⁰⁹ Rodger, *Wooden World* 266.

have provided the twelve-year old Thomas with the clothes and necessaries for his life at sea. He would have been expected to have his own octant, for instance, to practise navigation.

Date	Ship	Captain	Place	Rating
4 October 1736	<i>Tartar</i>	Matthew Norris	New York	Able seaman
8 December 1738- 19 January 1739	<i>Strafford</i>	Thomas Durell	Plymouth	Able seaman
19 January 1739 - 23 Jan 1742	<i>Tartar</i>	George Townshend	South Carolina	Able seaman
23 January 1742 - 20 August 1744	<i>Chatham</i>	George Townshend	Mediterranean	Midshipman
3 March 1742	Examined for lieutenant's passing certificate			
11-25 March 1743	<i>Namur</i>	William Dilke	Mediterranean	Supernumerary
20 August 1744	<i>Cambridge</i>	Charles Drummond	Mediterranean	4 th Lieutenant

Table 2: Movements of Thomas Burnett from his first appearance in 1736 to his first commission in 1744

Tartar needed a 'middling repair' and refitting which was carried out in Plymouth Dockyard. While this was being done her crew, including Burnett, were 'turned over' into the recently launched 4th rate *Strafford*, guard ship in Plymouth under Captain Thomas Durell.¹¹⁰ This kept the men together so that they would be available as soon as the dockyard work on *Tartar* was completed. In January 1739 *Tartar* was commissioned under her new captain, the Hon. George Townshend.¹¹¹ This was Townshend's first posting, having served before his commission under Captain Durell. It may be that as a newly appointed post captain Townshend did not have a following of his own, and was content to inherit the young gentlemen left in *Tartar* when Norris died. He would have known Burnett and his peers from

¹¹⁰ Durell was made post in 1720, and served under Wager in the Mediterranean. His was one of the three ships that captured the Spanish *Princessa* in 1740. Died in 1741. Charnock *Biographia Navalis* 82. Clowes *Royal Navy* 268. *Strafford* 60 gun 3rd rate O 1733 K 1733 L 1735 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 44. ADM 36/3441-2 *Strafford* pay book 1738/9.

¹¹¹ George Townshend was the son of Charles, 2nd Viscount Townshend and his second wife Dorothy, sister to Sir Robert Walpole. Made post in 1739, he first raised his flag in 1755, and died in 1769. Charnock *Biographia Navalis* Vol. 4 434, Syrett *Commissioned Sea Officers* 442.

their time together in *Strafford* during *Tartar*'s refit. Commissioned to South Carolina, *Tartar* took part in the Georgia operation in 1740. On *Tartar*'s return three years later both Townshend and Burnett transferred to the 50 gun 4th rate *Chatham*, Townshend on 7 December 1741, Burnett on 23 January 1742, presumably at Townshend's request.¹¹² As discussed in Chapter 1, this was the first of three occasions on which Burnett was inherited with a ship, and then taken by the captain to the next ship in which he was commissioned. *Chatham* escorted a convoy to Turkey before joining Admiral Mathews' fleet in the Mediterranean.¹¹³

2 The routes on board followed by Thomas Burnett's peers

Seven of Burnett's peers entered the navy as 'Captain's servants', and **Archibald Kennedy** spent three years as 'Captain's secretary'. **Samuel Spencer** spent two years as 'servant' on board the *Assistance*, and **Taylor Penny** spent a total of four years as 'Captain's Servant' on board *Port Mahon*. **William M'Cleverty** was three years in *Buckingham* as 'Captain's servant'. The Admiral's son **Thomas Harrison** spent a month as a 'servant' before being rated for nearly two years as 'clerk'.

Several men had years of experience in the merchant service: **Joshua Loring** had been five years as a merchant master on the east coast of America; **John Elliot** was in the East India service for two or three years; **Christopher Bassett** had time in the merchant service, and **Thomas Taylor** had done a trip to Jamaica.

At Pepys' instigation Charles II established in 1676 a system of 'volunteers', to encourage 'families of better quality .. to breed up their younger sons to the art and practice of navigation'.¹¹⁴ **Richard Kempfenfelt** and **Thomas Knackston** were rated 'volunteers' under this system. Rodger writes that this scheme was modified by the foundation of the Royal

¹¹² *Chatham* 50 gun 4th rate K 1718 L 1721 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 45. Burnett was unwell at the commencement of this commission: there is an entry 'said to be ill in town' above the purser's record that he was absent for six days when he should have been on board. ADM 36/4185 *Tartar* pay book 1741.

¹¹³ Dates in this table have been taken from the muster and pay books of the vessels in which Burnett served. ADM 36/4176 Pay Book *Tartar* 1736-7; ADM 36/3441 Pay Book *Strafford* 1738-9; ADM 36/4185 Pay Book *Tartar* 1739-41; ADM 36/377 Pay Book *Chatham* 1741-2; ADM 36/531-2 Pay Book *Chatham* 1742-3; ADM 107/4/492 Passing Certificate Thomas Burnett 3 March 1742; ADM 36/2098 Pay Book *Namur* 1744; ADM 33/385 Pay Book *Cambridge* 1744.

¹¹⁴ Ehrman, *William's Navy* 141.

Naval Academy at Portsmouth in 1730.¹¹⁵ However, ‘volunteer’ as a rating did not immediately disappear. The passing certificates which have been found so far show that a further four of Thomas Burnett’s peers were ‘volunteers’ for part of their sea time. **William Hotham** served as a ‘volunteer’ for eight months after his three years at the Royal Naval Academy; **John Lindsay**, after his two years at the Academy spent a further eighteen months as a ‘volunteer’ before Captain Edgcumbe rated him a midshipman in the *Deptford*. **Robert Man** spent a total of four years two months as a ‘volunteer’, **Robert Faulknor** a total of three years seven months.

It was possible to make up sea time without actually going to sea by spending time at the Royal Naval Academy, as the **Hon. William Hotham** and **John Lindsay** had done, and **Charles Medows, Viscount Newark** was warranted there for almost four years. Established by the King in 1730 to educate 40 young gentlemen as future officers, the Academy taught mathematics and navigation as well as fencing and dancing, and it may have seemed to concerned parents that it offered a more sheltered environment in which two years of sea-time could be accumulated.¹¹⁶

3 The ‘passing certificate’ for lieutenant

From the time of the Restoration, administrators of the navy were concerned about the quality of officers. No longer commanded by generals, the vessels of the navy needed a professional officer class. For effective command these men needed to have the right background and aptitude, while being able to replace the competent mariners who had been the masters under the Commonwealth.¹¹⁷ Samuel Pepys was determined to create a professional officer corps in the Restoration navy. He wanted to make the sea service attractive not only to younger sons but also to the first-born sons of gentry, hoping that they ‘might esteem it for the dignity of it, no diminution to their qualities or estates’ not just for a voyage or two, but would make

¹¹⁵ Rodger, *Wooden World* 265.

¹¹⁶ **Paul Henry Ourry** had a ‘large and expensive family’ of sons, and asked for a place for his son George Treby Ourry. The **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** wrote on behalf of another applicant and once his age and religion were proved the ‘usual letter’ was sent. ADM 1/2670 Captains’ Letters W 1768 **Walsingham** 7 and 28 December 1768. H.W. Dickinson, *Educating the Royal Navy*, (Routledge 2007); Rodger, *Wooden World* 25, 262. It is of interest that the French ‘garde de la marine’ were on a much more professional basis: the boys were taught fencing, drawing, mathematics, fortification, hydrography, the use of navigational instruments, gunnery practice, military drill, field manoeuvres, ship construction. F.B. Sullivan, ‘The Royal Academy at Portsmouth 1729-1806’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 63 (SNR 1977) 311.

¹¹⁷ Baugh quotes Macauley: ‘There were gentlemen and there were seamen in the navy of Charles the Second. But the seamen were not gentlemen and the gentlemen were not seamen’. Baugh, *Naval Administration* 93.

it ‘a principal (if not a necessary) step towards their advancement to the greatest offices of State and Court’.¹¹⁸

As part of the process of creating an officer corps, in 1677 Pepys initiated the ‘passing certificate’ which required the applicants to demonstrate a minimum standard of professional competence, to rid the navy of ‘volunteers, who having passed some time superficially at sea, and being related to families of interest at court, do obtain lieutenancies before they are fitted for it.’¹¹⁹ Potential officers had to show sufficient knowledge of maritime skills, to be of an appropriate age and to have had a reasonable length of sea service. In 1702, when the decision was also made that some instruction should have been given before the test, a minimum age of 20 years, which prevented immature candidates, was specified and by this age the candidate was expected to show evidence of six years sea service.¹²⁰ Evidence for the fact that the examiners have covered themselves over the question of minimum age is the use of the form of words ‘appears to be’, in every one of the 24 passing certificates which have been found relating to Burnett’s peers. The verbal examination, conducted by three captains, tested a range of necessary knowledge, amongst which was: ‘work a ships way <sic> by plain sailing and mercator, observe by sun or star, find the direction of the compass ...’¹²¹ If possible the candidates were examined at the Navy Board in London, where Dockyard commissioners and retired captains or even Admirals could form the panel.¹²² If London was out of reach and more than three ships were on station, a panel of three captains would be made up.¹²³

¹¹⁸ J.R. Tanner, ed. *Samuel Pepys’s Naval Minutes* (Navy Records Society 1926) 406.

¹¹⁹ Baugh, *Naval Administration* 100.

¹²⁰ H.W. Dickinson, *Educating the Royal Navy* (Routledge 2007) 11.

¹²¹ ADM 6/86/218 Passing Certificate **Joshua Loring** 25 Sept 1745.

¹²² ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 24 October 1760; ADM6/86/253 **William M^cCleverty** was examined by Anson and Saumarez; ADM 107/4/14 **Thomas Taylor**.

¹²³ In 1762 **William M^cCleverty** sent his son up to London with Admiral Rodney’s despatches. He asked the Secretary, Philip Stephens ‘to move their Lordships for an order to the Navy Board for passing his examination as he has served more than his time in the navy if their Lordships would favour me with him as one of my lieutenants will greatly oblige me....’ It was not to be. It was not until 1777 that George Anson M^cCleverty was commissioned. He had had to wait a long time, as the Navy Board could not be brow-beaten. ADM 1/2114 Captains’ Letters M 1762 **M^cCleverty** 17 July 1762.

	Born	Years at sea	Age	Passing Certificate	Commissioned Lieutenant	Waited
Affleck, Edmund	1725	4y 1m	20	9.4.1745	2.7.1745	3 months
Basset, Christopher	1722	5y 7m	21	14.11.1745	22.11.1745	0
Boyle, Hon Robert	1733	6y 2m	21	16.10.1754	23.3.1756	1yr 5m
Burnett, Thomas	1724?	6y 2m	18 ?	22.2.1742	20.8.1744	2yr 6m
Clements, Michael	1735	6y 11m	20	17.11.1755	4.12.1755	1 m
Craig, Robert	1715	6y 1m	25	18.11.1740	27.2.1741	3 m
Elliot, John	1732	5y 9m	20	25.3.1752	30.4.1756	4 years
Faulknor, Robert	1721	9y 10m	20	1.10.1741	5.10.1741	0
Harrison, Thomas	1725	7y 9m	21	30.11.1747	3.12.1747	0
Hotham, William	1734	6y	20	11.7.1754	28.1.1755	6 m
Kempfenfelt, Richard	1715	8y 10m	22	6.5.1737	14.1.1741	3 yr 8 m
Kennedy, Archibald	1720	10y	24	11.12.1744	16.12.1744	0
Knackston, Thomas	1710	9 y 3w	25	7.10.1735	15.12.1738	3 yr 2 m
Lindsay, John	1735	6y 1m	21	17.2.1756	2.3.1756	0
Loring, Joshua	1725	12y 5m	20	25.9.1745	23.5.1745	0
McCleverty, William	1725	9y 8m	20	11.7.1745	13.7.1745	0
Man, Robert	?	8y 4m	?	23.3.1739	6.3.1747	8 years
Medows, Charles	1735	7y 9m	20	6.8.1755	5.8.1755	0
Paston, William	1731	5y +	21	4.1.1752	19.9.1755	3 yr 8 m
Penny, Taylor	1722	10y 9m	23	25.7.1745	6.8.1745	0
Shurmur, William	1721	5y 12m	24	22.5.1745	23.1.1746	7 m
Spencer, Samuel	1717	6y 2w	21	27.3.1738	21.1.1742	3 yr 10 m
Taylor, Thomas	1721	5y 9m	24	22.7.1745	29.11.1745	4 m
Phillips Towry, Henry	1718	6y 8m	23	15.12.1741	6.8.1742	8 m

Table 3: Summary of careers at sea before their first commissions for the men whose Passing Certificates were found

In 1742 **Thomas Burnett** was examined for his ‘passing certificate’, having produced the journals he had kept in *Tartar* and in *Chatham*, and certificates vouching for his diligence from the three captains under whom he had served: Norris, Durrell and Townshend.¹²⁴ The notes which accompany the entry in the Admiralty ledger indicate that he ‘appeared to be more than 24 years of age’. This is unlikely. As he was probably born about 1724, Burnett

¹²⁴ ADM 107/3/492 Passing certificate **Thomas Burnett** 3 March 1742.

was probably some years short of 20 years old when he was examined, and although this might indicate that he was well-grown and looked mature for his age, it also suggests that for those with influence the rules could be disregarded, as they were for **Charles Medows** and **Joseph Peyton**.¹²⁵ The table above includes the twenty four men whose Passing Certificates were found.¹²⁶

Baugh suggests that baptismal certificates had to be supplied to the Navy Board, and that this requirement was seldom waived.¹²⁷ However in no case has a date of birth been entered in the formal record of the examination, and it seems this was brought in later in the eighteenth century.

It was unusual that **Robert Man** had spent eight years at sea before passing the examination, and then had to wait a further eight years before he received his lieutenant's commission.¹²⁸ **Robert Faulknor** was at sea for nearly ten years before he passed, however he then only had to wait four days before his commission was confirmed by the Admiralty. Nine aspirants did not wait longer than a month to have their commissions confirmed. **Christopher Basset's** commission is dated a week after his examination, the Admiral's son **Thomas Harrison's** only three days later. **William M^cCleverty** only had to wait two days: with certificates signed by Anson and Saumarez his credentials were better than impeccable. Other men had to wait until a vacancy occurred: **Edmund Affleck** and **Robert Craig** only three months, the **Hon. Robert Boyle** 17 months. **Thomas Burnett**, having taken his certificate while he was in the Mediterranean in *Chatham* had to wait more than two years until the chain of promotions instituted by Admiral Mathews on his last days in command gave him his commission. He was not alone in waiting more than two years: **John Elliot** waited four years, **Richard Kempfenfelt** more than three. For the 15 who had to wait more than a month, the average length of time between the passing examination and commission was two years two

¹²⁵ **Medows** was born on 14 November 1737 and took his passing certificate on 6 August 1755, at the age of 18; **Peyton** was born in 1725 and commissioned in 1743, at 18.

¹²⁶ Included are the 24 officers for whom passing certificates have been found. ADM 107/3; Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers*.

¹²⁷ Baugh, *Naval Administration* 100.

¹²⁸ Research has not yet shown the relationship between the Robert Man of this study and the Captain Robert Man who took the young Robert to sea and signed his first certificates. It is likely that this was a dynasty, and that he was also related to Robert G Man, active at the same time, who was promoted to Admiral in 1770. It is remarkable therefore that he had to wait so long.

months.¹²⁹ Rodger suggested that there was ‘no means of knowing whether the supply of officers in each rank matched the demand, and whether the relationship between demand and supply changed over time’.¹³⁰ The evidence of the graphs below seems to show that the relationship was a close one, and that those who were first commissioned close to the outbreak of war did not wait as long as those first commissioned in the 1740s.

Some potential officers never made the transition to commissioned rank, from choice or from lack of ability as well as lack of opportunity. There were always many hopefuls waiting for promotion further up the ladder to clear a space for them at the bottom. A traditional wardroom toast was: ‘A bloody war and a sickly season!’ Whenever a lieutenant was commissioned into his first command, he cleared the way for a chain of promotions which would spread its ramifications over many ranks.¹³¹

Links similar to those between Burnett and Captain Norris have not been established between all of Burnett’s peers and their patrons, but for some the probable source of interest is clear. In the case of **John Elliot**, for example, who began his naval career at the age of eight as a ‘Captain’s servant’ in the *Augusta*, his father Sir Gilbert Elliot’s connections with the Duke of Argyll would have provided the ‘interest’ necessary to persuade Captain Hamilton to take on the boy.

Geoffrey Green has written an account of the part played by Jews in the Royal Navy, and devotes a chapter to the career of **Alexander Schomberg**.¹³² Presumably his father, a successful doctor in the City of London, had contacts which put him in touch with Captain Pratten of the *Suffolk* who took the twenty three year old Alexander to sea with him.

¹²⁹ Some promotions were more rapid than others: when Captain Peyton of the *Rochester* resigned in 1743 his first lieutenant, Arthur Scott, was promoted to his place, having started the voyage three years before as a midshipman. Like Scott, Giles Vanburgh had only three year’s experience as a lieutenant when he was made post in 1744. Anon, *A narrative of proceedings* (in unpaginated appendix), confirmed in Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers* 397, 450.

¹³⁰ N.A.M. Rodger, ‘Commissioned officers’ careers in the Royal Navy, 1690-1815’ in *e-Journal for Maritime Research* (NMM June 2001) 1.

¹³¹ After the battle off Toulon John Russell, flag captain of the *Namur*, died of his wounds on 11 February 1744 in Port Mahon. The chain of movement amongst just the captains went: Lieutenant Bentley appointed Captain of the *Sutherland*; Lord Colvill moved to the *Dursley*; Captain Vanburgh into the *Feverham*; Captain Watkins into the *Newcastle*; Captain Fox into the *Chichester* and Captain Dilke into the *Namur*.¹³¹ Moving Bentley from first lieutenant would have meant many more changes amongst lieutenants, with promotions from small to larger ships a possibility, even if no change in rank from junior to senior lieutenant was offered. Anon *A Narrative of Proceedings of His Majesty’s Fleet in the Mediterranean 1744* (J. Millan 1744).

¹³² Geoffrey L. Green, *The Royal Navy and Anglo-Jewry 1740-1820* (Geoffrey Green 1989)

4 The change in status for a newly commissioned lieutenant

The first indication in the official papers that life had changed for **Thomas Burnett** once he was commissioned can be seen in the entry which accompanied his exchange from *Cambridge* into *Worcester*, with his servant.¹³³ Becoming a lieutenant, even one as lowly as a fourth, meant status. Burnett no longer lived in the gun room, at the after end of the gun deck, but in a cabin off the wardroom. He had a tiny private space of his own to which his servant would bring shaving water and in which he could tend to his clothes. Each successive rung up the ladder of commissions took lieutenants closer to the aftermost cabin on the starboard side, occupied by the first lieutenant.¹³⁴ In a ship of the line this cabin had a door which gave access to the starboard quarter gallery, giving the first lieutenant exclusive use of the head therein, a real mark of status. This demonstrated his standing vis-à-vis the master, who had to share the port side head with all the other officers berthed in the wardroom.¹³⁵ In addition to his clothes and navigational instruments, he would now have to furnish his cabin, and would need money for bedding, plates, cutlery, glasses and all the other items as if he were ‘setting up house’. An indulgent father or, in Burnett’s case, an uncle, would have been essential. The newly commissioned lieutenant would now be entitled to pay, although it would not be immediately forthcoming, leading to real hardship in some cases.¹³⁶ A few lieutenants with private income managed to marry during these years, but without financial support that would have been impossible. **Paul Henry Ourry**’s wife was Charity Treby, whose mother was a Hele and aunt was the duchess of Portmore. Charity was a landowner in her own right who looked after her farms while Paul Henry was away at sea.

Once the young lieutenant had a few year’s seniority he became entitled to half pay when not employed by the Admiralty, and this entitlement was for life. The question of pay and half pay is examined in Chapter 4.

¹³³ ADM 36/467 *Worcester* Pay book 1745.

¹³⁴ Brian Lavery, *The Arming and Fitting of Ships of War 1600-1815* (Conway 1987) 203.

¹³⁵ Social standing as well as naval status determined the use of heads in the roundhouses as opposed to those in the wardroom quarter galleries, and Rodger quotes the unhappy chaplain who was debarred from the privilege of the wardroom head. *Wooden World* 67.

¹³⁶ **John Elliot** was still being subsidised by his family when he was made post, the pay due to him from the East India service and his year as lieutenant not yet having been paid. NMM ELL/400 5 February 1757.

5 The pattern of first commissions issued during the inter-war years.

5.1 Lieutenants commissioned in years 1741-1745¹³⁷

In 1741 the number of first commissions issued was 137. This number dropped to 39 in 1742 and increased to 59 in 1743 before more than doubling to 129 in 1744. Even more lieutenants were needed in 1745, when 137 first commissions were issued.

When Walpole fell from government in 1742 the rôle of the navy was reduced. Sir Charles Wager was replaced as head of the Admiralty by a civilian, under whom Sir John Norris, Admiral of the Fleet since 1734, refused to serve.¹³⁸ It may be possible to see the lack of direction at the top being reflected in the lack of activity at the bottom of the naval profession. The Mediterranean, however, was still the centre of naval activity, and it is significant that of the 26 of Burnett's peers whose careers began in the 1740s, six served with him there: **Thomas Burnett** was in *Cambridge*; **Robert Craig** in *Chichester*; **Joseph Peyton** in *Essex*; **Robert Faulknor** and **Paul Henry Ourry** in *Elizabeth*; **Henry John Phillips** in *Revenge*; **William Goostrey** in *Marlborough*.¹³⁹ New ships were not being commissioned, and as shown below in Figure 1 the number of new lieutenants dropped from 137 in 1741 to forty in 1742 and sixty in 1743. It is clear to see why **Thomas Burnett** had to wait two years after his 'passing certificate' was issued before his services were needed.

An outline of the careers of those lieutenants for whom at least a date of commission is known can be derived from Syrett's *Commissioned Sea Officers*. Detailed analysis has only been done on the careers of those first commissioned in the same year as Burnett, 1744. This has been summarised in two charts which form Appendix 1.

¹³⁷ The tables are derived from Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers*.

¹³⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain 1649-1815* (Allen Lane 2004) 242.

¹³⁹ ADM 8/24 Disposition books 1742/3.

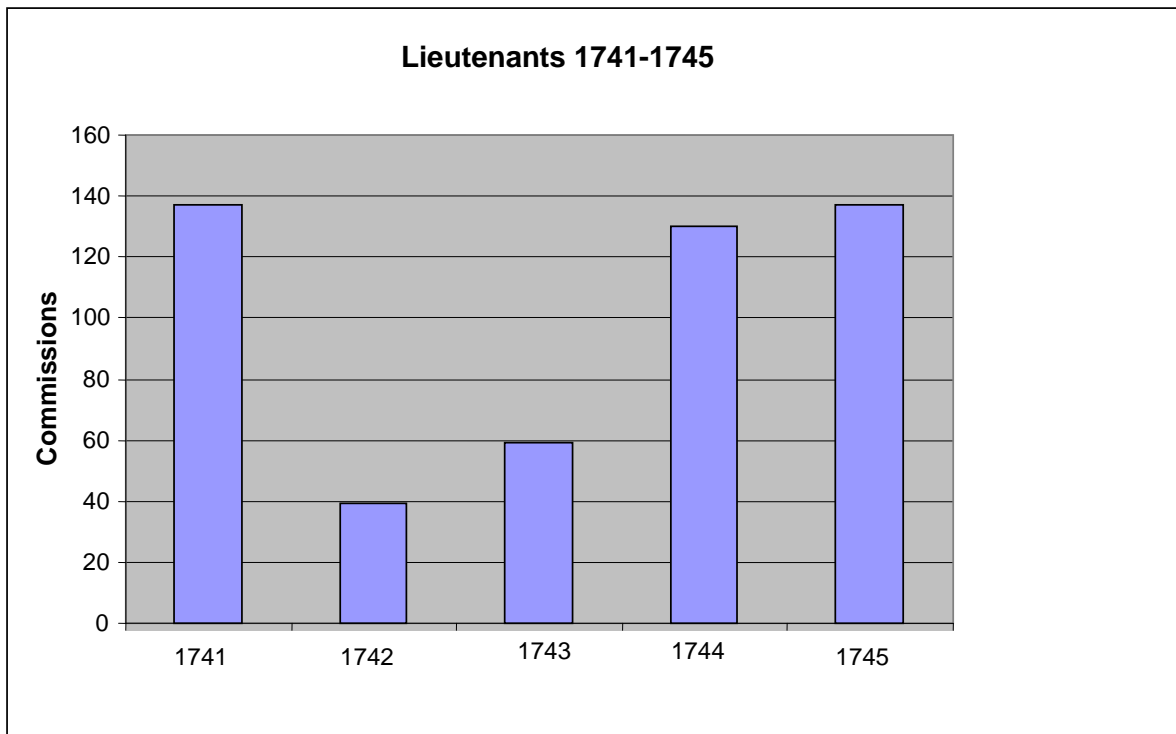


Figure 1: Lieutenants Commissioned between 1741 and 1745

The Admiralty relied upon a natural system of sifting and sorting to bring to the top of the pyramid enough men with experience to take independent command in due course. Chapter 7 will show the effect of this system on Burnett's peers. The **Hon. Augustus Keppel** spent just less than a year as lieutenant and master and commander, and eighteen years as captain before he raised his flag as Admiral. Huge influence was exerted by the Albemarle family (like Burnett's, Anglo-Dutch dating back to William III) and by Anson who initially commissioned Keppel in 1743.

The Hon. Augustus Keppel waited less than a year after his first commission before being made post. The Hon. William Bateman was made post in December 1745 and Michael Everitt, James Gambier, William Lloyd, Mark Milbank, Thomas Saumarez and Nicholas Vincent waited four years until 1748. The average length of time spent as lieutenant before being made post was 13 years. This corresponds well with the time Thomas Burnett spent after being commissioned: 12 years. He did not have the influence of the Hon. Augustus Keppel or the Hon. William Bateman.

5.2 Promotion achieved by Lieutenants commissioned in 1744

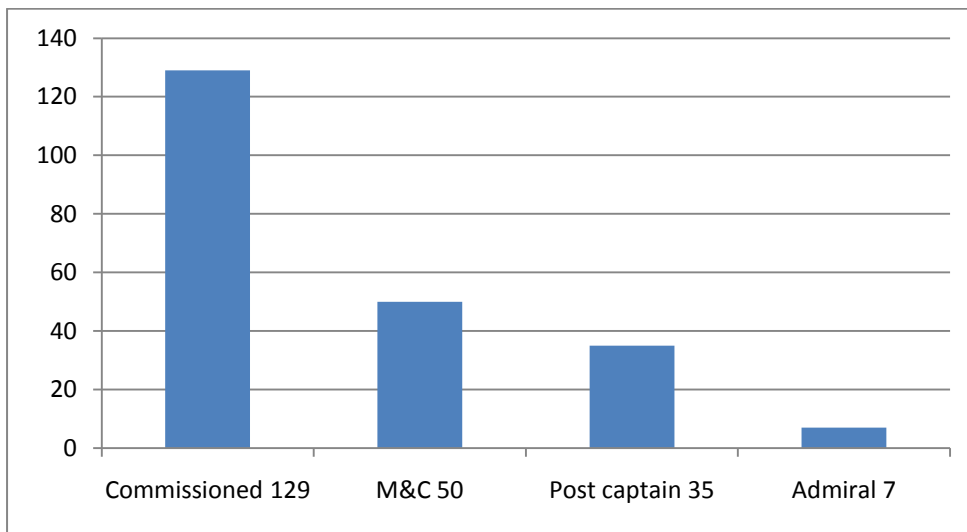


Figure 2: Total number of 1744 lieutenants and promotion achieved

Figure 2 shows clearly the broad based pyramid on which the final promotion to flag rank was based. From the 129 men who were first commissioned in 1744 50 went on to achieve independent command. Of these only thirty five were made post, and 20 per cent (7/35) were raised to flag rank. It is a coincidence that the figures of this cohort so nearly replicate those of the cohort chosen for study in this thesis.

6 The influences and 'interest' behind the appointments of Burnett and his peers as Masters and Commanders

6.1 Thomas Burnett's experience

Thomas Burnett was transferred from the *Chatham* to the Admiral's flagship the 2nd rate *Namur* on 11 March 1743.¹⁴⁰ Between November 1743 and March 1744 thirteen young men were transferred as supernumeraries from different ships in the fleet. Why did the Admiral make this order? What use did he make of the young men? The pay books give no detail at all, and the presumption is that the Admiral was looking for potential talent amongst the young men for whom his patronage had been solicited. One link might be that Matthews's

¹⁴⁰ *Namur* 90 gun 2nd rate O 1723 K 1723 L 1729 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 40.

flag captain was Captain Dilkes, one of Burnett's examiners in 1742. There are anomalies in this passing certificate, as mentioned above, and it may be that Captain Dilkes remembered the circumstances and recommended him to Admiral Mathews. It is also possible that Captain Townsend put his name forward to the Admiral as a worthy candidate. Of the 13 young men only three were commissioned, two by Admiral Mathews: Matthew Wallis on 16 March and **Thomas Burnett** on 20 August 1744.¹⁴¹

In February 1744 Mathews had fought the inconclusive battle off Toulon and was recalled and court martialled. At the end of his tenure Mathews had to ask his replacement, Vice Admiral Rowley, for a few more days in office as his secretary's clerks were unable to keep up with the work which needed to be done: 'It was not in my power to strike my flag sooner, in regard I have many accounts to adjust'.¹⁴² One of the last acts performed by Admiral Mathews was to commission **Thomas Burnett** as fourth lieutenant in *Cambridge*.¹⁴³ Clearly Mathews was determined to promote Burnett. A reason for his patronage has not yet been found, but it may have been that Mathews himself was discharging an obligation to someone else. A contemporary account of Mathew's trial lists 50 commissions in addition to the two mentioned above in *Namur*.¹⁴⁴

The promotion of **Thomas Burnett** through the ranks of lieutenant has been described in Chapter 1. He was 'poised for preferment' as first lieutenant in *Royal George*, the navy's premier 1st rate, when the Admiralty needed to expand the fleet rapidly in the face of threats at sea in every theatre in 1756. The commissioners would have looked carefully at the names of those men, no longer inexperienced, to whom they could entrust command. No evidence of the 'interest' behind Burnett's promotion to Master and Commander has been found, but it may have been behind the scenes. The extent of the Burnett family 'interest' is outlined in Chapter 1.

¹⁴¹ Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers* Wallis 456; Martin 301. **Henry John Phillips**, one of **Thomas Burnett's** cohort of post captains, shared his midshipman's accommodation in *Chatham* from 1 February until he left on 22 March 1741. ADM 33/377 *Chatham* pay book 1 July 1741 – 30 June 1742.

¹⁴² ADM 1/381 Mathews' letters 1744 21 August 1744.

¹⁴³ *Cambridge* 80 gun 3rd rate K 1713 L 1715 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 33.

¹⁴⁴ Anon *A Narrative of the Proceedings*. The author's copy was owned by Admiral Thomas Broderick, who was made post in 1741 and first raised his flag in 1756.

6.2 Family connections and ‘interest’ in the rest of Burnett’s peers

Despite Anson’s dictum referred to above, the letters of Burnett’s peers make clear that without influence or ‘interest’ it was not enough to demonstrate enterprise and daring. At first sight this might appear to be a very pessimistic view of the young man’s future, but ability without influence does not appear to equal promotion. Appendix 4 summarises the connections which may have eased the appointments of Thomas Burnett and his peers: **Edmund Affleck** was the son and brother of members of parliament; **Christopher Bassett** had strong Cornish interests and was a protégée of Admiral Boscawen; the **Hon. Robert Boyle**’s father was Henry, the first earl of Shannon and father-in-law was Sir Charles Hanbury Williams with close connections to both the Devonshire and Cavendish families; **Thomas Cornwall**’s connection to the naval dynasty has not yet been established; **John Elliot**’s father was Lord Minto (Lord Chief Justice of Scotland), his brother Gilbert a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty and a rising politician; **Robert Faulkner** was the son of Captain Samuel Faulkner, part of a four-generation dynasty; **Thomas Harrison** was the son of Admiral Henry Harrison; **John Henry Phillips** was the nephew of John Towry, a naval Commissioner; **Joseph Peyton**’s father was Captain, later Commodore Edward Peyton; **Robert Man** went to sea with Captain Robert Man who may have been his father; **William Hotham**’s father Sir Beaumont Hotham was the friend and estate adviser to the 3rd duke of Portland, and Hotham had served under Admiral Hawke in *Saint George* and followed him into *Namur* and *Ramillies*; **Richard Kempenfelt** was the son of Magnus Kempenfelt, honoured by Queen Anne for his services, and had served under Captain Charles Steevens in *Lichfield* and then followed him to *Orford*; **Archibald Kennedy**, heir to the earldoms of Kennedy and Cassillis, was a protégée of Admiral Warren who had worked closely with his father in New York; **John Lindsay** was the son of Sir Alexander Lindsay, and his mother was sister to Lord Mansfield; **Charles Medows, viscount Newark**, was heir to the duke of Kingston, his mentor was the Duke of Newcastle, and he also enjoyed the patronage of Boscawen and Keppel; **Paul Henry Ourry**’s mentor was the Hon George Edgcumbe, and his father-in-law was Rt. Hon. George Treby, Secretary at War; **Samuel Wallis** was a Cornishman and first lieutenant under Admiral Boscawen in *Invincible*; **Andrew Wilkinson** had been a lieutenant under Sir Charles Saunders in *Prince*.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵Ake Lindwall, ‘The Kempenfelt Family’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 57 (SNR 1971) 379-384; Namier used **Ourry** as an exemplar of a naval career boosted by parliamentary interest in *Structure of Politics* 34; Sir Lewis

Family interest is evident in countless documents. Thanks to his brother Gilbert's influence, **John Elliot** was taken to see Lord Anson by George Grenville 'and got done in ten minutes what we have been working for in vain for ten months': a commission in *Scarborough*.¹⁴⁶ He later ensured that his nephew William Elliot gained an independent command before his untimely death, apparently of tuberculosis.¹⁴⁷ **Joseph Peyton**'s flag captain while he was Commodore in the Mediterranean was his son Joseph, and his nephew Thomas Peyton in the sloop *Bulldog* was also in his squadron.¹⁴⁸ Vice Admiral **William Hotham** wanted his nephew William commissioned into his own ship as 8th lieutenant instead of 4th in the *Scipio*.¹⁴⁹

The Admiralty took note of professional ability, and it was rewarded in suitable candidates as soon as an opportunity presented itself. **William M^cCleverty** had been round the world with Anson, returning as mate in *Centurion's Prize*. Anson and Saumarez must have assured the young man that they would do their best for him. M^cCleverty's first commission followed two days after being examined for his passing certificate, although he then had to make his own way through the lieutenants' ranks. **Edmund Affleck** had taken command of the 4th rate *Advice* for seven months when her captain was taken ill, bringing her back from Antigua in May 1756 in such a state that she was surveyed and broken up immediately. His commission as post captain was dated March 1757. **Archibald Kennedy** had taken command of *Centaur* when Captain Crosby was killed, and he acted as captain from October 1753 until May 1754. However his position was not confirmed. The Admiralty wrote that '... he must return to his duty as lieutenant and wait another opportunity of being provided for.'¹⁵⁰ The outbreak of war brought Kennedy his promotion in April 1757. **Alexander Campbell, Robert Craig, William Fortescue** and **Thomas Knackston** had all served responsibly (for twelve, nine, eleven and twelve years respectively) as commanders in sloops on convoy duty or fishery

Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons 1754-1790 Vols. II and III* (HMSO 1964); John Towry was promoted to 'yellow' Admiral in 1747, Daniel Baugh, ed. *Naval Administration 1715-1750* (Navy Records Society 1977) 81; Rodger, *Wooden World* 260.

¹⁴⁶ NMM ELL/400 John **Elliot** letter 1 May 1756.

¹⁴⁷ NMM ELL Letter from Hood to **Elliot** 9 May 1792.

¹⁴⁸ The Graves dynasty takes a lot of sorting out: Rear Admiral Thomas Graves' flag captain in *London* was Captain David Graves: accompanying them in *Bedford* was Captain Thomas Graves; in the same squadron Rear Admiral Sir Samuel Hood's flag captain in *Barfleur* was Captain Alexander Hood. ADM 1/491 Commodore Edmund **Affleck** New York 31 August 1781.

¹⁴⁹ ADM 1/98 Vice Admiral William **Hotham** 29 October 1790.

¹⁵⁰ ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1751-6 **Kennedy** 29 April 1753.

protection, and it appears that long service as an independent commander was rewarded by promotion, even if, as in the case of Knackston, no further service was expected.

Successful captains expected their lieutenants to be promoted as a mark of favour: **John Elliot** reported that he was ‘honoured by having his first lieutenant promoted’, having recommended him for his bravery in an engagement.¹⁵¹

A unique commendation opens **Paul Henry Ourry’s** file of letters, from his mentor the Hon. George Edgcumbe, affirming that he ‘was extremely active and vigilant’.¹⁵² A naval captain and heir to the Edgcumbe estates opposite Plymouth dockyard when he recommended Ourry, Edgcumbe was the member of Parliament for Fowey from 1746 and clerk of the duchy of Lancaster from 1747-62. It is tantalising that apart from Ourry’s letter, no written evidence of ‘interest’ has been found behind the appointments of Burnett’s peers, although their letters contain many insights into the way in which the world of interest and influence worked. Such documents were not, as a rule, in Admiralty files and therefore ephemeral.

Those who had influence made sure that the Admiralty was reminded of it. The American-born **Joshua Loring** was certain that by quoting Lords Anson and Halifax he would have a chance of a vessel, and wrote in 1757 to remind them of their promises with great delicacy:

I had the honour of being informed by Lord Halifax that Lord Anson had promised him that he would give me a ship, and I understood his Lordship very soon, but as Lord Anson is so much engaged <sic> in business that it is more than probable that his Lordship may have forgot it. I should esteem it the greatest favour if you would be pleased just to remind his Lordship of me.¹⁵³

The workings of ‘interest’ is seen when established captains could rescue lieutenants from half pay when ships were being re-commissioned. **Thomas Burnett** asked for his first and second lieutenants to be commissioned from half pay when he had the opportunity of helping them in 1770. The **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** was similarly asked to recommend a lieutenant on half pay to replace his indisposed Lt. Bernard. He asked for Lt. Humphrey Sainthill: first commissioned in 1746 Sainthill must have feared that he would never return to

¹⁵¹ NMM ELL/400 **Elliot** to his father 24 February 1758.

¹⁵² ADM 1/2245 Captains’ Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry**.

¹⁵³ ADM 1/2046 Captains’ Letters L 1757 **Loring** 3 November 1757.

active service.¹⁵⁴ **Henry Martin** asked for Thomas Allen as his second lieutenant, and also ‘I should be very glad to have Mr Hill for my first, if I could learn where he is, I know not a better man nor one I could place more confidence in.’¹⁵⁵ In each of these instances the influence being exerted seems the result of the merit which had been displayed by the lieutenant.

An example of influence being a part of a network of favours is seen in a letter written by **Charles Medows** who appealed directly to the Admiralty, ‘As I have not the honour to be known to Lord Sandwich’. Despite the modesty of his tone, he wrote with the full weight of an aristocrat on behalf of Robert Young, a purser who had worked with him, for an appointment to a ship entitled to bear a purser ‘when in ordinary’. Philip Stephens ordered his clerk to ‘put Young on the list of candidates and remind me of him’. He also assured Captain Medows that ‘I shall be glad to do Mr Young any good office in my power.’¹⁵⁶ The unspoken message is that by complying with Medows’ request, Stephens could expect a favour in return.

The case of a young man who ‘having no interest’ was superseded was taken up by **Paul Henry Ourry**. Goodridge’s letter reveals not just the hopeless situation of a man without influence, but the fact that often ‘interest’ was exerted verbally and without written evidence. Ourry wrote from New Palace Yard, to say ‘I have taken the liberty to send Mr. Goodridge to wait on you, he is the gentleman I spoke to you about in the House.’¹⁵⁷ This is evidence, if the researcher needed to be reminded of it, that conversations such as those which benefitted Thomas Burnett must have happened all the time. The outcome is the only evidence that an intervention took place. Such evidence of patronage is found in a letter from **Alexander Schomberg** who was asked to discharge John Edwards ‘to join Rear Admiral Steevens who, it seems, is his friend.’¹⁵⁸ John Burney, aware that his ship, *Fame* was about to be refitted as a guard ship and that the complement would be reduced, wrote to **Ourry** ‘as my only friend.’¹⁵⁹ **Joseph Peyton** wrote on behalf of George Patton, his master’s mate, who was an

¹⁵⁴ ADM 1/2663 Captains’ Letters W 1758 **Walsingham** 9 February 1758.

¹⁵⁵ ADM 1/2118 Captains’ Letters M 1770-3 **Martin** 8 November 1770.

¹⁵⁶ ADM 1/2118 Captains’ Letters M 1771 **Medows** 1 November 1771.

¹⁵⁷ John Goodridge was commissioned as lieutenant on 27 Dec. 1775, but died on 12 July 1776. Syrett *Commissioned Sea Officers* 179. ADM 1/2247 Captains’ Letters O 1763-70 **Ourry** 9 February 1765.

¹⁵⁸ ADM 1/2474 Captains’ Letters S 1760 **Schomberg** 26 December 1761.

¹⁵⁹ ADM 1/2248 Captains’ Letters O 1771-7 **Ourry** 14 May 1771.

excellent petty officer ‘but as he has no friend to back his good qualities and procure him the reference he wishes’ needed to be released from the navy where he would ‘remain pining for preferment’.¹⁶⁰

As yet research has not revealed whether a further group of men had any ‘interest’ in their promotion. It appears that **William Paston, Taylor Penny** and **John Wheelock** all had to make their way by merit alone without the opportune capture of a privateer or an outside agency bringing them to the attention of the Admiralty. More research is needed.

7 The importance of convoy duty in providing a valuable training ground and opportunities to prove professional expertise at the outset of a naval career.

There were many ways in which convoy duty represented a first class training ground for command in the navy: commanders learned to follow instructions, while interpreting these instructions in unusual circumstances; battling with weather was a constant factor; local interests had to be accommodated, local conditions and pilots understood; once merchant masters had joined a convoy they had to be bullied into submission.

For the men first commissioned during the 1740s, experience in convoy duty was inevitable. Protecting ‘the trade’ was an essential part of the *raison d’être* of the Navy, and young men honed their professional skills in the sometimes tedious but always challenging arenas in which French privateers lurked. The newly appointed commander of a sloop was usually kept on coastal work, escorting convoys and preventing attacks by French privateers. His orders kept him under the watchful eye of the Admiral on the station, and his scope for individual action was limited, but his brief, an age-old form of words, was ‘to protect the trade and annoy the enemy’, and many of them did just that. The number of sloops actively engaged in convoy protection varied from years of peace to those of war, and the proportion used for trade protection rose sharply, from 40% of the total number of sloops to

¹⁶⁰ ADM 1/2299 Captains’ Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 19 November 1762.

approximately 65% at the beginning of the war years. The data in the table below is taken from the List Books.¹⁶¹

Date	Total number of active sloops	Sloops used for Convoy protection	Percentage
1 Jan 1755	25	12	40
1 Jan 1756	38	25	66
1 Jan 1757	47	30	64
1 Jan 1758	49	26	53

Table 4: Proportion of sloops used in convoy protection 1755-58

The sloops varied in size from the very smallest, **Burnett's** yacht-sized two-masted ketch-rigged *Happy* with 8 x 3 pounder guns and a complement of 50 men, to **Medows'** three-masted *Albany* mounting 14 x 6 pounder guns and a complement of 125, in appearance a miniature frigate. They were nominally based at the ports from which convoys departed, but were at sea for a very high proportion of their active lives. The turnaround in dock for cleaning and refitting was rarely more than a day or two, so that the crews never had the break from routine that ships-of-the-line enjoyed when they came into dock for cleaning. Several commanders worked for more than a year without a break. Many of Burnett's peers, like **Affleck** whose experience is summarised below, spent the war years permanently on convoy duty, firstly in sloops and then in 6th and 5th rates.

At the outbreak of war, in October 1756, the Admiralty put its sloops onto a war footing, ordering them to make up their complement of men to 125. The letter went out to 38 commanders, eleven of which were Thomas Burnett and his peers. It is interesting that they made up such a significant proportion (29 per cent) of the number. The letters went to ports which ranged from Yarmouth, Sheerness and the Downs to Portsmouth and Plymouth.¹⁶²

Twenty four of Thomas Burnett's peers had experience of convoy protection, ten of them first as commanders. **Christopher Basset** was appointed commander whilst he was in the Mediterranean by Admiral Byng and was recalled to England to be a witness at his trial. He

¹⁶¹ Data from ADM 8/29-32.

¹⁶² Letters went to **Affleck, Burnett, Campbell, Cornwall, Knackston, M^cCleverty, Peyton, Taylor, Wallis, Wheelock, and Wilkinson.** ADM 2/77 14 October 1756.

had to wait for a posting to the sloop *Rainbow* and was employed for a year in convoy duty across the North Sea. Like Basset, the **Hon. Robert Boyle** was engaged in convoy duty across the North Sea in the sloop *Badger*. **Alexander Campbell** was in the sloop *Porcupine* as commander, engaged in protecting transports from Scotland through the Irish Sea, before his posting in 1757. **Robert Man** was commander of *Porcupine* on convoy duty out of Glasgow, escorting troop transports down through the Irish Sea. **Edmund Affleck** was commander of the sloop *Albany* in the Bristol Channel. **Thomas Cornwall** spent eight months in the sloop *Speedwell* chasing privateers in the Channel, patrolling out of Weymouth. **Samuel Wallis** was also occupied in convoy protection based on Weymouth. **Robert Craig** served in a series of sloops from 1748, convoying the trade across the North Sea. For more than a year **William M'Cleverty** was commander of the 6th rate *Peggy* on protection of convoys of troop transports out of Yarmouth to the Elbe. **Alexander Schomberg** began his career in the French built *Intrepid*, escorting convoys to and from Gibraltar.

7.1 Annual trade patterns and convoy deployment

Britain's trade with Europe, the Americas, the West and East Indies and Asia had become steadily more complex and more lucrative throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁶³ It was recognised that the threat of French privateers could be countered by the combination of a sloop and a more heavily armed 6th rate, and big convoys always sailed under the protection of at least one 6th rate. Donald Crowhurst defined the principle by which the Admiralty organised the stations of sloops: most convoys were protected 'with small fast vessels which were more than a match for French privateers' while additional cruisers patrolled the main landfalls when convoys were expected.¹⁶⁴

Convoys bound across the North Sea assembled in the Downs for passage up the East coast. Assembling large westbound convoys was only possible at Spithead, which provided a big safe anchorage. Ships from ports to the east of Spithead were protected by coastal convoys until they got there, and those from ports to the west were picked up as the westbound convoy

¹⁶³ G. Hampson, ed. *Portsmouth Customs Letter Books 1748-50* (Hampshire County Council 1994); Richard W. Unger, 'Warships, Cargo ships and Adam Smith: Trade and Government in the Eighteenth Century' in *The Mariner's Mirror* 92 (SNR 2006) 41.

¹⁶⁴ Crowhurst, 'Convoy System' 173.

passed down Channel, putting in at Cork for foodstuffs such as meat, butter and oatmeal for the West Indies, where they were unobtainable.¹⁶⁵ Trade to North America was made up of vessels loaded with manufactured goods such as furniture, cloth, household goods and tools which were produced more cheaply in England than in the colonies. These vessels could accompany a West Indian convoy until it reached latitude 30° N. and turned west, safe by then from privateers.

Trade bound for the East Indies sailed in convoys of between three and eight vessels in February or at the beginning of March, escorted out of the Channel and into the Atlantic by a ship of at least 40 guns. Two more groups of East Indiamen travelled in May and June. Ships bound for China used the same system, except that their round trip might take as long as three years. Other convoys could be joined if they were sailing south for as long as they held a common course, before diverging independently. Several of Burnett's peers were involved in accompanying this trade 200 leagues out into the Atlantic. For the return journeys, a year later, escorts were sent to St Helena in November and July to bring back the convoy in May and January.¹⁶⁶ If the East India Company vessels missed the rendezvous they were directed to sail in divisions of two or three ships, ten days apart. Ships would make for a port on the south coast of Ireland, such as Kinsale, or even Leith on the north east coast of Scotland, whence the Admiralty would direct a frigate to ensure a safe homecoming.¹⁶⁷

Robert Faulkner bringing in a lone East Indiaman in November 1761 from Lisbon to Spithead was protecting a vessel unusual for its timing.¹⁶⁸

The sailings of Hudson Bay Company vessels were also constrained by seasonal weather, not in this case the wind, but the ice which froze the Hudson Bay during the winter. This meant that the groups of three or four vessels which constituted the trade were accompanied to the

¹⁶⁵ ADM 1/2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 17 June 1757. It appears that J.R Jones was wrong to state: 'the vast number, small size and unpredictable sailings of ships employed in the coasting trade made a local convoy system impracticable'. Local coasting convoys were in use during the Seven Years War. J.R. Jones, 'Limitations of British Seapower in the French Wars' in Black and Woodfine, *British Navy* 41; Douglas Hamilton, 'Private enterprise and public service: naval contracting in the Caribbean, 1720-50', *e-Journal of Maritime Research* (NMM 2004) 3.

¹⁶⁶ C. Ernest Fayle, 'The Employment of British Shipping' in Northcote Parkinson, *The Trade Winds* 74.

¹⁶⁷ Crowhurst, 'Convoy system' 165.

¹⁶⁸ ADM 1/1787 Captains' Letters F 1760-1 **Faulkner** 6 Nov 1761.

West of the Orkneys in May and June, and back from Stromness towards the end of September and during October 1757.¹⁶⁹

The sailings of other trades could also be predicted with some accuracy: sugar production in the West Indies and tobacco or rice from North America was ready for export at times which determined the sailings of convoys from England. Sailing dates for convoys were printed in the *Lloyd's List*, and reprinted in the provincial papers so that merchants who were not based in London knew where and when their ships should join convoys. This intelligence of course was also available to the enemy.¹⁷⁰ There was a two-way trade to the West Indies. Exports of supplies of Irish salted beef and pork products to the West Indies were convoyed from Cork in December or January. The merchants reached the Leeward Islands and Jamaica in time to purchase the crop of sugar as soon as it was ready for shipment in April or May. This arrangement suited the merchants as well as the Admiralty, as the same convoys could carry reinforcements and supplies to the Jamaica and the Leeward Islands stations. Sailing during the hurricane season in August and September was avoided.

Convoys bound across the North Sea gathered at the Nore and picked up further trade on their way up the east coast before leaving, with the appropriate pilots, for the Scandinavian countries and the Baltic. Trade across the North Sea was extremely valuable. The Baltic was the original source of naval stores: single straight trunks for masts, yards and spars; naval stores such as pitch and tar for preserving wood, and sailcloth, flax and hemp for making sails and ropes were the basic constituents of merchantmen as well as men-of-war. In the other direction Holland, Germany and Russia provided valuable markets for tobacco, rice and sugar, the produce of the West Indies. **Edmund Affleck, Christopher Basset and Robert Boyle** escorted large convoys (between 22 and 100 vessels) between Hull and Elsinore, carrying a huge variety of goods. The outward trade ranged from those named above through tin, indigo, ginger, bottled ale, shoes, cutlery ware and salt to 'bale goods' or woven materials, while return trade ranged from the naval stores from the Baltic through gunpowder from Amsterdam to wheat from Poland.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Crowhurst, 'Convoy system' 166. ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Craig** 15 June/28 December 1757.

¹⁷⁰ Crowhurst, 'Convoy System' 166-7.

¹⁷¹ ADM 1/1441 Captains' letters A 1757 **Affleck** 17 June, 3-28 September 1757. ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Basset** 13-17 June, 16 July, 19 September 1757; **Boyle** 1 April 1757.

Date	Vessel	Station	Destination	Cargos
1756	Sloop <i>Albany</i>	Bristol Channel	Plymouth, Cork	Wood, tin; linen, calf skin
		Dublin	Downs	Linen
		Gatcomb	Plymouth	Timber
		Falmouth	Downs	Tin
1757	6 th rate <i>Mercury</i>	Hull, Humber	Elsinore	Out: tin, indigo, ginger, bottled ale, shoes, cutlery, salt, sugar, silk, cloth. Return: naval stores, wheat, blubber, alabaster
1758	6 th rate <i>Mercury</i>	Plymouth	West Indies	Salt
1759	5 th rate <i>Launceston</i>	Portsmouth	Lisbon, Gibraltar	Out: supplies of all kinds for Garrison Return: wine, fruit
1762	5 th rate <i>Launceston</i>	New England	Spithead	Mast timber, logwood, oil, sugar, naval stores, furs.

Table 5: Elements of Edmund Affleck's deployments on convoy protection

Everyone must have been relieved to hear the news that François Thurot had been killed in 1760 by **John Elliot** off the Isle of Man, an encounter discussed in Chapter 6. Until then extra warships had carried out patrols in the North Sea if it was suspected that Thurot was about to begin a cruise.¹⁷² Ships from Glasgow received no protection because relatively few French privateers operated as far north.¹⁷³

As a single example, the table above summarises the types of convoy escorted by Edmund Affleck, a pattern repeated by many of his peers convoying equally diverse cargoes.¹⁷⁴ Affleck's work in *Albany* when he was based in the Bristol Channel was paralleled by that undertaken by his colleagues on the same station in 6th rates: there was nothing to choose between the responsibilities of a commander in a sloop and a post captain in a 6th rate on the same station: the real difference lay in the destinations. Affleck in *Mercury* and *Launceston* could range further afield, and look after convoys of between 50 and 100 merchant vessels, whereas the local trade he escorted in 1756 was rarely carried in convoys larger than 20 vessels.

¹⁷² Crowhurst, 'Convoy System' 173.

¹⁷³ Crowhurst quotes **Henry Martin's** experience in *Danae* off Tory Island. Crowhurst, 'Convoy System' 169.

¹⁷⁴ ADM 1/1441-5 Captains' Letters A 1749-78 **Affleck** 20, 30 July, 4, 24 November 1756, 12 May, 17 June, 3 28 September 1757, 17 January, 1 August, 31 December 1758, 29 July, 16 September, 28 October 1759, 16 June 1760, 6 August, 13 November 1761, 4 September, 6 November 1762 .

7.2 Co-operation between the Admiralty and merchant traders

The instructions issued to all captains responsible for convoy protection were unambiguous:

... not to let any of his Maj.^{ty} ships lye idle in port, but to keep them at sea cruising for the protection of the trade and to order them in at such times only as they may be wanted for convoy or when their own wants shall render it absolutely necessary and to take care constantly to do everything to protect and accommodate the trade.¹⁷⁵

The increasing power of London or Bristol merchants to voice their needs in parliament kept 'the trade' at the head of the Admiralty's list of priorities.¹⁷⁶ At the beginning of the century the Admiralty found it difficult to meet all their obligations. Crowhurst stated that English trade losses to French privateers during the War of Austrian Succession led to public outcries against the handling of the war. By the outbreak of the Seven Years' War the pattern of British trade routes was even more complex after the disruption of the War of Austrian Succession; the numbers of French privateers was undiminished, but losses were kept within limits which British merchants accepted.¹⁷⁷ Despite the difficulties of navigation up the Thames, East Indian trade as well as West Indian sugar and coffee to be re-exported were taken to London before onward trade to the Continent, making London the single most important port in England.¹⁷⁸ It was essential that trade was profitable and that profits were invested in Government funds to finance the war, and this depended on the cooperation between the administration and the banking and commercial communities. One feature of the relationship between the Admiralty and the East India Company was not amicable: the question of pressing the men out of the fleet when they returned to the Thames. This was not mentioned by Crowhurst in his article referred to above, and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Merchant vessels sailing in coastal convoys guarded by vessels no bigger than a sloop were still entitled to reduced insurance premiums. One of the reasons why the convoy system worked was that powerful pressure was applied to the merchants by the insurance companies. Much higher rates were levied if the ships were unescorted, and in some cases they were refused any insurance at all. From its first beginnings in Edward Lloyd's Coffee House in

¹⁷⁵ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Craig** 14 February 1757.

¹⁷⁶ **Harding**, *Sailing Navy* 110.

¹⁷⁷ Crowhurst, 'Convoy System' 163.

¹⁷⁸ Lucy Frances Horsfall, 'The West Indian Trade' in Northcote Parkinson, *Trade Winds* 162.

1688, Lloyd's played a central rôle, not merely as a mechanism for distributing information through *Lloyd's List* but also through coffee-house gossip. When disobedience on the part of merchant captains was reported to the Admiralty, a copy of the letter was passed to Lloyd's so that the merchant's insurers could take appropriate action.¹⁷⁹

Disobedient transport vessels caused problems for **John Lindsay**: 'Enclosed is a list of them that took orders, none of them obeyed any signals I made...'. The Admiralty immediately sent Lindsay's list to the Master of Lloyds.¹⁸⁰ **Robert Man** also sent in 'a copy of the convoy I have enclosed with the behaviour of each ship and hope their Lordships will give orders that their owners may be acquainted with the same.'¹⁸¹ Two years later **Henry Martin** was even more exasperated: 'The ill behaviour of many of the masters of ships and vessels who came out under my convoy puts me under the absolute necessity of complaining to their Lordships of them, as well to justify my own conduct as to prevent the insurers being imposed on, in case any of them should be taken....'¹⁸² His letter was copied and sent to the Master of Lloyds 'to be made public', as was that of **Robert Craig** who wrote at length on the subject of the 'inattention and disobedience to signals'.¹⁸³ These were not the only escorting captains who were exasperated. Thomas Pasley expressed his feelings in his private journal: 'Thus is the captain of a man-of-war's character sported away, who happens to have the misfortune to command a convoy'.¹⁸⁴

A professional decision had to be made by **Alexander Shomberg** about how to deal with a convoy in adverse weather conditions. While taking a convoy from Spithead to Chatham, the wind 'flew about to north and blew strong'. He described his situation so vividly that his predicament would have been clear to those listening to his letter in the Admiralty board room:

The convoy were all to the northward of me and as I could not tell how long the wind might keep on that point, nor how violent it might blow (the sky looking then wild) I did not think it proper to make their signal to bear down to me, from a weather shore, but endeavoured to close them as well as I could.

¹⁷⁹ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Craig** 15 March 1757; ADM 1/2047 Captains' Letters L 1758 **Lindsay** 18 January 1758; ADM 1/2470 Captains' letters S 1756 **Schomberg** 5 December 1756; Pares, *War and Trade* 307.

¹⁸⁰ ADM 1/2047 Captains' Letters L 1758 **Lindsay** 18 January 1758.

¹⁸¹ ADM 1/2111 Captains' Letters M 1759 **Man** 23 April 1759.

¹⁸² ADM 1/2113 Captains' Letters M 1761 **Martin** 17 May 1761.

¹⁸³ ADM 1/1605 Captains' Letters C 1757 **Craig** 15 March 1757.

¹⁸⁴ R.M.S. Pasley, ed. *Thomas Pasley Private Sea Journals 1778-1782* (London 1931) 38-9.

Only one of the 26 craft obeyed the signals sent by this young commander. A copy of his letter was ‘sent to the Master of Lloyds to be communicated to the merchants that they may see how negligent the masters of the merchants ships are’.¹⁸⁵

At stake were lives and fortunes and of course the individual naval officer’s career. Although merchant masters might often have been far older and more experienced in command than many escort commanders, a very real problem was that the instructions given to the masters of merchant vessels were often not understood or followed. **Thomas Cornwall** reported the difficulty he had had with a convoy en route to the West Indies. Alerted by a ship firing guns of distress he found that ‘many of this convoy had lack and others wholly at loss of what to do’ as different merchant ships were interpreting the signal in different ways. He hailed the ship in distress, showed a masthead light in his own vessel, and continued his course. In the morning he found he had collected 57 vessels of the convoy, and took them into Fayal.¹⁸⁶

7.3 The Special Relationship with the Merchant Venturers of Bristol

The special relationship between the Merchant Venturers and the Admiralty provides a unique insight into convoy protection.¹⁸⁷ Sailings were arranged at mutually convenient times, and many letters from the Society were enclosed with the captains’ letters as evidence of the essential service provided by the convoy system. A series of Burnett’s peers was based in the Bristol Channel: **Edmund Affleck** (June 1756 – April 1757), **William Fortescue** (January – October 1757), **Charles Medows** (May – December 1757), **Taylor Penny** (March – December 1759) and **Robert Man** (August 1759 – March 1762). These men were working far from the oversight customary at the Nore or Spithead. They took orders both from the

¹⁸⁵ ADM 1/2470 Captains’ Letters S 1756 **Schomberg** 5 December 1756.; ADM 1/2246 Captains’ Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry** 13/14 July 1761; ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1758 **Medows** 7 February 1758.

¹⁸⁶ ADM 1/1607 Captains’ Letters C 1759-60 **Cornwall** 10 February 1759.

¹⁸⁷ As the second largest city, and the third largest urban constituency, elections for the Bristol constituency were extremely expensive. Whig interests were coordinated by the Union Club which represented mercantile and shipping interests. (Namier and Brooke *History of Parliament* Vol. 1 283-289). Their chosen candidate for the 1754 election was Robert Nugent, a wealthy landowner in Essex with a seat at St Mawes. Nugent was always prepared to speak on ‘his favourite topics of trade and navigation’. (Namier and Brooke *History of Parliament* Vol. II 218-222). He agreed to stand in return for a place in Government, and was appointed a lord of the treasury. With powerful political backing from this source, the Bristol merchants enjoyed the Admiralty’s protection of their interests.

Admiralty and from the Merchants, and wrote detailed explanatory letters to the Admiralty justifying their decisions, making them an unrivalled source of material.

Crowhurst mentions the close co-operation between the Admiralty and the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol which protected the interests of the Bristol merchants and elected a member of Parliament, and he writes of the Admiralty sending a ship to escort all outgoing vessels from the port. In fact the relationship was much closer than he suggested. A succession of Admiralty ships was based at King Road at the mouth of the Avon River and did convoy duty from the Bristol Channel. From 1761 there were two ships permanently on duty in the Bristol Channel, the other based at Milford. The Bristol Merchant Venturers demonstrated their power by financing a ship to protect their convoys, the 6th rate *Milford*, built by Richard Chitty at Milford at a cost of £5,130 plus fitting.¹⁸⁸ Having paid for the *Milford* to be based in the Haven, the merchants paid the expenses of raising the men for her complement.¹⁸⁹ **Taylor Penny** was instructed before he left for Bristol in 1759 to leave his marines behind, as ‘the City of Bristol had undertaken to man her entirely.’ He was provided with an entire complement of seamen, who were to be paid from the day they signed up with the merchants although Penny had to make out bounty lists for them, to be paid by the Admiralty.¹⁹⁰ The clerk in the Admiralty office was doubtful: ‘The men raised by the merchants have been supplied with beds by them, I desire to know if I am to charge them therewith on the books.’ John Cleveland threw the question of bedding back to the merchants: ‘... and with regard to the beds he must charge them as the merchants desire.’¹⁹¹

Like his colleagues, **Robert Man** received instructions as to sailing dates and the composition of his convoys from the Bristol merchants, but he was employed by the Admiralty, and passed every request to them for confirmation. Man wrote once to say that he had been asked ‘to sail with the trade on Monday next and convoy them three hundred leagues to the westward of Ireland which is one hundred more than their Lordships orders to me’. The reply recorded on the turn back was dry: ‘The Lords do not doubt that he will govern himself by the orders he has received from them.’¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ *Milford* O 19.9.1757 K 11.1757 L 20.9.1759 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85.

¹⁸⁹ Bromley, ‘The British Navy and its Seamen’, 150-1; ADM 1/2111 Captains’ Letters M 1759 **Man** 16 August 1759.

¹⁹⁰ ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Penny** 14 April 1759.

¹⁹¹ ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Penny** 5 May 1759.

¹⁹² ADM 1/2112 Captains’ Letters M 1760 **Man** 10 June 1760.

Henry Casamajor, then the Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers, dealt frequently with **Taylor Penny** and this relationship was usually equable. However **Penny** passed on to the Admiralty a request he had received from the Merchants for a month long cruise in the 5th rate *Looe* after he had taken out the convoy due to leave ten days later. The Admiralty was quick to respond to this: a month's cruise would be too long, and 'he will do well to explain this with the merchants'. **Penny** waited on the Merchants who explained that **Robert Man** in the *Milford* would take out the convoy while he was on cruise, and bring back the trade from Cork. The Admiralty was still not totally satisfied: they had no objection provided the merchants did not ask for any further convoy besides the *Milford*. The response was immediate:

The Master of the Merchants Hall and the Committee desires I would return their Lordships thanks for the honour they have done them, and that they never could presume to ask their Lordships for any other ship for the protection of their trade but what they have already...¹⁹³

Despite the close relationship between the Admiralty and the Bristol Merchant Venturers, the merchants could be overly presumptuous. When **Edmund Affleck** was asked by Hugh Barlow, the member of Parliament for Pembroke Boroughs, to assist in putting down a mutiny amongst the miners he replied that he was not able to comply with their request.¹⁹⁴

Isaac Bough, Master of the Society of Merchants, requested **Robert Man** to cruise for fourteen days as 'several small French privateers having been lately seen in and about the Chops of the Bristol Channel'. The request was approved.¹⁹⁵ **Man** took the French privateers *La Fidelite* and *L'Amiral* in April 1761. On 5 February 1762 he wrote that he was getting under sail again, having had to put back as a result of contrary wind and bad weather.¹⁹⁶ It was the last letter **Man** addressed to the Admiralty. He took out a convoy, met up with *La Gloire* and both he and his 1st lieutenant lost their lives in the engagement which followed, the *Milford* being brought back by the master, as the second lieutenant Ezekiel Nash was

¹⁹³ ADM 1/2298 Captains' Letters P 1761 **Penny** 25 August 1761.

¹⁹⁴ ADM 1/1441 Captains' Letters A 1756 **Affleck** 19 February 1757

¹⁹⁵ ADM 1/2113 Captains' Letters M 1761 Isaac Bough to **Man** 4 September 1760.

¹⁹⁶ ADM 1/2114 Captains' Letters M 1762 **Man** 15 February 1762.

‘slightly wounded’.¹⁹⁷ **Robert Man** was the only one of Burnett’s peers to be killed in action by the French.

The orders from the Society of Merchants were always ‘to proceed with the first fair wind’, and almost every convoy got underway only after delays from contrary wind and bad weather. Convoys having to beat out of the Bristol Channel against the prevailing westerly winds were particularly vulnerable to the weather. The captains’ letters during the winter months often reported, ‘having been detained here till this time by contrary winds’. Solving the problems attendant on the weather required technical judgement and the courage to accept risks.¹⁹⁸ Merchant vessels were not usually as fast or as weatherly as men-of-war, and were never manned with as many seamen as naval vessels, so that bad weather found convoys sheltering rather than venturing out into the Channel, and many convoys ‘lost’ merchant vessels in adverse conditions, to be recovered once the weather improved. All convoy escorts spoke with exasperation of instructions not being followed, of signals not being acknowledged by day, of lights not being shown at night.¹⁹⁹ All of the convoy escorts encountered at least once ‘a very hard gale of westerly wind.’²⁰⁰ The constant refrain in their letters was, ‘I shall take the earliest opportunity of proceeding to sea whenever the wind and weather will permit...’²⁰¹ **Taylor Penny’s** letters in 1760 describe his efforts with a convoy which was due to sail in September, but was delayed and damaged repeatedly until he eventually got it to sea on 11 November.²⁰²

Operating out of Milford Haven, **Affleck** in *Albany* protected coasting convoys of small vessels (between 120 and 80 tons) loaded with linen and occasionally calf skin from Dublin. Timber from Gatcomb was destined for Plymouth Dockyard while tin from Penzance went as far as the Downs. The heavily laden timber ships which were given up for lost and then

¹⁹⁷ Rodger, *Wooden World* 295; ADM 52/656 Master’s Log *Milford* 1762.

¹⁹⁸ One hundred years later, in much more weatherly merchantmen than these eighteenth century vessels, a fleet followed Captain H.H. Brown’s example and anchored under Lundy Island, reputedly saying ‘if Brown can’t, nobody can’. A.B. McLeod, *Captain Herbert Huntington Brown, Bluenose Skipper out of Yarmouth Nova Scotia* unpublished MA Dissertation Greenwich Maritime Institute 2007.

¹⁹⁹ ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1757 **Medows** 7 February 1757; ADM 1/2111 Captains’ Letters M 1759 **Man** 23 April 1759; ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Martin** 17 May 1761; ADM 1/2246 Captains’ Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry** 14 July 1761.

²⁰⁰ ADM 1/1441 Captains’ Letters A 1749-58 **Affleck** 2 March 1757.

²⁰¹ ADM 1/1441 Captains’ Letters A 1749-58 **Affleck** 13 August 1756, 21 January 1757.

²⁰² ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Penny** September - November 1760.

discovered, battered but still afloat, in small harbours, were not the responsibility of the Merchant Venturers. Such coastal trading was not the traffic which occupied the Society. Their capital was involved in convoys bound far out to the west like the one Penny was responsible for.

7.4 Newfoundland fishery protection

A large proportion of the West of England trade was with the Newfoundland fisheries, which they dominated. The three-cornered trade was carried on by what was essentially a fishing fleet. It consisted in the first place of food stuffs from Ireland which were conveyed as provisions for the crews, as well as all supplies and necessaries of life, including fishing gear, which had to be transported to Newfoundland for the season.²⁰³ The fishing fleet caught and dried its catch during the summer, before sailing to Oporto in the autumn, to replace the dried fish with wine for England. Oporto was a difficult port to get into, and convoys had to be protected until every vessel had crossed the sand bar at the entrance. Lisbon was a safer port in that it was further south and further from Bayonne, but it also had a bar at the entrance which at times left vessels outside for a month until they could reach safety. Local politics also had to be taken into consideration, such as an embargo being put on the movement of merchant vessels out of Lisbon.²⁰⁴

This trade has already been mentioned in Chapter 1 as **Thomas Burnett** was involved as a lieutenant in *Penzance* in 1753 and 1755. As Governors of Newfoundland, Captains Bonfoy and Dorrill were responsible for getting the fishing fleet safely to their destinations and maintaining law and order amongst the fishing community. When *Marlborough* foundered in mid-Atlantic in November 1762 Thomas Burnett's life was saved by the fishing fleet returning to Lisbon.

²⁰³ A.C. Wardle, 'The Newfoundland Trade' in Northcote Parkinson, *Trade Winds* 227-250.

²⁰⁴ ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 31 December 1758.

7.5 Local conditions had to be observed and pilots obtained.

One of the problems of escorting convoys across the North Sea was the need for local pilots. **Edmund Affleck** was delayed at the Nore with one convoy waiting for a pilot for Elsinore. The reply he received from the Navy Board, the source of the pilots, is worth quoting in full:

Capt Affleck, we acquaint you that since our letter to you of the 3rd instant, we are informed from Trinity House that there is not any pilot in the way, qualified to take charge of the Mercury under your command to cruise on the coast of Norway between Bergen and Jutts Reef and are your affectionate friends' [signed by all four signatories] G Adams, Dan Devers, N Bateley, Ashburne²⁰⁵

It was suggested that **Affleck** was more likely to find a pilot with local knowledge in Yarmouth, and so it proved. The Admiralty might have hoped that the relatively short journey across the North Sea meant that escorting vessels were not detached from the channel fleet for too long, but in fact cruises on station were for periods up to eight weeks, during which time **Affleck** would have got to know the waters between Bergen and Jutland fairly well.

8 The experiences of the Commanders which lead to their postings in 1757

8.1 Thomas Burnett's personal courage and initiative as a means of achieving promotion

The Admiralty was always on the lookout for young men who showed the right qualities of courage and professional ability. Captain Richard Howe's orders to **Thomas Burnett** are typical of those issued to subordinate captains who had to be given discretion to use their own initiative, but for whom constraints of time and place were equally important. They began:

Whereas it may be necessary for the protection of this island as well as to interrupt the passage of the enemy by these coasts, you are therefore hereby directed to remain in this bay chiefly till further order, being upon this and all other occasions when at anchor for the guard of these coasts, to hold the sloop you command in constant readiness to put suddenly to sea; for any purpose regarding the immediate defence of these islands, the protection of the trade or annoyance of the enemy approaching near thereunto, as

²⁰⁵ ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 6 June 1757.

upon application from the Lieutenant Governor or other wise you judge consistent in these respects.²⁰⁶

Howe's further orders to Burnett, filling four pages, are typical:

- 1 To maintain sufficient stores and provisions to be able to keep on station.
- 2 To keep his ship constantly ready for sea, and to use a guard boat to examine all vessels entering or leaving port at night. To have at least one third of his crew armed at all times.
- 3 To communicate with the Lieutenant Governor of the islands about passing on any intelligence received.
- 4 In case of meeting a superior enemy force to signal with a Dutch flag at the main topmast head and retire until within reach of assistance.
- 5 To provide fresh meat at the current market prices.
- 6 To communicate through the Lieutenant Governors of the islands.²⁰⁷

During 1756 Burnett was ordered to increase the complement of the sloop from 50 to 70 men. Lieutenant Bradshaw's log, detailing as it does 'remarkable observations' in *Happy's* daily routine, frequently records 'small arms practice'.²⁰⁸ In June Howe sent in his return on the State and Condition of the ships in his squadron. This records 20 soldiers being borne as supernumeraries by *Happy*, and notes that two men were 'sick on board'. It is evidence of the efficacy of Howe's provision of fresh food whenever possible that only two men were ill out of Burnett's expanded complement of 70 men. This number was made up of 60 able seamen, eight officers and servants and only two ordinary seamen.²⁰⁹

Burnett had to engage the services of two local pilots around Guernsey, as each man was expert in the tidal conditions on one side of the island only. As Howe explained to the Admiralty: 'The circumstances of pilots about these islands proves particularly inconvenient

²⁰⁶ ADM 1/1891 Captains' Letters H 1756 Howe to **Burnett** 2 July 1756.

²⁰⁷ ADM 1/1891 Captains' Letters H 1756 Howe's letters (undated).

²⁰⁸ NMM ADM /L/M/49 Lt. Bradshaw's Journal 9 November 1756- 27 July 1757.

²⁰⁹ ADM 1/1891 Captains' Letters H 1756 **Howe's** letters (undated).

for being mostly fishermen, none knowing in both and few acquainted with the navigation on different side of the same island, are now to be procured.²¹⁰

As outlined in Chapter 1, Thomas Burnett and his sloop *Happy* enjoyed an active and successful year, bringing in privateers and retaking French captures. The year culminated in his action when they ‘met with, engaged and took, a French privateer called the *L’Infernal* of Havre de Grace.²¹¹

The subsequent holograph to their Lordships, with his own idiosyncratic spelling, is informal:

I received yours of the 16th Instant acquainting me that my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty whare well pleased with my conduct in takeing the Infernal. I beg leave to thank thair Lordship for thair kind approbation, thares nothing in this life I desire more than frequent opportunity of discharging my duty to thair Lordships satisfaction.²¹²

‘My Lords Commissioners’ were experienced men. They would have read between the lines of the brief account of the engagement. In a much smaller sloop, with a complement of only 70 men and eight 3 pounders, Burnett had chased for seven hours an opponent armed with 14 guns: six 6 pounders and eight 4 pounders with six swivels. Knowing that he would lose in a broadside battle against the heavier metal of the bigger vessel, Burnett determined to board her. During the long chase Burnett had time to prepare the soldiers for their rôle in the action, and to arm the boarding party. Eventually, with every sail set, he ran the *Happy* alongside the *Infernal* carrying away his studding sails in the process: speed was everything. This incident confirmed that Burnett was courageous, determined, able to make good use of resources and to keep his crew focused: above all, successful. Like Charnock, Beatson, the other contemporary eighteenth century historian, also changes details from those found in the primary sources. Beatson describes *Happy* being ‘attacked by the Infernal privateer of Havre de Grace, of six six pounders, eight four pounders, six swivels and seventy three men’.²¹³ Beatson did not appreciate that the long chase was the story worth recording, rather than a spirited defence against attack, even if by a much more heavily armed vessel.

²¹⁰ ADM 1/1891 Captains’ Letters H 1756 **Howe** 8 July 1756.

²¹¹ ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters B 1757 **Burnett** 12 March 1757.

²¹² ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters B 1757 **Burnett** 20 March 1757.

²¹³ Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs* Vol. 2 82.

The ketches of the *Cruizer* class were amongst the smallest in the navy, being based on the yacht *Royal Caroline* and Burnett might have felt himself unlucky to have been given her as his first independent command.²¹⁴ However luck, as Winston Churchill famously wrote, must be viewed as a whole. Perhaps it was Burnett's good fortune to be appointed to the minute ketch-rigged *Happy*, because in capturing a far larger French privateer he was able to display his courage and tactical ability. He had the seaman-like sense not to have booted landsmen attempt to scramble aboard the larger ship as *Happy* crashed alongside: instead he kept the 20 soldiers he was conveying on board *Happy* to provide covering fire. He had also practised the people diligently in the use of small arms, as any captain should, but no doubt reasoning that as all his opponents would probably carry heavier metal, boarding would give him his best chance.

Burnett's experience in his first independent command showed his credentials, and Chapter 7 will indicate whether or not he was lucky in his next appointment. He was one of seven young commanders who brought themselves to the attention of the Admiralty by capturing a French privateer.

8.2 Evidence of courage and initiative shown by Burnett's peers as the catalyst for achieving their promotion

Taking a French privateer resulted directly in **Thomas Baillie's** promotion. Already promoted commander, Baillie was available and senior enough to take command of the 6th rate *Tartar* when Captain Lockhart was taken ill. On 28 March 1757 Baillie was ordered to go out to search for a privateer 'which had been hovering on the coast.' After a two hour engagement which left 30 men killed or wounded in the newly-built French vessel, he took the *Marie Victoire* which was brought into the navy as *Tartar's Prize*. Baillie was rewarded by being posted as her captain on 30 March.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 92.

²¹⁵ *Tartar's* company was paid their prize money for this capture a year later on 13 March 1758. *London Gazette* Issue 10063 20 December 1760. If he had sold to private interests they might have received cash on the nail.

Another successful capture was effected by **Michael Clements** who took over command of the 6th rate *Unicorn* from her mortally wounded captain John Rawling.²¹⁶ He completed the capture of the *L'Invincible* and maintained *Unicorn* at her convoy duties for three weeks until he received a commission in the *London* buss.²¹⁷ He commanded the buss for four months, conveying transports to the Elbe before receiving his posting into the 6th rate *Acteon*.

The Admiral's son, **Thomas Harrison**, was commander in the 24 gun sloop *Otter* when he took *Les Trois Maries* on 8 December 1756 as the first success in a two day succession of engagements which resulted in his capturing a further prize, the *Tygress*, and recapturing a Bideford privateer. John Cleveland replied that their Lordships were 'extremely well pleased with his behaviour and approve very much of his conduct. He may expect some mark of their Lordships favour.'²¹⁸ He received his posting to the 6th rate *Greyhound* on 17 January 1757.

A series of whole hearted engagements in the Mediterranean resulted in **William Hotham's** being posted at twenty one years old. A fortunate beneficiary of Admiral Byng's trial which saw many lieutenants being sent back to England as witnesses, Hotham was promoted into the sloop *Fortune* by his mentor Admiral Hawke. While waiting for *Fortune* to return Hotham took out *Syren* and engaged the *Télémaque* of 26 guns which eventually evaded him after a considerable number had been wounded and four men killed. Returning to *Fortune* he took her out escorting a convoy, and meeting a large French privateer took her by boarding and went on to take other merchant vessels.²¹⁹

Convoy protection also gave **Thomas Taylor**, commander of the sloop *Badger*, his chance. He was protecting a convoy on 20 February 1757 when he took a small privateer and immediately afterwards came upon the much larger *Escourt*. He took this vessel too, with his purser in charge of the boarding party armed with small arms. Taylor was wounded in the engagement, and John Cleveland granted him leave to recover, adding that 'the Lords will give

²¹⁶ ADM 1/1605 Captains' Letters C 1755-6 **Clements** 7 June 1757. The dates of this engagement are not clear. Syrett (*Sea Officers* 373) gives the date of Rawling's death as 30 April 1757. Winfield (*British Warships* 226) gives date of engagement as 18 May 1757, noting that Rawling was mortally wounded.

²¹⁷ A hired vessel armed with 18 guns. Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 211.

²¹⁸ ADM 1/1891 Captains' Letters H 1756 **Harrison** 10 January 1757.

²¹⁹ ADM 1/384 Commander in Chief Mediterranean Saunders; William Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present* Vol. III (Sampson Low, Marston and Company 1898) 296; this capture is not recorded in Winfield, *British Warships*.

him and his officers a mark of their approbation soon'. His reward on 3 March was a posting to the 6th rate *Seahorse*.

The chain of promotions consequent on Burnett's commission in *Happy* resulted in **Andrew Wilkinson** following in **Thomas Burnett's** footsteps when he was commissioned in *Royal George* as 2nd lieutenant on 12 May 1756. In August Wilkinson received his own commission as commander in the sloop *Diligence*. He was protecting a convoy on 4 February 1757 when it was brazenly attacked by one of a pair of privateers. He chased the *Swan* for two hours before it struck 'without making any resistance'. Wilkinson then chased after the other privateer which had taken the last vessel in the convoy, which he recaptured. His posting to the 6th rate *Glasgow* was dated 23 March 1757.

8.3 Other routes to post rank

A minority had the opportunity of distinguishing themselves in combat. The paths to promotion for the rest of Burnett's peers were widely varied. In 1756 **Paul Henry Ourry** was 1st lieutenant in Commodore Edgcumbe's *Deptford*, and **John Henry Phillips** his 2nd lieutenant. They were commissioned by him into the fire ships *Proserpine* and *Blast* in Port Mahon, their first independent commands.²²⁰ The fact that both ships were taken back by the French before they could be used was an administrative problem for the Navy Board as discussed in Chapter 4.²²¹

The almost universal convoy duty was escaped by **Paul Henry Ourry** who was engaged with Howe's squadron in the operations in St Malo, Cherbourg and St Cas. **William Paston** was also involved in the operations at St Cas, where he was unluckily taken prisoner. After his exchange he was occupied with convoy duty along the south coast. **Joseph Peyton** busied himself with intelligence gathering along the French coast, particularly about the condition of shipping in Cherbourg or Brest.

²²⁰ David Eskine, ed. *Augustus Hervey's Journal* (Chatham Publishing 2002) 195.

²²¹ **Thomas Baillie** was 3rd lieutenant in the *Deptford* and benefited from the promotions, being ready to assume independent command when it was offered.

An unusual first command was offered to **John Elliot** in 1756, a Mediterranean xebec which would have given him independence, but was financially impractical.²²² His commission in the sloop *Albany* followed in March 1757 but in fact he waited instead for a posting into the 6th rate *Hussar* in July of that year. This rapid promotion was undoubtedly due to the appointment of his brother Gilbert as a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty on 17 November 1756. **Robert Faulknor** was another commander who did not take up his new commission. Appointed to the newly built sloop *Storke*, still in the hands of riggers, he was posted instead as flag-captain to the 2nd rate *Marlborough*.

Having a half brother who was Treasurer to the Princess of Wales would explain why **Henry Martin** enjoyed very rapid promotion through the ranks of lieutenant within a year, and was made commander in January 1757. It may also have been that he was in North American waters where there was a high rate of turn-over amongst lieutenants.

A unique first command was given to **Archibald Kennedy** – a brigantine on Lake Oswego. The French took it before he could return to America and take up his commission, so instead he was made responsible for the transports being prepared in the Thames.²²³ In daily letters he meticulously reported the difficulties of getting the masters of a dozen chartered merchant vessels to stick to deadlines. Eventually they all arrived safely in New York, and Kennedy was rewarded with a posting to the 5th rate *Vestal*.

Four men served for long periods as Commanders engaged in convoy duty and fishery protection, **Alexander Campbell** (twelve years) and **Robert Craig** (nine years) in Scottish waters; **Thomas Knackston** (twelve years) served on the east coast, where he was also used to recruit men in East Anglia. His experiences there will be found in Chapter 5. **William Fortescue** (eleven years) was also employed on impress duty. He was sent to Shrewsbury to recruit men for the Navy and spent nearly a year unhappily on that duty.

²²² He was very concerned that he would not be able to manage without a purser, in unfamiliar surroundings where he would have to organise supplies for his crew. In his letter to his father in which he discussed his need for an experienced man on the spot Elliot commented that he was ‘non of the best of clarecks’ i.e. not the best at secretarial work. This has been cited as evidence by N.A.M. Rodger of Admirals unable to spell. *Wooden World* 262.

²²³ David Syrett, *Shipping and Military Power in the Seven Years’ War: The Sails of Victory* (University of Exeter Press 2008) 160.

9 The difference between Thomas Burnett's experience and that of his 'late starting' peers.

There were some late starters amongst those commissioned in 1757 as post captains. All much younger men, **Michael Clements, John Elliot, William Hotham, John Lindsay, Henry Martin, Charles Medows, William Paston** and the **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** were not commissioned as lieutenants until 1755: that they all achieved the rank of commander before being made post captain before the end of 1757 is evidence of the rapid promotion which was possible in times of war if there was 'interest' involved. Thomas Burnett had years of experience which the late-starters amongst his peers lacked at the start of the war. Their letters give evidence of the speed with which they learned their craft, and the successes they enjoyed, some within months of achieving independent command.

This chapter has given evidence of the similar nature of the influences and 'interest' which shaped the professional lives of Burnett and his peers, despite their diverse backgrounds. The fragmentary nature of what had been known about Burnett's life takes shape when his experiences are compared with those of his peers. There is now a clearer understanding of the reasons why the Admiralty bestowed the commissions that shaped naval careers at their outset.

Chapter 3 The tools of the trade: a captain's duties regarding his ship's fabric and equipment, and her influence on his career.

An illuminating insight into the duties of a captain was given by William Falconer, who listed them in his 1769 dictionary.²²⁴ The experienced and knowledgeable Falconer had been the purser in the *Glory*, and when she was laid up at Chatham 'in ordinary' he was provided by the Admiralty with the use of the captain's cabin, and a stove, so that he could complete his 'explanation of the technical terms and phrases' employed in all aspects of a ship's operations. It is obvious that he wrote with the blessing of the Admiralty, although there is no suggestion that they had an input into his definition of the rôle of a captain. Where appropriate, the section headings in the chapter are derived from the categories of his list.

1 The duties of a captain when his ship is in dock

On receiving his commission the captain must attend his vessel constantly, and do everything possible to get to sea as soon as possible. He can only spend the night off his ship by particular leave from the Admiralty.²²⁵

1.1 Receiving a Commission

Once the Admiralty had informed a captain of his new ship he had to take up his commission from the Admiral or Commissioner at the dock, pay him the fee due, and take the oath of allegiance. Admiral Darby's list of the commissions he had issued reveals the fees due: a Vice Admiral paid £5.7.6d, Rear Admirals £2.12.6d and a captain £2.3s.²²⁶

Two months after capturing *Infernal* **Thomas Burnett** was rewarded by the position of flag captain to Commodore John Moore in the two-year old *Cambridge*, which had been first commissioned by Sir Peirce Brett in 1755 and used in the Western Squadron.²²⁷ Like

²²⁴ Faulkner, *Universal Marine Dictionary*.

²²⁵ The duties of captains will in this chapter be examined under relevant headings provided by William Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 76-8.

²²⁶ ADM 1/95 Admiral Darby 15 October 1780; ADM 1/388 **Lindsay** to Admiralty 10 October 1784.

²²⁷ *Cambridge* 80 gun 3rd rate three-decker O 1750 K 1750 L 1755 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 66.

Richard Kempenfelt, five months earlier, to speed his journey Burnett travelled overland to get to his new commission.²²⁸ Both had to wait until the captains they superseded finished writing up their accounts before handing over the commissions. As they were to find later in their careers, without the accounts there was no pay.²²⁹

The commission directed the captain to take command of a vessel, and gave him the date on which his commission began.²³⁰ This date determined the first entry in the captain's log, whether or not it was the date on which he physically arrived on board. It was important that the commission was retained by the recipient, as evidence of the date from which it was issued: seniority and pay depended on the evidence.²³¹ **Richard Kempenfelt** was commissioned from the *Elizabeth* into the *Grafton* and then the *Norfolk* during his period in the East Indies, and handed in these commissions at the Admiralty with his letter asking to have them confirmed so that he could be paid.²³²

It is possible to trace the progression and promotion of each captain through the sequence of ships to which he was commissioned. In a service where the career path had only five steps, from lieutenant to master and commander, then to captain and (if you lived long enough) to Commodore and finally to Admiral, there had to be more subtle gradations to signify seniority and approval from the Admiralty. It is clear that progression was from two or three masted sloop to a 9 pounder 6th rate; a 12 pounder 5th rate was succeeded by a ship-of-the-line and progression through the rates. Appendix 6 illustrates this progress. Some captains, like **John Lindsay**, declined commissions in ships of the line, preferring to stay in frigates. In some years the Mediterranean station did not warrant a 3rd rate, neither did New York. In these cases the station provided the cachet, rather than the vessel.

²²⁸ *Elizabeth* 3rd rate, two-decker 70 guns 480 men. O 33 K 33 L 37 Lyons *Sailing Navy List* 41; ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K **Kempenfelt** 1757-9 9 February 1757; ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Burnett** 14 May 1757.

²²⁹ ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1751-6 **Kempenfelt** 11 May 1756; ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Burnett** 17 May 1757; ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Man** 11 April 1757

²³⁰ ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Baillie** 31 March 1757; ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Man** 27 December 1757; ADM1/2661 Captains' Letters W 1756 **Wallis** 19 April 1756; ADM 1/2295 Captains' Letters P 1758 **Phillips** 16 November 1758.

²³¹ ADM 1/1441 Captains' Letters A 1749-58 **Affleck** 24 April 1757; ADM 1/2254 Captains' Letters P 1751-8 **Phillips** 9 June 1757; ADM 1/1443 Captains' Letters A 1762-70 **Affleck** 15 November 1764.

²³² Thomas Burnett's commissions in the Mediterranean in 1744 and 1745 were confirmed on 17 May 1746, when presumably he handed them in on his return to London. ADM 6/17 106. ADM 1/2012 Captains' Letters K 1763-70 **Kempenfelt** 10 May 1763.

It is possible to see very clearly that some men were looked upon with approval. Once independent command in a sloop had been deemed satisfactory, the first posting was crucial. As already mentioned, Thomas Burnett was delighted to have been commissioned as flag captain, as were Faulknor and Peyton, but it denied them the opportunity of commissions in frigates.

Was being given a French frigate a mark of Admiralty approval?²³³ These ships are discussed in Section 5.2 below, and it does seem clear that being given a fast vessel was a reward for endeavour.

Wareham suggests that by the end of the century being given cruising and convoy work could be seen as being out of favour with the Admiralty.²³⁴ This may have been so, but as discussed in Chapter 2, it seems that at the start of the Seven Years' War convoy work was taken for granted as a necessary part of training. During this time captains would be gaining confidence in their independent decisions, with the ever-present chance of meeting the enemy. **Robert Man** paid the ultimate price in his defence of his last convoy. Wareham seems surprised 'that someone in seniority *did* take note' of the successes of the young captains.²³⁵ There is continuous evidence that, at least earlier in the century, the letters detailing captures were read to their Lordships who ordered sections to be extracted for the newspapers, and usually sent back the comment that they 'were very pleased'.²³⁶ The importance of raising the morale of the public was never lost on the Admiralty. There are more examples of such commendations in Chapter 6.

There is rarely evidence that the new commission was the result of a direct request. **Edmund Affleck** wrote and asked for the elderly 40 gun 5th rate *Launceston*, believing her to be preferable to the one-year-old 6th rate *Mercury*.²³⁷ After three years in the 3rd rate *Bedford*

²³³ Robert Gardiner, *The First Frigates: nine-pounder and twelve-pounder frigates, 1748-1815* (Conway 1992) 113.

²³⁴ Wareham, *Star Captains* 104.

²³⁵ Wareham, *Star Captains* 132.

²³⁶ When **Elliot** captured the *Vengeance* John Cleveland replied, 'Let him know his behaviour has given their Lordships great satisfaction. Make a paraphrase of this for the Gazette' ADM 1/1759 Captains' Letters E 1757-8 **Elliot** 1 January 1758; after **Kennedy** had taken *Le Boutin* Cleveland told the clerk 'Inset what related to the capture in the next Gazette' ADM 1/2011 Captains' Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 3 February 1762.

²³⁷ Only **Edmund Affleck** was secure enough of his standing to write and ask directly for promotion. He had served in the 6th rate *Mercury* for a year, and asked for the 40 gun *Launceston* which was being brought back into commission at Sheerness. It only took the Admiralty two weeks to agree to his request. Of course other

from 1778-81 Affleck returned to 5th and 6th rate frigates for the rest of the American war, as these were more suitable on the New York station. It is not yet clear what political influence Affleck was able to wield.²³⁸ It is certain that other captains talked to their Lordships, as **Joseph Peyton** did, but without evidence of commissions it is difficult to follow this trail.²³⁹ **William Paston** was offered one cruise to the West Indies in the 4th rate *Defiance*, and was ‘sensible of the honour’ but it was taken by a more senior captain who had business to conduct there.²⁴⁰

Letters from the **Hon. Robert Boyle** reveal an interesting exchange within the Admiralty. Having just returned from convoy duty across to Elsinore, Boyle reported his arrival. The turn back of his letter has the comment from John Cleveland ‘where is he from and where is he going?’ While he was away Boyle had been commissioned into the *Jason*. When this news was passed to Boyle there is no evidence of his response to the offer of an elderly French *réfendu*, beyond the fact that he was immediately issued with a new commission, this time for the 6th rate *Boreas*, still building at Woolwich.²⁴¹

In September 1757 the very junior **Taylor Penny** had to remind the Admiralty that he was still without a ship, having paid off his sloop *Firebrand* in May, but he was rewarded immediately with 6th rate *Aldborough*.²⁴²

Of Burnett’s peers, 14 were given commissions for ships which were still in dock, and **John Elliot** enjoyed three new-builds, probably thanks to his privileged status. On most occasions they took over ships which had just been paid off at the end of a commission, and had to deal with the problems and defects of a vessel at the end of a cruise. Burnett’s commission in the

men might have spoken directly to one of the Lords, leaving no evidence. ADM 1/1443 Captains’ Letters A 1762-70 **Affleck** 15 November 1764. Affleck was not successful later when asking for the *Nassau*. ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 24 April 1759; *Mercury* 6th rate 20 guns O12.6.1755 K 1.7.1755 L 2.3.1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 90; *Launceston* 5th rate 40 guns O22.12.1740 K 26.1.1741 L 29.12.1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 48.

²³⁸ *Bedford* 3rd rate 74 guns O 12.10.1768 K 10.1769 L 27.10.1775 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 70.

²³⁹ ADM 1/2299 Captains’ Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 20 December 1762.

²⁴⁰ ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Paston** 21 May 1760; *Aldborough* 6th rate 22 guns O 11.4.1755 K 27.5.1755 L 15.5.1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 89.

²⁴¹ *Boreas* 6th rate 28 guns O 18.4.1757 K 21.4.1757 L 29.7.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85.

²⁴² ADM 1/2294 Captains’ Letters P 1757 **Penny** 3 September, 8 November 1757.

Boyne was slightly different. She had been launched in 1766, but was taken out of ‘ordinary’ in 1770, and taken by Burnett to Jamaica in 1771²⁴³.

1.2 The ship in dock

Most of the problems aired by the captains at the outset of a new commission were those of manning, discussed in Chapter 5, and the dockyard.

Britain had much better provision for repair and refitting than France did, having a fleet that kept the sea and experienced a great deal of wear and tear.²⁴⁴ Even so, there are constant references to the need to take advantage of high tide to get in or out of docks. Sloops were usually ballasted with shingle, and occasionally this had to be washed through to clean it. Otherwise the routine of work on the ship’s return to dock to clean was predictable. Any remaining stores were removed, together with guns and the ship unrigged. Only if a major refit was being carried out by the dockyard would the men be turned over into a holding ship for the period during which the vessel was uninhabitable. Otherwise, the hard physical labour of cleaning the ship’s bottom was carried out by the men. This practice was regretted by Hawke, who commented that the men would be better employed resting.²⁴⁵ The new stores (those of the carpenter, boatswain and purser) had to be taken below and stowed, masts and rigging replaced, guns and gunnery stores taken on board and then everything ‘settled to rights’ after a period of between three and ten days.²⁴⁶

Very little time was spent actually in dock in comparison with the time spent in the anchorage before actually leaving for the station. Rodger’s figures derived from ships’ logs suggests that on average ships were at sea for 43 per cent of their time in commission, with the largest ships at sea for even less time.²⁴⁷ Despite this, everything was done ‘without a moment’s loss of time’. **Henry Martin** hurried to advise the Admiralty that the severe frost had delayed

²⁴³ *Boyne* 3rd rate 70 gun O1.5.1758 K 9.8.12758 L 31.5.1766 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 73.

²⁴⁴ Daniel A. Baugh, ‘Naval power: what gave the British navy superiority?’ in Leandro Prados de la Escosura, *Exceptionalism and Industrialisation: Britain and Its European Rivals 1688-1815* (Cambridge, 2004) 235.

²⁴⁵ Ruddock F. Mackay ed., *The Hawke Papers, a Selection 1743-1771* (Navy Records Society 1990) 260, 272.

²⁴⁶ ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 **Peyton** 19 May 1756; ADM 1/2294 Captains’ Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 9 March 1757; ADM 1/2471 Captains’ Letters S 1757 **Schomberg** 5 January, 31 August 1757; ADM /2662 Captains’ Letters W 1757 **Wilkinson** 14 September 1757.

²⁴⁷ Rodger, *Wooden World* 37.

getting his stores aboard.²⁴⁸ The Admiralty knew the schedules for all the dockyards, and were quick to reprimand captains if it appeared that docking was taking longer than it should.²⁴⁹

Docking was supposed to take place once every six months, but captains were adept at getting their vessels cleaned earlier if possible, being well aware of the difference having a clean hull made to their speed through the water.²⁵⁰ **Edmund Affleck** put into words emotions with which all his peers would have sympathised: ‘.. having been six months off the ground is so foul that I had the mortification to see that in a whole day’s chase after a cutter I could not come up with her.’²⁵¹ An alternative to scraping was being ‘breamed and paid’ which meant that the filth on the ship’s bottom was burnt off, before the surface was repainted with a highly flammable mixture of tallow, sulphur and resin to reduce future growth.²⁵²

Thomas Burnett and his peers were not limited to the Thames ports which had been the centre of activity during the Dutch wars. With the French now the enemy, it was essential that ships could refit, be repaired and resupplied as far as possible to the West. Plymouth, first identified in 1689 as an important site, was rebuilt to have four dry docks by the end of the Seven Years’ War and five by the American War when the docks also had four building slips.²⁵³

The usefulness of the dry docks at Portsmouth and Plymouth was limited by the brief periods of spring tides when ships could be brought into the docks. Timing was everything, and many letters show the care that was required to make the most of the high tide, or ‘the next full moon’ so that valuable dock time was not wasted.²⁵⁴ Ships had to take their turn then

²⁴⁸ ADM 1/2118 Captains’ Letters M 1770-3 **Martin** 15, 31 January, 7,10 February 1771.

²⁴⁹ ADM 1/2294 Captains’ Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 11,13 June 1757; ADM 1/2474 Captains’ Letters S 1760 **Shomberg** 9 January 1760; ADM 1/2298 Captains’ Letters P 1761 **Penny** 27 February 1761.

²⁵⁰ ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 30 November 1760; ADM 1/2009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 20 May, 23 November 1755; ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1757 **Man** 1 August 1757; ADM 1/2246 Captains’ Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry** 23 July 1760; ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 1 June 1762.

²⁵¹ ADM 1/1443 Captains’ Letters A 1762-70 **Affleck** 23 January 1762.

²⁵² Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 48, 213

²⁵³ Jonathan Coad, ‘Historic Architecture of H.M. Naval Base Devonport 1689-1850’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 69 (SNR 1983) 341-394.

²⁵⁴ ADM 1/2294 Captains’ Letters P 1757 **Penny** 19, 26 March 1757; ADM 1/2471 Captains’ Letters S 1757 **Shomberg** 23 October 1757; ADM 1/2245 Captains’ Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 24 February, 8 March 1758;

wait for a pilot: anxious captains defended the resulting delay in their getting back on station.²⁵⁵ At times ships were ordered to Sheerness instead ‘as Portsmouth is so crowded it will be impossible to clean the ship there in time.’²⁵⁶ Burntisland, on the other side of the Firth of Forth from Leith, was a difficult dock to get into, as **Robert Craig** found in August 1757 when he had to heave most of his ballast over the side and ‘start the ground ton of water’ as the spring tide was only 12ft four inches instead of the more usual 14ft, 16ft or 18ft.²⁵⁷

The close and constant co-operation of the Navy Board was essential if these schedules were to work, and the example given from **Paul Henry Ourry**’s letters gives an indication of this:

In return to your letter of 9th inst. we acquaint you that we have ordered the officers of his Majestys yard at Portsmouth to cause his Majestys ship *Success* under your command (when she is taken into a dock pursuant to our warrant of the 29th of last month) to be graved, and tallowed over it, and to paint her weather works if they find it necessary agreeable to your desire and are your affectionate friends Holburn, Slade, Devers, Bateman, Adams.²⁵⁸

1.3 Leave from the ship

During the period when the ship was in the hands of the dockyard the captain was granted leave, with extra days added if he requested them, usually ‘for urgent private business.’²⁵⁹ London was easily reached from Portsmouth, Sheerness and Chatham. A captain could find

ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Phillips** 1 March 1759; ADM 1/2472-3 Captains’ Letters S 1758-9 **Schomberg** 13, 21 December 1759, 7 January 1759; ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Peyton** 10 April 1760.

²⁵⁵ ADM 1/2470 Captains’ Letters S 1756 **Schomberg** 15 December 1756; ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters B 1757 **Burnett** 17 May 1757; ADM 1/2294-5 Captains’ Letters P 1757-8 **Paston** 13 October 1757, 12 May 1758; ADM 1/2471 Captains’ Letters S 1757 **Schomberg** 12 March 1757; ADM 1/2472 Captains’ Letters S 1758 **Schomberg** 23 November 1758; ADM 1/1787 Captains’ Letters F 1760-1 **Faulknor** 11 November 1761; ADM 1/1760 Captains’ Letters E 1759-62 **Elliot** 25 April 1761; ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 15 August-1 September 1779.

²⁵⁶ ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Paston** 3 December 1759.

²⁵⁷ ADM 1/1606 Captains’ Letters C 1757-8 **Craig** 17 September 1757.

²⁵⁸ ADM 1/2245 Captains’ Letters O 1757 **Ourry** 12 December 1758.

²⁵⁹ ADM 1/1784 Captains’ Letters F 1756 **Faulknor** 16, 20 December 1756; ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 **Peyton** 6 May 1756; ADM 12294 Captains’ Letters P 1757 **Peyton** 8 August 1757; ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1758 **Medows** 26 August 1758; ADM 1/2245 Captains’ Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 1 January 1758; ADM 1/1894 Captains’ Letters H 1759 **Hotham** 27 April 1759; ADM 1/1442-3 Captains’ Letters A 1758-70 **Affleck** 6, 18 January, 28 December 1760, 3 February 1761; 12, 27 September 1762; ADM 1/1786 Captains’ Letters F 1758 **Fortescue** 12 September 1758; ADM /2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760 **Kennedy** 29 October 1760; ADM 1/2049 Captains’ Letters L 1760 **Lindsay** 14 May, 5 June 1760; ADM 1/2112 Captains’ Letters M 1760 **Martin** 20 March 1760; ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Paston** 7 January 1760; **Peyton** 10 April 1760; ADM 1/2665 Captains’ Letters W 1760 **Wheelock** 29 December 1760;

out from the Admiralty if the docking had gone according to schedule, and if not, he could ask for a few days more leave. Several senior officers took advantage of being in London to talk directly to the Lords, and replies to queries were sent out to them in the antechamber.²⁶⁰ The constant activity which was the rule during war was relaxed during the peace, and **Richard Kempenfelt** despaired of the slackness which saw captains not sleeping on board their ships, ships which were not at sea practising manoeuvres.²⁶¹

A captain could ask to be relieved of his duty for a cruise, usually for the sake of his health, and there was no shortage of men prepared to take a vessel out for a few weeks. At the end of the period of leave he would then be told where to rejoin his ship.²⁶² **William Fortescue** had to ask for nearly three weeks of leave to settle a court case over an incident while he was impressing seamen, and **Henry Martin** was also involved in a court case, his ‘a protested bill’ for £2,000.²⁶³

1.4 Will’s Coffee House

The coffee houses of London were recognised as meeting places for gentlemen with a penny to spend on the entrance fee and the price of a cup of coffee. Each house became the centre for men of similar interests, and it is not surprising that ‘Will’s Coffee House’ opposite the Admiralty became a meeting place for naval officers.²⁶⁴ Many of Thomas Burnett’s peers wrote to the Admiralty from Will’s, and it seems likely that a servant would have walked over to the official entrance with the note, and perhaps waited there for the reply. Many of their letters are not holographs, suggesting that a clerk was on hand to take dictation. Their Lordships must have been aware that gossip would be exchanged freely between fellow officers, and it is likely that such professional discussion lay behind the request made by

²⁶⁰ ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 7 January 1761; ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 29 April 1759; ADM 1/2299 Captains’ Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 20 December 1762.

²⁶¹ Kempenfelt to Middleton, 19 September 1779 Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers*, Vol. I 299.

²⁶² ADM 1/2664 Captains’ Letters W 1759 **Boyle Walsingham** 9 July 1759; ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Martin** September 1761; ADM 1/1894 Captains’ Letters H 1759 **Harrison** 13 March 1759; ADM 1/1896 Captains’ Letters H 1761 **Harrison** 27 May 1761.

²⁶³ ADM 1/1787 Captains’ Letters F 1759-61 **Fortescue** 3, 14 May 1759; ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Martin** 10, 23 September 1761.

²⁶⁴ ADM 1/1608 Captains’ Letters C 1761-3 **Cornewall** 18 August 1762; ADM 1/2665 Captains’ Letters W 1760 **Wallis** 24 December 1760; ADM 1/1609 Captains’ Letters C 1764-71 **Clements** 21 November 1764; ADM 1/2669-70 Captains’ Letters W 1766-7 **Wilkinson** 8, 11 December 1766, 7 April 1769; ADM 1/2118 Captains’ Letters M 1770-3 **M^cCleverty** 9 May 1772.

Robert Boyle Walsingham for the elusive ‘short double fortified twelve pounders’ as detailed below.

2 Duties of a captain as regards the fighting qualities of his ship

The captain is responsible for the management of his ship as regards its fighting qualities

2.1 Fighting qualities

Every ship’s sailing qualities depended on it being kept seaworthy and clean. Damage from weather and failure of wood or fibre could be expected whether or not the ship was involved in enemy action. The captain would be responsible for making sure that the carpenter, boatswain and their crews were constantly at work maintaining the structure of the vessel, ensuring that when she was required to be a fighting platform every preparation had been made. Inspection of the ships’ logs reveals constant employment of the carpenters and boatswains and their crews, together with ‘the people.’ Keeping the people employed kept them out of mischief, while maintaining the structure and fabric of their vessel. Repairing damage inflicted by weather is discussed below in Section 2.3.

The fighting qualities of the ships were determined primarily by their size, sailing qualities and armament. Each vessel was different, and the combination of qualities was only effective if the right decisions were made by the captain and carried out by his petty officers and a well-trained crew.

2.2 Accidental damage

Some damage was accidental: **John Elliot** reported without comment from the Admiralty an incident when *Edgar* was moved from the docks where she had been copper sheathed to the hulk so that her masts could be re-stepped. In so doing ‘the larboard quarter gallery below was by accident carried away. ... This accident will take about a week or ten days’.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ *Edgar* 3rd rate 74 guns O 25.8.1774 K 6.8.1776 L 30.6.1779 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 68. ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 17 July 1779.

The keel was given some protection by a sacrificial false keel stapled beneath it. **Thomas Knackston** in *Grampus* hit an unmarked rock off Yarmouth which did substantial damage to the keel, and allowed three feet of water in an hour into the hold. The elaborately constructed boxing of the stem was damaged, and one of the false keel's staples was brought up by a cable, proof that the false keel had been ripped off.²⁶⁶ In Knackston's case the accident resulted from a rock unknown to his pilot. Other problems with pilots are dealt with in Section 4.1 below.

There are many reports of damage caused by incompetently handled merchantmen. **John Wheelock** reported the damage done to his ship-rigged sloop *Stork* at night in the Bay of Biscay: ... 'having lost all her masts and bowsprit by a merchant ship running onboard us ... the merchantman had wore without signal it was so dark she was on board us before we could possibly avoid it.' Wheelock felt 'fortunate as we have not lost a single person, though there were two men in the main top when the masts went overboard.' On this occasion Wheelock was unable to get as far as Plymouth, but he made his way into Bristol and set about having the damage repaired there, drawing bills on the Navy Board to cover the expenses.²⁶⁷

2.3 Damage resulting from bad weather

Every commission repeated the instruction not to 'lye idle in port', but to be busy at sea doing 'everything to protect and accommodate the trade.'²⁶⁸ Despite the damage which resulted from heavy weather, captains were required to maintain their ships at sea for months at a time. Carpenters and boatswains were provided with tools and material with which most repairs could be achieved at sea.

On occasion repairs could not be done without further help. **Michael Clements** reported from *Pallas* that his best bower (i.e. the foremost starboard anchor) had come loose from its chain and had pierced the bilges. It was not until the carpenters from more than one vessel had been called together to examine the damage, and 'reported it unsafe for the ship to

²⁶⁶ Peter Goodwin, *The Construction and Fitting of the Sailing Man of War 1650-1850* (Conway 1987) 9-10, fig ¼ illustrates the gravity of his condition. ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 14 October 1753. The Navy Board was asked to investigate why this shoal was not previously known to the pilots.

²⁶⁷ *Stork* Sloop 10 guns O14.11.1755 K 11.1755 L 8.11.1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 94; ADM 1/2662 Captains' Letters W 1757 **Wheelock** 29 March 1757.

²⁶⁸ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Craig** 2 January 1758.

continue at sea' that Clements was ordered to head for Flushing, the nearest port.²⁶⁹ A year later, after a succession of gales south of Ireland Clements reported that he had had to put in to Kinsale after his boats had been washed away; standing and running rigging broken; many sails split and others blown away; one mast top sail yard broken in the slings <i.e. in the centre> and the lower mast not properly secured.²⁷⁰ In this report Clements did not specify which mast or masts were affected.

Violent gales carried away the main and mizzen masts and tore up part of *Looe*'s upper deck. **Taylor Penny** reported that the violence of this incident had opened up 'a butt or piece near the step of the mizzen mast, which makes a great deal of water'. *Looe* already had a damaged stem which had been investigated in dock. The location of the leak was not identified until provisions and stores having been replaced in her, the leaking timbers were lowered below the waterline again. A combination of the two meant that the ship was 'making upwards of three feet of water in an hour'.²⁷¹

The dire situation faced by *Flamborough* off the coast of Portugal in very heavy weather was described by **Archibald Kennedy** in vivid detail:

I cut away the mizzen mast and main jeers and let the main yard come down upon deck but the sea breaking over her washed away the main yard and cutter. I was obliged to cut away the rigging to clear the mizzen and yards of the ship. I had given orders to cut away the main mast but found when I had cleared the rest of the wreck she began to veer, so that I saved the main mast with very little damage. ... the store rooms were almost full of water notwithstanding all the hatches were battened down.

He enclosed with his letter the damage report compiled by his carpenter and boatswain to justify his decision to cut away the wreckage. Their report included the fact that the ship was lying 'on her beam ends, with the water to the middle of the hatches and very near foundring <sic>'. This report concluded with the information that 'the brick work of the furnaces and grates all rackt <sic> to pieces in bad weather the deck work so much that neither officers or people can lay dry in there beds.'²⁷² Not only could the cooks not supply

²⁶⁹ ADM 1/1607 Captains' Letters C 1759-60 **Clements** 18 March 1759.

²⁷⁰ ADM 1/1607 Captains' Letters C 1759-60 **Clements** 18 February 1760

²⁷¹ ADM 1/2298 Captains' Letters P 1761 **Penny** 29 December 1861.

²⁷² *Flamborough* 6th rate 20 guns O 11.4.1755 K 27.5.1755 L 14.5.1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 89; ADM 1/2010 Captains' Letters K 1757-9 **Kennedy** 3 October 1759. Kennedy's manoeuvre of cutting away the

the crew with a hot meal, no one could sleep in dry accommodation. It is interesting to historians that the expectation was that the men would sleep comfortably.

The fir-built *Hussar* caused **John Elliot** problems in that twice in six months he had to deal with a sprung foremast, and Anson suggested when his main mast sprung as well that they needed shifting.²⁷³ This problem was not confined to fir-built ships and there are many reports of sprung masts.²⁷⁴

Bad weather delayed **Paul Henry Ourry**'s intention to carry out his own repair in 1761 when he sent his ship's boats to tow off *Acteon*'s mizzen mast from Portsmouth dockyard. The weather was against him, 'it blowing so fresh the boats and mast were drove on shore under Southsea Castle where the mast is haled up.'²⁷⁵

Most damage could be repaired at sea, but occasionally the circumstances were such that even the most competent carpenter had to request help from a dock. **John Elliot** reported that the *Trident*'s carpenter had been confident of carrying out a complex repair at sea until a series of gales made the ship's safety an issue. The facing piece of the knee of the head was damaged, and the lead was torn right out where it should have been protecting the cable from the bolts. Initially the carpenter thought he could replace the lead, but the gales tore away the lower portion of the construction, revealing wood so rotten that he was:

of the opinion that the ship is by no means in safety here, or in any other roadstead, as the cables must be cut by the bolts and sharp edges of the knee of the head, which cannot be got at but in a dock and in a harbour where the ship may be lightened and brought by the stern.²⁷⁶

mizzen mast is described in Falconer's *Universal Marine Dictionary* as performed when 'it is absolutely necessary to veer in order to save the ship from destruction' 307-8.

²⁷³ A sprung mast had a crack in it which would need to be fished. ADM 1/1759 Captains' Letters E 1757-8 **Elliot** 11 January, 31 July 1758.

²⁷⁴ ADM 1/2010 Captains' Letters K 1757-9 **Kempenfelt** 23 July 1757; ADM 1/1893 Captains' Letters H 1758 **Harrison** 2 July, 13/17 December 1758; ADM 1/1895 Captains' Letters H 1760 **Harrison** 4 February 1760; ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 13 April 1765.

²⁷⁵ *Acteon* 6th rate 28 guns O 6.5.1757 K 26.5.1757 L 30.9.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85; ADM 1/2246 Captains' Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry** 5 May 1761.

²⁷⁶ *Trident* 3rd rate 54 guns O 28.2.1763 K 10.1763 L 20.4.1768 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 73; ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 5 October 1777.

Archibald Kennedy suffered much the same damage to *Flamborough* after a brisk engagement with the much larger French *Malicieux*.²⁷⁷

When **John Wheelock** brought *Pembroke* back from Jamaica he reported that his complement, much reduced by illness in Jamaica, and with 75 sick on board, had been made up by 22 invalids from the hospital. Three or four men a day succumbed to their illnesses. *Pembroke* was leaky before she left Jamaica, and the weakened crew left him scarcely able to manage the vessel ‘for want of strength’. The series of gales which swept over the ship in the North Atlantic caused damage to rigging and sails but most particularly ‘three times had our tiller broke in the rudder head and the way the rudder fetched before we could get the others fixt has shook her stern frame greatly which occasioned the increasing of her leaks.’ The carpenter and his mate were too ill to help, and only two of the carpenter’s crew were able to work. When Wheelock was only a day out from Spithead, having had the crew permanently at the pumps, ‘a large leak abaft the starboard ches <sic> tree about six feet under water’ was discovered.²⁷⁸

2.4 The need for cleaning and repair between dockings

Newly set up rigging was notoriously unstable until it had become weathered.²⁷⁹ **Paul Henry Ourry** described putting out to sea three times, and having to put back to set up new rigging ‘which was so slack that I feard loossing <sic> the mast’.²⁸⁰ Old rigging was also liable to be rotten, and every element needed to be checked.²⁸¹

The extremely professional **Archibald Kennedy** knew that he was expected to clean his ship as best he could between dockings. The accepted technique was to heel the ship, either by hauling her down using her masts and a hulk alongside, or by shifting the ballast or stores. Kennedy had enjoyed the years spent cruising in his French built *Blonde*, but his letters are a

²⁷⁷ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 21 June 1760.

²⁷⁸ *Pembroke* 4th rate 60 guns O 8.11.1752 K 1.1.1753 L 2.6.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 76; ADM 1/2668 Captains’ Letters W 1763-5 **Wheelock** 18 January 1764; the ches trees were bolted perpendicularly on either side of the ship to confine the clue, or lower corners of the main sail, placed as far before the main mast as the length of the main beam. Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 81. *Pembroke* was paid off, and surveyed in 1767 when she had a large repair and was cut down to a 50 gun ship. Winfield, *British Warships* 132.

²⁷⁹ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760 **Kennedy** 24 May, 13 December 1760.

²⁸⁰ ADM 1/2245 Captains’ Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 9 December 1758.

²⁸¹ ADM 1/22672 Captains’ Letters W 1777 **Wilkinson** 27 March 1777.

litany of regret that she could no longer be cleaned without going into a dock. His problems continued:

I am afraid she will not bear heaving down again as by the carpenters account she is settled four inches forward and aft since I last hove down. I am very sorry I have the least reason to complain of her and I look upon her to be one of the best sailing ships in England.

Having been on the Lisbon station for two years, and it being nine months since his last docking in Portsmouth, Kennedy had intended ‘to have given the ship a Parliament but the officers of his Majesty’s ship here are of opinion that the main mast is not trustworthy it being shot through as I acquainted their Lordships before nor can I get a stick to make a new one here.’ A ‘parliament’ heel was a slight incline, achieved through a shift of ballast.²⁸²

Having identified a leak, Kennedy used the *Blonde*’s masts to heave the ship down:

..but when the ship was within three strakes of being keel out the main mast gave way so that I was obliged to right ship which did luckily without any other accident; the leak is so very low that notwithstanding the ship was so near being keel out I could not discover it, so that as soon as I get in a new main mast I shall attempt to heave down again.

Having replaced his mast ‘ ... I hove the ship out on both sides and gave her a clean bottom and stopped the leak which was the third strake from her keel.’ Kennedy had continued problems with the *Blonde*: ‘I am now caulking refitting .. in the best manner I can she being so leaky and the upper works so very weak that the last time I heeled ship at Vigo the 24 June the water ran in so very fast I was obliged to right ship before I could finish scrubbing.’ The winter gales six months later brought matters to a watery conclusion.

.. having sprung my bowsprit and being obliged to fish my fore mast and the ship extremely leaky and particularly in the fore hold one pump being almost insufficient to keep her free there, as the water had not a free passage to the wells I thought it necessary to consult my officers who were all of the opinion that it was extremely dangerous and very much hazarding the ships to keep the sea and absolutely necessary to get into some port as soon as possible.²⁸³

The beautiful *Blonde* was paid off and refitted for sea.

²⁸² *Blonde* 5th rate 32 guns Le Havre 1755 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 206; ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 6, 24 December 1761, 23 March, 8 May, 9 July 1762. Admiral W.H. Smyth, *Sailor’s Word Book: A Dictionary of Nautical Terms* (Conway Classics 1996)517, Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 211.

²⁸³ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 6, 24 December 1761, 17 August, 8 December 1762.

When **Michael Clements** was on foreign coasts, ‘frequently I used to anchor for a day and night to heel, clean the bottom and put the ship’s hold to rights.’²⁸⁴

Leaks were an everyday occurrence in wooden ships, and every carpenter had the expertise and the tools to deal with the problems as they emerged. Ships usually had to be heeled to bring the leak above the water line so that the carpenter and his crew could repair the damage, otherwise docking was necessary. Pumping to get rid of water that had leaked in was again part of everyday business. (See Section 2.5 below on pumps). It is impossible to know how many ships foundered at sea as a result of leaks without any witness to the catastrophe. This thesis results from the fortunate coincidence of Thomas Burnett’s foundering *Marlborough* and *Antelope* which rescued the officers and crew.

The recognised way of describing of a leak was by reference to the number of feet of water which entered the ship’s well in an hour. **William M^cCleverty** described precisely the condition of his 16 year old *Norwich*: ‘In the passage we had fresh westerly winds in which the ship made from 6 to 8 inches water in an hour in the best of weather, at sea from 14 to 16 inches in four hours, and when in the harbour 12 inches in 24 hours.’ Two years later the leak can now be measured at the rate of ‘two feet of water each hour on passage.’ M^cCleverty is describing a ship which has a real problem, and in which the crew would be permanently engaged in pumping. There was no possibility of rest for the crew in this situation, and exhaustion would result in deaths.²⁸⁵ **Taylor Penny**, writing about the 20 year old *Looe*, asked to have her row ports sealed when next she went into dock, as her leakiness was occasioned by ‘her row ports which we can by no means secure, notwithstanding I have frequently barred and caulked them in, but whenever we go into a sea she works them out again’. Penny’s letter is a reminder that officers and men expected to be dry off duty, so that the wet conditions being reported to the Admiralty were the exception rather than the rule.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ ADM 1/1608 Captains’ Letters C 1761-3 **Clements** 10 September 1761.

²⁸⁵ *Norwich* 4th rate 50 guns O30.9.1743 K 23.11.1743 L 4.7. 1745 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 47; ADM 1/2294 Captains’ Letters P 1757 **Penny** 19, 21 March 1757; ADM 1/2113-4 Captains’ Letters M 1761-3 **M^cCleverty** 31 July 1761, 19 July 1762; ADM 1/2246 Captains’ Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry** 28 August 1762;

²⁸⁶ *Looe* 5th rate 40 guns O 8.2. 1740 K 2.6. 1740 L 19.7. 1741 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 48; ADM 1/2295 Captains’ Letters P 758 **Phillips** 10 November 1758; ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Penny** 3 November 1760.

Leaky ships were inevitably damp. The health of the ‘people’ is discussed in Chapter 5: the use of Dr Hales’s ventilators in all ships above 20 guns was part of the on-going attempts to by the Admiralty to make the vessels as healthy as possible.²⁸⁷

Damage was done to *Diana* as she struggled to slow to the speed of her convoy of transport vessels by scudding before the wind with bare masts, and **Alexander Schomberg** reported the solution imposed on her structure:

The builders at Boston has girt the larboard side with five large riders and the *Diana*’s bottom was very tight on the passage, however as these riders take up much room in the hold, I hope some method will be found to strengthen her without such inconvenience.²⁸⁸

2.5 Pumps

When ‘a peculiar mark of their Lordships indulgence’ was asked for by **John Wheelock** it was not for a personal favour, but for the provision of Captain Bentinck’s new pumps for the *Achilles* which had just experienced a dangerous leak.²⁸⁹ Wheelock had heard that the pumps had been approved by the Admiralty, and made the point that:

the great advantage they have over the common chain pumps struck me in the strongest light, the sudden jerks of the men’s arms that are pumping by the seizing of the chains weakens them much, and by the noise they make, disturbs the watch that are to relieve them. But when a chain breaks in a very leaky ship the rattling of it down the well strikes a perfect panick <sic> through the ship’s company giving the alarm that the water is gaining on them. All which is prevented by these new constructed pumps besides the delivering much more water, in the same time and with greater ease. ...²⁹⁰

Brian Lavery described the testing of this new pump in front of eleven captains, who unanimously favoured the new rather than the old chain pump, all agreeing that ‘the new pump was worked with greater ease and the people appeared much less fatigued’.²⁹¹ William Falconer gives a slightly different version of the testing, which took place under the

²⁸⁷ ADM 1/1445 Captains’ Letters A 1762-70 **Affleck** 18 September 1767; Rodger, *Wooden World* 106.

²⁸⁸ *Diana* 5th rate 32 guns O 1.6.1756 K 6.1756 L 30.8. 1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 83; ADM 1/2473 Captains’ Letters S 1759 **Schomberg** 27 December 1759.

²⁸⁹ *Achilles* 4th rate 60 guns O 14.11.1755 K 12.1755 L 6.2.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 76.

²⁹⁰ ADM 1/2671 Captains’ Letters W 1771-5 **Wheelock** 12 January 1771.

²⁹¹ Lavery, *Arming and Fitting* 72-5.

supervision of Sir John Moore.²⁹² According to Falconer, there were 12 captains and 11 lieutenants present when the new pump was tested.²⁹³ Wheelock and his colleagues would have been grateful to Captain Bentinck that new developments on land had been translated into naval service. An additional virtue of the new pump was that it could be easily and quickly repaired or cleared of blockages. Carpenters were issued with a printed sheet of instructions on how to deal with breakages. Rodger gives these pumps as an example of the co-operation between engineers and naval personnel which transformed the efficiency of the system.²⁹⁴

New Pump			Old Pump		
No of men	Tuns of water	Seconds	No of men	Tuns of water	Seconds
4	1	43 ½	7	1	76
2	1	55	4	1	81

Table 6: Falconers's comparison of Bentinck pump and previous system

2.6 Copper sheathing

The first letters from Thomas Burnett's peers about copper sheathing are from **John Lindsay** in 1764. When the 6th rate *Tartar* hit an obstacle underwater Lindsay was concerned for her experimental copper sheathing. 'Sweeping' the hull with a bight of rope had not revealed damage, but he asked permission to have her brought into dock to have the damage evaluated.²⁹⁵ Lindsay subsequently wrote at length about the copper sheathing, and his letters reveal the lack of understanding of the chemical processes involved in electrolysis. Lindsay took *Tartar* to survey the coast off Pensacola and logged his observations of the deterioration of the ship's hull carefully:

- 24 August Good and clean
- 25 Sept. Beginning to shine and a few barnacles
- 11 Oct. Numerous oysters which could not be got off
- 5 Dec. Ship covered with oysters

²⁹² Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 221-3.

²⁹³ Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 221-3.

²⁹⁴ N.A.M. Rodger, 'Navies and the Enlightenment' in Pieter van der Merve ed. *Science and the French and British Navies 1700-1850* (NMM 2003).

²⁹⁵ *Tartar* 6th rate 28 guns O 12.6.1755 K 4.7.1755 L 3.4.1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85; ADM 1/2051 Captains' Letters L 1763-5 **Lindsay** 28 February 1764.

4 March. Heeled the ship in harbour and the copper was so very foul that I thought it absolutely necessary to have her careened, for 8 or 9 feet down it as quite a bed of oysters, and from the sternpost for 14 feet forward down to the keel as likewise from the stem 5 or 6 feet aft, the rest of the body was very clean, except a carbuncle upon each of the copper nails which easily came off without leaving any part of the shell behind, but the former adhered much stronger to the copper than ever I saw it to the wood, and although no pains was spared by scraping and using a gentle fire the enamel of the shell could not be got entirely off which will make those parts very subject to foul again, I must observe that the shell came off easier without fire than with it. There was not weeds or grass of any kind upon the bottom.

Lindsay enclosed a report from the shipyard at Port Royal Jamaica, into metal fittings: ‘It is our opinion that the above defects proceeds from the verdegrease <sic> of the copper and unless shifted they will be unserviceable in eight months time.’²⁹⁶ Philip Stephens asked the clerks to let him have Lindsay’s letters again when they had dealt with the replies: this was a problem which was far from having a solution. Looking at Lindsay’s log with an understanding of electrolysis, the description of the ‘carbuncle’ upon each of the copper nails can be recognised as a typical electrolytic deposit. Although the nails were also copper they were a different metallic mix, and the salt water acted as an electrolytic solution.

In February 1779 **Richard Kempenfelt** explained the delays in repairs to the *Fly* sloop which:

has been here some considerable time. Some part of her copper sheathing is off and so low under water that it cannot be repaired without laying her ashore as going to sea in this manner might endanger the losing the whole of her sheathing. I therefore beg to know if their Lordships would approve of her being laid ashore to receive the necessary repairs.’

A day later he reported that the *Triton* was ordered to be cleaned and sheathed with copper, but there was no dock vacant at Chatham to receive her.²⁹⁷

Copper sheathing had been proposed as early as 1708, but the lack of understanding of electrolysis caused the suggestion to be turned down. Anson suggested it again in 1761: this time expense was a limiting factor, as well as the lack of confidence in the strength of copper bolts. By 1778 a water tight barrier could be created between iron bolts and the copper plates

²⁹⁶ ADM 2/2051 Captains’ Letters L 1763-5 **Lindsay** 9 August 1765.

²⁹⁷ ADM 1/2014 Captains’ Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** 2/3 February 1779.

and a year later there was great activity as the docks geared themselves up for this new procedure.²⁹⁸ **John Elliot's** *Edgar* took three days to be sheathed at Woolwich, but four years later the iron bolts were in a dangerous condition. It took time for the Navy Board to order every element of the ship to be protected, including the rudder and pintles, which were otherwise weak links.²⁹⁹

3 Duties of a captain as regards the ordnance of his ship

Previous to any possibility of engagement with an enemy, he is to quarter the officers and men to the necessary stations according to their office or abilities, and to exercise them in the management of the artillery that they may be more expert in the time of battle.

‘Exercising the people at the great guns and small arms’ was an entry which occurred regularly in the captains’ and masters’ logs of all naval vessels, fulfilling the requirement of the Admiralty Regulations.³⁰⁰ **Robert Man** asked for the quarter deck of the *Penguin* to be lengthened as it was ‘inconvenient in working the ship, and must prevent the musquetry being fought with advantage.’³⁰¹

Ships’ guns, gunpowder and all other gunnery stores were supplied by the Board of Ordnance which was responsible for all such resources needed by the army as well as the navy: they also provided the vessels to move the stores around the coast.³⁰² Until 1759 when the Faversham mills were purchased by the Crown, most gunpowder was privately produced. The shortfall between local supply and demand was filled by imports from Holland, and **Christopher Bassett**, in the sloop *Rainbow*, was responsible for convoying the *Pondicherry*

²⁹⁸ Goodwin, *Construction and Fitting* 226; R.J.B. Knight, ‘The Introduction of Copper Sheathing into the Royal Navy, 1779-1786’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 59 (SNR 1973) 299-309; David Syrett, *The Royal Navy in American Waters 1775-1783* (University of South Carolina Press 1998) 64-5

²⁹⁹ *Edgar* 3rd rate 74 guns O 25.8.1774 K 6.8.1776 L 30.6.1779 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 68; ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 14, 17 July 1779; Knight, ‘Copper Sheathing’ 305.

³⁰⁰ Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 6.

³⁰¹ *Penguin* 6th rate 20 guns K 12.1730 L 6.1.1732 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 50; ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1/2757 **Man** 27 December 1757.

³⁰² ADM 1/2668 Captains’ Letters W 1763 **Wallis** 27 February 1763.

from Texel with gunpowder in 1757.³⁰³ It was considered safer for the escorting vessel to be no larger than a sloop, to avoid alerting the French to the shipment. During the first years of the war the proportion of English powder in store was never higher than 59 per cent, when there were over 6,000 barrels of Dutch powder in store. The proportion dropped as low as 14 per cent in 1758 when over 14,000 barrels were in store, mainly at Tilbury and Gravesend.³⁰⁴ During the war ships built or re-fitted in the Thames loaded and unloaded their gunnery stores from the Royal Artillery at Long Reach, conveniently close to the gunpowder stores. Reloading was always concluded 'with the utmost despatch' before the ships fell down the river to the Nore.³⁰⁵ Many ships were delayed by the non-arrival of supplies at other ports.³⁰⁶

At the start of the Seven Years' War stocks of the better-quality home produced powder were so low that the government introduced legislation forbidding the export of gunpowder, legislation which had to be repeated at the start of the American War.³⁰⁷

Stocks sent to America were always liable to have been damaged by wet conditions, and when **Thomas Cornewall** was loading stores in 1758 he was offered only the condemned powder. The Board of Ordnance was doing its best to move supplies around the coast to Portsmouth and Plymouth, but the hired vessels were delayed by westerly gales.³⁰⁸

3.1 The great guns

Whenever rare changes to ordnance were being introduced a three-cornered series of questions and answers took place between the captain, the Admiralty and the Board of

³⁰³ *Rainbow* 5th rate 44 guns O 4.3. 1746 K 3.1746 L 30.5. 1747 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 79; ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Bassett** 31 May 1757

³⁰⁴ Jenny West, *Gunpowder, Government and the War in the Mid-Eighteenth Century* (Royal Historical Society 1991) 50-2, 220.

³⁰⁵ ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Boyle** 3 September 1757; ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Medows** 8 October 1757; ADM 1/1759 Captains' Letters E 1758 **Elliott** 19 December 1758; ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 16 March 1757; ADM 1/2118 Captains' Letters M 1770-3 **Martin** 15, 31 January, 7, 10 February 1771.

³⁰⁶ ADM 1/2111 Captains' Letters M 1759 **Martin** 9/28 September 1759; ADM 1/2118 Captains' Letters M 1770-3 **Martin** 7-10 February 1771; ADM 1/2014 Captains' Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** 31 December 1778.

³⁰⁷ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Cornewall** 11 June 1758; ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Man** 27 October 1757; West, *Gunpowder* 41; ADM 1/2673 Captains' Letters W 1778 **Wheelock** 24 December 1778.

³⁰⁸ Glete, *Navies and Nations* 18; ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Cornewall** 19-20 January 1758.

Ordnance. The difficulty was always the ‘establishment’ of the vessel concerned.³⁰⁹ When **Henry John Phillips** asked for additional 4 pounders for the 6th rate *Fowey* he asked for the same number as *Dolphin* which had been built from the same plans, perhaps advised by his uncle Commissioner Towry of the most effective strategy.³¹⁰ He repeated the strategy when promoted to the 5th rate *Juno*, asking for the short twelve pounders which had been fitted to others of her class.³¹¹ **Thomas Cornwall** wrote at length about the discussions he had had with the builders at Portsmouth about the problem of fitting long nine-pounders. Their suggested solution was to cut away the upper sill of the ports by four or five inches, but Cornwall asked if short nine-pounders could be made available instead of weakening the ship. The Admiralty referred the matter to the Board of Ordnance.³¹²

The Board of Ordnance noticed in 1759 that it was over a year since they had been warned by the Admiralty of newly built vessels requiring guns, and asked for a list ‘so that timely provision’ could be made.³¹³ It is not clear how the Board of Ordnance prioritised the orders received from the Admiralty, but some of Thomas Burnett’s peers were able to capitalise on the different lead times for equipment in ships being built for them. Unlike his peers, **William Paston** had occasion to ask to have his complement of guns reduced. After bad weather in the Atlantic he had had to throw overboard all the guns on the *Tweed*’s main deck, and he asked if they could be replaced with nine rather than twelve pounders ‘as the ship complains and works much’. Despite his argument, Paston was told not to interfere with the ship’s establishment. Some months later he noticed on the gun wharf at Portsmouth a complete set of 12 pounders, prepared for **Alexander Shomberg**’s *Diana*, which he thought would suit *Tweed* extremely well. The Board of Ordnance was ordered to carry out the exchange.³¹⁴

‘The Establishment’ gave the specification for any class of ship, and went into great detail. It laid down every measurement involved in the construction of the ship; the number, weight

³⁰⁹ *Fowey* 6th rate 44 guns O26.6.1747 K 10.1747 L 4.7. 1749 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 87; ADM 1/2661 Captains’ Letters W 1756 **Wilkinson** 15 September 1756.

³¹⁰ ADM 1/2294 Captains’ Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 2 March 1757.

³¹¹ ADM 1/2295 Captains’ Letters P 1758 **Phillips** 26 November 1758.

³¹² ADM 1/1606 Captains’ Letters C 1757-8 **Cornwall** 8 December 1758.

³¹³ Middleton, ‘Naval Administration’ in Black and Woodfine, 117.

³¹⁴ ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Paston** 3 March, 22 August 1760.

and location of every gun, and thence the complement of men required to serve the guns.³¹⁵

Taylor Penny was very professional in the arguments he put forward to increase his complement of guns:

the *Aldbrough* .. requires to go very much by the stern and as she hath a very small after hold and bread room, it is impossible to keep her so, and there are two vacant ports in the cabin, the best part of the ship for action, and very capable of carrying two more nine pounders for those ports, as also two four pounders on the quarter deck, which will enable me to keep her in her proper trim.³¹⁶

Despite this the reply was that he could have not more than the number laid down in his ‘establishment’, the usual reply given to such a request.³¹⁷ Penny’s problem was that the Navy Board had already increased his establishment to some extent: *Aldbrough* was fitted with two extra 3 pounder guns on the forecastle, which would have further upset her trim.³¹⁸

Stranded in Cuxhaven by ice in the river, **Taylor Penny** borrowed ship’s boats to get his sloop’s guns out, fearing that their weight would strain the *Aldbrough* as she lay along the bank.³¹⁹

The use of guns at sea showed up possible design faults in their carriages. When the **Hon Robert Boyle Walsingham** commissioned *Romney* he discovered that the carriages of the lower deck guns were:

.. at least three inches too high, for when the gun is laid down on the bed it will neither run out or come in at the port, which may be of dangerous consequence when elevation in time of action is requisite. The guns as they stand can be elevated but a little more than point blank.³²⁰

Writing from the *Victory*, **Richard Kempenfelt** wanted to reduce confusion by standardising his ordnance. He asked for ‘two long twelve pounders on the forecastle, in place of the two six pounders which are there by which all of the guns on the upper deck will be reduced to one of the same nature.’³²¹ Kempenfelt also discussed the use of langridge, a case shot

³¹⁵ Glete, *Navies and Nations* 24-30; Goodwin, *Construction and Fitting* Appendix 4A, 241- 259, Appendix 4C 262-265.

³¹⁶ ADM 1/2295 Captains’ Letters P 1758 **Penny** 6 April 1758.

³¹⁷ ADM 1/2661 Captains’ Letters W 1756 **Wilkinson** 15 September 1756.

³¹⁸ Winfield, *Warships* 262.

³¹⁹ ADM 1/2295 Captains’ Letters P 1758 **Penny** 25 January 1758.

³²⁰ ADM1/2667 Captains’ Letters W 1762 **Walsingham** 18 October 1762.

³²¹ ADM 1/2014 Captains’ Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** May 1779.

consisting of irregular bits of iron, to be issued so that the sails and standing rigging of enemy warships could be disabled.³²² In this he was advocating a French tactic, one that was disparaged by the English. Kempenfelt wanted to keep his adversaries within reach, instead of watching them sail away while he was incapacitated after an engagement.

3.2 Swivel guns

In 1757 the swivel guns **John Elliot** wanted for his newly built *Hussar* were not available at either Woolwich or Sheerness, and he had to set out on patrol in the Channel without them. Despite this, having enjoyed a brisk skirmish in company with three other cruisers, Elliot sank a French ship ‘with his colours flying’. This incident is recounted in Chapter 6.³²³

Swivel guns were asked for by **Thomas Cornwall** for his ex-French *Emerald*, and his request was granted immediately. Adding such armament was easier than trying to get English ‘great guns’ to fit on French-built decks.³²⁴

3.3 New designs: locks, carronades and howitzers

In the 1750s 12 pounders were redesigned to take flint locks rather than lighted matches in the touch holes, to ignite the priming. Having tubs with lighted matches in them on the exposed decks was a fire hazard, and tin tubes too were introduced, charged with powder which, pushed into the touch hole, instantly primed the gun. In 1757 while at Woolwich fitting out his new fir-built frigate *Trent*, **John Lindsay** asked for locks and tubes for his guns ‘as there are a great many in store here’, and others followed his example, ‘having found by experience the great utility of locks on the quarter deck guns’.³²⁵

³²² Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol. 1 291.

³²³ *Hussar* 6th rate 28 guns O 18.4.1757 K 3.5.1757 L 23.7.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85; ADM 1/1759 Captains’ Letters E 1757-8 **Elliot** 29 November 1757.

³²⁴ *Emerald* 6th rate 34 guns Le Havre 1744 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 206; ADM 1/1606 Captains’ Letters C 1757-8 **Cornwall** 17 June.

³²⁵ *Trent* 6th rate 28 guns O 5.5.1757 K 19.5.1757 L 31.10 1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85; ADM 1/1759 Captains’ Letters E 1757-8 **Elliot** 29 November 1757; ADM 1/2046 Captains’ Letters L 1757 **Lindsay** 11 November 1757; ADM 1/2471 Captains’ Letters S 1757 **Schomberg** 2 September 1757; ADM 1/1489 Captains’ Letters B 1758 **Boyle** 10 April 1758, ADM 1/2663 Captains’ Letters W 1758 **Boyle Walsingham** 10 April 1758.

Some captains were reluctant to change, but it is typical that **John Elliot**, having first asked for ‘locks for the great guns’ in 1757, asked if the newly launched *Aeolus* could be supplied with 12 pounders veined for locks. His request was passed directly to the Board of Ordnance by the Admiralty.³²⁶ This is an interesting exchange as locks were not commonly fitted at this date, which suggests that Elliot had perhaps been advised by his brother Gilbert, Commissioner of the Navy. Syrett thought that locks were only being fitted by 1782, but it is possible that this is a mistake. His comment results from the statement by Sir Gilbert Blane after the Battle of the Saintes in 1782 that lives were saved by this innovation.³²⁷

In 1759 Admiral Hawke, writing from *Ramillies* at sea in Quiberon Bay, sent back to John Cleveland the opinions of seven captains ‘concerning cannon locks and tin tubes’. He added ‘in mine, both of them will be very useful’.³²⁸ Mackay notes Hawke’s innovative injunction to his captains that they should be within pistol shot before loosing broadsides into the enemy, but does not in addition come to the conclusion that Hawke was prepared to try a new invention if it increased safety and efficiency in firing.³²⁹

Another captain who did not want to be left behind was **William Hotham**. He asked ‘... that they be pleased to order *Mélampe*’s guns round, and they will indulge me with those of the same kind as the *Thameses*, short double fortified twelve pounders, which I apprehend will be in every respect more convenient than the long ones’. The Admiralty’s response was: ‘Desire the major general of the Ordnance to supply him the guns he desires, if there are any of that kind in store, and to quicken them round to the ship.’ But Hotham had to admit, in response to a subsequent letter from the Admiralty asking for an explanation of what he meant by ‘double fortified’, that ‘I only made use of it as a general term, and what I have very frequently heard used to express the difference between the guns of the new pattern from the old ones.’³³⁰ Was it Captain Stephen Colby, the first captain of the *Thames*, who set him up?³³¹ There was no further mention of guns, old or new.

³²⁶ ADM 1/1760 Captains’ Letters E 1759-62 **Elliot** 24 January 1759.

³²⁷ David Syrett, *The Royal Navy in European Waters During the American Revolutionary War* (University of South Carolina 1998) 85; Christopher Lloyd, ed. *The Health of Seamen: Selections from the works of Dr James Lind, Sir Gilbert Blane and Dr Thomas Trotter* (Navy Records Society 1965) 172.

³²⁸ Mackay ed. *Hawke Papers* 288.

³²⁹ Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 53-4.

³³⁰ ADM 1/1893 Captains’ Letters H 1758 **Hotham** 8, 16 May 1758.

³³¹ *Mélampe* 5th rate 36 guns Bayonne 1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 205; *Thames* was launched at Bucklers Hard 10 April 1758. Winfield 191.

The carronade had been developed as a light-weight gun which, at close range, did even more damage to timber as a result of the lower velocity with which its ball impacted. The French had experimented with the system in 1747.³³² In 1780 **John Elliot** asked for 18 pounder carronades instead of 12 pounders so that there would be ‘no confusion on the poop’ resulting from a mixture of shot and wads. His request was passed to the Board of Ordnance. When Elliot was asked for his opinion on the carronades with which *Edgar* had been supplied, he replied that the ship on which they had principally engaged had blown up, so that he was not able to report on the effect they had had on the enemy.³³³ **Richard Kempenfelt**, writing from the *Victory*, was also concerned that all the guns on the forecastle should be the same, i.e. long twelve pounders.³³⁴ Two years later Kempenfelt was concerned that the beds of the carronades were faulty, and needed to be strengthened to absorb the recoil. He had been in correspondence with Patrick Miller, the inventor of the carronade, about the much larger 32 pounder carronade which he wanted to try out on *Victory*.³³⁵

Four six-inch howitzers for *Thunderer*’s poop deck were requested by **Boyle Walsingham** who explained, ‘for from some experiments I have seen tried with them I have a great opinion of their execution.’ The Board of Ordnance was asked ‘to comply therewith if they have no objection therein.’³³⁶

4 Navigation

4.1 Coastal navigation

The Admiralty was fully conscious of the fact that the lack of accurate coastal maps made any amphibious operation hazardous, and jeopardised all inshore work. The Admiralty issued a requirement on 9 July 1760 that all captains and their masters should take soundings

³³² John M. Bingeman and Arthur T. Mack, ‘The French influence on English Gunnery’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 92 (SNR 2006) 360.

³³³ ADM 1/11762 Captains’ Letters E 1780 **Elliot** 27 May 1780.

³³⁴ *Victory* 1st rate 100 guns O 14.6.1759 K 2.7.1759 L 7.5.1765 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 62; Glete, *Navies and Nations* 28; ADM 1/2014 Captains’ Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** 30 May 1779.

³³⁵ Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol. I Kempenfelt to Middleton 11 March 1782, 363.

³³⁶ *Thunderer* 3rd rate 74 guns O 15.7.1756 K 17.9.1756 L 19.3.1760 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 667; ADM 1/2674 Captains’ Letters W 1779 **Walsingham** 15 September 1779.

and bearings, and note landmarks whenever they were close to an unfamiliar shore. The Admiralty thought it important enough to make keeping these records a condition of the captain being paid.³³⁷

While he was in the Mediterranean **Michael Clements** wrote up and sent to the Admiralty a journal describing the ports he had been in ... ‘I hope the whole of them may be approved of by their Lordships and desire you will move them to grant me their certificate for the receiving my pay up to that time.’ Clements was assured that ‘the Lords very well approve of his observations’.³³⁸ On this occasion the Hydrographic department was equally impressed, and the index contains the comment ‘N.B. with neat drawings’.³³⁹ This favourable judgement did not temper the severity of the rebuke **Clements** suffered two months later when he wrote begging the Admiralty to dispense with the journal. As mentioned above, he had cleaned *Pallas* within twenty four hours on foreign shores, as a consequence of which:

.. time being taken entirely up for this purpose, never could spare the boats to make any accurate observations of my own either with regard to soundings shoals or to describe with exactness the strength of batteries or place the most proper for landing upon as it would have required much more time to have completed a work of this kind than the nature of the Service would have allowed if it had been the only object in view, and as I can aver to their Lordships

The Admiralty was not impressed by Clements’ extremely daring professional behaviour: ‘The Lords will not dispense with the want of remarks they have ordered him to make nor will they enter into any discussion with him on the subject than that it is the duty of every officer to obey his orders....’³⁴⁰ No evidence has been found to show how this was resolved.

Some captains were always aware of the need for improving charts. **Paul Henry Ourry** and **Joseph Peyton** both wrote at length to the Admiralty about their observations, although it seems a pity that Ourry’s beautifully drawn maps of the Balearic islands, done while he was in the Mediterranean in 1756, were not passed to the Hydrographic department set up in the 1760s.³⁴¹ **Richard Kempfenfelt** made use of his opportunities in the Far East, and brought

³³⁷ **Clements** got his letter in Sept 61; **Kennedy** had not received his in October 1760.

³³⁸ ADM 1/1608 Captains’ Letters C 1761 **Clements** 1 July 1761.

³³⁹ ADM 346/20/1 **Clements** *Pallas* Mediterranean 1760.

³⁴⁰ ADM 1/1608 Captains’ Letters C 1761 **Clements** 10 September 1761.

³⁴¹ ADM 1/2245 Captains’ Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 2 May 1756; ADM 1/2299 Captains’ Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 1 December 1762. The archive is being transferred from Taunton to the National Archive as ADM 346, and the

back ‘pilotage remarks’ accompanied by large plans of Ceylon. He also initiated the survey of Manila.³⁴²

Even the most experienced captain was expected to have a pilot on board in inshore waters but they still had to make their landfall if they had come from abroad.³⁴³ Pilots were employed by the Navy Board, which tested their competence, although some captains were deeply unimpressed by their lack of professionalism. **Joseph Peyton** had to cut his best bower cable to get himself off, having been run aground on the shivering sand by his pilot, ‘being wholly ignorant of where they were or where to go.’³⁴⁴ As the demands of the war extended the reach of the navy the demand for pilots increased, and many letters give evidence of the frustrations of captains working on the other side of the North Sea, and of the concerns of the merchant captains in their convoys.³⁴⁵ **William Fortescue** reported from an icebound Cuxhaven that the ‘Pilots refuse to work in river as buoys have all been taken up or broken adrift.’³⁴⁶ Pilots were always reluctant to take responsibility in adverse weather.³⁴⁷ This exasperation is captured in a letter from **Joseph Peyton**, senior officer at the Nore, who could not move ships as there were no pilots: ‘after waiting all day I sent the only pilot I had in the *Prince* but he finding himself alone would not take charge – I must here beg leave to observe that the Service is very often hindered by the backwardness of this class of people upon a sudden call .. the ships did not get away until 6 this morning.’ The Admiralty sent an extract of this letter to the master of the Trinity House, Dover, with a covering letter saying that the Lords were ‘concerned to find the public service continues to suffer so much through

first volumes, dating from 1760, contain the reports of eleven of Burnett’s peers, amongst them Vol. 1 *Acteon Ourry*, *Aeolus*, **Hotham**; Vol. 5 *Coventry Kennedy*; Vol. 12/52 *Hind M’Clevarty*; Vol. 15/6 *Juno Towry*; Vol. 20/1 *Pallas Clements* and *Prince of Orange Wallis*; Vol. 27 *Torbay Wallis*; Vol.24/1 *Rochester ??*; Vol. 20/24 *Pembroke Wheelock*; Vol.20/23 *Prince of Orange Wallis*.

³⁴² ADM 1/2012 Captains’ Letters K 1763-70 **Kempfenfelt** 26 July 1763.

³⁴³ ADM 1/2009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 22 February 1756; ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters **Boyle** 1 August 1757; ADM 1/2046 Captains’ Letters L 1757 **Lindsay** 14, 19 June 1757; ADM 1/2112 Captains’ Letters M 1760 **Man** 29 February 1760; **Martin** 10 June, 17 August 1760;

³⁴⁴ ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 **Peyton** 14 October 1756.

³⁴⁵ ADM 1/2009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 7, 10, 20 May 13 December 1756; ADM 1/1441 Captains’ Letters A 1749-58 **Affleck** 6, 15, 17, 20, 23 June 1757; ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 **Peyton** 3 March, 26 June 1756; ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1757 **M’Clevarty** 10 June 1757; ADM 1/2662 Captains’ Letters W 1762 **Wilkinson** 10, 14 August 1757.

³⁴⁶ ADM 1/1787 Captains’ Letters F 1760-1 **Fortescue** 5 January 1761.

³⁴⁷ ADM 1/2009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 30 March 1756; ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 14 October 1756; ADM 1/1894 Captains’ Letters H 1759 **Hotham** 17 March 1759; ADM 1/2299 Captains’ Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 26 November 1762.

the backwardness of the pilots of that place and that proper measures are set up forthwith to remedy the same.³⁴⁸

Local Guernsey fishermen were employed as pilots by **Thomas Burnett** while in the Channel Islands: employed in pairs, as they claimed to be expert on only one side of the island.

4.2 Surveying

In addition to the obligation placed on all captains, specific and systematic surveys were done after the war.

When the new British Colony of East Florida was established as part of the peace treaty ending the Seven Year's War it needed to be surveyed. William de Brahm was responsible for work based on land, and **John Lindsay** was sent out in his newly-coppered *Tartar* to work along the coast of Florida.³⁴⁹ Lindsay had to take with him all the technical equipment needed, and he and the Navy Board put together a list which he hoped would be comprehensive.³⁵⁰ He included a forge; a ten oared pinnace and a small four oared boat which would have been used for surveying; 12 boat grapnels and four 40 gun ship's top chains: as specified, these were the heavy chains required by a 40 gun ship to sling the lower yards in battle to prevent their falling down if the ropes by which they were hung were shot away.³⁵¹ Surveying parties in the ships' boats would have held the boats steady by dropping lengths of chain to hold the grapnels securely on the bottom while bearings were being taken. The length specified by Lindsay had, from experience, proved the most useful weight which could be man-handled in a small boat without endangering it. Two theodolites, a land quadrant, a reflecting telescope for astronomical observations, a case of pocket instruments, a pair of proportional compasses and plain tables with sights would have been all the equipment needed. A camera obscura, a pantographer, sufficient quantity of vellum and paper of various sizes, as well as pens, pencils and brushes made up the order.³⁵² Lindsay's

³⁴⁸ ADM 1/2299 Captains' Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 12 November 1762.

³⁴⁹ Samuel Proctor, ed. *William Gerard de Brahm The Atlantic Pilot* (London 1772 reprint Florida 1974).

³⁵⁰ ADM 1/2051 Captains' Letters L 1764 **Lindsay** February 1764.

³⁵¹ Smyth, *Sailor's Word Book* 687.

³⁵² A camera obscura was 'a machine representing an artificial eye, wherein the images of external objects are exhibited distinctly, in their native colours, either inverted or erect'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. II 14; a

maps were not left languishing amongst his letters, although their present location is unknown.

When **Samuel Wallis** took *Dolphin* around the world in 1766 he sent Lindsay's list to the Admiralty asking for as much of it as their Lordships 'would indulge him with' for his voyage.³⁵³

4.3 Oceanic navigation

Captains were required to traverse oceans with the most rudimentary navigational equipment, aids which had not progressed for hundreds of years.³⁵⁴ Latitude was easy to work out, so that ships made their way south or north to the correct latitude before turning east or west and making a landfall. It was never possible to measure accurately the distance travelled, so that a captain's confident assertion that he was 100 leagues west of Lisbon was possibly true, but as he had no accurate means of measuring his speed through the water or of identifying the strength of wind or currents he was operating on guesswork.³⁵⁵

The equipment which made possible more accurate navigation improved slowly. Foremost amongst these was to be Harrison's chronometer which permanently solved the question of longitude, but too late for Thomas Burnett and his peers. The war did not prevent tests on the chronometer. **Alexander Schomberg** met *Merlin* with William Harrison on board, returning from Jamaica in March 1762. **John Lindsay** was responsible for taking William Harrison back to the West Indies in 1764 on the second voyage to test H4. Before he left Spithead the chronometer was checked: '... the equal altitudes for taking the true time at this place are taken ..' Two months later Lindsay reported that he had 'taken four observations of the sun's equal altitudes to find the difference of time that Mr Harrison makes by his father's

pantographer was an instrument to copy or reduce drawings Smyth 516; paper was made in the following dimensions: atlas, elephant, imperial, super-royal, royal, medium, demy, crown, foolscap and post-paper. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. III 454 (there is a typographical error in this edition: 'post paper' is rendered 'pot paper').

³⁵³ A ballad commemorated the *Dolphin*'s circumnavigation; Firth, *Naval Songs* 243-4; ADM 1/2669 Captains' Letters W 1766 **Wallis** 8 July 1766.

³⁵⁴ E.G.R. Taylor, *Navigation in the Days of Captain Cook* (National Maritime Museum Monograph No 18 1974) ; Helen Wallis, 'Navigators and mathematical practitioners in Samuel Pepys's Day' in *The Journal of Navigation* Vol. 47 (1994).

³⁵⁵ Frank Scott, 'Speed, Navigational Accuracy and the Ship Log' in *The Mariner's Mirror* 92 (SNR 2006) 477.

timekeeper between Portsmouth and this place, and shall proceed this evening for Jamaica.³⁵⁶

There were still important improvements to be made to the compass, ‘being of the utmost importance to the purposes of navigation’. By 1757 the compass everyone wanted was that made by Dr Knight. According to William Falconer, the principal reason for Dr Knight’s compasses being better than those previously made was that he tempered the needles more successfully, so that they were ‘enabled to contain a much greater quantity of the magnetical stream, which is certainly a great advantage.’ But Falconer went on to say that the disadvantage of his compass was that the card was far too delicately balanced ‘to encounter the shocks of a tempestuous sea’.³⁵⁷

Doctor Knight’s Compasses were requested from the Navy Board by **Richard Kempenfelt** as he was fitting out the *Elizabeth* before her voyage to the East Indies under Commodore Steevens. The Admiralty went one better: all five of the ships under Steevens command were to be equipped with the latest technology.³⁵⁸ **Thomas Burnett** also needed Doctor Knight’s compass to equip *Cambridge* before her voyage to the West Indies, and was supplied with two.³⁵⁹

In 1766 **Samuel Wallis** needed the very best equipment before his circumnavigation. He visited Dr. Knight in person, together with Captain John Campbell, to discuss his new improved compasses. Campbell had tested Tobias Mayer’s lunar tables over a period of years off the Brittany coast and was the Admiralty’s expert on navigation. Obviously the criticisms voiced by Falconer had been heeded by the inventor, although Wallis does not say how the compasses had been improved. Dr. Knight asked for a Navy Board order rather than a personal order from Wallis, and promised that two compasses would be ready for delivery ‘by Saturday or Monday’.³⁶⁰ Good use of his equipment was made by Wallis and his master, John Harrison who did the calculations. Captain Cook was able to use Wallis’s charts of the Pacific for his own expedition, knowing exactly where to find Tahiti, for instance.

³⁵⁶ ADM 1/2051 Captains’ Letters L 1763-5 **Lindsay** 16 March, 16 May 1764.

³⁵⁷ Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 86-7.

³⁵⁸ ADM 1/2010 Captains’ Letters K 1757-9 **Kempenfelt** 10 February 1757.

³⁵⁹ ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters 1757 **Burnett** 23 June 1757.

³⁶⁰ ADM 1/2669 Captains’ Letters W 1766-7 **Wallis** 25 July 1766.

In 1771 **John Elliot** was instructed to fit out the *Portland* for a voyage to St Helena.³⁶¹ His orders also contained the direction that the master should ‘supply himself with the Nautical Almanac and astronomical spheres for the present year, with the requisite tables for showing the effects of parallax and refraction, in order to make the lunar tables constructed by the late Professor Mayer more generally useful’.³⁶² As the master could not be spared from fitting out the vessel, Elliot himself, together with the 2nd lieutenant and a midshipman, attended the Royal Academy ‘in order to qualify ourselves to make this useful observation of the Longitude etc at sea’. Elliot also used his inside information when he wrote to Captain John Campbell to help him find ‘a good well divided instrument for this purpose’. Campbell however had ‘been to all the best shops in London and not one is to be had for any money.’ Elliot asked therefore for permission to take with him the Royal Academy’s sextant which had been constructed by Mr Cole, and which the Master of the Academy would only part with on the Admiralty’s orders.³⁶³

The Mayer tables were not universally welcomed. The contemporary master mariner William Hutchinson wrote that the combination of Mier’s <sic> tables and ‘Maskalyne’s Nautical Almanack to observe and calculate by the sun, moon and stars which I doubt will require too nice observations and too long calculations to be performed without errors by the generality of such seamen as at this time navigate ships as sea ..’³⁶⁴ Hutchinson was right to doubt the ability of ordinary seamen to use lunar tables accurately: the calculations after the sextant was put away took around four hours. But the Board of Longitude awarded Mrs Mayer £3,000 in recognition of the work her husband had done.³⁶⁵

5 Defects in ships, fir-builds and French captures

On returning to port, the captain will list the qualities and defects of the ship for the attention of the commissioner of the navy at that port.

³⁶¹ *Portland* 4th rate 50 guns K 1.1767 L 1.4.1770 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 77.

³⁶² Professor Tobias Mayer (1723-62) began as a map maker who created a set of lunar tables for the moon’s location. In 1757 the Astronomer Royal James Bradley arranged to have these tested at sea by Captain John Campbell in the *Essex*. Dava Sobel and J.H. Andrews, *The Illustrated Longitude* (London 1995) 114-5.

³⁶³ ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 7 January 1771.

³⁶⁴ Hutchinson, *Practical Seamanship* 85.

³⁶⁵ Sobel, *Longitude* 116.

In 1745 the Norris Committee was given the task of setting guidelines for future naval building, but failed to look forward, instead concentrated on ‘establishments’ which took no account of the changes in design taking place on the other side of the Channel. It was not until *Invincible* and *Magnanime* were captured in 1747-8 that the inadequacy of the establishment designs was recognised.³⁶⁶

English design evolved very slowly through this period. ‘The art and mystery of the shipwright’ could not be questioned, as it was in France. **Richard Kempenfelt** summarised the dilemma in 1780:

The want of a good foundation laid of mathematical knowledge prevents our builders from rising to eminence; for want of this light, they are often obliged to grope in the dark, they guess, because they have not the mathematics to calculate certainty; when they give their bottom any particular form, they guess at the effect.³⁶⁷

The captains however were not constrained. **Robert Man** was forthright in his criticisms of his newly built 6th rate *Milford*, which was ‘very leaky in her upper works and decks very open by reason of the greenness of the planks and timber and that her quick work is very bare, being very indifferent painted at first.’³⁶⁸ He wrote to explain that he had had to put into Cork to repair the main rigging. Another problem he reported was with the shingle ballast, which at only 36 tons was 20 tons lighter than the iron ballast carried by other ships of her class.³⁶⁹ A month later he returned to the charge. He was certain that the *Milford*’s masts were not of the correct dimensions, and gave the figures which were passed on to the Navy Board. Man was right. The 1745 establishment for a 6th rate laid down the dimensions for the *Milford*’s mast: it should have been 73ft with a diameter of 22 ½ in. instead of 85 ft with a diameter 22 ¾ in. The maintop mast was similarly too long, 52ft instead of 43ft10in.³⁷⁰ The *Milford* had been built in a private yard in Milford Haven, a long way from supervision. Robert Man was too professional to accept an unseaworthy ship without comment. The knowledgeable **Henry John Phillips** also knew about ‘establishment’ rules

³⁶⁶ Peter Hemingway, ‘The Norris Committee: The 1745 Establishment of Dimensions and the Origins of the 74 gun Ship’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 96 (SNR 2010) 75.

³⁶⁷ Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol. 1 325, quoted by R.J.B. Knight, ‘Sandwich, Middleton and Dockyard Appointments’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 57 (SNR 1971) 179.

³⁶⁸ *Milford* 6th rate 28 guns O 19.9.1757 K 11/1757 L 20.9.1759 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85.

³⁶⁹ ADM 1/2112 Captains’ Letters M 1760 **Man** 12 May, 16 August 1760.

³⁷⁰ Table 6: 1745 Establishment, James Lees, *The Masting and Rigging of English Ships of War 1625-1860* (Conway 1979) 196-7.

when he asked to have his top masts, topgallant masts and yards lengthened so that *Juno* could carry the same sails as other ships of her class.³⁷¹

John Wheelock had been told by his predecessor in *Fly* about her shortcomings. He described her as being long in proportion to her breadth, so that a change in rigging to that of a ketch would suit her better. His arguments were accepted.³⁷²

Research has not yet shown how many captains took seriously the instruction that they should draw up a list of the good and bad sailing qualities and defects of the commission they were relinquishing. Such reports were requested by Jacob Acworth, who wanted reports on performance to inform his designs.³⁷³ The reports sent to the Navy Board were carefully compared, and good sailing features were identified. An exhaustive review of the reports has been made by Robert Gardiner in his study of sailing qualities and the reports of many of Thomas Burnett's peers can be identified in his pages.³⁷⁴ What was more difficult than identifying good qualities was attempting to reproduce such qualities in a new design. A fast ship's lines could be copied, but with building methods as they were it was impossible to reproduce them exactly in different shipyards. The sailing qualities of the *Victory* were legendary, but she was never matched.

One quality which cannot be measured is the combination of a captain's ability to make the right decision and his crew's ability to interpret his orders promptly. The result of this intangible is the fact that some captains were able to affect the outcomes of their engagements by being in the right place at the right time, as **Edmund Affleck** was by going through the gap in Rodney's Battle of the Saintes.³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Phillips** 25 May 1759.

³⁷² ADM 1/2661 Captains' Letters W 1756 **Wheelock** 29 October 1756.

³⁷³ Peter Hemingway, 'Sir Jacob Acworth and Experimental Ship Design during the Period of the Establishments', *The Mariner's Mirror* 96 (SNR 2010) 156.

³⁷⁴ Gardiner, *First Frigates*.

³⁷⁵ Michael Duffy, 'The hidden Trafalgar – dull winds or dull captains', *The Mariner's Mirror* 92 (SNR 2006) 226.

5.1 Fir-built frigates

Under the interim Board of Winchelsea, ten fir-built frigates were ordered in April and May 1757 as an experiment. Five were built, all commissioned by Thomas Burnett's newly-posted peers.³⁷⁶ These ships were a cheap wartime expedient, not repeated until the end of the century. They were quick to build as fir was easy to work with and readily available. With two built at each of Chatham and Woolwich and one at Deptford, they were launched incredibly quickly between July and October. The fir frigates saw active service for an average of eight years, a relatively short period. This meant that they did not incur rebuilds, which were often two or three times the cost of the initial build. It is very difficult to compare the costs of these frigates against those built in private yards as none of the costs can be compared directly.³⁷⁷ The traditionally built frigates of the Coventry class enjoyed an average working life of 24 years, three times longer than the average of the fir frigates. The average cost of fir built vessels per year of service was £1,573 whereas the traditional frigate average annual cost was £1,261. Fir-built frigates were, therefore, neither cheaper to build nor to maintain.³⁷⁸ The ships served their purpose in that their captains succeeded in escorting convoys and taking prizes, and **John Lindsay** kept the *Trent* for her entire five years of service.³⁷⁹

On the other hand, it appears that fir frigates needed to be docked more frequently; and timbers subjected to friction such as the wales wore out inordinately quickly. **Robert Boyle** commented that elm might have been cheaper as it did not need replacing, and although he did not have statistical analysis to guide his view, the practical experience of the dockyards meant the experiment was not repeated until the emergency at the end of the century.³⁸⁰

Boreas was ordered on the 18 April, her keel laid on 21 April and she was launched on 29 July, 102 days from order to launch.³⁸¹ By the beginning of September the ship had been rigged, **Robert Boyle** had completed his provisioning, and called in at Long Reach for his

³⁷⁶ *Acteon*, Clements and Ourry; *Boreas*, Boyle; *Hussar*, Elliot; *Shannon*, Medows; *Trent*, Lindsay.

³⁷⁷ Barrington Rosier, 'The Construction Costs of Eighteenth Century Warships', *The Mariner's Mirror* 96 (SNR 2010) 161-9.

³⁷⁸ All figures are derived from Winfield, *British Warships*.

³⁷⁹ *Trent* 6th rate 28 guns O 5.5.1757 K 19.5.1757 L 31.10 1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85.

³⁸⁰ Gardiner, *First Frigates* 115.

³⁸¹ *Boreas* O.18.4.1757 K. 21.4.1757 L.29.7.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy* 85; Gardiner, *First Frigates* 18.

guns. But by December, when Boyle wrote from Portsmouth, it was to report that the soft wood from which *Boreas* had been constructed was already causing problems: ‘...The comings of the hatchways being made of fir are quite rubbed through. It is not only my opinion but the officers of the yard, that elm would not only be of a longer duration but less expensive, as otherwise every cruise we shall be obliged to have new comings....’. The wales were also being rubbed away, and Boyle’s comment was that if ‘there <sic> had been sheathed with elm, would be a great means of their preservation’. In addition, there were two serious faults in design. He asked ‘...that the after hatchway should be stopped up as it is directly over the powder room scuttle, and may be of fatal consequence in time of action....’ Another design fault was that ‘the stantions on quarter deck are not long enough at four feet high and consequently the people much exposed’. Boyle asked to have them lengthened ‘according to establishment.’³⁸²

John Elliot wrote to his brother about his new *Hussar*, commenting that ‘I don’t find that she has any bad quality for being fir, though she’s very light she’s stiff enough but I intend to write the Navy Board tomorrow for more iron ballast as the ship does not keep so good a wind as I could wish’.³⁸³ **John Lindsay** asked for directions to have *Trent* graved as ‘I apprehend it would be a means of preserving the ships bottom as she is built of fir, and would prevent her being water socken <sic> after the tallow is wore off ...’³⁸⁴ After only eight months at sea **Michael Clements** commented that the *Acteon*, ‘by frequent hogging at sea makes the planks extremely ragged should be glad to have the bottom graved ...’.³⁸⁵ ‘Hogging’ was cleaning the bottom afloat on an even keel using a special brush. This was difficult work, directed from a boat alongside the vessel, with the brush pulled from the deck by ropes.³⁸⁶ Graving the ship was done with her on the ground, in a dock or on a beach between tides and would give better results with less damage to the soft fir planking of the ship’s hull. Careening involved hauling her down, and in both cases she would be breamed, or cleaned with fire.

³⁸² ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters B 1757 **Boyle** 21 December 1757.

³⁸³ *Hussar* 6th rate 28 guns O 18.4. 1757 K 3.5.1757 L 23.7.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85; NMM ELL/400 23 October 1757.

³⁸⁴ ADM 1/2047 Captains’ Letters L 1758 **Lindsay** 5 December 1758.

³⁸⁵ *Acteon* 6th rate 28 guns O 6.5. 1757 K 26.5.1757 L 30.9.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85; ADM 1/1606 Captains’ Letters C 1757-8 **Clements** 21 May 1758.

³⁸⁶ The brush was made from birch twigs clamped between two planks before being trimmed evenly. Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 155.

5.2 French built purchases

The perception amongst Thomas Burnett's peers was that the French vessels they chased were fast. Rodger made the point that French designers were judged by the speed of their ships, which were built for a high initial speed off the wind in fair weather.³⁸⁷ **Edmund Affleck**, sailing ahead of the convoy he was protecting, sighted a French ship and chased her, but '... had the mortification to see I did not gain upon her and about 11pm lost sight of her.'³⁸⁸

Forty French built vessels, in size ranging from large 3rd rates to 6th rates, were purchased by the Admiralty after capture. Several of the commissioning captains were exasperated by the mess left when the Navy Board surveyors had finished their inspection, as the vessels had to be re-stowed by a scratch crew before a full complement had been collected. The lines of many of these vessels were studied by the Navy Board, but it was not possible to copy even the fastest French vessel exactly, as English ships were always built with heavier timbers and stronger joints, because they had different requirements for service.³⁸⁹ The Slade family were constantly on the watch for qualities which could translate design into speed.³⁹⁰

These captured vessels were added relatively quickly to the navy list, but not necessarily cheaply. The following table gives the costs of purchase of the nine French vessels taken by or commissioned by the captains from the sample.³⁹¹

In the case of **Thomas Baillie** whose captured French frigate was bought by the Admiralty, he wrote to say that:

...I am already like to have an action brought against me by the *Tartar's* ships company for suffering the ship to be sold to the Government, the captors being offered near one thousand pounds more by the merchants in which case I hope their lordships will indemnify me...³⁹²

³⁸⁷ Rodger, 'Navies and the Enlightenment' 9.

³⁸⁸ ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-9 **Affleck** 24 September 1759.

³⁸⁹ Larrie D. Ferreiro, 'The French influence on eighteenth century shipbuilding', *The Mariner's Mirror* 93 (SNR 2007) 98.

³⁹⁰ Patrice Decencière, 'Three French Sailing Ship Performance Trials', *The Mariner's Mirror* 94 (SNR 2008) 276-284; Bingeman and Mack, 'The French influence' 357.

³⁹¹ Costs are taken from Winfield, *British Warships*.

³⁹² ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Baillie** 19 May 1757.

Ship	Taken by Captain	Date taken	Cost of purchase £	Cost of fitting £	Total Cost £
<i>Mélampe</i>	Hotham	2.11.1757	5,398	4,976	10,374
<i>Danae</i>	Hotham	28.3.1759	6,930	5,941	12,871
<i>Blonde</i>	Kennedy	28.2.1760	3,855	4,319	8,174
<i>Brune</i>	Harrison	30.1.1761	4,327	?	4,327
<i>Bertin</i>	Harrison	3.4.1761			19,074
<i>Boulogne</i>	Harrison	2.1762	3,362	7,192	10,554
<i>Emerald</i>	Cornwall	21.9.1757	4,288	3,657	7,945
<i>Tartar's Prize</i>	Baillie	27.3.1757	4,258	1,107	5,365
<i>Terpsichore</i>	Elliot	28.2.1760	2,888	4,673	7,561

Table 7: Costs of a sample of French vessels taken into Navy

Three prizes taken within a few weeks were offered first to the Admiralty by **Thomas Harrison**. He offered to show *La Légère* to the Admiralty before he sold her, admiring her potential as a snow: she sailed very well, ‘having as fine a model as ever I saw.’³⁹³ She was turned down by the Navy Board, but when he brought in *La Brune* his confidence was justified and *Brune* served in the navy until 1792. In company with **William Fortescue** in *Hero*, Harrison brought in the French East Indiaman *Le Bertin*. Renamed *Belleisle*, she served until she was hulked in 1784, and finally sold in 1819. In December 1761 Harrison also brought in *Le Boulogne*, an East Indiaman laden with coffee and pepper, with the comment:

...she is an extremely fine ship, only three years old and had the King’s Commission if their Lordships should be in want of frigates, would make a very fine one. She sails well, having chased her eight hours...³⁹⁴

The Navy Board was also asked to inspect two privateers Harrison brought in during 1762: ‘Both the privateers are new ships strongly built and sailed remarkably well, if their Lordships should be in want of men of war sloops I believe they will not disapprove of their fine dimensions.’³⁹⁵

³⁹³ ADM 1/1892 Captains’ Letters H 1757 **Harrison** 1 November 1757.

³⁹⁴ ADM 1/1897 Captains’ Letters H 1762 **Harrison** 1 January 1762.

³⁹⁵ ADM 1/1897 Captains’ Letters H 1762 **Harrison** 8 June 1762.

When *Danae* was brought in by **William Hotham** after an engagement lasting three hours she was surveyed by the Navy Board and found ‘fit to be purchased’. He also brought in the *Malouin* who ‘sails extremely well particularly in a fresh of wind when she have <sic> rather the advantage of the *Æolus* or *Brilliant*’. Hotham understood this was because she was built ‘upon a new principal <sic>’, but the Navy Board rejected this new-built vessel.

French built vessels presented features other than speed. **Thomas Baillie** was delighted to be given his prize as his first command, but his pride did not blind him to the shortcomings of *Tartar’s Prize*.³⁹⁶ One of the twenty 6 pounders had burst in the engagement, causing casualties on board, and Baillie made the point that none of them were properly certified. The guns did not fit properly between the coamings of the hatches and the sides. When they were measured they were found to be eight feet two inches from the cascable to the muzzle. This posed a problem because there was a clearance of only nine feet from the coamings of the hatches to the sides, ‘which will render it extremely hazardous and difficult to load in time of action’. For this reason the Board of Ordnance was eventually directed to supply him with guns.³⁹⁷

The problems with *Tartar’s Prize* were not over. Once Baillie took her to sea the evidence of her distinctive French build became clear. In August he had to put into Corunna to restow barrels in an attempt to ease the movement of the *Tartar’s Prize*. In September, while cruising between 47° and 49° degrees ‘the ship sprang a leak and made eighteen inches water every hour’. Baillie asked for ‘a deck to be laid below similar to the *Amazon* to hold her together or at least a few beams, beside a standard or two upon deck to support her extreme long delicate body, which labours and opens immoderately in rowling <sic>’. The cook, Bartholomew Barry, had written to explain the difficulty of cooking under the conditions on board. ‘This is to let you know that it is an impossibility for me or any man in the world to keep victuals in this galley until it is altered ...’ Baillie added more details to the cook’s description:

... on account of the smoakyness of the gally which in truth is so great that no man living can stand it, especially as the fireplace is fore and aft and the kettles only hanging ones, which have more than once fell over on the deck, scalded the people and always burning the cables and stoppers....

³⁹⁶ *Tartars Prize* 6th rate 24 guns Le Havre 1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 206.

³⁹⁷ ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters B 1757 **Baillie** 21 May 1757.

Without a stable kitchen the simplest food would have been difficult to provide. Until enclosed iron stoves were introduced about 1750, cooking presented a challenge at the best of times.³⁹⁸ English crews were used to working in uncomfortable surroundings, and would have accepted without comment being cold and wet when on deck. But the conditions in *Tartar's Prize* were exceptional. Without gun port lids the lower gun deck would have been frequently awash. Baillie asked for canvas to make awnings, and if this had been supplied the resourceful sailors would have rigged these to keep out the worst of the deluges of water coming through the deck. *Tartar's Prize* was lost in the Mediterranean in 1760, not surprisingly, by springing a plank.

A severe gale off the Scillies lasting four days was encountered by **Christopher Bassett**, returning in *Ambuscade* from Gibraltar, 'which occasioned the ship to spring a leak that has obliged me to pump her every half hour since.'³⁹⁹ This misadventure should perhaps not be blamed on her original construction: four days of gales would have strained any ship.

The French built *Emerald* caused difficulties for **Thomas Cornwall** as her guns were too long, as mentioned in Section 3.2 above. The master builder in Portsmouth dockyard thought the upper sill of the ports could be cut away four or five inches without weakening the ship. Cornwall suggested that short nine pounders would 'answer the purpose' and save modifying the vessel. This was referred to the Board of Ordnance. Cornwall took *Emerald* to sea in October and returned to Plymouth in November as the foremast was 'sprung in six places it was impossible to secure it sufficiently to keep at sea.'⁴⁰⁰

Mélampe was very leaky, making between twelve to twenty inches of water an hour, which kept the pumps continuously employed. **William Hotham** made the point that the crew was permanently ill due to the wet conditions. He asked to have the cause examined, 'and such further methods taken to strengthen her the better to keep the sea, setting aside her weakness she has every other good property a ship can have.'⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ William N. Boog Watson, 'Alexander Brodie and his fire hearths for ships', *The Mariner's Mirror* 54 (SNR 1968) 409; Goodwin, *Construction and Fitting* 161

³⁹⁹ *Ambuscade* 5th rate 40 guns Le Havre Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 198; ADM 1/1491 Captains' Letters B 1760 **Bassett** 10 December 1760.

⁴⁰⁰ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-58 **Cornwall** 11 November 1758.

⁴⁰¹ ADM 1/1894 Captains' Letters H 1759 **Hotham** 23 December 1759

The French-built *Blonde* gave **Archibald Kennedy** much satisfaction. He loved her speed but the shallow hull gave inadequate support to the masts, while the weak structure often gave way under pressure. The *Blonde* regularly suffered damage to hull and rigging during chases.⁴⁰² Like Hotham, Kennedy was concerned about the effect on his crew of the permanently wet conditions below:

...she being so very weak and leaky there is no possibility of any of the officers or men lying dry in their beds and during the last cruise I had upwards of 30 of my men down with the rheumatism occasioned by their lying wet...⁴⁰³

Kennedy reported that he could not even keep ‘the stores dry on account of the principal defects’ but more seriously was unable to careen the *Blonde*, as mentioned above in Section 2.4.

The French built *Arc en Ciel* was brought back from Louisburg by **Henry Martin**. When he arrived in Cork:

...the ships company and prisoners were very sickly and most of the brick work about our fireplace and copper had fallen down by the working of the ship in the almost continual gales of wind ...⁴⁰⁴

Martin was subsequently commissioned into *Danae*, recently acquired by Hotham, and six months later the Navy Board was asked to investigate modifications he suggested:

...I beg leave to represent to my Lords Commissioners the great inconvenience of having the tiller .. in my cabin, which in rainy or bad weather is constantly wet through the holes for the tiller rope which added to the extreme coldness of my cabin by it having only one bulk head without bed place or steerage and the windows as they were in the French service makes it almost impossible to lie in it. I hope therefore their Lordships will indulge me as far as to give directions to the Navy Board for the tiller to be moved on the quarter deck, and a grating deck made over it as I am convinced the ship will steer as well, and the grating deck be very convenient for the marines in time of action. I would not trouble their lordships with a complaint of this kind but apprehend the Navy Board will not comply with my request without

⁴⁰² Kennedy reported that the *Blonde* sailed at 10 knots close hauled, 11-12 knots reaching, 12-13 knots running. He described her as a good sea boat, rolling deep but easily and behaved well even in a head sea. Gardiner, *First Frigates* 103, 115.

⁴⁰³ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 8 May 1762.

⁴⁰⁴ *Arc en Ciel* 4th rate 50 guns Bayonne Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 205; ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1758 **Martin** 23 October 1758.

their Lordships approbation as it may possibly detain the ship two or three days longer in the harbour than would otherwise be occasion for...

The need for these modifications was accepted by the Admiralty, who directed the Navy Board to do the work 'if it will not take up too much time'⁴⁰⁵

The French designed their ships to be long and narrow and therefore fast. They used scientific principles to measure speed at sea.⁴⁰⁶ They were not designed to comfortably house hundreds of men during summer and winter-long blockading off Continental ports. Their lack of internal supports caused the hull to work and leaks to develop. It also prevented the quick careening which reduced lengthy visits to docks for cleaning. The French *Panthère*, brought into the Navy as *Amazon*, was built with only four feet of headroom between decks, a complete contrast with the British 6th rates.⁴⁰⁷

6 Orders

Every commission began with a set of orders issued by the Admiralty, and many of the files of captains' correspondence open with a letter listing the orders received. Howe's orders to Burnett have been given in Chapter 2 Section 8.1. Identical orders would be issued to every other captain on this station. Precedence and seniority determined that when a captain arrived on a station he would present his orders to the senior officer there to explain his presence. If new orders were issued both the recipient and the more senior officer who issued the order would record the fact. Eventually clerks in the Admiralty could check that every vessel was in fact going about legitimate business and not 'sloping off' on private cruises.

This procedure has been illustrated by the order books made out by **Michael Clements'** clerk from June 1757.⁴⁰⁸ As a very new Commander in the *London* buss every order has been copied into a hard-bound book, together with a copy of every letter acknowledging an order. There is also proof of the importance of seniority. In August 1757, off the coast of East

⁴⁰⁵ *Danae* 5th rate 38 guns Le Havre Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 205; ADM 1/2112 Captains' Letters M 1760 **Martin** 16 March 1760.

⁴⁰⁶ Decencièrre, 'Sailing Ship Performance Trials' 276; N.A.M. Rodger, 'Navies and the Enlightenment' in Pieter van der Merwe *Science and the French and British Navies 1750-1850* (NMM 2003) 9.

⁴⁰⁷ Gardiner, *First Frigates* 19.

⁴⁰⁸ NMM CLE 3/2 4 June 1757 – 1 December 1761.

Friesland, Commander **William M^cCleverty** of one year's seniority in the rank, has issued an order to Commander **Michael Clements** of three month's seniority, which required him to intercept:

.. all ships and vessel bound to these ports laden with any kind of forage or supply for the French army, acquainting me with the vessels so stopped for which this shall be your order.⁴⁰⁹

In the following month Clements received his posting into *Acteon* which instantly gave him seniority over **M^cCleverty**, who was never again in a position to give orders to **Clements**, although his own posting was only thirty one days later.

7 Conclusion.

While the captain was responsible for the well-being of his ship, she in turn shaped his career, sometimes in subtle ways. Thomas Burnett's career serves as an example.

Had Thomas Burnett been appointed to a large ship sloop, rather than to the tiny ketch *Happy*, originally intended to combat smugglers, his pursuit and capture of the French privateer *L'Infernal* might not have won his immediate promotion to post rank. Years later, when in command of the *Prudent*, a similar capture elicited the comment that their Lordships were pleased with his success.

After *Happy*, command of the towering *Cambridge* with her spacious captain's accommodation must have been gratifying, but her dreadful sailing qualities offered little chance of distinction. On the other hand, the fact that she was too big for fever-ridden English Harbour meant that she used the relatively healthy anchorage on the other side of the island. This doubtless saved the lives of many of his crew, and perhaps also that of Thomas Burnett.

When Burnett was removed from the sound *Rochester* into the decrepit *Marlborough* which had been launched as a second rate in 1732 and finally cut down to a 3rd rate two-decker 68 in 1761, he was actually being favoured with the opportunity to join in the plundering of

⁴⁰⁹ NMM CLE 3/2 2 August 1757.

Havana.⁴¹⁰ However the *Marlborough* was expendable and so chosen, along with the heavy *Cambridge*, for the diversionary attack on the Morro Castle. It was indeed dangerous: one of the four captains was killed and another court martialled and dismissed the service for failing to take part. Thereafter it was by the merest chance that Burnett did not drown when the *Marlborough* came apart and sank in mid-Atlantic.

⁴¹⁰ Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 40.

Chapter 4 The relationship of Thomas Burnett and his peers with the Admiralty

This chapter outlines the means by which the Admiralty came to know the captains commissioned to its ships, and the degree of control exerted by bureaucracy. The sharp-eyed clerks who cross-checked between journals and logs were part of this control, all based on age-old precedent. Inattention to duty was frowned on, and systems had been devised to detect corruption if it was attempted.

1 System of communication between the administration and officers

Correspondence between serving captains and the Admiralty was extremely efficient, as it determined the control over them exerted by the Admiralty. While letters from Bristol or Plymouth took two days to arrive, there are hundreds of examples of letters written on one day and read in the Admiralty office on the next. What is more, the response from the Secretary and his clerks would be read by the captain on the third day. This 48 hour turn-around of letters from Portsmouth, Chatham and the Nore was made possible through intelligent sifting by the Secretaries, John Cleveland and later Philip Stephens, who dealt personally with the majority of correspondence, and reserved for their Lordships only the letters with which they needed to be concerned. The First Lord and his board colleagues routinely took an immediate decision when the letter was read to him. The furious pace is indicated by the secretary's abbreviated scrawl in the turn-back notes. The fact that every captain knew that the response to most letters was determined by the Secretary accounts for the deference shown him.

The clerks in the office began their day's work shortly after 10.00 am, but did not finish at night until every letter was written.⁴¹¹ This involved deciphering the secretary's brief 'turn-back' summary of what was to be said, filling in the unstated gaps with official terminology and writing the copy, and sometimes multiple copies, into the ledger book as well. They had at their finger tips every detail of the movements of officers and ships. When a replacement boatswain was slow to arrive, Schomberg's query has on its turn-back: 'Pray see what is

⁴¹¹ Rodger, *Admiralty* 62,

become of Avery'. The clerk knew: '*He was boatswain of the Dover in the Downs and superceded in her the 7th inst. in order to go to the Diana*'.⁴¹²

Senior officers at Portsmouth or Chatham were expected to communicate with the Admiralty on a daily basis, Torbay or Plymouth every three or four days: they reclaimed the costs of the service on their expenses.⁴¹³ Communications were also made between ports. After the official post had gone there was still the option of a civilian express delivery, a relay of riders who could cross England in a matter of hours rather than days.⁴¹⁴ **Joseph Peyton** was not the only senior officer to receive more than one letter during the day. On 18 November at the Downs he recorded receiving three in one day from the Admiralty.⁴¹⁵ Packets of books for the Admiralty from Scotland or Plymouth travelled by stage coach.⁴¹⁶ Every captain informed the Admiralty as soon as he arrived in port, so that his whereabouts were known in case he needed to be sent further orders.⁴¹⁷

Knowing where to send a letter was easy during war time when captains had cruising instructions, but harder when they were on leave. **Charles Medows** wrote from Brook Street asking for an extension of his leave, and the clerk was directed to send the reply 'at the place mentioned in the letter.'⁴¹⁸ **Paul Henry Ourry** proposed being away from Plymouth on business, and asked for the reply to be sent to 'Edward Drewes Esq in the Close Exeter.'⁴¹⁹ The surprising amount of information that **Thomas Burnett's** twenty-first century family has about his private life ashore was gleaned from the address on a letter he wrote from 'Longford, Colnbrook' to the Admiralty asking for an extension to his leave. **Robert Boyle Walsingham** knew how to contact an impecunious candidate for the position of lieutenant. The young man gave his London address as: 'lodges at Mr Morphey, haberdasher in Butcher Row.'⁴²⁰

⁴¹² ADM 1/2474 Captains' Letters S 1760 **Schomberg** 9/20 February 1760.

⁴¹³ Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 102; ADM 1/95 Admiral Darby 8 January 1781, who claimed £38.8.6d for postal expenses between 26 August – 23 September 1780.

⁴¹⁴ ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **M'Cleverty** 10 June 1757.

⁴¹⁵ ADM 1/2299 Captains' Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 18 November 1762; ADM 1/1896 Captains' Letters H 1761 **Hotham** 16 September 1761.

⁴¹⁶ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757 **Craig** 8 April 1757.

⁴¹⁷ ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Medows** 3 July 1757; ADM 1/1901 Captains' Letters H 1771-3 **Hotham** 24 February 1772.

⁴¹⁸ ADM 1/2110 Captains' Letters M 1758 **Medows** 26 August 1758.

⁴¹⁹ ADM 1/2248 Captains' Letters O 1771-7 **Ourry** 26 July 1772.

⁴²⁰ ADM 1/2666 Captains' Letters W 1761 **Walsingham** 29 March 1761.

It was not only addresses which changed. Both the **Hon. Robert Boyle** and **Henry John Phillips** changed the names by which they were known to the Admiralty. On the death of his brother the Hon Robert Boyle changed his name to Boyle Walsingham, and it was ‘so inserted on the List’.⁴²¹ On the death of his uncle Rear Admiral Towry, Henry John Phillips changed his name to Towry as a condition of the will before he inherited his uncle’s estate.⁴²² There are instructions to the clerks to take note of this and the subsequent papers are filed accordingly. **Charles Medows** also changed his name, but not until he had resigned from the navy. By royal licence in 1773 he became Charles Pierrepont, heir to the vast Pierrepont estates.

From the twenty-first century we can only look back and wonder at the efficiency of the rapid and apparently perfectly reliable system of communication, and the speed with which decisions were taken.

2 The individual voices which can still be heard through the formality of correspondence through clerks

The thousands of letters written by Thomas Burnett and his peers to the Secretary at the Admiralty give evidence of the formality required of correspondence with the Admiralty in the eighteenth century. Most of the letters were written by the captains’ secretaries in the ‘clerkly hand’ which was a requirement for the job. Despite this filter it is possible to discern the individuality of the men who dictated the letters. On occasion letters are holographs, written by the captain himself, and these give direct evidence of spelling or dialect as well as hand writing.

When the few holograph letters of the less articulate captains are compared with their letters in the ‘clerkly hand’, it is evident that some clerks must have improved on their captains’ phraseology as well as spelling. Burnett revealed a great deal of himself when he told the Admiralty about his capture of the French *Infernal*, quoted in Chapter 2. The idiosyncratic spelling is Burnett’s. He always used ‘whare’, ‘thair’ and ‘thare’ if he wrote in his own hand. Unique to Burnett is the breathless excitement of a young man whose courage and success in

⁴²¹ ADM 1/1489 Captains’ Letters B 1758 **Boyle** 20 November 1758.

⁴²² ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Phillips** 3 October 1760.

battle have been appropriately rewarded. He uses the formal expressions: ‘acquainting me’, ‘pleased with my conduct’, ‘kind approbation’, ‘discharging my duty’, but in a letter so brief as to be almost telegraphic. Burnett never used a word unnecessarily.

In contrast, **Edmund Affleck** was a classically educated correspondent. His sentences are beautifully crafted and would have evoked for the listeners in the Admiralty office a man who was totally in command, no matter what the circumstances. At the outset of his career, even a difficult encounter with a returning merchant vessel off King Road is recounted with confidence:

I desire to represent to their Lordships that on a large ship’s appearing to the westward last night I dispatched my own boat with that of the Devonshire and Despatch tender in order to press her hands, but on the approach of the boats she fired on them and would suffer none of them to board her ...⁴²³

Affleck had time to collect his thoughts and consider the effect of his letter on their Lordships. His response to an emotionally charged situation was to suggest cool consideration: his sentences are beautifully constructed to create the desired effect in his readers.

Burnett was not the only captain with idiosyncratic spelling. The Irish **William M^cCleverty** was careful whenever possible to use his secretary for letters to the Admiralty, as he was obviously aware of his weakness: ‘As there Lordships has been pleasd to remove the Boatswen of the Peggy into his maj’s. ship Glasco, I hop there lordships will favour me with George Wilson now sailmaker of the Peggy to be boatswen of her.’⁴²⁴ Eight months later, again without a secretary, M^cCleverty wrote asking for a midshipman, ‘Be pleased to discharge Thoams Scarr .. for prefarment as I ame greatly distressed for a midshipmen that knows his duty. It is the young mans desier to work with me..’⁴²⁵

It appears that a clerk was part of the establishment at Will’s Coffee House, over the road from the Admiralty. This is an address from which many letters were written to the Admiralty, and to which replies were sent. It must have been very convenient for officers on leave in London to have had, a few yards from the front door of the Admiralty, the equivalent

⁴²³ ADM 1/1441 Captains’ Letters A 1749-58 **Affleck** 16 September 1756.

⁴²⁴ ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1756 **M^cCleverty** 26 May 1756.

⁴²⁵ ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1757 **M^cCleverty** 11 January 1757.

of a club in which they could be sure of meeting colleagues and friends. **M^cCleverty** made use of the clerk when he had to compose a long letter justifying his use of discipline.⁴²⁶ The facility was also used several times when officers were asking for extensions to their leave towards the end of the war.⁴²⁷

When asking for favours from the Admiralty the language used is that of formality and humility. **Michael Clements** sent in his journals, and added: ‘I hope the whole of them may be approved of by their Lordships and desire you will move them to grant me their certificate for the receiving my pay up to that time ..’. Despite the fact that he is writing to a salaried employee, Clements uses the respectful and formal tone of a supplicant. This is in contrast to the pompous tone adopted by the young **William Hotham** who put the full weight of formality behind his request:

Having passed my accounts for his Majesty’s Sloop Fortune ... I am to desire you will be pleased to move their Lordships to grant their order to the Commissioners of the Navy for payment of my wages in pursuance of his Majesty’s Order in Council.⁴²⁸

As a very senior officer, writing in his own hand, Hotham once even left out the ubiquitous ‘humble’.⁴²⁹ A total contrast in tone was used by **Richard Kempenfelt** in 1756 who was rewarded with the ‘usual order’ when he used becoming informality: ‘I take the liberty to sollicite <sic> their Lordships favour for an order to receive the money due to me as Lieut. in the Litchfield and Orford being now removed into the Lightning fireship.’⁴³⁰

In complete contrast to the captains’ formality is a wonderful letter enclosed by **Archibald Kennedy** in his account of the death of Captain Skynner of the sloop *Biddeford*, written by the ship’s master, Thomas Stace. Here the enthusiasm of the men is unconstrained, vital and impressive:

Everyone was sensible of the very superior forces of the two ships now standing towards us, besides that several other ships were coming in view, to whom the enemy was seen to make signals. No questions passed, shall we engage, the word was Now

⁴²⁶ ADM 1/2118 Captains’ Letters M 1772 **M^cCleverty** 9 May 1772.

⁴²⁷ ADM 1/2666 Captains’ Letters W 1760 **Wallis** 27 December 1760; ADM 1/1609 Captains’ Letters C 1764 **Clement** 21 November 1764; ADM 1/2669 Captains’ Letters W 1766 **Wilkinson** 8, 10 December 1760.

⁴²⁸ ADM 1/1893 Captains’ Letters H 1758 **Hotham** 9 May 1758.

⁴²⁹ ADM 1/1901 Captains’ Letters 1771-3 **Hotham** 28 February 1771.

⁴³⁰ ADM 1/2009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Kempenfelt** 31 May 1756.

for Honour. We saluted each other with three cheers and stood in line for the enemy who upon seeing this hauled up and obliged us to make the attack ...⁴³¹

The eighteenth century was an age of exquisite politeness: writing to Cleveland, Lord Sandwich himself graciously accepted full responsibility for an oversight:

Dear Sir, I forgot to speak to you about Captain Elliots Carpenter, in consequence of the enclosed letter let him have the carpenter of any frigate that he recommends for the Edgar. I am very sincerely yours Sandwich Blackheath Saturday.

John Elliot received the carpenter of his choice with no further delay.⁴³²

Despite their formality, very few of Burnett's peers wrote with the oleaginous style affected by **Paul Henry Ourry**: 'I am favoured with your obliging letter .. in answer to mine .. for which I beg leave to return you my thanks and hope you will pardon the liberty I have taken and the trouble I have given you.'⁴³³

The early signs of what would today be identified as a nervous breakdown before **Thomas Knackston** became 'disturbed in his senses' in later years can be traced in his letters. His lack of confidence can be seen in a whole sequence of letters, typical of which is the following pathetic extract:

This is to acknowledge the receipt of their Lordships directions of the 8th instant by last post, that their reprimand is too justly founded I am both ashamed of and concerned at. That the event has not answered my expectations of repairing to Nore, long ere this time (how late my orders for not departing hence I need not say) the opportunity of what I could think a safe conveyance since offering, are the only reasons I can give why my monthly books have not been as regularly transmitted to the Navy Office as till the 25 June 1755, some little time before I left the Nore. I can only add it has been such an anxiety on my mind some time past, as of itself, I hope will prevent any such accident for the future, for what is past, I humbly beg and hope their Lordships pardon..⁴³⁴

There was no reassurance for Knackston in a subsequent response: 'the Lords are very dissatisfied that he did not proceed according to his orders the moment he got a man to pilot

⁴³¹ ADM 1/2011 Captains' Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 14 April 1760.

⁴³² ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 22 July 1779.

⁴³³ ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 21 December 1757.

⁴³⁴ ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1756 **Knackston** 19 March 1756.

the sloop and expect that he make no further delay.⁴³⁵ Their Lordships were experienced men and it appears that they interpreted Knackston's letters correctly. Their dissatisfaction was tempered with humanity. Knackston was rewarded for his long service by being made a post captain, but he was never given a ship: a man without confidence in himself could not be entrusted with a ship-of-the-line in blue water.

There is no doubt that despite the formality of mid-eighteenth century correspondence the personality of the writer emerges. Each captain's individual style is clear, especially when the clerks were dispensed with and correspondence carried on in their own hand. **Thomas Knackston**'s fragility is demonstrated to be the opposite of **Thomas Harrison**, the nonchalant super-ace, who catalogued success after success at sea. The beautifully rounded periods of the classically educated **Edmund Affleck** contrast forcefully with the minimalist communications of the almost inarticulate **Thomas Burnett**.

An important sequence of letters was written by **Richard Kempenfelt** to his friend Charles Middleton during the four years Kempenfelt was active at the end of his life. These letters have been useful in giving Kempenfelt's private thinking, written as they were for a man of exactly equal status and experience who understood the problems facing the navy as no-one else did.⁴³⁶ But even they do not reveal the man behind the naval uniform, although he makes clear that his Christianity is the bedrock of his discipline. If Kempenfelt had been writing to the Admiralty on a regular basis there is no doubt that he would have revealed more of his beliefs in his letters. As it was, Middleton was not deaf to Kempenfelt's thinking: it was just that in 1770 he was not in a position to change the fundamental basis of naval fleet actions.

3 The degree to which Thomas Burnett and his peers were rigidly controlled by pay rather than promotion

3.1 Control by the Admiralty through pay

⁴³⁵ ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1756 **Knackston** 20 May 1756.

⁴³⁶ Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol.1 288-366.

N.A.M. Rodger spoke of the tenuous control exerted by the Admiralty over its captains, saying that promotion was the Admiralty's only weapon.⁴³⁷ On the contrary, this thesis has discovered evidence that stopping pay, which for most captains was their only source of income, was the administration's highly effective means of enforcing obedience and punishing officers for not complying precisely with regulations. The evidence of the captains' letters makes it possible to witness some of these regulations, listed below, and of their enforcement.

Students of the eighteenth century are indebted to the work of Daniel Panzac who established the comparative rates of pay for the navies of the Mediterranean between 1736-9. The monthly figures for the officers of the English navy are: Admiral, £98.0.0; Vice Admiral, £70.0.0; Rear Admiral, £32.4.0; Captain of a 1st rate £28.0.0; Captain of a 2nd rate £22.8.0; Captains of rates between 3rd and 6th rates, £18.12.5 - £8.8.0; lieutenants in 1st and 2nd rates £7.0.0; lieutenants in 3rd rates £5.12.0.⁴³⁸

The establishment of the Bank of England in 1694 and the new financial arrangements which followed meant that finance was constantly available to the Exchequer throughout the century, and huge sums were expended on new ship building. However, paying sea officers was not constrained by the financial reserves of the Exchequer.⁴³⁹ In actuality it was conditional on the sea officers having submitted accounts which could then be approved. The Admiralty used their pay as a means of controlling the officers and men who served the navy. The letters written by Burnett and his peers make it clear that pay rather than promotion was the means by which the Admiralty exerted rigid control over its captains. All Burnett's peers were obliged to ask before their pay and allowances were authorised by the Admiralty, at best a year in arrears, under procedures set up half a century earlier. These procedures were old fashioned even in the time of Pepys, who installed some administrative reforms which remained guiding principles by which the mid-eighteenth century navy was controlled.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁷ Rodger, *Wooden World* 303.

⁴³⁸ Daniel Panzac, 'Armed Peace in the Mediterranean 1736-1739: A Comparative Survey of the Navies', *The Mariner's Mirror* 84 (SNR 1998) 46.

⁴³⁹ Rodger, *Wooden World* 35.

⁴⁴⁰ Pepys was aware of the difficulties the antiquated system imposed on the navy: 'the service may meet with disappointment ... if the commissioners of the victualling here goe <sic> by one reckoning and the men eat by another'. Ehrman, *William's Navy* 242; Pepys commented that the huge sums which had been saved through the new management of the navy and its expenses had been achieved at the cost 'of the simple wages of a worn unassisted Secretary.' Tanner, *Pepys Memoirs* 85.

Precedents were collected systematically for the use of the administration by Thomas Corbett while Deputy Secretary of the Admiralty on behalf of his patron, Sir George Byng, appointed First Lord as Lord Torrington in 1727.⁴⁴¹ Corbett's collection was printed as the official *Regulations and Instructions*. These precedents determined the administrative decisions made by the Navy Board which was made up of Naval Commissioners who enjoyed permanent tenure and were directed by the Lords who came and went and were, in some cases, rank amateurs.⁴⁴²

One of Pepys' instructions for all officers was that they were to send back from the first and subsequent ports they reached on a cruise an account of their proceedings from the date of their last, with an abstract of their journals, to be forwarded to the Secretary of the Admiralty so that 'we may at all times have a constant and thorough knowledge of the condition, services and proceedings of all and every of our ships employed on foreign service, with the occasions of the same.' The entire book of journals, together with a book of entries in which every order issued or received was to be kept, were to be handed to the secretary 'both which books our said secretary is to cause to be well examined by himself, or such other person as shall be expressly appointed thereto ... before the payment of their wages or the further allowance hereafter appointed in consideration of their good service during their said voyage.'⁴⁴³ Pepys advised future administrators to combine the qualities of experience and integrity together with 'vigour of application, assiduity, affection, strictness of discipline and method.'⁴⁴⁴ It is difficult not to get the impression that discipline was no longer tempered by affection by mid-century.

A contemporary account of the difficulties faced by captains, responsible for a total of twenty nine different books detailing stores of all kinds for the ship as well as muster and pay books, exists in a pamphlet published in 1758. The author wrote of the 'close application and attention' which are necessary if the captain is to receive his pay. He goes on, 'some captain's accounts have been known to lie more than seven years before he could get them

⁴⁴¹ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 87 and 533.

⁴⁴² This tension was felt particularly in 1745 when the young trio of Bedford, Sandwich and Anson took over the Admiralty.

⁴⁴³ Tanner, *Pepys Memoirs* 60-2.

⁴⁴⁴ Tanner, *Pepys Memoirs* 130.

passed, and even then not without exorbitant quickening fees'.⁴⁴⁵ There is, of course, no mention in the captains' letters of 'quickenings'. The visits paid to the various offices by **Paul Henry Ourry** and **William M^cCleverty**, detailed below, took place because specific leave had been granted for the personal face-to-face explanations to be made. Nevertheless, an experienced contemporary of Burnett (Bromley suggests that he was Vice Admiral Knowles) was sure enough of his ground to make a charge of corruption against the procedures of the administration.⁴⁴⁶ Again, no evidence has been found in the captains' letters of any justification for such a charge. The Admiralty had since 1738 instructed a clerk to examine and abstract all the journals which were sent in, with an annual salary which was 'to be paid in full to him for all fees or other allowances'.⁴⁴⁷

Every serving officer needed to know what he was expected to do, and the printed 'Regulations' would have been his starting point. In 1759 **Robert Man** 'asked the Commissioners in the yard for an Act of Parliament and abstract in order to be informed of the methods used in the service, with regard to keeping books and desire I may be supplied with what is necessary on that account.' He was sent the most recent Act of Parliament and the instructions on signalling.⁴⁴⁸

The regulation that impinged on every captain was that of payment for service in a ship which terminated before the end of that ship's commission, as it affected every man commissioned out of a ship in service. In 1743 the Admiralty questioned William Corbett, Paymaster of the Navy, as to the feasibility of paying captains and lieutenants the wages due to them in ships from which they had been moved before those ships came out of commission. The Lords appreciated the hardship to individual commissioned officers of waiting years for their pay. The decision was that the inconvenience to the Treasury would be small and could be remedied by 'proper orders'.⁴⁴⁹

Even following the 1743 decision, nothing was done automatically. The Admiralty order to the Navy Board to pay an individual for his service was only issued on request. Every one of

⁴⁴⁵ J.S. Bromley, ed. *The Manning of the Royal Navy: Selected Public Pamphlets 1693-1873* (Navy Records Society 1974) 112.

⁴⁴⁶ Bromley ed. *Manning the Royal Navy* 112.

⁴⁴⁷ Baugh, ed. *Naval Administration 1715-1750* 70.

⁴⁴⁸ ADM 1/2111 Captains' Letters M 1759 **Man** 9 May 1759.

⁴⁴⁹ Baugh, ed. *Naval Administration 1715-1750* 72.

Burnett's peers had to ask to be paid for their time as lieutenant before they were made post. In most cases the Admiralty instructions took the form of the 'usual order', but there were many reasons for delay, and in some cases it took years for an accounting error or procedural fault to be corrected.⁴⁵⁰

The simplest case was that of **Robert Faulknor**, who delivered to the office his general muster book and two months' pay books for the time he was in the sloop *Stork* 'and as there was no officers stores ... and the sloop in petty warrant all the time and no slops or tobacco issued' he asked for his wages and those of his servants to be paid without passing any other accounts.⁴⁵¹ The Admiralty order was to 'pay him if no objection'. **John Wheelock** received an order to 'hasten him in refitting the sloop' and as an incentive was assured that he and his servant would be paid for their previous commission.⁴⁵²

As an extremely senior captain **William Hotham** was able to write from within the Admiralty itself, suggesting that he had already talked to the Commissioners and settled the matter before putting it into writing. His request received a 'usual order' response:

...My accounts for the Resolution being deposited in the several offices I desire you will be pleased to move their Lordships for an order to pay my wages, notwithstanding the ship is not under order of payment, agreeable to his Majesty's order in Council....⁴⁵³

Despite his seniority, Hotham had to comply with every detail of the regulations before he received the pay he apparently needed urgently.

Five attempts had to be made by **Alexander Schomberg** between 1757 and 1760 before he was paid for earlier commissions. In 1757 he wrote to the Admiralty first on 3 April, then on

⁴⁵⁰ There was a necessary preliminary to this order, and evidence was provided by **Charles Medows**. He 'received a certificate from the Commissioners of the Navy of there being no Imprest against me' and asked to be paid. An imprest was a sum of money entrusted to an officer to be used for a particular purpose, such as setting up a recruiting dépôt. When the transaction was completed the receipts were handed back to the Navy Board. This is the only evidence of such a certificate being a requirement. ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Medows** 15 July 1757. ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Bassett** 31 May 1757; ADM 1/1784 Captains' Letters F 1756 **Faulknor** 27 November 1756; ADM 1/1787 Captains' Letters F 1760-1 **Fortescue** 14 October 1761; ADM 1/2012 Captains' Letters K 1763-70 **Kempenfelt** 14 June 1763; ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1751-6 **Kennedy** 18 September 1754; ADM /2048 Captains' Letters L 1759 **Lindsay** 8 February 1759.

⁴⁵¹ ADM 1/1785 Captains' Letters F 1757 **Faulknor** 5 February 1757.

⁴⁵² ADM 1/2662 Captains' Letters W 1757 **Wheelock** 20 April 1757.

⁴⁵³ ADM 1/1901 Captains' Letters H 1771-3 **Hotham** 23 December 1773

12 April and 25 May before a letter on 11 December 1758 received the ‘usual order’. However the Navy Board was still not satisfied, and Schomberg’s final letter repeated that no stores were received or expended from the 5th rate *Richmond*. The Admiralty response to the Navy Board this time was ‘to do it if no material objection’.⁴⁵⁴

A request for pay by **William M^cCleverty** reveals an interesting precedent. He had been appointed by Vice Admiral Smith to command an armed cutter, and his allowance of pay was ‘equal to the Lieutenant of a first rate with a servant.’⁴⁵⁵ When he was still a lieutenant **Joseph Peyton** had also taken out an armed cutter on the instructions of Vice Admiral Smith. As no order for his payment had been received by the Navy Board they refused to issue a bill in his favour, but as the recently commissioned commander of the sloop *Savage* Peyton wrote to the Admiralty to ‘pray the favour such an order may be given’.⁴⁵⁶ This is an intriguing case. The circumstances of the two promotions to command of an armed cutter are identical, both by Vice Admiral Smith, but research has not yet revealed if Peyton’s pay for the period was also at the rate of a first lieutenant of a first rate.

Several men found that a personal visit was the best way to sort out problems in the Navy Board office. **John Wheelock** asked for leave to come to London to sort out his affairs, ‘as I have been in America very near three years and not received any pay these four years, I am afraid by the remissness of the person intrusted <sic> with them....’⁴⁵⁷ **Samuel Spencer** was sensible of potential problems and personally presented his journals and accounts in the relevant offices before asking for an order for his pay and that of his servants to be released.⁴⁵⁸ One example shows that long delays were not necessary. **John Elliot** wrote from within the Admiralty office, where his brother Gilbert Elliot was a Lord Commissioner, to ask if, since the 6th rate *Hussar*’s accounts had been passed, his wages and those of his servants could be paid. This showed that on occasion there was very little delay in passing accounts: Elliot gave up *Hussar* on 21 December and claimed his pay in February.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁴ ADM 1/2471, 2, 4 Captains’ Letters S 1757,8,17 60 **Schomberg** 3, 12 April, 25 May 1757, 11 December 1758, 6 August 1760.

⁴⁵⁵ ADM 1/2108 Captains’ Letters M 1756 **M^cCleverty** 27 July 1756.

⁴⁵⁶ ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 **Peyton** 6 May 1756.

⁴⁵⁷ ADM 1/2665 Captains’ Letters W 1760 **Wheelock** 29 December 1760.

⁴⁵⁸ ADM 1/2471 Captains’ Letters S 1757 **Spencer** 16 May 1757.

⁴⁵⁹ ADM 1/1760 Captains’ Letters E 1759-62 **Elliot** 7 February 1759.

An error was identified by **Hotham** (or his agent) who was determined to redress it. He wrote in 1773 that ‘upon a revival’ he realised that he had not been paid for a period of nine days in 1756. The Admiralty responded simply ‘order the Navy Board accordingly’ for these nine days, as it had for the 15 days Hotham had asked for, back in 1756, when he had acted as captain of the 6th rate *Syren*.⁴⁶⁰

3.2 Allowances due to serving captains

To ensure that captains did not indulge in private trading, Pepys instituted allowances ‘to support their tables, proportioned to the respective rates of the ships and vessels they shall happen severally to command’.⁴⁶¹ His ‘table money’ almost doubled the rate of pay. Pepys’s new pay scale was thrown out, but reforms in pay as he had suggested were made.⁴⁶² A commission was paid on specie carried for merchants from European ports, but captains were not permitted to delay their return to accommodate the merchants.

When commissions were issued they detailed precisely what the recipient was entitled to. At the top of the list for entitlements was Lord Anson, appointed on 12 July 1749 as Admiral on the death of Sir John Norris. He was entitled to 20 shillings a day, and to allowances for 16 men at 10 shillings a day a piece.⁴⁶³ Admiral Mathews’ commission entitled him to 16 shillings a day and 12 men at 10 shillings a day.⁴⁶⁴ These servants did not receive their 10 shillings a day, which were a means of enhancing the emoluments of senior flag officers, and providing a hugely rewarding perquisite. The ‘young gentlemen’ who made up the flag officer’s entourage were there voluntarily, to receive the benefits of interest and patronage as well as instruction. The question as to whether ‘servants’ are the carriers of shaving water, or indeed ‘young gentlemen’ has been discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴⁶⁰ ADM 1/1901 Captains’ Letters H 1771-3 **Hotham** 27 January 1773

⁴⁶¹ Tanner, *Pepys Memoirs* 63-4.

⁴⁶² Although Pepys’s level of allowances was reduced, the reality of the allowance was that the captains’ pantries were three times larger than those of the wardrooms. Brian Lavery, *The Bellona* (Conway 1985) 52, 81.

⁴⁶³ As for everyone in the navy, pay was calculated at 28 days to the month. As Admiral he was paid quarterly, the four usual dates were: the birth of Lord Christ; the Annunciation of Mary (25 March); the nativity of St John the Baptist (24 June) and St Michael the Archangel (29 September). ADM 6/17 18 September 1745 475.

⁴⁶⁴ ADM 6/17 30 April 1757 478.

All captains were allowed the number of servants appropriate to the ship in which they were commissioned, at the rate of four to every hundred of the ship's complement. **Joseph Peyton** was instructed to increase the complement of his sloop *Savage* to 80 men. His officers immediately asked for servants according to the new complement. The Admiralty would not have it. 'They are to be allowed the servants according to the instructions and the previous complement of men.'⁴⁶⁵

Extra allowances were payable to extremely senior officers, such as **Richard Kempenfelt**, who wore a distinguishing pendant on board the *Alexander*.⁴⁶⁶ Years earlier, he had asked to be paid during the time he was travelling back from Manila as a passenger. He made the point that precedent had already been set: 'and I have been lately informed that their Lordships in such cases have been pleased to favour the officers so employed with a continuance of their full pay from their discharge to their arrival in England I therefore humbly take the liberty to solicit their lordships for the same indulgence...'. The response was predictable: 'See what has been done in similar cases'.⁴⁶⁷

Providing extraordinary provisions left **William M^cCleverty** considerably out of pocket when he had to convey the Marquis du Quesne and the captains of the captured 74s *Foudroyant* and *Orphée* together with their retinues from Gibraltar after the battle of Lagos. The extra food alone cost £35, in addition to the wines for which M^cCleverty was unable to put a value. The Admiralty ordered the Commissioner in Portsmouth to pay him £100 for his expenses.⁴⁶⁸

The Navy Board was not always negative. Disbursements made by officers were settled by bills, and when the regulations were exactly complied with there was never a delay in acceptance or settlement. **Joseph Peyton** had been told to send in an account of his disbursements, and he knew exactly what to do: 'By this post I have wrote to my agent to lay before their Lordships the Bills I have drawn on the Navy Board which I imagine is the proper method of proceeding – properly vouched.' Peyton asked for expenses to be repaid after 'coming up express from Vice Admiral Smith in the Downs'. Peyton also asked for

⁴⁶⁵ ADM 1/2293 Captains' Letters P 1756 **Peyton** November 1756.

⁴⁶⁶ ADM 1/2014 Captains' Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** 19 April 1779.

⁴⁶⁷ ADM 1/2012 Captains' Letters K 1763-70 **Kempenfelt** 18 February 1765

⁴⁶⁸ ADM 1/2110 Captains' Letters M 1758 **M^cCleverty** 3, 7 May 1758; **M^cCleverty**'s arrival with his passengers was newsworthy: *London Gazette* Issue No 9784 18 April 1758.

reimbursement of the amount he had paid for pilots out of his own pocket at the rate of three shillings a day. The response was that he should ‘lay an account of his disbursements before their Lordships’.⁴⁶⁹

Bills were the accepted means of settling payments at a distance. When **John Elliot** had to deal with the huge numbers of French prisoners after his capture of Thurot’s squadron in 1760 he wrote:

...I have likewise hired a snow and sent her to Whitehaven with 200 of them escorted by two Irish customhouse smacks for which I have agreed to pay the owner of her £25 sterling being the lowest I could possibly agree for. I have drawn a Bill of this date on the Commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen etc for that sum and acquainted them by letter with the above particulars. I hope their Lordships will give orders that the Bill may be honoured....⁴⁷⁰

A friend in the right place proved useful when **Paul Henry Ourry** was informed by a Mr Mason that he needed to apply for an order to be paid for the period of travel out to Halifax having been commissioned into the 6th rate *Success*. The decision in this case was, as always, based upon precedent, with John Cleveland asking the clerk ‘what is usual in these cases’, and receiving the reply that, ‘as he was upon ½ pay when he was commissioned for the *Success* abroad it is usual that the same should be continued til he took possession of her.’⁴⁷¹ Ourry may well have taken care to be on friendly terms with such an influential official. His letter confirms the view that officers knew that procedure had to be followed correctly if they were not to be left out of pocket.

⁴⁶⁹ ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 **Peyton** 26 June 6 July, 9 August 1756; ADM 1/1895 Captains’ Letters H 1760 **Hotham** 15 November 1760; ADM 1/2012 Captains’ Letters K 1763-70 **Kempenfelt** 12 May 1763; ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters L 1758 **Lindsay** 5 December 1758; Lindsay was advised ‘to draw a bill on Mr Jn. Milnes at this office for £34 the amount of his expenses, expressing therein the service it was for, the same will be paid.’ John Milnes was at this time Deputy Secretary in the Admiralty office. J.C. Sainty, Compiler, Admiralty Officials 1660-1870 (IHR 1975) 140. ADM 1/2051 Captains’ Letters L 1763 **Lindsay** 11 September 1763. Mr Fearn was asked to pay him the ‘usual allowance’. (Charles Fearn became Chief Clerk on 4 July 1763) Sainty, Admiralty Officials 124. ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Man** 6 May 1761; ADM 1/2014 Captains’ Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** 19 April 1779.

⁴⁷⁰ ADM 1/1760 Captains’ Letters E 1759-62 **Elliot** 29 February 1760.

⁴⁷¹ ADM 1/2245 Captains’ Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 26 December 1758. There was an Edmund Mason in the Navy Board office at this time, who was Chief Clerk responsible for seamen’s wages. J.M. Collinge, compiler, *Navy Board Officials 1660-1832* (Institute of Historical Research 1978) 121.

On some occasions there was no precedent to fall back on. Lord Barrington, Secretary at War, had to be referred to when **John Elliot** had to carry Lord Cornwallis to North America to negotiate with the rebellious American colonists. He wrote:

...I will be much obliged to you if you will be kind enough to let me know how and to whom I should apply for the Freight of Lord Cornwallis and his people and baggage for as I must carry goods and passengers I may as well take what I can for them, and I hope and think it will be the last time I shall ever have such a service for the servants and baggage is past all belief. If I should sail before I have an answer I will desire my bankers to put the same question to you....⁴⁷²

John Elliot was concerned to clarify before he left how his victualling accounts were to be made out, to allow for the children of soldiers' wives. Many of them had from two to four children, and this could not come out of parents' two-thirds allowance. 'There is a column in the Accounts sheet for children, but this is never taken account of I am at a loss how to act upon that head.'⁴⁷³

The precedent concerning the transport of troops was also known to **William Hotham**. When his ship the 3rd rate *Hero* was used to carry troops to and from Minorca, he asked 'to move their Lordships to order me to be paid the usual allowance granted to captains employed in the like service.'⁴⁷⁴ Having succeeded in obtaining the desired 'usual order', Hotham next asked for the same allowance as other captains, from the point of disembarkation to the time of his return to Plymouth Sound, 'in like manner as all other captains have been paid who have sailed from this port.' The response was predictable: 'See if what he says is so, and if so order him to be paid in like manner as others have been paid.'⁴⁷⁵

Having been Commander-in-Chief of his Majesty's squadron in the Mediterranean between 23 Sep 1763 and 23 Aug 1766, **Thomas Harrison** wrote on behalf of his purser who:

...has been refused at the Victualling Office the usual allowance for Top and Poop lights and all other extra expenses relating to a commanding officer's ships during the time my broad pendant was flying as notwithstanding he has produced a regular certificate from me on that occasion. I am therefore to desire Sir, more especially as

⁴⁷² ADM1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 14 April 1778.

⁴⁷³ ADM1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 13 April 1764.

⁴⁷⁴ ADM1/1899 Captains' Letters H 1766-9 **Hotham** 23 June 1769.

⁴⁷⁵ ADM1/1899 Captains' Letters H 1766-9 **Hotham** 8 August 1769.

the service could not have been carried on without those distinguishing lights you will be pleased to move their lordships for an order to grant Mr Lawrence payment for that additional expense agreeable in such cases to the Rules and Customs of the navy.⁴⁷⁶

Appointed Commodore and Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean, **John Elliot** wrote with great dignity but unquestionable authority when he was recalled by Sandwich asking to have not just his Flag pay but also his table allowance paid from the date of his commission by Admiral Rodney to the date of his arrival in England.⁴⁷⁷

3.3 Reprimands from the Admiralty

The swingeing nature of reprimands and the humility with which they were received is an irrefutable proof of the Admiralty's control over their captains. On occasion John Cleveland left it to his clerks to voice his exasperation. When the **Hon. Robert Boyle** sent a fussy letter asking to have his convoy instructions amplified, Cleveland's turn back reads simply 'explain it to him'.⁴⁷⁸ Boyle's self confidence was based on his constant attendance at the Admiralty. This is revealed when he wrote defensively:

You'll please to acquaint their lordships that I am now getting under sail and that I am very sorry they should think that I have been backward in promoting his Majestys service. As for raising men I have found it impossible after many trials to obtain them in London, and it is well known to some of their Lordships that I offered to raise men in Ireland but was not permitted. I am very sorry they found it necessary to send me as severe a reprimand..⁴⁷⁹

'The Lords will not tolerate proceedings in their officers in direct violation of their orders' was the message received by several of Burnett's peers.⁴⁸⁰ This was not the only swingeing reprimand delivered by Cleveland if the recipient had not done what he had been told to do. **Robert Craig**, operating north of Leith, ventured to question the orders of his immediate superior. Despite attempting to justify his behaviour, he was told 'Their lordships do not apprehend an officer wants any directive to obey the orders of his superior'.⁴⁸¹ Similar reprimands were sent to several men. **Taylor Penny** was told: 'the Lords expect in future

⁴⁷⁶ ADM1/1899 Captains' Letters H 1766-9 **Harrison** 24 November 1766.

⁴⁷⁷ ADM 1/1762 Captains' Letters E 1780-3 **Elliot** 31 May 27 August 1780, 2 January 1781.

⁴⁷⁸ ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Boyle** 7 September 1757.

⁴⁷⁹ **Boyle Walsingham**'s father was the earl of Shannon, so that recruiting might have been easier for him in Ireland. ADM 1/2667 Captains' Letters W 1762 **Walsingham** 29 September 1762.

⁴⁸⁰ ADM 1/ 2471 Captains' Letters S 1757 **Schomberg** 27 October 1757; ADM 1/2112 Captains' Letters M 1760 **Man** 10 June 1760.

⁴⁸¹ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757 **Craig** 3 May 1857.

that he conform to his orders and instructions and not deviate from them to please any person whatever.⁴⁸² Penny's knuckles were rapped again: 'acquaint him with his negligence in not signing the letter.'⁴⁸³ However Penny was tough, and responded in kind: 'I hope when their Lordships have occasion to write to me again to receive a more agreeable letter which I hope my behaviour will always deserve'. On this occasion Admiral Durell was directed to reprimand instead the men who caused a mass desertion.⁴⁸⁴

The Lords' displeasure was always incurred if they suspected that time was being wasted in returning a ship to her duty at sea. **Henry John Phillips** was unfortunately delayed in dock, and when he reported on progress was told 'the Lords are surprised the ship will not be ready sooner'.⁴⁸⁵ Phillips was indignant: 'I have had the mortification to have signified to me by Rear Admiral Broderick that they are dissatisfied with me for not having his Majestys ship under my command sooner fit for sea. ... I have with the greatest diligence attended the duty of the ship .. a little severe to be the only one blamed.'⁴⁸⁶ It was noted that **Alexander Schomberg** had asked for leave while the *Diana* was being refitted, but that the progress books from the docks had shown that 'it appears by the progress that the Diana is not yet cleared. Which the Lords expected would have been done before she came into the harbour.'⁴⁸⁷ **Paul Henry Ourry** was usually complacent, but he miscalculated when he asked for an extra week's leave, and was told: 'Acquaint him that his service is wanted and is so pressing that the Lords will not permit any other action that can occasion a moments delay.'⁴⁸⁸ On another occasion he recognised his fault and apologised suitably: '... I am extremely sorry to be given reason for their lordships severe reprimand as I have made it my study ever since I have had the honor <sic> to serve to strictly comply and observe their lordships orders and instructions ..'⁴⁸⁹

After reporting the difficulties he was encountering in trying to recruit men in Shrewsbury, **William Fortescue** was told, 'Let him know I have communicated his letter to their

⁴⁸² ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Penny** 26 December 1759.

⁴⁸³ ADM 1/2297 Captains' Letters P 1760 **Penny** June 1760.

⁴⁸⁴ ADM 1/2298 Captains' Letters P 1761 **Penny** 26 April 1761.

⁴⁸⁵ ADM 1/2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 11 June 1757.

⁴⁸⁶ ADM 1/2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 13 June 1757.

⁴⁸⁷ ADM 1/2474 Captains' Letters S 1760 **Schomberg** 9 January 1760.

⁴⁸⁸ ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1758 **Ourry** 8 March 1758.

⁴⁸⁹ ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1758 **Ourry** 18 May 1758.

Lordships who expect he will do what will most contribute to forward the service by which he is employed.⁴⁹⁰

Letters from cruisers off the Lisbon station were conveyed to the Admiralty by naval vessels returning to England and **Thomas Harrison** was reprimanded when a letter in which he reported a successful encounter with a French privateer went astray, and the subsequent letter gave no details. His response was unequivocal: 'If there is anything else their Lordships desire to be informed of I beg the favour you'll please to communicate it to me, and I shall endeavour to satisfy their Lordships in every respect to my utmost power and am with all due respect.'⁴⁹¹ The tone of this letter is that of a man determined to redeem his reputation. It is not that Harrison was hoping for a better ship or station, as he was already the happy beneficiary of the best of both.

Having written to inform the Admiralty of his success in capturing a French privateer, **Archibald Kennedy** might have wondered when he read his reply how he was to catch privateers if his station was too far to the east: '...say the Lords are pleased with his success but at the same time are much dissatisfied with him for going off of his station and thereby leaving the trade which it was his duty to protect exposed to their enemies.'⁴⁹² Kennedy must have felt this hard, as he had followed intelligence of a privateer operating west of Lisbon, and brought in *Le Boutin*.⁴⁹³ **Hotham**, by contrast, was specifically given permission by Keppel 'to proceed after them, tho' they should be without the limits before prescribed'.⁴⁹⁴

Reprimanded by the Admiralty for being off his station on the north coast of Ireland, **Henry Martin**'s response was measured and detailed, and concluded 'I must confess therefore their Lordships seeming to doubt my assiduity in executing their orders gives me the greatest uneasiness more especially as I had flattered myself that nothing had been taken since I had been on the station.'⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁰ ADM 1/1784 Captains' Letters F 1756 **Fortescue** 3 March 1756.

⁴⁹¹ ADM 1/1897 Captains' Letters H 1762 **Harrison** 3 August 1762.

⁴⁹² ADM 1/2011 Captains' Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 3 February 1762.

⁴⁹³ ADM 1/2011 Captains' letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 3 February 1762.

⁴⁹⁴ ADM 1/1896 Captains' Letters H 1761 **Hotham** 3 November 1761.

⁴⁹⁵ ADM 1/2112 Captains' Letters M 1760 **Martin** 17 July 1760.

4 Payments to officers delayed by precedent

The Navy Board clerks had Thomas Corbett's list to justify a great variety of objections. **Thomas Burnett** had to admit that he was 'considerably embarrassed' by loss of pay when difficulties with his purser caused his accounts to be delayed.⁴⁹⁶ In this case the purser's transgressions are dealt with in Chapter 5. What is interesting is that of all the letters which were sent asking for pay Burnett's is the only one to use such a humiliating appeal. Perhaps it was the exasperation induced by the lengthy procrastination of a venal purser which allowed emotion to break through the usual formality of correspondence with the Admiralty. Perhaps he was indeed 'considerably embarrassed'.

In 1756 when **Paul Henry Ourry** asked for help from the Admiralty they did at first issue the 'usual order'.⁴⁹⁷ But between the Victualling Board and the Navy Board the complications were such that Ourry had to visit the Navy Board in person to be told what he had to do to resolve the problems. As Lieutenant of the 4th rate *Deptford*, he had been commissioned as master and commander of the merchant vessel *Proserpine* at Mahon when it was bought to be turned into a fireship. However the *Proserpine* was captured by the French before it could be used. The Admiralty had to enter the vessel on the Navy List before Ourry could be paid for commanding her. He then had to make up pay books for the ship and present them to the Navy Board so that he would be given pay until he returned to England. The Victualling Board also requested a separate instruction from the Admiralty to dispense with vouchers so that his officers and men could be paid to the time of their arrival in England in some other ship.⁴⁹⁸ A further complication was that when he was promoted into the *Proserpine* he took his lieutenant's journals with him. These were lost with the fireship, and he was granted the 'usual order' to the Navy Board for his and his servants' wages to be paid, on his making an oath that they were 'lost as represented'.⁴⁹⁹ However when Ourry asked for full pay during the period he was returning to England for Admiral Byng's court martial, precedent ruled that he was only allowed half-pay for the period, as his ship had been lost. The Admiralty referred this back to the Navy Board to have the situation confirmed: these were contradictory precedents and both parties wanted to be sure that they

⁴⁹⁶ ADM 1/1491 Captains' Letters B 1760 **Burnett** 13 March 1760.

⁴⁹⁷ ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 22 August 1756.

⁴⁹⁸ ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1756 **Ourry** 13 October 1756.

⁴⁹⁹ ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 22 August, 6 September 1756.

were doing the right thing.⁵⁰⁰ This was not the end of the affair. Ourry wrote again in 1767, enclosing a copy of his commission in the ill-fated *Proserpine*, signed by Captain Edgcombe on 19 March 1756.

This case was the precedent invoked in the case of **Henry John Phillips**. He too was commissioned into a fireship in Mahon harbour which was sunk and had to return to England to attend Byng's court martial. The Admiralty decided to use Ourry's case as the precedent, and the clerk was asked, 'Pray see in what manner Capt Ourry has been paid. Order him to be paid to the day of his arrival in England as Capt Ourry was and half pay from that time.'⁵⁰¹ Presumably they had forgotten that the loss of Ourry's ship determined his getting half pay and not full pay, and Phillips would consequently have the same treatment.

A personal visit to the Victualling Board was necessary from **John Wheelock**, and he was granted a week's leave in order to sort out his accounts. His problem was that he had taken up his new commission in the 4th rate *Pembroke* at such short notice that he had not obtained counter signatures on his quarterly accounts for the 6th rate *Squirrel*: 'my removal into the *Pembroke* was so immediate that I had not time to make my accounts compleat, <sic> the ships being ordered on different services.'⁵⁰²

Personal visits to the various offices had to be made by **William M^cCleverty** to sort out the delay resulting from a missing receipt for slops received on board at Leghorn: 'that receipt is either lost or mislaid and he is dead and not to be found'. It is not clear from M^cCleverty's letter who was dead. The slops however had been found, they had been issued to the ship's company as evidenced by the ship's books and the slop book and the purser's accounts which had all been passed.⁵⁰³ **John Lindsay** had a similar problem in that his clerk, taking up his new appointment in great haste 'absconded and carried with him all my ships books and papers', when he left for Portsmouth.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry** 13 October 1756.

⁵⁰¹ ADM 1/2297 Captains' Letters P 1760 **Phillips** 5 January 1760.

⁵⁰² ADM 1/2666 Captains' Letters W 1761 **Wheelock** 19 January 1761.

⁵⁰³ ADM 1/2114 Captains' Letters M 1762 **M^cCleverty** 13 October 1761.

⁵⁰⁴ ADM 1/2052 Captains' Letters L 1766 **Lindsay** 29 June 1766

Joseph Peyton was also unlucky enough to lose his ship at sea when the 2nd rate *Prince George* was burnt in 1758. Like Burnett he was exonerated by the ensuing court martial, but unlike Burnett whose misfortune happened at the end of the war, he was given a new commission immediately. Peyton asked to be paid for the period between *Prince George* and the 2nd rate *Prince* ‘without accounts’, and again the Navy Board was deferred to for their opinion.⁵⁰⁵

Using one muster book for more than two month’s records was a fault which was picked up every time it occurred. The two-monthly book, to be forwarded to the Admiralty every two months, had been introduced to prevent fraud, and also in the event of a ship being lost, to have the accounts to the nearest period.⁵⁰⁶ **Thomas Burnett**’s excuse was that he made up the *Marlborough*’s books retrospectively and put three months records into one muster book ‘as all I had was lost with the ship, ...’⁵⁰⁷ Other captains also had to make their excuses.⁵⁰⁸

Richard Kempenfelt wrote from the Admiralty office in 1765 to inform the Lords that he had included the four months February to May into one book in the year 1759 when he sent his accounts for the 3rd rate *Grafton* back from the East Indies.⁵⁰⁹ This stoppage of accounts is familiar: what is more unusual is the six years delay in requesting payment. Despite Kempenfelt’s seniority their Lordships referred it back to the Navy Board for their opinion.

A different problem faced **Michael Clements**. While he had still been a lieutenant his captain, John Rawling, was killed in an action.⁵¹⁰ This meant that Clements could not receive his pay as lieutenant as there was no one to certify that he had complied with the general instructions.⁵¹¹ In this case the response of the Admiralty was to direct the Navy Board to dispense with the certificates. The Navy Board was also directed to pay Clements at the captain’s rate for the period from 2 May until 24 May during which he had acted in that capacity.

⁵⁰⁵ ADM 1/2295 Captains’ Letters P 1758 **Peyton** 13 June 1758.

⁵⁰⁶ Smyth, *Sailor’s Word Book* 704.

⁵⁰⁷ Captains ordered from the Port Commissioner the stationery they anticipated using. NMM CLE3/4 Clement Order Book; ADM 1/1493 Captains’ Letters B 1762-3 **Burnett** 1 June 1763.

⁵⁰⁸ ADM 1/ 2666 Captains’ Letters 1761 **Wheelock** 17 March 1761; ADM 1/2115 Captains’ Letters M 1763 **Medows** 25 May 1763; ADM 1/1787 Captains’ Letters F 1760-1 **Fortescue** 8 March 1761; ADM 1/1901 Captains’ Letters H 1772 **Hotham** 13 February 1772; ADM1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Man** 10 June 1761; ADM 1/2012 Captains’ Letters K 1763-70 **Kempenfelt** 30 June 1765;

⁵⁰⁹ In this letter **Kempenfelt** is not ‘humble’.

⁵¹⁰ On 30 April 1757. Source attributed by Syrett is *London Gazette Commissioned Sea Officers* 373.

⁵¹¹ ADM 1/1606 Captains’ Letters C 1757 **Clements** 7 June 1757.

Taking victuals to sea without the proper signatures or survey of quantities caused more problems for **Michael Clements**. His reward for his handling of the 6th rate *Unicorn* after Rawling's death was a commission as master and commander in the *London* buss. He was ordered to 'make the utmost despatch from Plymouth' to Harwich where the buss was lying. Adverse weather had kept provisions which had been ordered from being loaded on board, and he had only 'about three days bread and a few pieces of salt provisions in the harness tubs'. He made a voluntary charge on these supplies without waiting to have a proper survey done by a proper officer as this would have meant 'waiting till the arrival of such officers which was very precarious and uncertain would have delayed the service...'. Unfortunately, although Clements was following his instructions to get to sea without delay, by not having the survey he was not following 'the regular forms of the Navy', and his accounts were stopped.⁵¹²

The **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham**, confident that he would not be turned down, asked for his 'accounts to be passed quickly as there was not time for usual handing over of orders.' Even this was referred to the Navy Board for their opinion.⁵¹³

5 Requirement for charting unfamiliar waters

In Chapter 3 the belated drive to improve information about coastal navigation has been discussed. The order was issued in July 1760 that captains and masters had to 'use their utmost diligence in making observations on the shoals, sands, seamarks soundings etc of all coasts they may be employed in cruising on' and transmit them to the Admiralty. It appears that the novelty of this order caused most of the captains to have problems getting their accounts passed as they had not submitted the required maps and charts.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹² ADM 1/1607 Captains' Letters C 1757 **Clements** 9 January 1759

⁵¹³ ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Boyle** 3 October 1757.

⁵¹⁴ Affleck wrote in February 1761 saying that he had not received the letter earlier. ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 7 February 1761; ADM 1/1492 Captains' Letters B 1761 **Bassett** 7 April 1761; ADM 1/1493 Captains' Letters B 1762-3 **Burnett** 14 July 1762; ADM 1/1608 Captains' Letters C 1761-3 **Cornwall** 14 September 1762; ADM 1/1760 Captains' Letters E 1759-62 **Elliot** 25 April 1761; ADM 1/1787 Captains' Letters F 1761 **Fortescue** 20 February 1761; ADM 1/2011 Captains' Letters K 1761 **Kennedy** 24 August 1761; ADM 1/1896 Captains' Letters H 1761 **Hotham** 15 May 1761; ADM 1/2247 Captains' Letters O 1763-70 **Ourry** 8 November 1764; etc. The letters acknowledging receipt of the order are dated between February 1761 and July 1762.

When **Thomas Harrison** asked for his certificate he claimed: ‘Since I received instructions concerning making observations Venus has been only to Portsmouth and Plymouth and cruising to westward.’ The Admiralty’s response was that he should ‘have the usual certificate if what he writes corresponds with his journal’. However a sharp-eyed clerk noted that he ‘*has anchored in Quiberon Bay twice in the time*’.⁵¹⁵ **William M^cCleverty** too was called to account by a clerk who noticed that that despite the reports being taken ‘in the best manner I possibly could’, he had omitted the time when he was in St Anne Bay.⁵¹⁶

6 The significance of half pay for commissioned officers

Twice a year the Navy Office advertised the days on which half pay could be collected, either in person or by an accredited attorney. Like pay, this was in arrears – but only by between six and twelve months.⁵¹⁷ The foundation for a permanent corps of long-service regular officers was laid in 1668 with the provision of half-pay for flag officers, extending by 1675 to commanders of squadrons and masters of 1st and 2nd rates.⁵¹⁸ The seniority of officers was established by listing them all, and increasing the rates of pay reduced their need to speculate.⁵¹⁹ Half pay provided a permanent and professional corps of officers ready to be brought back into service when necessary. Once the system was established it ran smoothly in war and peace: the precedents which had been established provided solutions for the future. Baugh makes the point that half pay tied the naval officers to the service during peace time, acting as a reward for past service and the chance of future wealth when action resumed. He also noted that half pay officers could not go abroad, thus keeping them from the merchant service.⁵²⁰ In fact half pay officers went on leave regularly, as discussed below. Any commissioned officer could ask to retire on half pay. In 1740 when the fleet was needed in the West Indies so many captains refused to take commissions, preferring to remain on half pay rather than serve there, that the Admiralty had to threaten to remove captains from the

⁵¹⁵ ADM 1/1896 Captains’ Letters H 1761 **Harrison** 27 May 1761.

⁵¹⁶ ADM 1/2114 Captains’ Letters M 1762 **M^cCleverty** 9 October 1762; The French officers of this period were so disenchanted that they stopped depositing their navigation journals in the arsenals and the practice of charting foreign shores had grown rare. Pritchard, *Louis XV’s Navy* 65.

⁵¹⁷ *London Gazette* 13 July 1762. This edition advertised payment on 27 and 28 July 1762 for the period 1 July to 31 December 1761.

⁵¹⁸ Ehrman, *William’s Navy* 139.

⁵¹⁹ Ehrman, *William’s Navy* 452-61

⁵²⁰ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 102.

half pay list, and to strike lieutenants from the list altogether.⁵²¹ This is a further example of money being used as a potent method of control by the Admiralty.

The Half Pay books reveal the beautifully simple and methodical working of the eighteenth century accounting system. When ships were taken out of commission the individual's name was entered on the appropriate page, the vessel in which he had served and the date the commission ended were entered carefully and the number of days calculated until the next commission was given. The final column gave the 'neat' figure which was to be handed over to the individual or his agent or solicitor after the fee of 3d a day was deducted. There are marginal notes if unusual information needed to be recorded, and occasionally slips of paper are pinned to pages, bearing necessary signatures. Each book covered six months: the July – December period is quite straight forward; the January – June book is complicated by the fact that the end of the financial year fell on 5 April, so that there are two lists of entries to cover the period between January and June.⁵²²

The deduction of 3d a day from every payment was a precedent which went back to Josiah Burchett. Since 1717 the fees which resulted from the accumulation of 3d deductions were shared between the staff in the office. As Secretary he received half, the remainder being divided between the clerks according to their rates of pay. For the last two years of Burchett's life, when he was being supported by his successor Thomas Corbett, the younger man took half of Burchett's share in addition to his own. The perquisite of fees was understood to provide an additional source of income.⁵²³ These fees were not abolished until the re-organisation of administration at the end of the century.⁵²⁴

In the 'bad' years of peace, from the perspective of the officers of the navy, every ship of the line returning to England was paid off. The Admiralty tried to tie officers on half pay to addresses so that their whereabouts would be known.⁵²⁵ With the hind sight of a twenty-first

⁵²¹ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 116-7

⁵²² David Ewing Duncan, *The Calendar* (Fourth Estate 1999) 315.

⁵²³ Sainty, *Admiralty Officials* 4. Sainty lists (n.29) the Secretaries to the Admiralty, but leaves out John Cleveland who served between Corbett and Stephens, from 16 October 1759 to 18 June 1763 and was also an MP.

⁵²⁴ Considerable problems accrued in the dockyards where wages did not keep pace with inflation and the principle of fees and premiums was endemic. R.J.B. Knight, *Portsmouth Dockyard papers 1774-1783: The American War* (City of Portsmouth Publication 1987) xli.

⁵²⁵ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 105.

century administrator, it would have been easy to ensure that when the payments were distributed, twice a year, an address should have been required along with the signature of the recipient, but bureaucracy of this kind was foreign to the eighteenth century.

Officers were allocated their half pay according to seniority. In 1748 only two of Burnett's peers were on these lists, as masters and commanders rather than fully fledged captains: **Alexander Campbell** had been in the sloop *Saxon* which was condemned on 15 October 1747; **Thomas Knackston** was superseded in the sloop *Ferret* on 27 October. Both were on half pay at 4s a day until the end of the year. Only one of Burnett's peers was a sufficiently senior lieutenant to receive half pay at the rate of 2s 6d a day: **John Wheelock** had been commissioned in June 1741, so was a lieutenant of 7 years' seniority.⁵²⁶ All the rest of his peers, as relatively junior lieutenants, were paid at the lower rate of 2s a day. By 1748 only **Richard Kempfenfelt** was still employed, all the rest of Burnett's peers who had been commissioned during the early 1740s went onto half pay. As their vessels came back into dock to be de-commissioned, the names of **Baillie, Bassett, Harrison, Kennedy, Man, M^cCleverty, Penny, Peyton, Phillips, Shurmur, Taylor** and **Wilkinson** appear in the register.⁵²⁷

As the pace of remobilisation picked up before the Seven Years' War more and more ships were put into commission, and the numbers of officers on half pay diminished. During the years of war names appeared and disappeared from the lists as ships were taken out of commission and new employment offered. In every case the date of the end of employment was carefully noted as this brought full pay to an end.⁵²⁸

A clerical error in the office had to be sorted out by **Samuel Spencer** who had been alerted by a 'friend in the Navy Office' that his name had not been transferred to the Captains' list on his promotion to the rank of master and commander. He wrote to Mr Alcock, clerk in the office, 'that an order may be sent to insert my name on the same. Your favouring me in this

⁵²⁶ **Wheelock** was paid off from the 3rd rate *Russell* where he had been 2nd lieutenant on 4 June 1748. (He was immediately re-commissioned as her 1st on 22 July - Winfield says she was not re-commissioned). **Faulknor** was paid off from *Bristol* on 22 April.

⁵²⁷ ADM 25/35 Half Pay 1748.

⁵²⁸ After being injured on 26 May 1758 in the engagement with Thurot, **Craig** was paid his full salary until 31 March 1761, and only then went onto half pay until his death in 1767 ADM 25/69 Half Pay Book January –June 1761.

will not only prevent a like error in future, but also prevent having recourse to a former list in the next payment and will much oblige ...'.⁵²⁹

William Fortescue, who had been a commander on coastal convoy protection for several years, demonstrated his frustration when he wrote, 'I am arrived in town according to their orders and beg to know their Lordships further commands ..' but was brushed off with the comment that there were no instructions for him and he went back onto half pay.⁵³⁰

The half pay books for 1763 show the extent to which the navy was reduced by the Peace of Amiens. There were 388 captains on half pay, and 841 lieutenants, giving a ratio of approximately 1 : 2. As death thinned out the most senior lists, names crept upwards through the ranks over the years, allowing half pay to seem a very humane way of rewarding longevity.⁵³¹

Half pay was also used as a means of long-term punishment. In March 1796 James Norman was sentenced by court martial to half pay for life.⁵³² On 8 March 1796 Thomas Afleck had his seniority amended and was 'sentenced by court martial to be incapable of ever commanding a King's ship and to be put at the bottom of the half pay list for life.'⁵³³ It appears that the Admiralty stopped short of taking such miscreants off the half pay list altogether.

7 The application for and granting of leave to captains

There was no provision for annual or regular leave within the navy. Officers were commissioned when they were needed, and when their ship was not needed they came out of commission onto half pay. This meant that some officers worked without a break for months or even years at a time. A brief period of leave was possible during the weeks when their vessel was in dock being refitted. Much more rarely they could ask to miss a cruise, but this was only asked for and granted at the end of the war when the pace of activity was reduced.

⁵²⁹ ADM 1/2471 Captains' Letters S 1757 **Spencer** 6 August 1757.

⁵³⁰ ADM 1/1784 Captains' Letters F 1756 **Fortescue** 1 June 1756.

⁵³¹ In 1782 the thirty oldest lieutenants were taken off the half pay lists and awarded pensions instead. ADM 181/9.

⁵³² Syrett *Commissioned Sea Officers* 333.

⁵³³ Syrett *Commissioned Sea Officers* 3.

Leave for ‘the people’ is discussed in Chapter 5. As no letters from lieutenants survive in the archives the researcher can only surmise that to lieutenants leave was granted even less frequently than it was to captains. The muster book for the 3rd rate *Berwick* in 1747 shows that Captain Douglas and **Thomas Burnett**, the new second lieutenant, are entered on consecutive lines in the *Berwick’s* pay book, having entered the ship on the same day at the start of the commission. Douglas was only on board for two weeks before he left for a month’s leave, the lieutenants being entrusted with keeping ‘the people’ busy on board.⁵³⁴

In the same way as did all his peers, **Edmund Affleck** asked for leave to go back to his home in Colchester during the process of cleaning, or refitting with sails and stores ‘to attend to private business which suffers much for want of my presence’: this was granted. He usually asked for a week and then having checked with the Admiralty, asked for an extension if the ship was still in dock. He asked once for an extension of his leave ‘by a relation being deprived of her senses’ and this was refused as ‘the ship is being fitted for foreign service with all the expedition that is possible therefore it will be required that he will be at his duty.’⁵³⁵

‘Having been near four years in North America,’ **Samuel Wallis** asked for leave and was granted fourteen days, which was extended by a further ten days. When he wrote from Will’s Coffee House, opposite the Admiralty, to ask for a further ten days, proof of the fact that he had been abroad was the comment on the turn back to his letter ‘what is he?’ The response that he was Captain of the 3rd rate *Prince of Orange* allowed the Admiralty to check up on his circumstances: ‘as the ship is out of the dock their Lordships cannot indulge him with more than 7 days further leave of absence.’⁵³⁶ **Archibald Kennedy** also asked for and received ten day’s leave after four years’ service.⁵³⁷ **William Fortescue** asked for leave before he left on foreign service, but was only given 10 days.⁵³⁸ He had to have extended leave to fight a court case about impressment, discussed in Chapter 5. At the end of the war Fortescue also asked for extended leave to settle personal affairs, and threatened ‘to resign the command of the *Achilles* as I must be a great sufferer for want of attending on my private affairs.’ On this

⁵³⁴ *Berwick* 70 gun 3rd rate O1740 K 1741 L 1743 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 43; ADM 36/292 Muster book *Berwick* May 1746 – July 1748.

⁵³⁵ ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1759-61 **Affleck** 16, 29 April 1759; 6, 18 January; 28 December 1760, 7 January 1761;

⁵³⁶ ADM 1/2667 Captains’ Letters W 1762 **Wallis** 8, 24, 27 December 1762.

⁵³⁷ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 19 October 1761.

⁵³⁸ ADM 1/1786 Captains’ Letters F 1758 **Fortescue** 12 September 1758

occasion he was given six weeks leave ‘on the expiration of which he must undertake to return to his duty.’⁵³⁹

Thomas Harrison asked for leave to settle his father’s affairs after the Admiral’s death, but asked if *Venus* could be cleaned while he was away, so that the time was not wasted.⁵⁴⁰ Apart from this period of absence, Harrison had no other leave until 1761 when he asked for six weeks’ leave. Harrison was an acclaimed hero within the body of captains, and had just brought in the fifth of the privateers he captured that year, so Captain Fitzherbert took out the *Venus* for a cruise. Missing a cruise was always a possibility if the circumstances warranted more leave than the few days a dockyard spent cleaning a ship. **Henry John Phillips** asked for leave when his uncle, Commissioner Towry, died. He guessed that this would ‘take more time than I can have while my ship is in port, I request their Lordships leave to be absent from my duty <sic> the next cruise that I may be indulged with this favour but if thought improper I should rather have my private affairs suffer than his Majesty’s service. I shall keep or return to my duty when their Lordships think it proper.’ Captain Baillie was sent to take over the 5th rate *Juno* in his absence.⁵⁴¹ The tone of this letter suggested that Phillips was not taking his responsibilities as a serving captain lightly.

The tone of **Henry Martin**’s letter is also of interest. He ‘presents his compliments to Mr Stephens and begs to know whether he has asked Lord Anson for leave for Capt Martin to go to Ireland on his private business and to let the Danae go out for one cruise without him.’ Martin’s need for more time emerged as his ‘having had the misfortune to have a bill in my favour on Mr Touchet for two thousand pounds protested.’⁵⁴²

Ill health was a possible reason for applying for leave, but a suspect one as it was difficult to prove. Gout was an affliction which clearly was acceptable, as was treatment in Bath. **Thomas Burnett** suffered from gout, as did **John Lindsay** and **Paul Henry Ourry**.

⁵³⁹ ADM 1/1788 Captains’ Letters F 1762-3 **Fortescue** 25 August 1762.

⁵⁴⁰ ADM 1/1893 Captains’ Letters H 1758 **Harrison** 27 March 1758. (Admiral Harrison died on 13 March.)

⁵⁴¹ ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Phillips** 22 June 1760.

⁵⁴² ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Martin** 10, 23 September 1761.

After the war several captains fell into the habit of spending several months at a time in France.⁵⁴³ A very senior **John Elliot** asked for permission to stay on shore as the dissolution of parliament on 1 September 1780 meant his ‘attendance in the Country’ was of great importance. Elliot returned to Roxburghshire to assist his brother Gilbert, Lord Minto, who had been Treasurer of the Navy since 1770.⁵⁴⁴

The granting or withholding of leave provides further unambiguous examples of the Admiralty’s rigid control of officers.

8 Corruption

The procedures established by Pepys to control captains were also intended to prevent corruption on their part. Daniel Baugh records that too many captains had contravened regulations and instructions for years, from a level of staggering corruption to petty chiselling. He suggests two professional causes for this behaviour, the first being inadequate pay, the second being slow promotion. The Admiralty was aware of the difficulties faced by officers forced to live on their income, and Baugh quotes the unsuccessful petition made by the Admiralty to the King for increased pay to sea officers, through ‘that necessity which the insufficient pay of the officer imposes on him of either ruining himself in the discharge of his duty, or of increasing his profits by imposition on the public’.⁵⁴⁵ In fact, no doubt to Pepys’ credit and to his successors’ strictness, there is little indication of any corruption on the part of Burnett and his peers.

As recorded above, a week’s leave was granted **John Wheelock** to sort out his accounts with the Victualling Board and **William M^cCleverty** had to visit several offices to resolve the difficulty for missing receipts for slops. During these visits, were the ‘exorbitant quickening fees’ referred to above offered or demanded? There is no way of knowing, but the years captains waited for their pay suggests that ‘quickenings fees’ were not being used.

⁵⁴³ ADM 1/1494 Captains’ Letters B 1766 **Baillie** 12 September 1766; ADM 1/1608 Captains’ Letters C 1761-3 **Cornwall** 23, 25 May 1763; ADM 1/2012-4 Captains’ Letters K 1763-81 **Kempenfelt** 30 July 1756, 6 January 1766, 1 September, 23 December 1767, 11 September 1771, 26 June 1772, 11 June, 4 October 1773 15 July, 31 September 1777, 14 April 1778, 16 May 1779; ADM 1/2115 Captains’ Letters M 1763 **Medows** 7, 9 November 1763; ADM 1/2477 Captains’ Letters S 1763 **Schomberg** 2 December 1763; ADM 1/2673 Captains’ Letters W 1778 **Wheelock** 8 March 1778

⁵⁴⁴ ADM 1/1762 Captains’ Letters E 1780-3 **Elliot** 3, 24 September 1780.

⁵⁴⁵ Baugh, ed. *Naval Administration 1715-1750* 40-1.

The letters give evidence of the surveys on stores which had to be condemned before being destroyed, always carried out by officers from three ships. The logs provide evidence of the meticulous counting and recording of the number of pieces of pork or beef contained in casks. As noted above, taking victuals to sea without the requisite surveys caused **Michael Clements'** accounts to be stopped.

As a senior officer, late in his career, **John Elliot** received a reprimand from Philip Stephens over a missing bolt of canvas which drew from him an outraged response: 'In answer to all I will only tell you that by God I never did either embezzle or connive with others to embezzle the Kings stores nor did I believe that the gentlemen who form your Board would have signed such a letter to me.'⁵⁴⁶ The only other accusation of corruption resulted in **Thomas Burnett's** longest and most impassioned letter, when he angrily refuted the allegation of his former purser that he had embezzled spirits due to his servants.

There is no other evidence of possible corruption on the part of Thomas Burnett and his peers, and the furious rejection of the accusation of corruption suggest that, for this group of captains, corruption was held to be dishonourable.

9 Conclusion

This thesis began by asking a series of questions, the first of which was: can a greater understanding of the life of Thomas Burnett be gained from studying him in the context of his peers. Burnett's correspondence with the Admiralty covered the same ground as his peers but, as his letters were infrequent, a great deal had to be assumed. Once his peers' correspondence had been examined, the gaps in Burnett's correspondence were, to a large extent, filled in. The second question asked: can our understanding of the mid-eighteenth century navy be enhanced by such a study. The evidence gained from the correspondence between the Admiralty and Burnett and his peers has demonstrated the themes which were of great interest to the men themselves. This chapter answers questions 1 and 2 with a positive 'yes' with regard to the topics covered.

⁵⁴⁶ NMM ELL/400 **Elliot** to Stephens 15 October 1771.

The third question asked: has any general assumption been overturned by this study. As themes were identified and pieced together it became clear that an assumption about the control of the Admiralty over the captains was being overturned. An understanding of the degree to which the captains had to observe every detail of their instructions if they were to be paid and an appreciation of the tight control of the Admiralty and the submission of the captains both result from this research. The assumption that the Admiralty's control over the captains was tenuous has been disproved. The financial control exerted through highly efficient bureaucracy was absolute.

The sixth question asked: given the formality of mid-eighteenth century correspondence, can individual voices be heard. It is only when correspondence from many individuals is compared that variations from normality can be distinguished. The evidence of these letters shows how strongly individuality can be discerned, despite the formality of correspondence dictated to a secretary. The pathetic lack of resolution of Thomas Knackston, the exquisite formality of Charles Medows, the appetite for combat of a John Elliot, Thomas Harrison or Archibald Kennedy emerge from their letters with absolute clarity.

Chapter 5 Manning the mid-eighteenth century navy

Many of the questions posed in the Introduction are addressed in this chapter. The manning of their ships was a major preoccupation for captains at the beginning of every commission, and those bound for the West Indies knew that their problems would only intensify when the depredations of malaria and yellow fever were encountered. Although only a limited analysis has been done of muster books for death, disease and desertion and logs for punishment, Thomas Burnett's ships give an insight into the problems all the captains would have faced at some time in their careers.

1 Standing and warrant officers

The standing officers such as masters, pursers, gunners, carpenters and boatswains were appointed to particular ships and usually stayed with them.⁵⁴⁷ However there are many instances of exchanges between carpenters and boatswains, who moved from one ship to another and then exchanged back again.⁵⁴⁸ The work of these officers was indispensable and their rare appearance in the letters of Thomas Burnett and his peers is a testimony to their efficiency.

Although the Articles of War were designed 'to keep admirals and officers to their duty' petty officers such as masters and pursers were not exempt from its provisions.⁵⁴⁹

1.1 Masters

It is a measure of the professionalism of these men that none of Burnett's peers commented adversely on the behaviour of the master of his ship. In 1761 when the Admiralty instructed all captains to provide cartographical evidence of visiting foreign parts it was in fact the master who had 'accurately to observe the appearances of coasts, rocks and shoals, with their depths of water and bearings, noting them in his journal.'⁵⁵⁰ Some of these journals contain beautiful examples of topographical drawing and sketching.⁵⁵¹ The master's log recorded all

⁵⁴⁷ Daniel Baugh ed. *Naval Administration 1715-175* 43.

⁵⁴⁸ ADM 6/16, 17, 18 etc Commissions and Warrants Books.

⁵⁴⁹ N.A.M. Rodger, *Articles of War: The Statutes which governed our Fighting Navies 1661, 1749 and 1866* (Kenneth Mason 1982) 11.

⁵⁵⁰ Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 191.

⁵⁵¹ ADM 346/20/1 Mediterranean **Clements Pallas** 1760; ADM 346/15/6 Mediterranean **Towry Juno** 1762.

foodstuffs brought into the ship, as he was one of the officers who provided checks on provisions, and his signature had to be appended to all muster books or pay books kept by the purser, as well as on records of food and drink stowed in the ship. This responsibility is summarised in Article XXIV.⁵⁵² It was the master's responsibility to maintain the proper stowage of solid and liquid stores to maintain the trim. The difficulties faced by **Taylor Penny** and **John Wheelock** in stowing sufficient beer would have been brought to their attention by their respective masters.⁵⁵³ The master's log was usually copied by the lieutenants, who had to produce a similar daily account of the ship's actions for scrutiny by the Navy Board.

1.2 Pursers

Pursers were self-employed entrepreneurs who enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the ships in which they carried out their business. Before being granted a warrant they had to provide an indemnity to the Admiralty appropriate to the size of the complement.⁵⁵⁴ Pursers were paid to carry out their appointed tasks, but could also make money out of providing supplementary services to the ship's crew. The muster books and pay lists show clearly where much of the purser's time was spent, and Article XXXI reminded him of the penalty for making or signing a false muster book.⁵⁵⁵ Sloops too small to warrant a purser were mustered by the 'clerk of the cheque' when they were in dock.⁵⁵⁶

Historians have not been clear as to whether the purser kept books by the calendar month or the lunar month. Admiral 'Goose' Pye was responsible for the statement that seamen were paid by the calendar month. Rodger refutes this, stating that the navy had always been paid by the lunar month.⁵⁵⁷ The confusion seems to result from the fact that the musters, as

⁵⁵² Rodger, *Articles of War* 27.

⁵⁵³ ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Penny** 5 May 1759; ADM 1/2262 Captains' Letters W 1757 **Wheelock** 8 Feb 1757.

⁵⁵⁴ Janet Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: the True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (Chatham 2006) 92.

⁵⁵⁵ Rodger, *Articles of War* 27.

⁵⁵⁶ ADM 1/ 2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Peyton** 22 January 1757; ADM 51/433 Captain's log *Happy* 1756-7.

⁵⁵⁷ Rodger, *Wooden World* 125.

shown by the tally sheet, break each month into four periods each lasting between seven and nine days. The muster months are therefore based on calendar rather than lunar periods.⁵⁵⁸

Though they were standing officers, pursers did move from smaller to larger vessels if their business prospered and they could afford the higher indemnity.⁵⁵⁹ Many pursers became extremely wealthy from their private enterprise, although the provision of dry goods by a fourteen-ounce pound was unlikely to make a fortune.⁵⁶⁰ Much more food had to be condemned than the fourteen-ounce pound was designed to alleviate.⁵⁶¹ Baugh made the point that the purser's salary was not nearly equal to his responsibilities, and the system practically required him to twist the regulations if he were to remain solvent.⁵⁶²

Despite the opportunities pursers had for sharp practices, **Thomas Burnett** was alone in recording difficulties with a purser. Burnett's case against Alexander Charles, his purser, was complicated. The purser was apparently intent on making what he could out of the accounts and particularly out of the stores of rum still on board the *Cambridge* when she returned from the Leeward Islands. Charles' claim to the Admiralty appears to be that Burnett had stopped the boys from receiving their allowance of rum and had appropriated 300 gallons of rum (worth 16p a gallon) to sell on his own behalf. Burnett refuted this furiously. Burnett had stopped the boys having more than half of their ration, as they sold what they didn't drink to the rest of the ship's company. He had also made clear to Charles that if any rum remained when the ship returned to England that it belonged to the boys and would then be sold back to Charles on their behalf so that they could buy clothes which they needed very much on their return to a cold climate.

The purser was intent on maintaining that the officers owed him money rather than the other way about, and refused to settle his debts to them. The master had had to threaten to cane Charles before his accounts were balanced. In Burnett's case Charles had claimed to the Admiralty that he had issued a promissory note to Burnett for £24 19s 0d to settle his

⁵⁵⁸ *Happy, Cambridge, Worcester*, ADM 36/6449-50 *Rochester* Muster Books May 1760- August 1761, Aug 1761 – July 1762; ADM 36/8002 *Boyne* Muster book November 1770-2; *Prudent, Royal Oak*.

⁵⁵⁹ ADM 1/1493 Captains' Letters B 1762-3 **Baillie** 2 June 1762.

⁵⁶⁰ Rodger, *Wooden World* 93.

⁵⁶¹ NMM CLE/3/6 **Clements** 27 September 1770, 7 March 1771.

⁵⁶² Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 405.

account. Burnett stated that this ‘note’ was no more than an account of the balance due, and that at no time had Burnett’s accounts been settled.

The affair is an example of the way in which a venal purser could make money, by straight forward double dealing with the individual accounts each officer had incurred. Burnett’s outraged letter gives an insight into the way in which a careful captain reduced the risk of alcohol to young people, restricted the buying and selling of alcohol within the crew and provided for the cash needs of his young gentlemen on their return to an English winter.

Pursers could also take an active rôle. **Thomas Taylor**’s purser, Andrew Rutherford, took charge of the boarding party when their sloop *Badger* engaged the much larger *Escort*, and despite a shot through one of the corners of his hat, ‘behaved with the greatest bravery’. For this Rutherford was appointed purser of the *Coventry* frigate, which would give him the opportunity of making more money.⁵⁶³

1.3 Carpenters and boatswains

Carpenters usually learned their trade in dockyards. At sea they worked with a mate and a crew of up to eight men in the largest ships, maintaining and repairing the wooden structure of the ship. **Thomas Burnett**’s logs for *Cambridge* during 1757-8 when she was in the Leeward Islands reveal that the carpenters were in constant employment, maintaining the fabric of the ship, and repairing damage done by usage, weather and enemy action. The carpenter’s stores, replenished every time the ship was refitted for sea, had to cover all eventualities.⁵⁶⁴ Just as a naval officer could earn promotion through merit, a carpenter could be recommended for promotion to a bigger ship, in which he would earn more. William Reid was only a carpenter’s mate, but after his sterling service when the mast had to be fished after the battle with the *Courageaux* **Robert Faulknor** recommended him to the Admiralty. His name was put on the list for a sloop or 6th rate, so that his future was assured.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs* Vol. II 82.

⁵⁶⁴ ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Penny** 21 August 1759.

⁵⁶⁵ ADM 1/1788 Captains’ Letters F 1762-3 **Faulknor** 11 July 1762.

An ageing carpenter or boatswain could be semi-retired by a warrant to a ship ‘in ordinary’, where his responsibility was limited; in effect he would retire with his family on board.⁵⁶⁶ An alternative in terms of ‘softer work’ was a warrant for a Royal yacht. Like a ship in ordinary the yachts rarely moved from their berths in a dockyard.⁵⁶⁷ As a result of **Thomas Burnett**’s urgent plea, John Parlby, the carpenter in the *Marlborough*, was recommended by the officers of the court martial for his endeavours in the last days before she sank. His reward was a warrant for the 2nd rate *Union* which had just been decommissioned in Plymouth dock.⁵⁶⁸

There was no examination for the post of boatswain: experience was the major requirement. However, the boatswain had to maintain his stores, and work with the carpenter whenever their spheres of influence intersected during action.⁵⁶⁹ **John Lindsay** suggested that perhaps some educational standard should be required as well, as his boatswain could not read or write therefore could not provide ‘a regular expense’.⁵⁷⁰ The signature of Richard Townsend, boatswain in the *Cambridge*, can only just be made out. Perhaps he was scarcely literate, but his signature was still required on the all-important books, and his accounts had to be presented to the Navy Board at the conclusion of a voyage.

Gunners were taken for granted by Thomas Burnett and his peers, and carried out their duties without attracting comment.⁵⁷¹

1.4 Chaplains

As laid down in the first Article of War, every naval vessel was required to perform public worship.⁵⁷² In the larger vessels this was led by an Anglican Chaplain recommended by the Bishop of London or the Archbishop of Canterbury. The captains’ letters reveal that family

⁵⁶⁶ ADM 1/1759 Captains’ Letters E 1757-8 **Elliot** 12 October, 26 November 1758; ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 24 May 1779.

⁵⁶⁷ ADM 1/1760 Captains’ Letters E 1759-62 **Elliot** 7 April 1761.

⁵⁶⁸ ADM 6/19 483 Warrant John Parlby 15 April 1763.

⁵⁶⁹ ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Penny** 21 August 1759.

⁵⁷⁰ ADM 1/2050 Captains’ Letters L 1761-2 **Lindsay** 14 July 1761.

⁵⁷¹ Gareth Cole, ‘Royal Navy Gunners in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 95 (SNR 2009) 284-295.

⁵⁷² Rodger, *Articles of War* 22.

connections as well as opportunities for exerting ‘interest’ could be displayed here.⁵⁷³ A chaplain was paid at the rate of an ordinary seaman, but he also received four pence a month from every member of the crew, and was entitled to a share of prize money.⁵⁷⁴

1.5 Surgeons

The surgeon is rarely mentioned by Thomas Burnett and his peers, unless he was to survey men who needed to be discharged. The surgeon provided the instruments and stock of medications he took on board, although he reclaimed from the Sick and Hurt Board the cost of the items used. When **Samuel Wallis** took the *Dolphin* round the world he reported the special assistance for the surgeon given by the ‘Board of Sick and Hurt’. Wallis had not been permitted to tell Mr Hutchinson their destination, so the doctor had had to go to extraordinary expense to lay in stocks for any eventuality to cover an unspecified duration.⁵⁷⁵

Researchers are indebted to Patrick Renny, the acting surgeon in *Cambridge* from 2 February until 26 April 1757, for the journal he kept of his experiences. This was published in 1899 in *Naval Yarns*, and his ‘vivid and true picture of the social side of life afloat at that period’ is an insight into the working habits of the mid-eighteenth century surgeon.⁵⁷⁶

1.6 School master

It became usual for a ship with ‘young gentlemen’ on board to carry a school master who would teach them navigation. **Robert Boyle Walsingham** was able to employ his choice of school master: having provided a certificate ‘from good and substantial people’ stating that he was of good character, Philip Lamb’s knowledge of the theory and practice of navigation

⁵⁷³ **Edmund Affleck** was asking for his nephew John Affleck to be appointed chaplain. Lt. William Affleck (presumably a relation) was also on board. ADM 1/1444 Captains’ Letters A 1771-2 **Affleck** 12 Jan. 1771; ADM 1/2118 Captains’ Letters M 1770-3 **M’Clevarty** 14 June 1771; ADM 1/1901 Captains’ Letters H 1771-3 **Hotham** 22 May 1771; ADM 1/2671 Captains’ Letters W 1771-5 **Wheelock** 31 March 1771; ADM 1/2247 Captains’ Letters O 1763-70 **Ourry** 23 Sep. 1770; Gordon Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*,: A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy (Oxford Illustrated Press 1978) 506-7.

⁵⁷⁴ Taylor, *Sea Chaplains* 142, 169.

⁵⁷⁵ ADM 1/2670 Captains’ Letters W 1768-70 **Wallis** 12 May 1769.

⁵⁷⁶ W.H. Long, *Naval Yarns* (Gibbings and Co Ltd 1899) ; it is to be regretted that Renny left the ship as **Burnett** joined. His gossip might have provided a unique glimpse of the man; Rodger, *Wooden World* 20; Brian Lavery ed. *Shipboard Life and Organisation 1731-1815* (Navy Records Society 1998) 481-539.

was tested at Trinity House.⁵⁷⁷ There was some suspicion about the backgrounds and intentions of applicants for such posts, which is why, alone of the warrant officers, school masters had to provide character references as well as proof of competency from Trinity House.⁵⁷⁸

2 The recruitment of seamen to the Navy

The ‘new style’ muster books which were in use from 1764 provide additional columns for the age and place of origin of each man on board, making them a rich source of information for historians of the later half of the century.⁵⁷⁹

2.1 Recruitment on land

Manning the navy in times of war was a problem throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁸⁰ Andrew Lambert has summarised the available statistics related to manning the fleet: an estimated 184,893 seamen and marines served in the navy of which 1,512 were killed in action or died of wounds, 40,000 deserted, 34,000 were demobilized and almost 60,000 died of disease or were discharged as unfit for service.⁵⁸¹

Rodger quotes David Starkey who calculated that before the Seven Years’ War 58,000 men were employed afloat, of whom 17,000 men were in the Navy, rising to a wartime maximum of 85,000.⁵⁸² These figures are disputed by Peter Earle who calculated that before the war the

⁵⁷⁷ Earlier **Walsingham** had taken it upon himself to appoint the gunner to act as school master to his young gentlemen and was instantly reprimanded: ‘Let him know it is contrary to the practice of the Navy to bear an officer in two capacities in the same ship and that it was very unjustified his taking upon himself to give such a warrant at any time but much more so whilst the ship was in dock.’ ADM 1/2668 Captains’ Letters W 1763-5 **Walsingham** 11 January 1763; In 1779 Walsingham enclosed the signed certificate with his letter ADM 1/2674 Captains’ Letters W 1779 **Walsingham** 6 February 1779; ADM 1/2111 Captains’ Letters M 1759 **Martin** 3 September 1759.

⁵⁷⁸ Dickinson, *Educating the Navy* 12.

⁵⁷⁹ Tim Clayton, *Tars: the men who made Britain rule the waves* (Hodder and Stoughton 2007). This innovation presages the Victorian merchant navy’s crew agreements which became increasingly complex. A.B. McLeod, ‘The crews of Captain Herbert Huntington Brown, a Bluenose skipper out of Yarmouth Nova Scotia’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 94 (SNR 2008) 48-61.

⁵⁸⁰ David Aldridge, ‘The Navy as handmaid for commerce and high policy’ in Black and Woodfine *British Navy* 56-7; Bromley, ‘The British Navy and its Seamen’.

⁵⁸¹ Andrew Lambert, *War at Sea in the Age of Sail 1650-1850* (Cassell and Co 2000) 123.

⁵⁸² N.A.M. Rodger, ‘A Little Navy of Your Own Making: Admiral Boscawen and the Cornish connection in the Royal Navy’ in Michael Duffy ed. *Parameters of British Naval Power 1650-1850* (Exeter 1992) 83.

figure for naval manning stood at 10,000, rising to 75,000 men.⁵⁸³ Richard Middleton gives the figure of ‘over 40,000’ for seamen employed at the end of 1755.⁵⁸⁴ If the totals can vary by as much as 50%, it is less incredible that the Admiralty itself did not know how many men were employed: naval estimates were always a year in arrears, based upon nominal manning levels. The actual complement was sometimes only half the nominal total. In 1757 John Cleveland reprimanded the Navy Board for sending information which ‘serves rather to mislead than to inform’. The Admiralty kept a list of ships in sea pay, while the Navy Board had a list of all the ships in dock or reserve, and between them a quick glance should have shown the total strength of the Navy. Seemingly this was never done, and it was only at the end of the century that the magnitude of discrepancies was discovered.⁵⁸⁵

The earliest mention amongst Burnett’s peers of recruiting for the expanded navy required for the Seven Years’ War was in February 1755, when **Thomas Knackston** was told to exert himself in procuring seamen. He was able to raise only sixteen landsmen, men who were starving, and desperate for work. Knackston had to supply them with money for immediate food. It is a commentary on the economy that there was no alternative work other than service in the navy. Seamen however were more difficult to find. The local merchant vessels were navigated by old men or boys and ‘such as are exempted by Act of Parliament’. Knackston met local officials and four justices of the peace, who were happy to give him warrants for the ‘apprehending of vagrants’, but even this solution only secured three persons.⁵⁸⁶

There were volunteers, however. Admiral Boscawen’s ‘little navy of your own making’ is often mis-quoted as the following of a popular and successful captain.⁵⁸⁷ The reality is that during bad winters, when the tin mines were closed by flooding, volunteers were found amongst miners and farm workers. These were fit men, not vagabonds, and welcomed on board not just Boscawen’s vessels, but also that of the other Cornishman, **Paul Henry Ourry**.⁵⁸⁸ The ‘little navy’ referred to by Fanny Boscawen was not made up of the

⁵⁸³Peter Earle, *Sailors: English Merchant Seamen 1650-1775* (Methuen 1998) 186-7.

⁵⁸⁴ Richard Middleton, ‘Naval Administration in the age of Pitt and Anson’ in Black and Woodfine, *British Navy*, 112.

⁵⁸⁵ Middleton, ‘Naval Administration’ 117-8.

⁵⁸⁶ ADM 1/2009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 4, 19 February 1755.

⁵⁸⁷ Rodger, ‘A Little Navy’ 85.

⁵⁸⁸ ADM 1/2247 Captains’ Letters O 1763-70 **Ourry** 26 October 1770.

Cornishmen raised by the Admiral, but of the officers whose professional lives he had shaped through advice and guidance.⁵⁸⁹ The flurry of mobilisation in 1770 prompted by the Falkland Islands dispute also coincided with a period of economic hardship during a bad winter, and seamen, fishermen and tin miners all volunteered. Volunteers could also be found amongst foreigners, exchanged prisoners and even returning East Indiamen.⁵⁹⁰

To encourage voluntary enlistment, successive Acts of Parliament attempted to regulate the practice: for the better discipline of the royal navy in 1693; on wages and the payment of sailors, together with the encouragement of seamen into the service in 1727; the better supply of mariners and seamen in 1754; the encouragement of seamen and more speedy and effectual manning of the navy in 1757. Legislation which did make a difference was that of 1758, which laid down that two months' wages were to be paid in advance and that remittances could be made to wives. These were not the only features of this far-reaching Act, brought in by Grenville and Pitt against opposition from Anson and Boscawen who feared that regular payments would weaken the navy's hold over seamen.⁵⁹¹ Bounty payments were made to volunteers, and at a level of £2 (increased in 1758 to £3 and in 1759 to £5) were briefly an effective inducement for some men, although contemporaries claimed that the system was open to abuse by contractors who provided men.⁵⁹² As the Government wrestled with the problem over the years, the active captains received abstracts of each new Act for dissemination to their crews, and orders as to how it should be distributed.⁵⁹³

2.2 Impressment

Social historians focus on the opposition to the activities of the press gang and judge its value accordingly, assuming that only pressed men entered the navy: 'It is hard to see how the

⁵⁸⁹ Cecil Aspinall-Oglander, *Admiral's Wife: The Life and Letters of Mrs Edward Boscawen 1719-1761* (Longmans 1940) 218; in this study, **Bassett, Martin** and **Wallis**.

⁵⁹⁰ ADM 1/2662 Captains' Letters W 1757 **Wilkinson** 6 September 1757; ADM 1/2246 Captains' Letters O 1760 **Ourry** 4 June, 13 August 1760; ADM 1/1762 Captains' Letters E 1780-3 **Elliot** 12 February 1780; ADM 1/2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Paston** 13 November 1757; ADM 1/2471 Captains' Letters S 1757 **Schomberg** 29 June 1757.

⁵⁹¹ Gradish, *Manning* 118.

⁵⁹² *London Gazette* Issue No 9779 1 April 1758 etc; Bromley, *Manning Pamphlets* 139.

⁵⁹³ ADM 1/2661 Captains' Letters W 1756 **Wallis** 2 February 1756; ADM 1/1490 Captains' Letters B 1759 **Bassett** 21 February 1759; ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Penny** 10 November 1759; ADM 1/1490 Captains' Letters B 1759 **Boyle** 25 November 1759; ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Clements** 28 December 1758; ADM 1/1787 Captains' Letters F 1759-61 **Fortescue** 2 January 1759.

British Navy won so many battles in the eighteenth century with these crews'.⁵⁹⁴ Nicholas Rogers took exception to Ralph Davis' statement that impressment was 'almost entirely confined to seamen and shipyard workers', and demonstrated that men with no sea experience were pressed.⁵⁹⁵ He gives substantial evidence of the social disorder which accompanied the activities of the press gangs, particularly in Bristol and Liverpool, however he accepted the calculation of the disgruntled Captain John Fortescue that fewer than one per cent of seamen were brought in by the press gang.⁵⁹⁶ One mayor of Gravesend was threatened with imprisonment for allowing the impressment of one of his constituents, while a second threatened to imprison the press officers.⁵⁹⁷

On the outbreak of war an Act of Parliament legitimised the press, the traditional means of manning the navy. Posters were displayed advertising the bounties paid for volunteers. A Regulating officer (often a 2nd or 3rd lieutenant) would set up a rendezvous, usually at a public house. With his petty officers, or with a hired gang, he would set about spreading the word of the bounty available to volunteers, signing them up and sending groups back to the receiving ship with their proper tickets.⁵⁹⁸ If none were forthcoming, then the gang would enter public houses, lodging houses and other possible hiding places, searching for men. The clothes of seamen, their weather-beaten faces and rolling gait would give them away, but the gang was looking not just for seafarers, but for any man with experience on water. Men brought involuntarily into service were given 'prest money' as an advance on their wages, being thus 'imprest' rather than 'impressed' men.⁵⁹⁹ If such a man was found, his press warrant had to be filled in immediately so that the restriction of his liberty was a legally binding document. Issued to all captains engaged on pressing, the warrants were valid during a calendar month, and had to be returned to the Admiralty at the end of the month if they had not been issued.

⁵⁹⁴ Liza Picard, *Dr Johnson's London* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson 2000) 319, having derived her conclusion from J.R. Hutchinson, *The Press-Gang Afloat and Ashore* (London 1915).

⁵⁹⁵ Rogers, *Press Gang* 8; Philip Woodfine, 'Ideas of naval power and the conflict with Spain, 1737-1742' in Black and Woodfine *British Navy* 83.

⁵⁹⁶ Rogers, *Press Gang* 66.

⁵⁹⁷ ADM 3/44 9 April 1740, Rodger, *Wooden World* 169.

⁵⁹⁸ ADM 1/2247 Captains' Letters O 1763-70 **Ourry** 3 November 1770.

⁵⁹⁹ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Seas: A Naval History of Britain Vol. 1 660-1649* (Harper Collins 1997) 398.

Some men were rejected before they were entered into the books. The Admiralty's instructions were that 'none but seamen or seafaring men, fit for his Majesty's service' were to be taken, but it was not unknown for city magistrates to take advantage of a recruiting drive, and to get rid of reprobates who would otherwise be a burden on the parish.⁶⁰⁰ Men who were completely unfit for service were discharged from receiving ships. **Thomas Burnett** rejected nine seamen as 'unsuitable' after they had been passed on from receiving ships to make up the complement of *Cambridge* in 1757.⁶⁰¹

The captains' letters make clear that the Admiralty refused to accept the dregs of society, despite the widely held view that the opposite is the case. Gordon Taylor quotes the account written by Edward Thompson in 1756, while he was still a midshipman in *Stirling Castle*, in which he talked of '... the collected filth of jails. Condemned criminals have the alternative of hanging or entering on board'.⁶⁰² This account was given in full by Clowes, and if it is accepted a very different picture would be given of life on board.⁶⁰³ The mutual affection and respect between captain and crew evident in many letters does not conform to the 'horror and infamy' mentioned by Thompson. Taylor accepts this version without question, claiming that 'the social conditions on board naval ships at mid-century were appalling'.⁶⁰⁴ However Rodger checked the muster books of the *Stirling Castle* and states that there was not a single man who could be identified as coming from gaol amongst the 115 pressed men on board.⁶⁰⁵

The shortage of men at the start of the Seven Years' War was such that **William Fortescue** began his independent career far inland, based at Shrewsbury on impress duty. Despite all his efforts seamen were not to be found so far up the Severn. The trows or river barges were usually handled by their owners, and therefore completely protected.⁶⁰⁶ As Fortescue pointed out to the Admiralty, the 'difficulty and inconvenience there would be in securing them would be very great.' Despite his best efforts Fortescue was rewarded only with a chilling put down by John Cleveland, who replied that their Lordships expect 'he will do what will

⁶⁰⁰ ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 22 February 1756; ADM 1/1786 Captains' Letters F 1758 **Fortescue** 5 May 1758.

⁶⁰¹ ADM 36/5256 *Cambridge* Muster book May 1757 – April 1858.

⁶⁰² Taylor, *Sea Chaplains* 162.

⁶⁰³ Clowes, *Royal Navy* Vol. III 21.

⁶⁰⁴ Taylor, *Sea Chaplains* 162.

⁶⁰⁵ Rodger, *Wooden World* 171.

⁶⁰⁶ David Hussey, *Coastal and River Trade in Pre-Industrial England: Bristol and its Region 1680-1730* (New York 2000) 4.

most contribute to forward the service by which he is employed'. The result of his hard work was that 18 unwilling men were delivered to a receiving ship, having cost the Admiralty not just Fortescue's pay and expenses, but also the expenses of the guard which consisted of a sergeant, corporal and twelve men.⁶⁰⁷ It has been calculated that in 1756 it cost £114 to put each impressed man on board.⁶⁰⁸

Men were prepared to risk their lives to escape the press. Five men put on board the tender by the regulating captain operating in Bristol attempted to swim from the ship and were drowned. John Cleveland's response to **Taylor Penny** was that 'the Lords are sorry they were not better looked after.'⁶⁰⁹

Seamen 'protected' from the press included the crews of the fishing fleets, on whose labours the food supplies of the nation depended. Men from the Greenland ships were protected until they had been mustered at the Customs House steps, at the end of their cruise. They were prepared to defend themselves with fire arms against being forcibly pressed, but **Andrew Wilkinson** offered a guinea each (approximately a month's pay) to the men who were prepared to return in a month's time to his new commission.⁶¹⁰

Similarly protected were wherry men and watermen in the Thames and other rivers generally, who made possible the loading and unloading of freight and the movement of people across rivers and about harbours. Foreigners and apprentices who had paid to be indentured were also protected. 'Pressing from protections' was only resorted to if all other means of raising men had been exhausted.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷ ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 13 January 1756; ADM 1/2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 14/23 February 1757; ADM 1/1784 Captains' Letters F 1756 **Fortescue** 28 February – 7 May 1756; ADM 1/2671 Captains' Letters W 1771 **Wallis** 2 February 1771.

⁶⁰⁸ Larry Neal, 'The Cost of Impressment during the Seven Years' War', *The Mariner's Mirror* 64 (SNR 1978) 46.

⁶⁰⁹ ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Penny** 23 April 1759; ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Paston** 19 May 1759; N.A.M. Rodger, 'The Mutiny in the *John and Thomas*', *The Mariner's Mirror* 70 (SNR1984) 293-298.

⁶¹⁰ ADM 1/2586 Captains' Letters T 1756-7 **Taylor** 20 August 1756. Taylor paid out one shilling a day to the men who worked under him at his rendezvous; ADM 1/2662 Captains' Letters W 1757 **Wilkinson** 14 August 1757.

⁶¹¹ ADM 1/2010 Captains' Letters K 1757-9 **Knackston** 6 April 1757; ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 24 June 1779; ADM 1/2014 Captains' Letters K 1777-81 **Kempfenfelt** 4 February 1779. Clayton, *Tars*170-1.

The Admiralty's problems were mirrored on the other side of the Channel, where the French had relied on their Maritime Register. James Pritchard makes clear that the result of the French King's inability to pay the sailors lead to large scale resistance to conscription and desertion.⁶¹² **Joseph Peyton** sent back intelligence that French privateers in Boulogne were unmanned, as were those of Calais, the local seafaring people having all been sent along the coast to Brest or Rochefort.⁶¹³

2.3 Recruitment from the merchant service

Traditionally, the navy regarded the fishing fleets and the merchant marine as reservoirs to be drawn upon when the need for an enlarged navy arose.⁶¹⁴ When war broke out and naval vessels required crew the Admiralty asked for volunteers from these sources, and a proportion of the numbers needed was always raised in this way. One of the problems was that the navy needed more men in wartime than the merchant marine employed in the years of peace. But the merchant vessels had to stay at sea, to go on providing the imports without which the economy would have collapsed, as well as the extra shipping demanded by the navy and the army for supplies.⁶¹⁵ This meant that there was real tension between the two services, and volunteers had to be supplemented. Men to make up the shortfall in numbers were brought into service involuntarily, sometimes with considerable force.⁶¹⁶ The situation had not changed since Pepys deplored the result of securing the service of seamen by pressing them: 'more complaints arise, and justly, every day, of the irregularities and violences committed in that one particular of the pressing of men.'⁶¹⁷ A register of seamen, along the lines of the French *Inscription Maritime*, was suggested in the seventeenth century, and this suggestion was revived without success by Walpole and others between 1720 and 1749.⁶¹⁸ Despite these abortive effects Gradish appeared to believe that a register of merchant seaman would have solved the manning problem.⁶¹⁹ The Admiralty was confident that the navy would always be able to raise enough men when necessary, using the press to

⁶¹² Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy* 71-88.

⁶¹³ ADM 1/2299 Captains' Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 14 November 1762.

⁶¹⁴ Ehrman, *William's Navy* 109-143. Margaret Robinson, 'Loose and Unknown Persons: Listing Seamen in the late Seventeenth Century', *The Mariner's Mirror* 95 (SNR 2009) 392-399. Rodger, 'A Little Navy' 84.

⁶¹⁵ Neal, 'The Cost of Impressment' 34.

⁶¹⁶ Rodger, 'The Mutiny in the *John and Thomas*' 293.

⁶¹⁷ Tanner, ed. *Pepys's Naval Minutes* 268.

⁶¹⁸ Anson, *Lord Anson* 19; Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 234-6; Ehrman, *William's Navy* 451, 601;

Rodger, *Command of the Ocean* 312.

⁶¹⁹ Gradish, *Manning* 50.

harvest able bodied and experienced seamen when they were required from their peace time employment. George II used his accession speech in 1728 to speak out against the ‘force and violence’ then being used to raise men for his fleet.⁶²⁰

A major preoccupation for each of Thomas Burnett’s peers was the traditional need to press as many men as possible from the returning trade. The merchant fleets were allowed to reach the relative safety of the Bristol or English Channel before they were plundered. A warning shot fired from a naval vessel was usually enough to allow a lieutenant with some petty officers to go on board returning merchant ships and take ‘volunteers’. Returning merchant ships sometimes fired on the approaching tenders, or subverted their crews and enticed them to desert.⁶²¹ One Jamaican fleet was lucky enough to encounter a thick fog, so ‘many hulls passed unsearched’ as they slipped past the Downs.⁶²² This source of pressed men was seasonal: by January ‘trade is already in and laid up’.⁶²³

Once impressment had taken place at sea it was customary for a number of sailors from the naval vessel to take the places of the pressed men so that the merchant ship could navigate safely into the home port. **Robert Man** had to send men of his own to Dublin ‘in lieu of pressed men’. He sent them ‘with a letter to the Collector of the Customs agreeable to the printed form for Conduct money which he refused paying the consequences of which occasioned great delay in the return of my people, having been obliged to sell part of their cloaths <sic>for their subsistence. ...’⁶²⁴ There were other difficulties when the men on loan were delayed or distracted.⁶²⁵

Research has been done by Peter Earle, David Starkey and Marcus Rediker into manning the merchant navy as part of the wider implications for trade.⁶²⁶ The reality was that most sailors

⁶²⁰ Bromley, *Manning Pamphlets* 82 n1.

⁶²¹ ADM 1/1441 Captains’ Letters A 1749-58 **Affleck** 9 July 1756; ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1757 **Man** 10 July, 1 August, 5/22 September 1757; ADM 1/2471 Captains’ Letters S 1757 **Schomberg** 26/7 October 1757; ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Penny** 30 July, 18 September 1759.

⁶²² ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 15 August 1777.

⁶²³ ADM 1/2118 Captains’ Letters M 1770-3 **M’Clevarty** 5 January 1771.

⁶²⁴ ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1757 **Man** 1 August 1757.

⁶²⁵ ADM 1/ 1894 Captains’ Letters H 1759 **Hotham** 30 January 1759; ADM 1/2111 Captains’ Letters M 1759 **Martin** 20 February, 30 October/1 November 1759; ADM 1/2112 Captains’ Letters M 1760 **Martin** 1 April 1760.

⁶²⁶ Earle, *English Merchant Seamen*; David Starkey ‘War and the market for seafarers’ in Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordwik eds. *Shipping and Trade 1750-1950: Essays in International Maritime Economic History* (Pontefract 1990) ; Marcus Rediker *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Cambridge 1987).

in the merchant service had spent some time in the navy in war time. Naval life offered excitement, companionship, the chance of wealth from prize money, as well as better food, although sailors in the merchant service could buy spirits as well as clothes and tobacco.⁶²⁷ The work in naval vessels was lighter in that the huge crews necessary to man the guns reduced the need for individual effort. Despite every sailor having contributed sixpence a month, he could only be invalided to Greenwich Hospital if he had served in the navy.⁶²⁸ Peter Earle quotes Rodger who pointed out that there was not an identifiable class of merchant seamen, merely seamen working for one employer rather than another.⁶²⁹ During times of peace Rodger may have been right to judge that seamen could choose deliberately whether they were employed by the navy or the merchant service. This view may have been reached as the result of the testament of William Spavens, who made clear that although some men were coerced into naval employment, others chose it deliberately. Spavens was himself pressed into naval service, and concluded that ‘it is a hardship which nothing but absolute necessity can reconcile to our boasted freedom’.⁶³⁰ In times of war, when the numbers needed by the navy increased so sharply, the merchant seamen no longer had that choice.

The close relationship between the number of men in the merchant service and those available for service in the navy was not confined to the British navy. The French navy was also dependent upon merchant seamen to man vessels in times of war, and this relationship is made clear by Michael Duffy in his explanation of the importance of the French West Indian trade. It was the long-distance shipping which trained and seasoned seamen.⁶³¹

Ships needed to be manned at three levels of experience: ‘topmen’ who were fit young men capable of working aloft, where they were a long way from direct instruction or discipline; ‘seamen’ who were experienced and could anticipate what was going to happen and could be relied on to follow shouted instructions; ‘landsmen’ who had to be pushed into position

⁶²⁷ Earle, *English Merchant Seamen* 35.

⁶²⁸ Spavens was very complimentary about the organisation, setting and facilities for invalided seamen ‘when safe moor’d in Greenwich tier’. Under the original charter the pensioners were supplied with more food than they could eat, the surplus being sold back to the contractors. William Spavens, *Memoirs of a seafaring life* (Folio 2000) 99. Lord Beveridge, *Prices and Wages in England* (Cass 1965) 247-8.

⁶²⁹ Ralph Davis, *The Rise of English Shipping in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (David and Charles 1962) 156; Earle, *British Merchant Seamen* 186.

⁶³⁰ Spavens, *Memoirs* 46.

⁶³¹ Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower* 22.

where needed, but provided brute strength. The Admiralty's ideally balanced complement was a third of each class, while captains wanted as many 'topmen' and seamen as possible. In the crisis of the 1740s the Admiralty deliberately targeted landsmen, and by 1744 the permissible ratio of seamen to landsmen on board had become 2:1.⁶³² The reality of manning was that although experienced men might volunteer, there were never enough of them and the press was required to make up the numbers.

Newly commissioned ships in the Deptford and Woolwich dockyards were rigged in a few days by specialised teams, although at times help had to be given by men from the Royal yachts or pensioners at the Greenwich Naval Hospital.⁶³³ The ship had to be 'navigated' from the dock down to the Nore, and stores loaded at Deptford or Woolwich, so that this passage down the Thames required the efforts of a large proportion of the complement of the ship, and many captains were particularly short of experienced men at this stage in their commission.⁶³⁴ London and Portsmouth were notoriously difficult cities to recruit in: seamen who lived locally were likely either to be protected from the press or hidden from it.

The delight felt by **Thomas Baillie** at being given the French *Marie Victoire* he had taken was tempered by his having to raise the 160 men of her complement. Their Lordships were adamant: Baillie was reminded that he had had their commission for nearly three months and that he had to do 'everything in his power to get the ship he is appointed to command ready for the sea [and] must endeavour to get men'.⁶³⁵ Baillie was not the only newly appointed post captain to be expected to raise his men, and it may be that this was a test of competence set by the Admiralty.⁶³⁶ Baillie's request to be allowed to travel to Ireland where he 'had

⁶³² Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 206-7.

⁶³³ ADM 1/2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 4 February – 2 April 1757; ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Man** 21 January – 6 February 1757; ADM 1/1759 Captains' Letters E 1757-8 **Elliot** 27 July 1757; ADM 1/2471 Captains' Letters S 1757 **Schomberg** 31 August – 14 September 1757; ADM 1/2014 Captains' Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** 11 October 1778; ADM 1/2118 Captains' Letters M 1770-3 **Martin** 23 November, 15 December 1770; ADM 1/2474 Captains' Letters **Schomberg** 1, 11 September 1760.

⁶³⁴ ADM 1/2046 Captains' Letters L 1757 **Lindsay** 3 May – 19 June 1757; ADM 1/2667 Captains' Letters W 1762 **Boyle Walsingham** 9 July, 31 August 1762; ADM 1/1788 Captains' Letters F 1762-3 **Faulknor** 28 September 1762; ADM 1/2247 Captains' Letters O 1763-70 **Ourry** 3 November 1770; ADM 1/2014 Captains' Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** 28 November 1778; ADM 1/2054 Captains' Letters L 1776-8 **Lindsay** 13 April 1778.

⁶³⁵ ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Baillie** 24 April – 29 June 1757.

⁶³⁶ ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1751-6 **Kempenfelt** 20 August 1756; ADM 1/2046 Captains' Letters L 1757 **Lindsay** 25 May 1757; ADM 1/2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Paston** 13 March 1757; ADM 1/2111 Captains' Letters M 1759 **Man** 14 September 1759; ADM 1/1893 Captains' Letters H 1758 **Harrison** 6 May 1762.

some influence', like that of **Robert Boyle Walsingham**, was initially refused.⁶³⁷ It is hard to see that there could still have been feeling against the largely Catholic Irish, as the Cabinet had instructed the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to press 1,500 Irishmen in 1756.⁶³⁸ The Irish **William M^cCleverty** became an expert at recruitment in Northern Ireland, and spent his long professional career organising the logistics of getting men from Ireland into tenders and then to holding ships in Plymouth or Portsmouth where they were needed.⁶³⁹

As part of **Thomas Harrison**'s duties in the Mediterranean after the war he had stopped and searched merchant vessels, and to his surprise found that a number of English merchant vessels were manned by foreigners. He made the point to the Admiralty that the English merchant navy was thereby 'training valuable subjects for foreign powers, who by this means will be the better capacitated to act against us in time of war.'⁶⁴⁰ Merchant marines of other countries were also short of men: England was not the only country having difficulty finding enough men prepared to make a life at sea, and English seamen were always able to find work.

If recruiting was difficult in England, it was even more of a problem in the West Indies, where crews were reduced through death from local diseases and desertion: local merchants were unlikely to return deserters to the navy.⁶⁴¹ **Thomas Burnett** lost 20 deserters in the Leeward Islands, out of the total of 42 men who ran between January 1757 and 30 April 1758.⁶⁴² **John Lindsay** wrote from Jamaica to say that he had distributed men from the vessels under his command 'as there has been generally a great want of men by reason of having no means of recruiting'.⁶⁴³ Some deserters returned to the service, perhaps feeling far from home.⁶⁴⁴

Pressure from the merchants made recruitment in the Caribbean ever more difficult. Eventually in 1760 the law allowing impressment was changed, reducing still further the

⁶³⁷ ADM 1/2667 Captains' Letters W 1762 **Walsingham** 9 July – 9 October 1762.

⁶³⁸ Gradish, *Manning* 38

⁶³⁹ ADM 1/2118 Captains' Letters M 1770-3 **M^cCleverty** 5 January 1771.

⁶⁴⁰ ADM 1/1899 Captains' Letters H 1766-9 **Harrison** 24 November 1766.

⁶⁴¹ Duncan Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm* (Liverpool 1993) 99-143; Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 216 -9.

⁶⁴² ADM 36/5256-9 *Cambridge Muster Books* August 1756-February 1760.

⁶⁴³ ADM 1/2010 Captains' Letters K 1757-9 **Kennedy** 7 September 1757; ADM 1/2049 Captains' Letters L 1760 **Lindsay** 30 January 1760.

⁶⁴⁴ ADM 1/2111 Captains' Letters M 1759 **Man** 23 April 1759.

opportunity of naval vessels replacing complements reduced by desertion, yellow fever or malaria.⁶⁴⁵

Always aware of opportunities being missed by the navy, **Archibald Kennedy** wrote from Lisbon suggesting that the bounty being offered in England as an inducement to recruitment should be offered there, as the Portuguese service was attracting men by a similar scheme: ‘and am certain a great many men might then be got here which I am informed now go into the Portuguese service as they give them a large bounty and 36 shillings a month pay’. The sailors would not have been averse to doubling their pay by serving in foreign ships.⁶⁴⁶

2.4 Pay

The rate of pay for seamen had not changed since the 17th century, and even in Pepys’ day was so low that men would not work through the winter to refit ships ready for a spring offensive.⁶⁴⁷ It was not until the last decade of the century, after the mutinies at Spithead, that the problem of pay was addressed.⁶⁴⁸ Sailors were paid at the same rate no matter which vessel they served in. Able seamen received 24s a four-week month, ordinary seamen 19s, and landmen 18s. After deductions of six pence for the Greenwich Hospital and one shilling for the Chatham Chest this gave a net annual wage of £14 12s 6d for an able seaman, £11 7s 6d for an ordinary seaman and £10 11s 6d for landsmen.⁶⁴⁹ Ralph Davis calculated wages for merchant seamen based on London, and although in peace time there was not a big differential in seamen’s wages, during the war wages went up to sixty or seventy shillings a month.⁶⁵⁰ These wages for sailors need to be seen in the context of wages for other employments. Davis quotes J. Massie whose calculations were based on taxes paid, and gave the range of wages for skilled workers in London as averaging between 11s a week in London and 8s in the provinces, and unskilled labourers between 9s in the London and 8s in

⁶⁴⁵ ADM 1/307 Commander-in-Chief’s Letters Leeward Islands John Moore 1757-60 October 1758.

⁶⁴⁶ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 8 May 1762.

⁶⁴⁷ Sailors refused to be paid in the old ‘clipped’ coins once new ones with milled edges were introduced in 1695, and by 1697 when the ships were decommissioned and sailors needed to be paid off, their back pay amounted to £1.8 million. Ehrman, *William’s Navy* 448-5, 577, 594.

⁶⁴⁸ Anthony G. Brown, ‘The Nore Mutiny – Sedition or Ships’ Biscuits? A reappraisal’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 92 (SNR 2006) 60-74; Anne Hawkins and Helen Watt, ‘Now is our time, the ship is our own, Huzza for the red flag’: Mutiny on the *Inspector* 1797’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 93 (SNR 2007) 156.

⁶⁴⁹ Rodger quotes Admiral Pye’s letter to Lord Sandwich (20 April 1780) in which he stated that seamen were paid by the calendar month as evidence of his ignorance and stupidity. Rodger, *Wooden World* 125.

⁶⁵⁰ Davis, *English Shipping Industry* 137. Quoted by Rodger, *Wooden World* 126.

the country.⁶⁵¹ It is not surprising that recruiting for the navy on the Thames was almost impossible. The Admiralty was compelled to change rates of pay in dockyards to bring them into line with the private sector where rates were competitive.⁶⁵²

Petty officers and the ‘standing officers’, the carpenter, gunner, boatswain, and purser, were paid according to the ship’s rate: the carpenter and gunner between £1.16.9 and £1.1.0; the boatswain between £1.12.0 and £1.6.3; the purser £2.0.0.⁶⁵³

It was not only sailors’ pay which caused problems: the frequency with which they were paid was a real cause for concern. **Thomas Burnett**’s uncle, in 1715, addressed a pamphlet to Lord Halifax extolling the fact that, as head of the Treasury, he had ‘found means to pay off all the poor creatures, excepting only a few’, unlike his predecessor Lord Oxford who had kept the seamen waiting two years for their pay.⁶⁵⁴ Daniel Baugh stated that in the 1740s, following the *Regulations and Instructions* of 1734, men who were ‘turned over’ into a new ship were paid their wages in full, together with a two month advance payment before the ship sailed, in order to minimise desertions.⁶⁵⁵ This policy, cited by Baugh as evidence that the financial situation of the Admiralty was secure in the time of Walpole, did not survive into the Seven Years’ War. Gradish quotes evidence provided for the House of Lords in 1758 to show that seamen who had the largest amount of wages in arrears were the least likely to desert, although further evidence seemed to show that it was the failure to pay regularly which was more likely to drive experienced ‘old standers’ from the service.⁶⁵⁶ Anson had been sceptical about the efficacy of proposals to improve the system of pay, and Grenville’s 1758 Bill, which paid the men every six months, only brought in an extra 3,000 men in 1758, the smallest rise of the war.⁶⁵⁷

Admiralty policy, based on long experience and the advice of Anson and Boscawen, was to withhold pay from sailors, believing they were less likely to desert if a ‘bank’ of wages was

⁶⁵¹ Davis, *English Shipping Industry* 252.

⁶⁵² ‘The Sailor’s Complaint’ is a 40 line ballad which voices the discontent of men who were not paid. C.H. Firth, ed. *Naval Songs and Ballads* (Navy Records Society 1908) 230-1.

⁶⁵³ Panzac, ‘Armed Peace’ 46.

⁶⁵⁴ Thomas Burnett, ‘*Mr Burnett’s Letter to the Earl of Hallifax*’ (London 1715) 31.

⁶⁵⁵ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 198.

⁶⁵⁶ Gradish, *Manning* 116-7.

⁶⁵⁷ Richard Middleton, ‘Naval Administration in the age of Pitt and Anson, 1755-1763’ in Black and Woodfine, *British Navy* 120.

due to them. The Admiralty also knew better than to pay sailors on the completion of commissions. The dockyard official came out to the vessel when she was ready to leave and paid the men as much of their arrears in pay as was thought appropriate, usually two month's at a time, as an 'advance' on their due pay.

The crew of **Thomas Burnett's** *Happy* was paid in Portsmouth on one of their visits. Having been mustered by the clerk of the cheque, the next day they went on board the *Litchfield* and received their wages there, the clerk of the cheque having perhaps decided against trying to use the facilities on board the tiny sloop.⁶⁵⁸ Four months later Burnett witnessed another payday, when the clerk of the cheque brought *Cambridge's* pay out to the ship on 2 June. This was timed carefully to take place after the final stores had been brought on board and contact with the shore broken, before she sailed for the Leeward Islands on 5 June.⁶⁵⁹

This set a precedent which made it difficult for **Archibald Kennedy** when he was commissioning the *Flamborough* late in 1758 for a voyage to Lisbon. He wrote to the Admiralty from Spithead to report that he was ready for sea, but that the crew, despite not having been paid since 1756, had not received any wages. Kennedy reported that 'there were great murmurs amongst them that they should go to sea without receiving any part of their wages', and the Admiralty had the pay books sent by express so that they could be signed off by the Navy Board for payment in Plymouth.⁶⁶⁰ It is likely that only a captain as confident of his standing and reputation as Kennedy would voice the 'murmurs' of his crew.⁶⁶¹

Seamen did not always wait patiently for their pay. Davis does not make clear whether the seamen with a wage grievance who held Liverpool for three days in 1775 were naval or

⁶⁵⁸ ADM 51/433 Captain's Log *Happy* 16-7 February 1757.

⁶⁵⁹ ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Medows** 12 May, 27 Dec. 1757; ADM 1/2245 O 1751-8 **Ourry** 23 March, 9 Dec. 1758; ADM 1/2296 Captains' letters P 1759 **Paston** 19 May 1759; ADM 1/2295 Captains' Letters P 1758 **Phillips** 23 June 1758; ADM 1/2246 Captains' Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry** 4 Nov 1761; ADM 1/2470-1 Captains' Letters S 1756-7 **Schomberg** 2 Dec. 1756, 26 Jan 1757. ADM 36/5257 *Cambridge* Log May 1757- April 1758.

⁶⁶⁰ ADM 1/2010 Captains' Letters K 1757-9 **Kennedy** 30 Nov, 29 Dec. 1758.

⁶⁶¹ In 1780 Admiral Thomas Graves' squadron mutinied and refused to go to sea for America from Portsmouth because the crews had not been paid. J.H. Owen, *Mutiny in the Royal Navy Volume 1 1691-1919* (Training and Staff Duties Division, Naval Staff, Admiralty 1933) 19-35.

merchant seamen. Armed as they were with cannon, muskets and cutlasses they might have been in slave trade vessels.⁶⁶²

Having to provide large sums of cash to the dockyards involved complicated problems of logistics. For security and speed several of Burnett's peers were engaged in transporting cash along the coast to the dockyards. Despite this system the Commissioner at Portsmouth found himself at least once without the cash he needed to pay wages. In 1760 **Archibald Kennedy** reported that he was ready to set out from Spithead for a cruise to Lisbon but had been told that Commissioner Bateman did not have enough cash at Portsmouth Dockyard, and that he was not expecting more for a month. On this occasion the Admiralty ordered sufficient money to be transported immediately to Portsmouth, having ordered the Navy Board to 'comp' the men to be paid.⁶⁶³

As a result of the 1758 legislation it became possible for sailors to remit part of their wages to their wives, who would otherwise be forced to live expensively on credit until their return, although it is not clear how many took advantage of this facility. Such legislation did not solve the problem caused by the delay in payment of wages, and as late as 1772 **Paul Henry Ourry** transmitted a petition from his crew which expressed the despair of the wives who saw the interest they incurred in debt outrunning the wages owed.⁶⁶⁴

Kennedy and Ourry were not the only captains to champion the cause of their crews.⁶⁶⁵ The very junior but fearless **Alexander Schomberg** negotiated leave for his crew, and went on to put their case for pay. The statutory fixed dates to which pay books were made up meant that men who had been transferred just before the ship sailed for the Mediterranean had had no

⁶⁶² Davis, *English Shipping* 155. It was not only seamen who had to wait for their pay. **Thomas Burnett** had to wait nearly three years to be paid for his years in the Mediterranean, collecting the sum of £67.4.10 in Plymouth on 19 November 1746, representing pay dating back to January 1743. (*Namur's* pay book) ADM 38/385. Calculating the period covered by this payment is complicated by the fact that for part of the period he was still a midshipman, paid at the rate of an able seaman. Burnett was transferred into the *Chatham* in January 1741 as a midshipman, and served in that capacity until he was commissioned into the *Cambridge* as a lieutenant on 20 August of 1744. Burnett left the *Worcester* on 7 February 1746. The 171 days he had served as a lieutenant at 4s a day earned him £34 4s, the remaining £33 representing two years at the rate of an able seaman, taking him back to January 1743. More research is needed to establish the earlier payment which would have been recorded in the pay books for the *Chatham* for 1741 and 1742.

⁶⁶³ ADM 1/2011 Captains' Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 5, 28 Nov 1760.

⁶⁶⁴ ADM 1/2248 Captains' Letters O 1771-7 **Ourry** 27 Jan 1772.

⁶⁶⁵ ADM 1/2295 Captains' Letters O 1758 **Peyton** 18 Feb. 1758; ADM 1/2112 Captains' Letters M 1760 **Man** 19 August 1760; ADM 1/2661 Captains' Letters W 1756 **Wallis** 3 April 1756.

wages since 1755, and could not take up their offered leave through shame at their lack of clothes.⁶⁶⁶

When **Thomas Burnett** returned to England in 1763 he still had the welfare of his foundered *Marlborough* crew to settle. Because the circumstances were not those of a usual paying off after a commission, the officers and men had to make their own way to the pay office in Broad Street. Burnett wrote to warn the Admiralty that the men were leaving the next day to walk the 75 miles to London.⁶⁶⁷

Robert Man was reprimanded by the Admiralty for not having returned his pay books to the Navy board in time to get his men's wages paid, and a year later it emerged that the bulky pay books had been transported from Bristol to London by wagon (taking ten or twelve days), not by express post, which explained the delay. On the second occasion his ship's company refused their pay altogether. Being owed more than a year's wages they refused the six month's wages which the Commissioner brought out to the *Milford* for them and refused to put to sea 'unless they are paid agreeable to the Act of Parliament.'⁶⁶⁸ On such occasions crews were voicing the discontent which crystallised at Spithead in 1797.⁶⁶⁹

Pritchard's study of the French navy at this time reveal the fact unknown to the Admiralty, that the financial crisis left all staff, not just the sailors, unpaid. Although the intention had been to pay sailors in advance for their service, the payments never materialised. Most ships were unmanned as a result of the refusal of sailors of all ranks to be drawn into the navy.⁶⁷⁰

3 The retention of 'followings' of young gentlemen and of crew members

3.1 'Followings' of young gentlemen and servants

When **Thomas Burnett** was transferred from the 3rd rate *Cambridge* to the 3rd rate *Bedford* he wrote to the Admiralty giving the names of his 'following'. The most interesting name

⁶⁶⁶ ADM 1/2471 Captains' Letters S 1757 **Schomberg** 26 Jan 1757.

⁶⁶⁷ ADM 1/1493 Captains' Letters B 1762-3 **Burnett** 7 March 1763.

⁶⁶⁸ ADM 1/2113 Captains' Letters M 1760 **Man** 12 August 1761.

⁶⁶⁹ ADM 1/2248 Captains' Letters 1771-87 **Ourry** 27 Jan 1772; ADM 1/2298 Captains' Letters P 1761 **Penny** 2 Dec. 1761.

⁶⁷⁰ Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy* 85-8.

from the Burnett family's point of view is that of 'John Burnett – my son', discussed in Chapter 1. Also with John Burnett was John Wales, the son of Sir Christopher Wales. There were also four 'young gentlemen particularly recommended to my care': Daniel Messervy, Frederick Lepentiere, John Terry (who had been recommended by Captain Tyrell) and Charles Hunter. In addition to the young gentlemen Burnett asked for his personal servants: John Munro, clerk; Thomas Whitchurch; William Chald, steward; William Pompey, man; Josiah Willon, coxswain; Devonport Hall, an able seaman.⁶⁷¹ These men were transferred with Burnett first into *Bedford* then into the 4th rate *Rochester*. Of these young men, only Charles Hunter was later commissioned but he appears to have progressed no further in the service.⁶⁷² Either Burnett had been asked to take in men of little potential, or this is evidence of Burnett's lack of influence on their behalf. Of the sixteen young gentlemen who came into *Cambridge* in May 1757 as 'captain's servants', eight left in June, before the fleet sailed to the West Indies.⁶⁷³ A similar pattern emerges from the muster books of the *Boyne* in 1770. Burnett was accompanied on board by twenty one young men as his 'servants', but thirteen of these men had left the ship again within two months. It appears that there was a 'cooling off' period before a final commitment was made.⁶⁷⁴ Other captains took their 'young gentlemen' with them, and most had personal servants who stayed with them through successive commissions.⁶⁷⁵ It is also possible that some of the 'young gentlemen' were in fact only a pretext for the allowance of £12 paid to the captain, and were not physically there at all.⁶⁷⁶ **Thomas Harrison** wrote to say, 'Yesterday on receipt of my servants wages .. I found by mistake of my clerk I have been borne one servant short all the time I have commanded that ship ..'.⁶⁷⁷ In 1759 when he returned from Germany in the 6th rate *Boreas* **Robert Boyle Walsingham** brought back six musicians who were held in the *Royal Anne* at Spithead until the refit was completed. His following also included six young gentlemen as well as a 'taylor', a cook, two servants and a steward.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷¹ ADM 1/1490 Captains' Letters B 1759 **Burnett** 15 December 1759.

⁶⁷² Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers* 235.

⁶⁷³ ADM 36/5258 Muster book *Cambridge* 1757.

⁶⁷⁴ ADM 36/8002 Muster book *Boyne* 1770.

⁶⁷⁵ ADM 1/ 2111 Captains' Letters M 1759 **Martin** 12-24 April 1759; ADM 1/2295 Captains' Letters P 1758 **Phillips** 25 November 1758. **Paul Henry Ourry** had a large family, and the **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** took three of the boys on board with him as 'young gentlemen', until 1762 when Ourry asked for an Admiralty order to discharge them, so that they could go to school. ADM 1/2667 Captains' Letters W 1762 **Walsingham** 9 October 1762.

⁶⁷⁶ Rodger, *Wooden World* 320.

⁶⁷⁷ ADM 1/1899 Captains' Letters H 1766-9 **Harrison** 30 September 1766.

⁶⁷⁸ ADM 1/2666 Captains' Letters W 1761 **Walsingham** 24 April 1761.

Joseph Hatton was identified by **Robert Craig** amongst the pressed men sent to him. He was the son of a timber merchant, and had been well educated, but was taken into the Navy as a landsman, i.e. at the lowest level of usefulness on board. Craig recognised his worth and asked to have Hatton discharged from service into the *Solebay*, as he was in great need of a clerk.⁶⁷⁹ The promotion from before the mast to captain's clerk would have transformed Hatton's life, and might have given him the chance to become a purser in due course.

3.2 Followings of crew members

Rodger suggests that men joined particular ships for specific commissions, and did not join the navy.⁶⁸⁰ This may have been true of volunteers in peace time, but the material gathered for this thesis suggests that once war had been declared the Admiralty considered the men to be at their disposal, and there was no question of choice about leaving the navy. As detailed below, many captains were disappointed at not being able to take with them into new commissions the men who had volunteered to serve with them, who were instead 'turned over' into holding ships until a new ship was ready to be manned.

Having raised and trained a crew, all captains would have preferred to keep at least a nucleus of trustworthy men in a new commission. Rodger makes the point that securing one's old followers was the main support of an officer's credit.⁶⁸¹ It is remarkable that so few of Thomas Burnett's peers were permitted to do that, and perhaps it is a measure of their youth and lack of political standing that so many of their requests were rejected. One fortunate captain was **Archibald Kennedy**, and he wrote with manifest surprise and delight to acknowledge his commission into the French built *Blonde*, to which he brought his complement of men and officers.⁶⁸²

It must have seemed unfair that other captains with whom men volunteered to serve could not keep them. **Henry John Phillips** wrote to say that some of the men who had assisted *Fowey* to Sheerness had volunteered to serve with him rather than continue to serve in the yacht *Princess Royal*. Phillips suggested that it would be better to have volunteers than all impress

⁶⁷⁹ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757 **Craig** 10 January 1757.

⁶⁸⁰ Rodger, *Wooden World* 113.

⁶⁸¹ Rodger, *Wooden World* 121.

⁶⁸² ADM 1/2011 Captains' Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 10 October 1760.

men, 'and the having all imprest men many times is inconvenient to the service.' He was informed that 'these men are already disposed of'.⁶⁸³ It was however accepted that some petty officers would accompany their captain, and a request for such a transfer implied that merit was being rewarded by patronage.⁶⁸⁴ Despite their arguments, the requests of **Affleck**, **Ourry**, **Phillips** and **Wilkinson** for some of the seamen from their previous commissions were all refused.⁶⁸⁵ The reply was always: 'Let him know that men are so much wanted in the service that the Lords will not consent'.⁶⁸⁶ This evidence from Burnett's peers is the opposite of that given by Baugh for the 1740's, and perhaps indicates the extremity of the Admiralty in the later crisis.⁶⁸⁷ Even **Thomas Harrison** was not indulged when he asked for his previous purser to accompany him into a new commission.⁶⁸⁸ Further evidence comes from the crew of Augustus Hervey's *Monmouth*, who were ordered to help another ship, and responded with a petition in which they objected to being used as 'slaves'.⁶⁸⁹

Promoted into the rebuilt 3rd rate *Prince George*, **Joseph Peyton** asked the Admiralty if he could take five men who were 'desirous of going with him'. He made the point that it might be an inducement to men serving in small sloops to stay and not desert if they thought there was some chance of being moved into a more comfortable ship. The Admiralty offered to exchange the men when the two ships were next together in port. Peyton returned to the charge when the *Prince George* was ready for sea, this time firing a big gun:

Lord Anson has been pleased to favour me so far as to assure me that the five men in the margin which I wrote for before, at his Lordships desire to the Board should be discharged from *Savage* when the former was ready for sea. I mention these men again as the *Savage* is now fit for sea and should be ordered away the opportunity may be lost.

⁶⁸³ ADM 1/2294 Captains' Letters P 1757 **Phillips** 3 March 1757.

⁶⁸⁴ ADM 1/2009 Captains' Letters K 1751-6 **Kempenfelt** 27 August 1756; ADM 1/2046 Captains' Letters L 1757 **Lindsay** 9 May 1757; ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** December 1758; ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 6 August, 8 September 1761; ADM 1/1896 Captains' Letters H 1761 **Hotham** 17/22 May 1761; ADM 1/2012 Captains' Letters K 1763-70 **Kennedy** 12 April 1763; ADM 1/1901 Captains' Letters H 1771-3 **Hotham** 17 January 1771; ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 9 August 1779.

⁶⁸⁵ ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 10 May 1759; ADM 1/2662 Captains' Letters W 1757 **Wilkinson** 1 April 1757; ADM 1/2295 Captains' Letters P 1758 **Phillips** 25 November 1758; ADM 1/2247 Captains' Letters O 1763-70 **Ourry** 26 October 1770.

⁶⁸⁶ ADM 1/2662 Captains' Letters W 1757 **Wilkinson** 27 June 1757.

⁶⁸⁷ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 193-6.

⁶⁸⁸ ADM 1/1893 Captains' Letters H 1759 **Harrison** 7 April 1758.

⁶⁸⁹ Clayton, *Tars* 86.

But their Lordships were not moved: ‘Let him know the Lords will order them to be discharged when the *Savage* and *Prince George* meet’.⁶⁹⁰ The chances of this happening were small as *Prince George* was bound for the Mediterranean, but the five men must have considered themselves fortunate when they heard of her destruction by fire at sea a few weeks later.⁶⁹¹

As a senior officer whose brother Gilbert Elliot had been one of ‘their Lordships’, **John Elliot** was successful in taking ten volunteers with him. He commented to the Admiralty that the men were unlikely to desert as they had considerable sums due for wages, and ‘the last named man served several years under my command on which considerations I think there is little or no dangers of losing any of them.’⁶⁹²

Many captains were concerned about young men for whom they felt responsibility. **Joseph Peyton** asked that the mate and two midshipmen he had lent to the *Marlborough* should be returned to the 1st rate *Prince*, as their pay was better even if there were vacancies on board the lower-rated ship.⁶⁹³

4 Health

Typical of the problems revealed by captains’ letters is one written by **Alexander Schomberg**, who was asked to explain why the complement of his 5th rate *Diana* was 44 men short of the nominal 210. He had taken part in the siege of Louisburg during which seven men were killed; twenty nine men were killed by ‘malignant fever’; a further eight men had deserted on their return to England, despite their being ‘old standers’. These figures indicate the relative wastage from the navy: 21 per cent, of which 3 per cent were killed, 14 per cent died of fever and 4 per cent deserted.⁶⁹⁴ Death and desertion will be dealt with below in Section 5, but disease was by far the most lethal force at sea. The Admiralty expected seamen who were ill to be cured and returned to their stations, and Section 5.1 below lists the conditions which were accepted as incompatible with active service. Mackay gives the total

⁶⁹⁰ ADM 1/2294 Captains’ Letters P 1757 **Peyton** 6/16 December 1757.

⁶⁹¹ *London Gazette* Issue No 9790 9 May 1758.

⁶⁹² ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 26 July 1779.

⁶⁹³ ADM 1/2298 Captains’ Letters P 1761 **Peyton** 26 May - 8 October 1761; ADM 1/2012 Captains’ Letters K 1763-70 **Kempenfelt** 21 October – 2 November 1770.

⁶⁹⁴ ADM 1/2473 Captains’ Letters S 1759 **Schomberg** 12 January 1759.

number raised for the Seven Years' War as 185,000, of which only 1,512 (0.8 per cent) seamen were killed in action, 133,708 (72 per cent) lost through death or desertion. An analysis which does not offer a break down between 'death and desertion' while it occupies 72 per cent of the total is not helpful.⁶⁹⁵ A similar return in the American War from 1774-80 showed 175,990 enlistments of which 1,243 (0.1 per cent) were killed in action, 18,545 (10.5 per cent) died of disease and 42,069 (23.9 percent) deserted.⁶⁹⁶

The naval physician Dr James Lind was concerned to preserve seamen 'from such distempers as prove much more fatal .. than all other calamities incident to them at sea.'⁶⁹⁷ Once the men had been recruited they were so valuable they had to be kept healthy. Although the common perception is that being at sea was dangerous, at times simply being in the confinement of pressing tenders or transports spread malignant fevers.⁶⁹⁸ Not until there was an understanding of the causes of disease could such illnesses be alleviated. Surgical facilities in ships of this period were limited, but the surgeons understood the basis of their treatment. The Admiralty and its subsidiary, the Sick and Hurt Board, were prepared to try all of the many schemes proposed by the contemporary medical world as cures for disease.⁶⁹⁹ The need for cleanliness, proper clothing and food was understood and accepted.⁷⁰⁰ All men were issued with two hammocks so that they would always have a dry one to sleep in, while the one which had been washed was drying.⁷⁰¹ Decks were dried after they had been cleaned. In addition to scrubbing, the 'tween decks were whitewashed.⁷⁰² To remove the damp conditions resulting from sailing in adverse weather, the Admiralty recommended 'Doctor

⁶⁹⁵ Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 162.

⁶⁹⁶ Michael Duffy, 'The Foundations of British Naval Power' in Michael Duffy ed. *The Military Revolution and the State 1500-1800* (Exeter University Press, 1980) 72

⁶⁹⁷ Lloyd, ed. *The Health of Seamen* 27.

⁶⁹⁸ Le Fevre, Peter and Harding, R., eds. *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century* (Chatham Publishing 2000) 123.

⁶⁹⁹ Brian Vale, 'The Conquest of Scurvy in the Royal Navy 1793-1800: A challenge to current orthodoxy', *The Mariner's Mirror* 94 (SNR2008) 160-175.

⁷⁰⁰ Dr Blane's regime of cleanliness, ventilation and fresh fruit and vegetables made Rodney's fleet 'the healthiest body of British subjects in the world', in contrast with the situation taken for granted in French ships. Rodger, *Command of the Ocean* 399; in contrast the French fleet was ravaged by disease: typhus in 1748 and 1757-8 and bacillary dysentery in 1779-80. Lambert, *War at Sea in the Age of Sail* 113.

⁷⁰¹ Contrast the description of French ships as 'badly ventilated, filthy, humid and congested' in Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy* 83.

⁷⁰² A midshipman who spoke French noted the approving comments on the cleanliness and good order of his ship by the officers who had been made prisoners on board. Warner reports Dr Thomas Trotter's disapproval of the shockingly dirty state of captured French ships. The same book gave an eyewitness account of a ship-of-the-line scrubbing her sides after an action, until her paintwork looked as clean as if nothing had happened. Oliver Warner, *The Glorious First of June* (Macmillan 1961) 74, 62, 84; ADM 1/2673 Captains' Letters W 1778 **Wheelock** 1 April 1778.

Hales's proposals for airing ships between decks' and these ventilators were fitted in several vessels.⁷⁰³ Improved ventilation also served to reduce the noisome odours from the ballast, which, it was believed, were somehow connected with disease, odours being blamed for ill-health.⁷⁰⁴ The belief in 'bad smells' led to a variety of methods being used to fumigate vessels. One surgeon used a mixture of tobacco, sulphur and vinegar to prevent the tobacco from being embezzled by the men.⁷⁰⁵

Once a vessel had been at sea for a few weeks, away from infections on land and with regular food, the health of the crew was likely to improve. If impressed additions to the crew brought on board infectious fevers, however, the crowded conditions on board could leave the whole crew unable to work. Middleton identifies the conditions on board the press tenders as responsible for some of the wastage: between 1755 and 1757 13,000 men were discharged sick, when only 143 died in combat in that period.⁷⁰⁶ Quite apart from the dangers of encounters with the French, if the vessel was too long away from fresh supplies there was the probability of scurvy. Living at sea could weaken a man's constitution: the constant damp conditions in some vessels brought on arthritis and encouraged tuberculosis; hard labour aloft and below could lead to hernias; untreated infections could become ulcerated.⁷⁰⁷ All of these conditions rendered a man 'unfit for his Majesty's service'. Sometimes when men had to be discharged they were simply 'worn out'. The faithful Joshua Sayer, **Thomas Burnett's** lieutenant in *Marlborough* who rejoined him in *Boyne*, had to be invalided out when he lost his sight.⁷⁰⁸

Medical knowledge was such that it was impossible to diagnose the cause of many complaints. **Samuel Spencer's** professional career had ended in 1757, and he could not be more specific than to say 'the very infirm state of my health ever since I was superceded in the *Magnanime* has prevented the ambition I always had in the offer of my service in defence of my King and Country ...'.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰³ ADM 1/1441 Captains' Letters A 1749-58 **Affleck** October 1756; ADM 1/2012 Captains' Letters K 1763-70 **Kennedy** 8 May 1764.

⁷⁰⁴ ADM 1/2110 Captains' Letters M 1758 **M'Cleverty** 13 April 1758; ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 18 August 1760; ADM 1/1608 Captains' Letters C 1761 **Clements** 12 July 1761.

⁷⁰⁵ ADM 1/1762 Captains' Letters E 1780 **Elliot** 19 August 1780.

⁷⁰⁶ Middleton, 'Naval Administration' in Black and Woodfine, *British Navy* 119.

⁷⁰⁷ Faking down anchor cables within the cable tier was notorious as causing hernias.

⁷⁰⁸ ADM 1/1496 Captains' Letters 1773 **Burnett** 26 October 1773

⁷⁰⁹ ADM 1/2473 Captains' Letters S 1759 **Spencer** 4 July 1759.

Mental health was as little understood in the eighteenth century as physical. There were no attempts by naval surgeons to treat the condition, and once the individual had been discharged from the service no further information is available. **Alexander Schomberg** reported evidence of humanity towards mental instability in a court martial decision: although the man charged was guilty of his crimes, he had been ‘distempered in his mind’ over a period of time and was to be acquitted of the crime.⁷¹⁰

Gout was something doctors knew how to recognise, if not to cure. In 1764 **Paul Henry Ourry**, elected a member of Parliament in his late brother’s seat, was so ill with gout that he could not walk. He asked for leave ‘the moment I can bear the motion of a carriage I may be permitted to go to Bath .. for I am in a most miserable condition..’. Ourry was given a month’s leave, and when he wrote again from Bath to say that he was still incapacitated, was given a further month’s leave.⁷¹¹ **Thomas Burnett**, writing from his home in Longford, had to ask for an extension of his leave by a week due to gout.⁷¹² **John Lindsay** asked for leave as he was ‘under the care of doctors, but would recover if given time in Bath.’⁷¹³

4.1 ‘Cloathing’

The clothes of the men who came on board from press tenders were almost universally dirty and the cause of disease on board. The philanthropist Jonas Hanway became aware of this, and founded the Marine Society in 1756, which provided appropriate clothing to poor boys and young men who joined the navy.⁷¹⁴ **Samuel Wallis** spoke on behalf of the pressed men raised for his 3rd rate *Dublin*. They had been turned over from tenders:

having not any cloths <sic> except what is on their backs and many without bedding – yet have had a great quantity of slops charged against them in the tenders they came in which they say were lost. I have been under the necessity of supplying them with more to keep them from the inclemency of the weather and to prevent illness.⁷¹⁵

⁷¹⁰ ADM 1/2475 Captains’ Letters S 1761 **Schomberg** 28 January 1761.

⁷¹¹ ADM 1/2247 Captains’ Letters O 1763-70 **Ourry** 27 November 1763/15 February 1764.

⁷¹² ADM 1/1495 Captains’ Letters B 1771 **Burnett** 28 April 1771.

⁷¹³ ADM 1/2055 Captains’ Letters L 1779 **Lindsay** 20 March 1779.

⁷¹⁴ Peter Kemp, *The British Sailor: a social history of the lower deck* (London 1970) 129-131.

⁷¹⁵ ADM 1/2674 Captains’ Letters W 1779 **Wallis** 28 November 1779.

Thomas Burnett was sent landsmen to make up the complement in *Cambridge*, and every one of them required clothes from the purser. The purser was responsible for maintaining a supply of ‘slops’ for the men’s use, as no work clothes were issued to them.⁷¹⁶ The value of anything they bought from him was taken out of their wages, and some pursers made a great deal of money from this source by buying cheaply and selling dear. It is impossible to tell whether these incidents were the results of pursers’ desire for profits or not. Marines were different. They were issued with two sets of uniform, and **John Lindsay** was reprovved for not having ordered in time when he wrote on the Marines’ behalf to order more as ‘there are none in store’.⁷¹⁷ **Thomas Burnett**’s log for the newly commissioned *Boyne* reveals that the people were employed ‘making boxes’. These might well have been chests to hold the clothes issued to the men pressed into service: they also needed boxes to sit on.⁷¹⁸

4.2 Food and Scurvy

Vessels destined for months at sea were stored with provisions which could be preserved and stored in casks or barrels.⁷¹⁹ The Victualling Board provided every vessel with stores for 3, 4 or 6 months appropriate to the complement, to be consumed as below, and the Regulations laid down alternatives which might be substituted.⁷²⁰ On the appropriate day the logs of the ships record the opening of every cask, identified by its unique number, and the tally of pieces inside. On occasion the cask contained one or perhaps two pieces less than it should have done. The clerks in the Navy Board, who checked the logs, would have followed up a victualling office which persistently supplied deficient casks.

This diet provided nearly twice as many calories per day than active men on shore would need, and ensured that in contemporary pictures and cartoons sailors are depicted as plump, jolly and well fed, in contrast to the emaciated soldier.⁷²¹ A large proportion of the surplus

⁷¹⁶ ADM 36/5257 *Cambridge* muster book 1757

⁷¹⁷ ADM 1/2049 Captains’ Letters L 1760 **Lindsay** 15 July 1760; ADM 1/2052 Captains’ Letters 1766-9 **Lindsay** 28 August 1769. Perhaps this interest on behalf of the marines was rewarded when Lindsay was made a Colonel of the Royal Marines in 1781.

⁷¹⁸ ADM 51/129 Captain’s Log *Boyne* 30 December 1770.

⁷¹⁹ Roger Morriss, ‘The Supply of Casks and Staves to the Royal Navy, 1770-1815’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 93, (SNR 2007) 43-50.

⁷²⁰ Rodger, *Wooden World* 83; Gradish, *Manning* 141; Lavery, *Shipboard Organisation* 18.

⁷²¹ The expression ‘a square meal’ comes from the square wooden trencher on which the food was served. An individual who piled his serving so high that it threatened to overflow the fiddle or rim around the trencher was said to be ‘on the fiddle’.

calories would have been consumed by the body in keeping warm when there was no external source of warmth and clothing was wet.⁷²² The only problem with this diet was that after some weeks at sea scurvy was likely to appear amongst the men. Despite the fact that Dr Lind had conducted controlled experiments with diet as early as 1747, six years later he believed that cold and damp living conditions were to blame for scurvy.⁷²³ Despite this lack of understanding of the root cause, Rodger suggests that the Georgian navy ‘was beginning to ... understand scurvy as a dietary disease’.⁷²⁴ Although the relation between diet and health was not understood, basic diet could be and was augmented whenever possible. Peter Kemp remarked that it never occurred to the Admiralty to ask the East India Company why their ships were never affected despite the voyage their vessels routinely completed: they carried quantities of lemons, but medical experts were slow to recognise and advise the efficacy of lemons against scurvy. In their competitive search for enlightenment, researchers distracted themselves from the fruits of the scientific method where the experiment was not concluded until the result had been evaluated.⁷²⁵

	Bread	Beer	Beef	Pork	Pease	Oatmeal	Butter	Cheese
Sunday	1 lb	1 gal.	-	1 lb	½ pt	-	-	-
Monday	1 lb	1 gal.	-	-	-	1 pt	2 oz	4 oz
Tuesday	1 lb	1 gal.	2 lb	-	-	-	-	-
Wednesday	1 lb	1 gal.	-	-	½ pt	1pt	2 oz	4 oz
Thursday	1 lb	1 gal.	-	1 lb	½ pt	-	-	-
Friday	1 lb	1 gal.	-	-	½ pt	1 pt	2 oz	4 oz
Saturday	1 lb	1 gal.	2 lb	-	-	-	-	-

Table 8: Weekly allowance of food on board

There was, however, suspicion that scurvy was caused by prolonged use of salted beef or pork in the sailors’ diet, and it was believed that supplies of fresh meat and vegetables were efficacious.⁷²⁶ As early as 1756 **Thomas Burnett** and his crew in the sloop *Happy* were

⁷²² R.E. Johnson, ‘Doctors Abroad’ in J. Watt, E.J. Freeman, W.F. Bynum eds *Starving Sailors: the influence of nutrition upon naval and maritime history* (NMM 1981) 105

⁷²³ Christopher Lloyd, ‘Cook and Scurvy’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 65 (SNR 1979) 23; Lloyd, *Health of Seamen* 12-14.

⁷²⁴ Rodger, *Wooden World* 82.

⁷²⁵ Kemp, *British Sailor* 94; Janet Macdonald, ‘Two years off Provence’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 92 (SNR 2006) 448; Brian Vale, ‘The Conquest of Scurvy in the Royal Navy 1793-1800’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 94 (SNR 2008) 160-175.

⁷²⁶ ADM 1/2295 Captains’ Letters P 1758 **Penny** 25 January 1758; ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 10/16 March 1764; ADM 1/2669 Captains’ Letters W 11766-7 **Wallis** 8 July 1766; ADM 1/2669

enjoying the fresh meat supplied to them by orders of Captain Howe, no illness at all being reported for months at a time amongst his men.⁷²⁷ Pursers were instructed to ensure that fresh meat was accompanied by ‘roots and greens.’⁷²⁸ Dull records that in addition to cattle and sheep for slaughter crews on blockade were provided with cabbages, turnips, carrots, onions, potatoes, apples and even lemons and oranges.⁷²⁹

At the end of his surveying expedition off Pensacola **John Lindsay** had to return via Jamaica to buy the fresh provisions and vegetables which had been unobtainable locally, and without which his ship’s company were ‘much afflicted with the scurvy’. He mentioned to the Admiralty that serving ‘portable soup’ had proved efficacious in keeping scurvy at bay.⁷³⁰ This use of ‘portable soup’ records the use of this ten-year old invention. Kemp gives a list of ingredients without realising that ‘offal’ in this period meant leg and shin of beef, which provided the gelatinous connective tissue which set the portable soup like jelly.⁷³¹ There is evidence of a lack of understanding as late as 1779 when **John Elliot** (who believed in fresh provisions) asked for a supply of essence of malt, currently being evaluated as a cure for scurvy, to be provided by the Victualling Board before he returned to the Mediterranean.⁷³² *Dolphin*’s second circumnavigation, under **Samuel Wallis**, was completed without a single death from scurvy, thanks to a supply of lemons from Madeira on their way south, short passages in the Pacific allowing frequent resupply of vegetables, and the ten tons of limes he took on board in Batavia for the return journey.⁷³³ The little book in which he meticulously noted the 308 instances of illness on board records the six deaths which occurred: one man fell overboard and was drowned; one was ‘hurt’; two died of the flux; one died of bilious vomiting and one of ‘cold’. Out of a complement of 160 men and a two year circumnavigation, this is a real tribute to the care taken by Wallis and his surgeon.⁷³⁴

Captains’ Letters W 1766-7 **Wilkinson** 25 February 1767; ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 9 July 1777.

⁷²⁷ ADM 1/1891 Captains’ Letters H 1756 Howe’s letters (undated).

⁷²⁸ Lavery, *Shipboard Organisation* 47.

⁷²⁹ Dull, *The French Navy* 136.

⁷³⁰ ADM 1/2051 Captains’ Letters L 1763-5 **Lindsay** 30 January 1765.

⁷³¹ Gradish, *Manning* 159; Kemp, *British Sailors* 120; Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson’s Navy* 154.

⁷³² ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 14 August 1779.

⁷³³ The first one under John Byron 1764-6; *Dolphin* 24 gun 6th rate O 10.6.1748 K 3.8.1748 L 1.5.1751 Lyon 87; Randolph Cock, ‘Precursors of Cook: The Voyages of the *Dolphin* 1764-8’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 85 (SNR 1999) 44.

⁷³⁴ The deaths occurred after the visit to Batavia. This document was important enough for Wallis to send it to the Admiralty, four years after his return, under cover of a document signed under oath, and on stamped paper. ADM 1/2671 Captains’ Letters W 1771-2 **Wallis** 18 October 1772. It seems a pity that despite having been

The men were not alone in suffering from scurvy. **Christopher Bassett** was not the only captain to have to leave his lieutenant on shore ‘with a scorbutic complaint.’⁷³⁵ Captains were not fed by the ships’ cooks but from their own stores, for as long as they lasted, prepared by their own staff. One perquisite of post captain status was that it conferred the right to a barrel of tongues, provided by the Victualling Board.⁷³⁶

The French equivalent of the Victualling Board was a system of private enterprise which provided rations and the cooks to prepare them on board. The provision of high quality biscuits, wine, cheese, dried legumes, salt fish and fresh and salt meat was stipulated, but without financial resources could not be provided.⁷³⁷

4.3 Beer

Alcohol, in the form of beer or its equivalents, made the largest contribution to the energy requirements of the eighteenth century sailor.⁷³⁸ Beer was available without rationing on board, not just to the ‘people’ but also to their women in port. Water was needed to cook with but was never drunk as it was impossible to keep sweet in casks, although it was used to ‘water down’ the rum issued in the West Indies where beer was not available.⁷³⁹ The provision of vast quantities of beer challenged the Victualling Board, and there were occasions on which ships had to return to port for re-supply when other stores were more than adequate.⁷⁴⁰ During the summer of 1759 the Plymouth brewers were castigated for producing beer which did not keep, causing real concern to Hawke, who was attempting to keep the blockading fleet at sea for as long as possible.⁷⁴¹

given Wallis’ journal before he left, Cook did not follow his example and take lemons. Lloyd, ‘Cook and Scurvy’ 24.

⁷³⁵ ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters B 1757 **Bassett** September 1757; ADM 1/1785 Captains’ letters F 1757 **Fortescue** 10 October 1757; ADM 1/1896 Captains’ Letters H 1761 **Hotham** 13 October 1761.

⁷³⁶ NMM CLE 3/6 **Clements** to Victualling Board October 1769, 7 March 1771.

⁷³⁷ Pritchard, *Louis XV’s Navy* 178-81.

⁷³⁸ Sir James Watt, ‘Nutritional disorders in 18th century British circumnavigations’ in Watt, Freeman and Bynum eds. *Starving Sailors* 68.

⁷³⁹ Beer and water were not the only items stored in casks: bread or biscuit could be bagged, but every other element of diet was either transported in ‘dry cask’ or ‘tight cask’. Morriss, ‘Casks and Staves’ 43.

⁷⁴⁰ ADM 1/2-009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 29 November 1754; ADM 1/2662 Captains’ Letters W 1757 **Wheelock** 5 February 1757; ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Penny** 16 May 1759; ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 18 August 1760.

⁷⁴¹ Gradish, *Manning* 144.

Casks were stowed wherever possible, and instructions were given that empty casks were not to be ‘shaked’ or collapsed, but returned complete to save the coopers’ time.⁷⁴² If beer was not available spirits or wine were considered appropriate alternatives, and **John Lindsay**, in the *Medway* in the *Victory* at Black Stakes, was supplied with one month’s spirits instead of beer when it could not be supplied from Sheerness.⁷⁴³

4.4 Drunkenness

Drunkenness was not an acceptable state on board a sailing ship. **Michael Clements** refuted angrily an allegation made against him for allowing a marine to be ‘intoxicated with liquor’.⁷⁴⁴ **John Elliot** asked to have a carpenter replaced, who had been ‘drunk ever since Sunday last and will do no duty for good nor bad words.’⁷⁴⁵ **William Fortescue** had to leave his lieutenant James Wilkie in Bristol, commenting that he was: ‘ill of a fever .. which may be true, but .. he is a person so addicted to drunkenness that there is no dependence to be had on him, which I have passed by for some time in hope of amendment in his behaviour but as I find there is no prospect of it I hope their Lordships will be pleased to appoint another 3rd lieutenant in his room.’⁷⁴⁶ **Thomas Harrison** ascribed to alcohol the loss of one of his men, drowned alongside ‘although all possible means were used to save him it was without effect, the man being a little in liquor.’⁷⁴⁷ It seems that being drunk was not the normal state of affairs at sea, and although he was writing of the end rather than the middle of the century, Dr Gilbert Blane was certain that naval officers ‘were persuaded of the baneful tendency’ of intemperance.⁷⁴⁸

Blane and subsequent commentators have interpreted the daily issue of alcohol as the cause of lunacy and accidents on board.⁷⁴⁹ On the other hand, **Thomas Burnett**’s experience in *Cambridge* and *Boyne* was that drunkenness only became a problem when they reached the

⁷⁴² ADM 1/1491 Captains’ Letters B 1760 **Burnett** 4 January 1760.

⁷⁴³ ADM 1/2054 Captains’ Letters L 1776-8 **Lindsay** 28 April 1778.

⁷⁴⁴ ADM 1/1606 Captains’ Letters C 1757-8 **Clements** 6 November 1757.

⁷⁴⁵ ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 11 October 1770.

⁷⁴⁶ This was the end of Wilkie’s naval career, but his addiction to drink gave opportunities to Daniel Butler who was commissioned as 3rd lieutenant from the *Firedrake* and William Fleming who took his place in the *Firedrake*. ADM 1/1785 Captains’ Letters F 1757 **Fortescue** 10 October 1757.

⁷⁴⁷ ADM 1/1893 Captains’ Letters H 1758 **Harrison** 13 September 1758.

⁷⁴⁸ Lloyd, *Health of Seamen* 191.

⁷⁴⁹ Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson’s Navy* 152.

West Indies, where illicit alcohol could be bought freely.⁷⁵⁰ Blane observed the effects of alcohol when he was with Rodney in the West Indies, and perhaps the commentators have not taken location into account.

4.5 Fevers

‘Fever’ was a generic term used to describe any one of the diseases which could not be more specifically identified at that time. The West Indies was dreaded as a destination, as crews were decimated by what are now identified as yellow fever or malaria.⁷⁵¹ Unidentified ‘fevers’ were initiated in England too, and in 1753 **Thomas Knackston** was ‘supplied with Doctor James Fever Powder from the Commissioners of the Sick and Hurt Board.’⁷⁵²

In 1757 **Robert Man** spent months moving newly raised Highland troops down to Cork to join the transports. He was recruiting seamen from every port he entered, but his final report was bleak: he had brought in 126 supernumeraries of which 40 men, identified with fevers, were delivered direct to hospital ships. A further five had died on the journey from Scotland, and only 21 healthy seamen were delivered to the receiving ship, the rest being landsmen.⁷⁵³ The fact that the crew would catch fevers from infected soldiers was an ever present worry. **Archibald Kennedy** took soldiers to New York in 1773, and reported when he arrived there that many of his own people had been infected by the soldiers of the 58th Regiment with a malignant fever which spread rapidly. Kennedy kept his sailors on board but they were too ill to work and he was concerned for their safety. Soldiers packed together in transports seemed to be particularly vulnerable, and once an epidemic was established the infection could be communicated not just to the crew, but to the inhabitants of the port when the ship arrived at its destination. Burning the clothes and bedding of the affected men would have slowed down the spread of typhus, but it was impossible to isolate individuals given the crowded conditions on board.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵⁰ ADM 51/3798-9 Captain’s Log *Cambridge* 1757-9; ADM 51/129 Captain’s Log *Boyne* 1770-1

⁷⁵¹ ADM 1/2667 Captains’ Letters W 1762 **Walsingham** 24 April 1762.

⁷⁵² ADM 1/2009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 12 May 1753.

⁷⁵³ ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1757 **Man** 27 December 1757.

⁷⁵⁴ Mackay, *Hawke* 131; ADM 1/2661 Captains’ Letters W 1756 **Wheelock** 30 April 1756; ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1758 **Martin** 8 February 1758; ADM 1/2051 Captains’ Letters L 1763-5 **Lindsay** 16 September 1765; ADM 1/2012 Captains’ Letters K 1763-70 **Kennedy** 29 October 1776; ADM 1/2674 Captains’ Letters W 1779 **Walsingham** 10 October 1779.

Prevention as well as cure interested **John Wheelock**. He had talked to the Agent Victualler at Portsmouth who had a quantity of port wine in store, and asked for it for the use of *Modeste*, as he had witnessed in the West Indies the benefits when given to those stricken with dysentery.⁷⁵⁵

Brian Lavery points out that the provision of sanitary accommodation for all on board was ‘simple and effective, and considerably healthier than conditions in the growing industrial towns of the late eighteenth century.’⁷⁵⁶ Not since the Romans had servicemen had access to facilities which provided for such bodily cleanliness. Next to the heads were hung supplies of tow or sponges which could be cleansed in a bucket of seawater before re-use.⁷⁵⁷

5 Discharge, desertion and death

5.1 ‘Unfit for service’

There was little change in medical understanding or medical conditions over the century. At the outset of his career **John Wheelock** had to send in a return on six men from his sloop *Fly*. His surgeon and that of the *Princess Caroline* hospital ship had examined the men, who were all discharged. Out of a complement of 50 men, this is a discharge rate of worse than 10%. Given that the navy was supposed to give employment to active young men, it is surprising that three of these men were in their fifties.⁷⁵⁸

Name	Age	Disability
John Felmey	56	Rheumatism
James Sharp	19	Burned in right arm
John Reynolds	58	Consumption
Robert Douglas	50	Epilepsy
William Bolam	25	Epilepsy
James Ryner	39	Consumption

Table 9: Reasons for discharge in 1756

Twenty years later Wheelock sent in a second table with almost the same range of ages and disabilities. The table below is an extract from a table drawn up by **John Wheelock** to justify

⁷⁵⁵ ADM 1/2672 Captains’ Letters W 1776-7 **Wheelock** 2 May 1777.

⁷⁵⁶ Lavery, *Arming and Fitting* 201; Joe J. Simmons *Those Vulgar Tubes* (Chatham Publishing 1997) 57.

⁷⁵⁷ Roy and Lesley Adkins, *Jack Tar* (Abacus 2009) 142.

⁷⁵⁸ ADM 1/2661 Captains’ Letters W 1756 **Wheelock** 9 May 1756.

his discharging the men. The table also contained the names of the doctors and the ships from which the men had come.⁷⁵⁹

In these lists 87 per cent (13/15) are diagnosed with consumption and/or rheumatism, and similar surveys were reported by others.⁷⁶⁰ In 1778 **John Lindsay**, commissioning the *Victory*, was desperately short of the seamen he needed. He reported that he had received 185 men from *Antelope*, of whom eleven had been sent to hospital with ulcerated legs (a symptom of scurvy) and were not likely to recover. He had sent a further eleven to be surveyed but was confident that they would be ‘condemned as unserviceable’. He had only 163 effective men and needed 800.⁷⁶¹

Men's names	Reason for their unfitness	Age	Time on board Hospital ship (days)
William Yeates	Consumption	25	94
Thomas Mills	Scurvy and Rheumatism	57	73
John Hay	Rheumatism and consumption	46	73
Thomas Davis	Gravel and consumption	24	73
John Killan	Rheumatism and scurvy	53	67
Henry Potts	Consumption	50	67
Edward Thropsal	Rheumatism and fistula in ankle	32	62
Jonathan Backill	Rheumatism and gravel	45	57
Thomas Miller	Consumption	43	57
John Ansiola	Blind eye by a blow	28	50
Hugh Calligen	Rheumatism and consumption	42	48
Matthew Bonnington	Deep consumption	48	46
Edward Heaton	Rheumatism and scurvy	30	41
Lionel Trotter	Loss of use of his right leg and thigh by a fall from topsail yard	35	37
John Cass	Rheumatism and consumption	49	33

Table 10: Reasons for discharge in 1777

⁷⁵⁹ ADM 1/2672 Captains Letters W 1777 **Wheelock** 30 November 1777; Wheelock's table indicates that the 15% of ordinary seamen and landsmen who were over 25 years old were most vulnerable. Rodger, *Wooden World* 78.

⁷⁶⁰ ADM 1/2014 Captains' Letters K 1779 **Kempenfelt** 19 February 1779; ADM 1/2673 Captains' Letters W 1778 **Wheelock** 23 January 1778.

⁷⁶¹ ADM 1/2054 Captains' Letters L 1776-8 **Lindsay** 5 May 1778.

The Admiralty was always conscious of the fact that some officers, like their men, would do anything rather than go to the West Indies. When officers reported that they were ‘ill’ when their vessel was commissioned for the West Indies their claims were investigated.⁷⁶² A real case of illness was identified when **Robert Man** had to put his second lieutenant, Ezekiel Nash, on shore with a condition which might today be diagnosed as tuberculosis. He was ‘extremely ill with an asthma attended by spitting a great quantity of blood and has not been able to do his duty for some months. Doctor Hexham of Plymouth is of opinion that going to sea this winter may in all probability occasion his death.’ The Bristol doctor Archibald Drummond who visited Nash on shore confirmed a cough and slow fever.⁷⁶³ Nash survived this episode, but progressed no further in the navy.⁷⁶⁴

The Admiralty considered scurvy a disorder from which it might be expected the men would recover; incurable disease or disability were the only acceptable reasons for discharge.⁷⁶⁵ Bad eyesight (understood today to be another symptom of scurvy) was often quoted, and was always accepted as a reason for discharge.⁷⁶⁶

5.2 Discharge by petition

After three years of war a stream of requests for discharge was received from men who wished to leave the service legally, without deserting. Sorting out those who should not have been pressed and discharging them formed a large proportion of the administrative duties of senior officers. Petitions were the usual means of making the request formal, sometimes presented by a parent on behalf of a son, sometimes by a foreign embassy on behalf of a citizen. Occasionally the individual presented it on his own behalf, and **Edmund Affleck** encountered this in 1761 when he wrote to the Admiralty reporting that as soon as his

⁷⁶² ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1758 **Man** 29 February 1758.

⁷⁶³ ADM 1/2113-4 Captains’ Letters M 1760-1 **Man** 17 December 1760, 13 March 1761.

⁷⁶⁴ N.A.M. Rodger suggests that Ezekiel Nash brought the *Milford* back after **Man** and the first lieutenant were killed in the capture of *La Gloire*. *Wooden World* 295. In fact John Young, master of *Milford*, ‘took command, the second lieutenant being slightly wounded’. ADM 52/656 Master’s Log *Milford* 1762. Nash was commissioned 2 June 1760, died 16 April 1803. Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers* 328.

⁷⁶⁵ ADM 1/2672 Captains’ Letters W 1776-7 **Wheelock** 18 November 1777.

⁷⁶⁶ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 6 December 1760.

experienced crew realised that the ship was being victualled for foreign service they petitioned to be discharged from the navy.⁷⁶⁷

As the war came to an end every ship-of-the-line which returned to England was paid off and the men discharged. This put great pressure on the captains of vessels still in service, whose crews were anxious to be discharged. **William M'Cleverty**, who tried to get discharge orders for those men who had served most of the war, was told firmly that 'the release of those who want their discharge would retard the other ships, and that the Lords do not therefore think fit to comply with what is requested at present.'⁷⁶⁸

There always were some foreign nationals serving in the navy, but political pressure could be brought to bear on behalf of those who had been involuntarily pressed into service. **Thomas Burnett** described the plight of Andrew Evans, a Norwegian born in Christiana who was pressed out of an English ship in the Norway trade. He had served on board *Cambridge* since March 1756, and having heard on the ship's return to England that his parents were dead wanted to go home. In the same letter Burnett gave the case of an African-born sailor with an interesting past: 'Mathew Nestrum having quarrelled with the master of a Guinea vessel to which he belonged was by the request of the said master, taken onboard his Majesty's sloop *Antigua*, at Antigua, from which he deserted and entered on board his Majesty's ship *Cambridge* under my command on the 16 March 1758 and being born in Calma in Fincaland wants to go to his own country.' Burnett was instructed to send both men to Mr Seddon, the Admiralty solicitor, who would arrange their discharge.⁷⁶⁹

The Admiralty solicitor was involved in many cases which had political overtones. The Prussian plenipotentiary demanded the release of two men, but **John Elliot**, having interviewed the second, reported that he was not Prussian 'or ever to have been in Prussian territory'. Count Bothmer was involved in the demands for release of several Danes: Samuel Meyes who was said to be Danish but was in fact Dutch and had been brought up in England since he was four, and had served a regular apprenticeship; Ole Hendrickson had also been brought up in England, had served an apprenticeship and several years in his Majesty's

⁷⁶⁷ ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 28 February 1761; ADM 1/2672 Captains' Letters W 1776-7 **Wheelock** 7 December 1777.

⁷⁶⁸ ADM 1/2115 Captains' Letters M 1763 **M'Cleverty** 14 June 1763.

⁷⁶⁹ ADM 1/1490 Captains' Letters B 1759 **Burnett** 7 December 1759.

service; John Christian had volunteered and received a bounty, and was willing to continue in the service.⁷⁷⁰

A writ of *Habeas Corpus* was often used as a means of freeing men from impressed service. The broad stiff ribbons of paper, legal documents which could not be denied, were filed with the captains' letters. When **Robert Faulknor** received one 'on body of John Nightingale', Mr Seddon was asked to enquire into the grounds upon which the man was impressed.⁷⁷¹ **Henry John Phillips** received a visit from a man claiming to have a writ from Lord Mansfield the attorney general 'for me to appear before him with the body of the said Podick.' Phillips was indignant, as he claimed that John Podick had been in the service since before the war, and 'wants to claim the benefit of the act for the benefit of foreigners.' He asked for guidance as to how to treat the writ, but the Admiralty knew the law, and told Phillips that if he had been served with a writ he had to discharge the subject.⁷⁷²

Writing as Senior Officer at the Nore, **Richard Kempfenfelt** reported that he 'had the greatest trouble and difficulty imaginable (without using open violence)' in having seven Russians taken out of the ship. He only succeeded because he allowed one of them to go up to London to represent their case to their Ambassador.

They say they will be cut to pieces before they will serve .. they will only create disagreeable circumstances in whatever ship they are to serve being quite avers thereto and totally ignorant of the English language. ... I find they have eat no victuals since they have been on board nor would they take any up.⁷⁷³

5.3 Desertion

Some men who had been impressed were prepared to wait for legal assistance and eventual discharge. Others simply deserted as soon as they could, and a further number deserted when opportunity arose, even after years of service.⁷⁷⁴ Several captains found that resistance to the

⁷⁷⁰ ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 1/15 August 1777; ADM 1/2114 Captains' Letters M 1762 **M^cCleverty** 25 July 1762. It is interesting to see the speed and efficiency with which such a request was handled: four days from receipt of request to order for discharge.

⁷⁷¹ ADM 1/1788 Captains' Letters F 1762-3 **Faulknor** 25 October 1762.

⁷⁷² ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Phillips** 20 April 1759; ADM 1/2112 Captains' Letters M 1760 **M^cCleverty** 23 April 1760; ADM 1/2666 Captains' Letters W 1761 **Wheelock** 17 March 1761.

⁷⁷³ ADM 1/2014 Captains' Letters K 1777-81 **Kempfenfelt** 7 February 1779.

⁷⁷⁴ ADM 1/2111 Captains' Letters M 1759 **Man** 29 October 1759; ADM 1/2671 Captains' Letters W 1771-5 **Wallis** 13, 18 October 1771.

press on shore was allied to protection for deserters. **Taylor Penny** was informed that deserters had collected in a house on shore ‘at the sign of the Angel’, and sent an armed party to retrieve them. The hapless lieutenant was confronted by a gang of 60 men armed with blunderbusses, muskets, pistols and cutlasses, and one of his party was killed before they withdrew.⁷⁷⁵ **William M’Cleverty** gave evidence of the work of ‘crimps or what they call here buttock keepers’ who decoyed sailors by promising them ‘greater wages and advance money than is given by the King.’⁷⁷⁶ **Robert Man** also wrote of the higher wages offered by merchants which enticed sailors to desert rather than wait years to be paid.⁷⁷⁷

Men who had served several years were ‘old standers’ who could probably be trusted not to desert.⁷⁷⁸ **Joseph Peyton** was rueful about the desertion of five of his men, who had all previously been trusted on shore. He blamed their behaviour on the circumstances in which they lived on board: ‘This I have observed to be a general reason with them as they profess their willingness to the service but their being in such a situation constantly wet both on deck and below and no shelter or retreat of any kind or hopes of any they can’t hold against it.’⁷⁷⁹

A desertion from the 6th rate *Flamborough* while he was in Lisbon concerned **Archibald Kennedy**. He wrote in detail about the five marines and the carpenter’s mate who deserted during the night. When Kennedy met up with them in the street they were dead drunk. Although the Portuguese officials were prepared to take the men into custody, they were not released until he had promised not to punish them.⁷⁸⁰

Desertion from holding ships was common, and the offending captain responsible was always severely rebuked.⁷⁸¹ It was not until the men had been at least a day or two in the ship on whose roll they were listed that their distinguishing features were listed. Sheets on which these descriptions were entered were ordered by the quire, with all the other stationery, from the Commissioners of the Dockyard.⁷⁸² It took Thomas Burnett three days to examine each

⁷⁷⁵ ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Penny** 18 September 1759.

⁷⁷⁶ ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1758 **M’Cleverty** 8 July 1758.

⁷⁷⁷ ADM 1/2111 Captains’ Letters M 1759 **Man** 16 July 1759.

⁷⁷⁸ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 14 November 1760.

⁷⁷⁹ ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 **Peyton** 14 October 1756.

⁷⁸⁰ ADM 1/2010 Captains’ Letters K 1757-9 **Kennedy** 2 June/6 August 1759.

⁷⁸¹ ADM 1/2009 Captains’ Letters K 1751-6 **Knackston** 10 February 1756; ADM 1/2046 Captains’ Letters L 1757 **Lindsay** 21/23 July 1757; ADM 1/2109 Captains’ Letters M 1757 **Man** 27 December 1757.

⁷⁸² NMM CLE 3/3 **Clements** 31 October 1757.

of the 600 men on board *Cambridge*. These lists were not handed in to the Admiralty, they were only referred to if one of the men deserted, so that his description could be circulated.⁷⁸³ The detail ‘wears a wig’ is unexpected, but is repeated several times when descriptions are given.⁷⁸⁴ In the case of Lindsay’s nine men, as with other deserters, it is likely that the four Londoners would have been able to stay out of reach of the Marshalls unless they were given up by a neighbour who wanted the reward.⁷⁸⁵ Knowledge of a home address did not necessarily ensure recapture: there was no sign of ‘the Ship on Peter Hill’ in Larne.⁷⁸⁶

Name	Age	Stature	Complexion	Other remarks	Place of abode	Single or married
Alexander Smith	27	5 7”	Brown	Black hair and wears a wig	Montrose	Married
John Craven	20	5 5”	Sanguine	Sore eyes. Brown hair and wears a wig	London	Single
James Penlarick	24	5 5”	Marked with the smallpox. Waterman wears a cap		Southwark	Married
John Stubs	37	5 5”	Ruddy	Waterman. Wears a cap	Southwark	Married
John Agar	60	5 5”	Pale	Blind of the left eye	Cork	Married
Joseph Drago	36	5 4½ “	Brown	A shoemaker. Wears a cap	London	Married
John Coates	28	5 5”	Swarthy	Strong built. Wears a wig	Sunderland	Single
William Johnson	20	5 5”	Ruddy	Wears a cap	Sunderland	Married
Joshua Denny	30	5 5”	Brown	Sore eyes. Wears a wig	Newcastle	Married

Table 11: Descriptions of deserters

In 1761 **Christopher Bassett** was petitioned by the crew of the 5th rate *Ambuscade* who wanted to go on leave after five year’s service in the Mediterranean. He was permitted to give a month’s leave ‘to those who may be trusted among the crew.’⁷⁸⁷ There were always men who did not return from their leave. **Alexander Campbell** was commissioned to take over the 6th rate *Rye* at Deptford, and arrived to find that 27 men had not returned from leave. The procedure was that the men were reminded of the expiry of their leave in the local papers, with a date by which they had to return to their ship. If they did not reappear they

⁷⁸³ ADM 1/2046 Captains’ Letters L 1756 **Lindsay** 23 July 1757.

⁷⁸⁴ From these descriptions has been derived the figure of 5’ 5” as the men’s average height, suggesting that living in the ’tween decks would have been less uncomfortable than it might appear in the twenty first century. ADM 51/3798 *Cambridge* log 1757.

⁷⁸⁵ ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Man** 26 March 1761.

⁷⁸⁶ ADM 1/2118 Captains’ Letters M 1772 **M’Clevarty** 1 February 1771.

⁷⁸⁷ ADM 1/1492 Captains’ Letters B 1761 **Bassett** 19 March 1761.

would then be prosecuted as deserters.⁷⁸⁸ The papers listed included: *Gazetteer*, *Daily Advertiser*, *Publick Advertiser*, *Evening Advertiser*, *Whitehall Evening Post*, *General Evening Post*. Two weeks later when the men had not returned their names were sent to the Regulating Captains and Campbell left the Thames without them.⁷⁸⁹

Some men were incorrigible deserters. The twenty four year old Coriolanus Rich, **Charles Medows**' master at arms, had deserted, been retaken, escaped from confinement and 'has got quite off notwithstanding all the means I have used to retake him.'⁷⁹⁰ Mutinous and troublesome men were not welcome on board, where they could be a danger to others. Iain Hansen deserted from a transport at Embden and was picked up by the Army and returned to **William Paston** but his reputation was such that the order was to discharge him.⁷⁹¹

One of **Henry John Phillips**' men was an 'object of charity'. He was not only lame but subject to fits so incapable of doing duty and would have been discharged but he ran from a walk on the shore. Despite the man's disabilities the Admiralty was not moved. Phillips was ordered to run him', i.e. to report his desertion which made harbouring the man illegal.⁷⁹²

5.4 Death, accidents and wounds received on active service

Discharge could be ordered on account of disability. Robert Wheeler, an ex colliery worker, had been taken as a landsman on board the 3rd rate *Trident* and had lost the use of his arm through an accident. **John Elliot** sent in letters from Sir John Delaval's steward as well as the surgeon. The fact that Sir John had been a prominent member of Parliament may have helped to secure Wheeler's discharge.⁷⁹³

Death in combat at sea was always a possibility, but for the English casualties were always much lower than for the French, as discussed in Chapter 6.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁸⁸ ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Penny** 28 September 1759.

⁷⁸⁹ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Campbell** 2/17 December 1757.

⁷⁹⁰ ADM 1/2110 Captains' Letters M 1758 **Medows** 30 November 1758.

⁷⁹¹ ADM 1/2295 Captains' Letters P 1758 **Paston** 19 May 1758.

⁷⁹² ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Phillips** 9 July 1759.

⁷⁹³ ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 1 August 1777.

⁷⁹⁴ *La Blonde* and *Marechal de Belleisle* (and *Terpsichore*, the third vessel) were between them carrying 1,000 soldiers who had been landed at Carrickfergus, hence the appalling casualty figures. Extracted from the only letters which report casualties; ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Baillie** March 1757; **Burnett** March

Name	Ship	English crew	French privateer	English dead	English wounded	French dead	French wounded	French crew
Baillie 1757	<i>Tartar</i>	200	<i>Marie Victoire</i>	1	0	?	?	160
Burnett 1757	<i>Happy</i>	70	<i>Infernal</i>	0	1	2	7	75
Clements 1760	<i>Pallas</i>	240	<i>La Blonde</i>	1	5	300	100s	220
Clements 1760	<i>Pallas</i>	240	<i>Diadem</i>	2	20	?	?	?
Elliot 1757	<i>Hussar</i>	200	<i>L'Alcyon</i>	21 in all		Drowned		350
Elliot 1758	<i>Hussar</i>	200	<i>Vengeance</i>	6	15	52	37	319
Elliot 1759	<i>Aeolus</i>	220	<i>La Mignonne</i>	0	2	31	26	143
Elliot 1760	<i>Aeolus</i>	200	<i>Marechal de Belleisle</i>	4	15	300	100s	350
Faulkner 1761	<i>Bellona</i>	550	<i>Courageux</i>	6	28	240	110	500?
Fortescue 1757	<i>Prince Edward</i>	250	<i>Duestra Senoria Dolores</i>	10	34	?	?	?
Harrison 1761	<i>Venus</i>	240	<i>Brune</i>	4	18	19	39	220
Kennedy 1760	<i>Flamborough</i>	160	<i>La Malicieux</i>	5	10	21	32	?
Man 1762	<i>Milford</i>	200	<i>La Gloire</i>	4	14	24 in all		94

Table 12: Casualties reported in single-handed actions with French vessels

The most serious wound inflicted on one of Burnett's peers was that received by **Robert Craig** in his encounter with François Thurot:

.. the musket shot I received from the privateer has passed through my lungs and lodged in my back and affected the nerves there and in my left arm in such a manner as it is impossible for me to come up in the ships and that I humbly submit my case to their Lordships consideration to have the ship kept for me or another when able to go to sea.

Craig's servant Charles Mitchell was discharged so that he had someone to attend him through the winter. Craig remained on full pay for three years before being reduced to half pay until he died in 1767.⁷⁹⁵

1757; ADM 1/1607 Captains' Letters C 1760 **Clements** February, May 1760; ADM 1/1759-60 Captains' Letters E 1757-9 **Elliot** November 1757, January 1758, February 1760; ADM 1/1787 Captains' Letters F 1761 **Faulknor** August 1761; ADM 1/1785 Captains' Letters F 1757 **Fortescue** August 1757; ADM 1/1896 Captains' Letters H 1761 **Harrison** January 1761; ADM 1/2011 Captains' Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** April 1760; ADM 1/2114 Captains' Letters M 1762 **Man** March 1762.

⁷⁹⁵ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters 1757-8 **Craig** 8 June 1758 -25 October 1758.

His engagement with the *Brune* resulted in a wound for **Thomas Harrison**:

I had the good fortune to have [only] four men killed and eighteen wounded, of which last is myself, slightly, my first lieutenant and the master, the former of which was at his quarters the whole time, but the latter was so much hurt as to be disabled. The rest of my wounded (except one) I hope will recover.⁷⁹⁶

Despite the fact that accident and sudden death must have been an ever present risk on board, the muster books show that casualties were low. **John Elliot** gave no further details when he reported that ‘Mr Owen, gunner, shot himself through the head and died upon the spot.’⁷⁹⁷

Taylor Penny reported that a soldier cleaning a gun at the armourer’s bench tried the new flint but the charged gun went off and the ball went through the carpenter’s ankle. His condition was surveyed and the surgeons agreed that he had to have his foot amputated.⁷⁹⁸

The injured Lt. Frederick Holton was brought back to England by **Robert Man**. He had been wounded while attempting to cut a French schooner out of the harbour at Port aux Basques.⁷⁹⁹ Three surgeons had examined the contusion on his leg, and recommended a month resting on shore. This had not been sufficient for his recovery, and Holton had begged for permission to return to England, as he feared ‘being left destitute’.⁸⁰⁰ **Thomas Burnett** had occasion to ask for compensation for George Chambers, one of his ‘people’ who had been injured in an accident, and Chambers became a beneficiary of the Chatham Chest, receiving five pounds for his ‘smart’ ticket.⁸⁰¹ **Alexander Schomberg** wrote on behalf of Joseph Page who had lost his right hand on board *Diana* as he was firing a gun to celebrate the King’s coronation. Schomberg asked for a cook’s warrant for Page, the post traditionally given to men who lost an arm or leg. He wrote:

My lad, I have received your letter of the 28th of January and take this first opportunity in answering it. Get your petition wrote out and specify your accident in it and send the enclosed letter to Mr Cleveland Sec to the Admiralty and I make no doubt that your business will be done. I am going to sea the first wind that offers and I shall be glad to hear that you are provided for. I am, my lad, your friend and well wisher Alexander Shomberg.⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁶ ADM 1/1896 Captains’ Letters H 761 **Harrison** 16 January 1761.

⁷⁹⁷ ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 20 April 1765.

⁷⁹⁸ ADM 1/2295 Captains’ Letters P 1758 **Penny** 14 July 1758.

⁷⁹⁹ Frederick Holton was commissioned 28 June 1756, died 1767. Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers* 226.

⁸⁰⁰ ADM 1/2111 Captains’ Letters M 1759 **Man** 2 February 1759.

⁸⁰¹ John B. Hattendorf, R.J.B. Knight, A.W.H. Pearsall, N.A.M. Rodger and Geoffrey Till eds *British Naval Documents 1204-1960* (Navy Records Society 1993) 529

⁸⁰² ADM 1/2473 Captains’ Letters S 1758 **Schomberg** 9 February 1759.

6 Discipline and courts martial

Discipline on board was very much the responsibility of the captain, whose regime could be as strict or lax as he wished it to be. **Thomas Burnett** punished two men who were absent without leave from *Happy* with 9 lashes each, obviously choosing to be lenient. The evidence of the logs does not say which, if any, of the available forms of punishment were used on transgressors, apart from the requirement to record the use of the lash.⁸⁰³ There were captains who flogged a large proportion of their crews, others operated without the lash. Officially, not more than twelve lashes could be awarded, but it has been suggested that unofficial logs were kept in which the actual, much larger, punishments were recorded. The logs compiled by Thomas Burnett which have been examined for this thesis show that on occasion sentences of more than a dozen lashes are recorded together with the reasons for the punishment without any attempt to conceal them. But it appears that Burnett did not rely upon flogging to maintain discipline and had nothing to hide.⁸⁰⁴

It might be expected that at the outset of a voyage, while landsmen were being literally ‘beaten into shape’, flogging could be expected, and that once the ship was on passage the incidence would fall. Despite this, **Thomas Burnett**’s log for the *Boyne* shows that when he put together a piecemeal crew from every available source and took them to Jamaica, there were only two floggings in the first eight months, one for theft and the other for neglect of duty. During the six weeks *Boyne* spent in Kingston Harbour, where rum was freely available, there were twenty floggings, all associated with drunkenness. During these weeks, after courts martial, men from the flag ship were flogged at every ship in harbour.⁸⁰⁵ Amongst Burnett’s peers drunkenness was most commonly reported as the cause of bad behaviour.⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰³ Byrn, *Crime and Punishment* 77-81.

⁸⁰⁴ ADM 51/433 Captain’s Log *Happy* 1754-57; ADM 51/3798-9 Captain’s Log *Cambridge* 1757-9; ADM 51/792 Captain’s Log *Rochester* 1760; ADM 51/129 Captain’s Log *Boyne* 1770-72; ADM 51/748 Captains’ Log *Prudent* 1779-82.

⁸⁰⁵ ADM 51/129 ADM 51/129 *Boyne* log 1770-1772.

⁸⁰⁶ ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1758 **Man** 6 February 1758; ADM 1/2245/6 Captains’ Letters O 1751-62 **Ourry** 28 February/29 April 1758, 1 January 1759, 8 January 1760; ADM 1/2297 Captains’ Letters P 1760 **Penny** 16/26 January/8 February 1760; ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot** 11 October 1770; ADM 1/2662 Captains’ Letters W 1757 **Walsingham** 25 October 1757.

Byrn's study of punishment in the navy is derived from courts martial records from the Leeward Islands station between 1784 and 1812.⁸⁰⁷ Despite the value of this work, Byrn does not compare results on this station with a similar study of punishment on another station, not associated with access to rum. The limited evidence gathered from those logs of Burnett's ships which have been analysed show that a different pattern of punishment was instituted once the Leeward Islands were reached: an established system of discipline had to change to accommodate the temptations of freely available alcohol.

Theft was a crime which was taken very seriously at sea. Sailors were paid just before their ship sailed, so they all had money with them. Their clothes, money and other personal possessions could be shut into their boxes. Bowls containing food stuffs were stored in 'garlands', netting bags with wooden hoops to hold the mouths open, hung between the berths, each the property of an individual mess. If these places of storage were not respected it was regarded as a serious crime against society. By delivering the punishment, 'running the gauntlet', the sailors were demonstrating to their fellows what they thought of theft.

Crimes too serious to be punished by twelve lashes were sent to court martial. Offences such as desertion accompanied by theft of a boat, refusal to obey authority or lying while giving testimony went to a hearing in front of seven senior officers. **Kempenfelt** suggested in 1779 that the administration of courts martial should be stream-lined so that admirals, sitting with six other senior officers, were no longer almost constantly involved in hearings when in dock. The cases he was concerned with at the time were signed by the Admiral as well as himself, **Taylor Penny, Samuel Wallis** and three other senior men. Justice was being done, but at a huge cost to the Admiralty.⁸⁰⁸

It was rare, but occasionally officers were disciplined too. **Henry Martin** reported on his lieutenant's character and 'conduct in general being more like that of a madman.' The Admiralty took Martin's evaluation seriously. John Doherty was ordered to make up his

⁸⁰⁷ Byrn, *Crime and Punishment*.

⁸⁰⁸ Kempenfelt to Middleton, 13 October 1779 Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol.1 300; ADM 1/95 Admiral Darby, 27 September 1780; Eder, *Crime and Punishment*; John D. Byrne ed. *Naval Courts Martial 1793-1815* (Navy Records Society 2009).

accounts and was put on half pay. This effectively ended his service career, but avoided a court martial.⁸⁰⁹

Courts martial did not always result in capital punishment. They were held to pass judgement on men who had behaved with disrespect to the needs of the navy or committed social crimes against fellow sailors.⁸¹⁰ They were also used as a means of arriving at a better understanding of an event or sequence of events, and relied on witness statements from everybody concerned to be deliberated by a court of captains. The notorious courts martial of Matthews and Lestock, and of Palliser and Keppel each resolved disputes between two Admirals in an extremely public arena.

Serious charges were made by **Sir John Lindsay** against Sir William Burnaby when he returned from the West Indies in 1766. He had experienced constant obstruction while surveying the coast of Pensacola, and his detailed letters left the Admiralty in no doubt as to Lindsay's feelings towards Sir William. In 1767 Lindsay asked for the charges to be withdrawn, and cancelled the court martial proceedings.⁸¹¹ There is no means of knowing why he changed his mind: perhaps he was persuaded that he would not gain from exposing the faults of a much older man in public.

7 Conclusion

Every captain was aware of the difficulties of manning: a new commission almost inevitably called for the establishment of a rendezvous and gathering volunteers if not pressed men. The harvesting of merchant seamen in the Channel was also part of every captain's responsibility. The hierarchy of officers and petty officers responsible for the running of the ships were as professional as training and experience could make them. They were charged with the task of turning a rabble of unkempt landsmen into smart disciplined sailors capable of working independently of authority. It was not possible for the Admiralty of the mid-eighteenth century to solve the one real grievance of the sailors, the irregularity of their pay.

⁸⁰⁹ ADM 1/2112 Captains' Letters M 1760 **Martin** 29 August 1760; ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters 1759 **Phillips** August 1759- 13 February 1760.

⁸¹⁰ ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 7 May 1759; ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 20/28 September 1760; ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 28 August 1761.

⁸¹¹ ADM 1/2051/2 Captains' Letters L 1763-9 **Lindsay** Sept 1765 - 3 March 1767.

It might have surprised the sailors to know that their officers were waiting even longer for their own pay.

It is not perhaps a surprise that brutality has not been revealed to the Admiralty. This chapter shows instead the concerns of the captains for their men, their letters revealing an unexpected and universal concern for the well-being of 'the people' which refutes the brutal reputation of the navy in popular mythology.

The reality was that having gathered together the men required to man their ships, by whatever means were available, it was accepted that they were an expensive resource and were looked after to the best of the captains' abilities. An understanding of the causes of ill health was still years in the future, but fresh food and hospital care were alleviating factors the Admiralty could and did provide, as well as the insistence on cleanliness which so amazed the French.

The one unexpected outcome of this section was the extent to which the men's desire to stay with specific captains was rejected. Perhaps by the end of the century this had been reversed.

Chapter 6 The opportunities for individuals to display their professional expertise and courage.

This chapter will demonstrate the ways in which Thomas Burnett and his peers engaged in a variety of naval activities through a period lasting more than thirty years. Sections 1, 2 and 3 below cover the chronological periods of the Seven Years' War, the Spanish mobilisation and the American War of Independence. For Thomas Burnett and his peers the years 1756 to 1762 were those of high endeavour, and the political background to the war dictated that protecting world-wide trading interests in the East and West Indies had to be accommodated alongside keeping Britain and her colonies safe from attack.

The geographical spread of Section 1 begins in home waters, which is where most of the men were engaged. The amphibious operations which were practised on the French coasts were then extended to North America and to the Pacific. The naval blockade of French ports took place not just on the northern coasts but in the Mediterranean. The final section turns to the West Indian campaign. Their duties included intelligence gathering, convoy protection, cruising for privateers, attacks on enemy trade, taking part in amphibious operations, blockade and fleet actions. Naval 'strategy' did not exist in the eighteenth century; instead policy making had a naval element. Fleet actions during this war were rare, for the opportunities for winning decisive actions did not always occur when they were wanted: as Nelson said later, '... we English have to regret that we cannot always decide the fate of Empires on the sea'.⁸¹²

Section 2 follows the long peace after the Treaty of Paris which effectively ended the careers of many captains. A fortunate few were employed during these years, but with little chance of distinguishing themselves. The mobilisation against Spain of 1770 was of so little importance that historians might omit it altogether: it is of significance in this study because it provided an occasion for re-employment for a few men, discussed in Chapter 7.

Section 3 follows the ten men of the original cohort who were employed again in the American War of Independence. The American war saw a series of naval battles, with

⁸¹² Julian Corbett, *England in the Seven Years' War* (Greenhill Books 1992) Vol. I 5.

differing outcomes. In this war the fate of the British empire was believed to be at stake, rather than those of the French or Spanish, and in it the main responsibility for the logistics of transport and supply rested on the navy.⁸¹³ Within this section there is therefore again a geographical spread, from home waters to America and concluding in the West Indies.

This chapter also shows the way in which the chronological progression from section 1 to section 3 indicates the way in which the ships which they commanded reflected the changing roles of Thomas Burnett and his peers in naval operations. There is a clear progression from the sloops in which the young captains conducted intelligence gathering and convoy protection on to the swift frigates which were the eyes of a fleet at sea and finally to the heavily gunned ships of the line which determined the outcomes of battles at sea.

Post captains who were taken into squadrons no longer reported to the Admiralty, and their individual experiences have to be identified from within the reporting of larger actions. Few admirals reported minor engagements by their subordinate commanders. Being ‘mentioned in despatches’ was evidence that they had caught his eye, and had been put into situations in which they could distinguish themselves.

1 The global theatres of the Seven Years’ War

1.1 The navy and the gathering of intelligence

Intelligence gathering was of vital importance to the Government and to the Admiralty. Agents such as **Thomas Taylor** (after his retirement from the navy) provided information about ship building, troop movements or construction of defences.⁸¹⁴ In addition to official letters from ambassadors and agents, all captains were expected to interrogate any shipping encountered, and to send back to the Admiralty interesting, relevant or unusual information. Early in the war **Joseph Peyton** became an expert on the coast at Brest, and reported information received from local pilots on troop movements and numbers. He did not rely on

⁸¹³ Richard Harding, ‘America, the War of 1739-48 and the development of British Global power’ in *e-Journal for Maritime Research* (NMM March 2004); Jeremy Black, ‘Political and Strategic Problems 1688-1770’ in Duffy ed. *British Naval Power*; Corbett, *Seven Years’ War* Vol.1 ix; N.A.M. Rodger, ‘The nature of victory at Sea’ in *e-Journal for Maritime Research* (July 2005); Jeremy Black, *Pitt the Elder* (Cambridge University Press 1992).

⁸¹⁴ ADM 1/2593 Captains’ Letters T 1780-3 **Taylor** January 1780 – 3.

hearsay about shipping, however: he penetrated the harbour of Cherbourg to count the ships in the basin and note their readiness. He also took careful note of the location of the batteries and their armaments. The Lords at the Admiralty would have been reassured to know that the French were also having difficulty manning their ships, and might have regretted not being able to use the French solution of a maritime register, on the basis of which seamen had been drafted from the seaports of Normandy to send to Brest.⁸¹⁵ **Henry Phillips**, amongst others, reported that most local English ‘intelligence’ about privateers was false. He had chased many vessels on the coast which had all been English but the sight of any sail at sea caused alarm on land. He asked for a cutter to speed the interrogation of vessels at sea and to give a feeling of security to local trade.⁸¹⁶ **Thomas Harrison** knew the value of intelligence from all sources, and passed on information gained from the crew of the Spanish *Amabel Josepha* which he had captured. Harrison also reported the news of Spain’s invading Portugal, as did **Archibald Kennedy** who reported the ‘apprehensions of the Factory in Lisbon.’⁸¹⁷

News of movements of vessels to and from the major French Atlantic ports was crucially important: the readiness of the French to leave port determined the speed with which the English fleet was manned or not.⁸¹⁸ The weakness of the English blockade in the years 1755 to 1757 permitted the French navy to transport materials to and from the colonies. Their small fast squadron actions, without any fleet movements, kept the French threat very much alive.⁸¹⁹

This mobility was recognised by the young captains, all keen to make use of miniature squadrons of their own, in many capacities. **Edmund Affleck** asked for a ‘well rowing cutter’ which would have prevented a privateer from escaping by rowing into Havre.⁸²⁰ **Michael Clements** in the relatively deep drafted *Acteon* asked for a cutter to search vessels he could

⁸¹⁵ ADM 1/2293 Captains’ Letters P 1756 **Peyton** 3, 13 March 1756.

⁸¹⁶ ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Phillips**, 23 March 1759; ADM 1/2114 Captains’ Letters M 1762 **Man**, 29 February 1762; ADM 1/2110 Captains’ Letters M 1758 **M^cCleverty**, 31 May 1758.

⁸¹⁷ ADM 1/1897 Captains’ Letters H 1762 **Harrison** 19 March 1762, also 1 January, 15 October 1762; ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1762 **Kennedy** 9 July 1762.

⁸¹⁸ The most telling French difficulties were lack of funds and seamen. What was perhaps not fully appreciated by the Admiralty was that by September the credit capacity of financiers of the French navy began to crumble, and in November they went bankrupt. The lack of seamen was well known: intelligence of the shortage of men was reported several times. Harding, *Sailing Navy* 129

⁸¹⁹ Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare 1650-1830* (Routledge 1999) 205.

⁸²⁰ ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 3 May 1760.

not otherwise reach.⁸²¹ ‘Interrogation’ was the reason given by **Henry John Phillips** for his plea for a cutter, coupled with giving ‘a feeling of security to local trade’.⁸²² **Joseph Peyton**, in his capacity as senior officer at the Downs commented to the Admiralty that cutters stationed off Beachy Head would serve the trade well.⁸²³ **Richard Kempenfelt** was more concerned about protecting the Medway from raiding parties, and stationed his three cutters at the mouth of the Medway.⁸²⁴

1.2 Convoy protection

At the outset of the war all of the young men, newly promoted to independent command, first as commanders and then post captains, were busy with the essential and never ending convoy protection already discussed in Chapter 2 Section 6.⁸²⁵ Naval ships in transit, from flag ships to sloops, were used to protect the convoyed movements of supplies, troops or trade.

The English government took seriously its rôle as protector of the trade. Navigation acts were passed to interdict trade being passed through neutral vessels. By refusing to allow other countries opportunities for trade, the government was protecting the merchant owners on whose support Parliament relied. A ‘rule of the war of 1756’ was passed which made any trade carried by neutrals liable to confiscation and condemnation as legal prizes.⁸²⁶

1.3 Cruising against privateers

An indirect form of convoy protection was cruising against the privateers which preyed on merchant vessels. Whenever fleet action became impossible for the French, they turned to privateering, resulting in an aggressive French presence in the Channel and opportunities for

⁸²¹ ADM 1/1607 Captains’ Letters C 1759-60 **Clements** 3 March 1759.

⁸²² ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Phillips** 23 March 1759.

⁸²³ ADM 1/2299 Captains’ Letters P 1762 **Peyton** 14 November 1762.

⁸²⁴ ADM 1/2014 Captains’ Letters K 1777-81 **Kempenfelt** 2 February 1779.

⁸²⁵ Convoy protection was not all aggressive. **Henry Martin** reported that he had taken a French schooner whose master had his family on board. His wife had given birth only five days before the capture, and was too ill to be moved ‘.. the circumstances which were really pitiable will plead my excuse’ for not bringing in the vessel. Martin’s humanitarian decision was approved of by the Lords. ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Martin** 7 September 1761.

⁸²⁶ Starkey, ‘British Privateering’ 2.

Burnett's peers.⁸²⁷ French privateers were large, well armed and relied on swift passage out and back from home ports, enabling them to carry very large crews. Individual French captains were brave and determined to make a profit. François Thurot was so feared by the English authorities that agents sent special briefings when he left port so that English trade could be protected against him.⁸²⁸ French privateers were adept at gathering information about potential convoys, and on at least two occasions sailed round the Isle of Wight to gain intelligence.⁸²⁹

Against the aggression of the French, the frigates did their best, as **Thomas Cornwall** wrote, 'to prevent too many vessels falling into their hands both by convoying and giving a caution to those we meet at sea.'⁸³⁰ As Thomas Burnett's peers grew in confidence they began to do more than 'give a caution' to the 'lurking piratical vessels'. The reports which were sent in after every cruise gave details of captures to the Admiralty, and the *London Gazette* printed the bulletins they issued.⁸³¹ These newspaper accounts often contain useful details such as the names of the prizes and the size of their crews as well as details of the distribution of the resulting prize money, discussed below.

On several occasions numbers of vessels were involved. The engagement between the *La Malicieux* 32 guns, *L'Opale* 36 guns and the 20 gun 6th rates of **Archibald Kennedy** and Lancelot Skynner was immortalised on canvas, and is reproduced in Winfield's *British Warships in the Age of Sail*.⁸³² The French vessels escaped destruction, and explained the holes in their topsides and other damage by claiming that they had been engaged by English frigates of 40 and 36 guns. Kennedy was particularly glad to speak to Captain Harris, a witness to the engagement, who was on board *La Malicieux* as his vessel the *Penguin* had

⁸²⁷ ADM 1/2661 Captains' Letters W 1756 **Wallis** 25 April 1756; ADM 1/1892 Captains' Letters H 1757 **Harrison** January, 3 October 1757; ADM 1/2662 Captains' Letters W 1757 **Wilkinson** 4 February 1757; ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Craig** 26 March, 28 April 1757; ADM 1/1785 Captains' Letters F 1757 **Fortescue** 4 May 1757; ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters M 1757 **Medows** 20 December 1757; ADM 1/2246 Captains' Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry** 14 November 1760.

⁸²⁸ Intelligence of Thurot sent SP 54/45/181.

⁸²⁹ ADM 1/1760 Captains' Letters E 1759-62 **Elliot** March 1760; ADM 1/1442 Captains' Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 4 December 1760.

⁸³⁰ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Cornwall** 11 January 1757.

⁸³¹ *London Gazette*: February 23 1760, **Bassett** taking *Ambuscade*; 14 April 1761 **Paston** taking *Hardi*; **Kennedy** taking 'large vessel'; 18 April 1761 **Fortescue** and **Harrison** taking *Le Bertin*;

⁸³² Winfield, *British Warships* 263.

been taken and sunk. Harris confirmed that the French vessels were ‘Kings frigates’ and relayed the French version of the encounter.⁸³³

On one occasion the English vessel came off in a worse state than its French adversary. **William Fortescue** in the 5th rate *Prince Edward* was unlucky enough to be alone when he encountered three ships off the western approaches, and was engaged by the smallest, a frigate of 36 guns.⁸³⁴ The two ships exchanged broadsides for hours until *Prince Edward*’s main and mizzen masts both ‘went by the board’. At intervals there was a lull in the battering, but without being able to set any sails he could not escape. As the wind moderated Fortescue could use some of his lower deck guns which finally persuaded the French vessel to make sail and leave the shattered but defiant *Prince Edward* after nineteen hours of conflict. Fortescue lost 10 men killed and 34 wounded, many of them seriously, but he had no idea what damage he had inflicted.⁸³⁵ With this display of fortitude Fortescue had done what was expected of him, and his only reward was an expression of their Lordships’ satisfaction.

Captains often mentioned the courage and spirit of officers and crew, although rarely by name. **Archibald Kennedy** wrote that ‘they behaved extremely well and I should do great injustice to all my officers and men was I to omit acquainting their Lordships that they behaved with conduct and undaunted courage.’ The 20 gun *Bideford* ‘behaved gloriously,’ having kept up a brisk and constant fire against her combatant.⁸³⁶ It appears that in addition to prize money all qualities of officers of a ship engaged in a successful action could expect promotion, apart from a post captain. **John Elliot**, who was affronted when his first lieutenant was not promoted after his capture of Thurot’s squadron, was previously ‘honoured’ by Joseph Deane’s promotion after their capture of the 28-gun frigate *Vengeance*.⁸³⁷ The chase began at daybreak and lasted until 3.00pm before the two-hour long engagement. His letter to the Admiralty is a model of brevity, listing factually the damage and the casualty list. In his letters to his father and brother a vivid description emerges of the scene, at a range of no more than 200 yards between the *Hussar* and the French privateer,

⁸³³ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1860-2 **Kennedy** 14 April, 3 May 1760.

⁸³⁴ *Prince Edward* 5th rate 44 guns O 21.6.1744 K 12.7.1744 L 2.9.1745 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 49.

⁸³⁵ ADM 1/1785 Captains’ Letters F 1757 **Fortescue** 24 August 1757; Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs* Vol.2 86.

⁸³⁶ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 14 April 1760.

⁸³⁷ NMM ELL/400 **Elliot** 24 February, 22 April 1758.

which could return only one gun for *Hussar*'s six or seven. *La Vengeance* was reduced to a sinking condition, and Elliot was reluctant to put many of his men on board the prize. He sent his first lieutenant Joseph Deane, 'the finest fellow in the world' and eight men, enjoining the French to 'pump or sink' to save themselves as they were on a lee shore in a gale of wind. In a break in the wind he managed to get a cable on board and tow the prize out of danger. This whole episode was the result of remarkable seamanship, determination and concerted effort, not simply by the captain and the crew of the *Hussar* but also by Deane who kept the French crew at work at the pumps until they could be rescued.⁸³⁸

The captains' letters to the Admiralty are restrained by the protocol of official reporting, but nevertheless convey the enthusiasm and determination of the officers and men. The privateers were often first seen at daybreak, and after the sighting the chase might last for hours: **Thomas Burnett** chased his quarry for ten hours, and many accounts give details of fights which continued only after towing with boats for hours.

English captains demonstrated their intentions and their control over their crews by closing to pistol shot range before firing, as Hawke laid down 'the distance I shall think proper to engage at'.⁸³⁹ It meant that the first broadside, prepared carefully and without haste, would cause maximum damage. The intention was always so to disable the guns of the opposition that they could fight no further. If the two ships were closely matched in size there might be several broadsides exchanged: 'the sternmost ship .. poured a broadside into me, I thought I could do no less than return the compliment', reported **Archibald Kennedy**.⁸⁴⁰ The French intention was always to disable the rigging of the English ship so that she could not follow, and occasionally the repairs to masts and rigging did take so long that the privateer was able to take advantage of nightfall to escape.⁸⁴¹ Flying before a strong wind, **Paul Henry Ourry** chased a privateer into Plymouth Sound, and in the confusion the brig 'put in stays which

⁸³⁸ NMM ELL/400 **Elliot** letters January 1758; ADM 6/18 Commissions and Warrant 1757-8 18 July 1757; Joseph Deane was promoted on 23 April 1758. Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers* 119.

⁸³⁹ From the writer's personal experience with black powder pistols, not more than 25 m. Pistol range was suggested by Mackay and Duffy to be under twenty yards *British Naval Leadership* 7, 56

⁸⁴⁰ ADM 1/2011 Captains' Letters K 1760 **Kennedy** 14 April 1760.

⁸⁴¹ The contemporary view of this behaviour can be seen in Falconer's definition of 'retreat': the order or disposition in which a fleet of French men of war decline engagement, or fly from a pursuing enemy. He continues in a footnote: the reader, who wishes to be expert in this manoeuvre, will find it copiously described by several ingenious French writers .. who have given accurate instructions, deduced from experience, for putting it in practice when occasion requires. As it is not properly a term of the British marine, a more circumstantial account of it may be considered foreign to our plans ... the same candour and impartiality obliges us to confess their superior dexterity in this movement. Falconer, *Universal Marine Dictionary* 241.

gave me the opportunity to fire my starboard guns as he passed my side I wore my ship at the same time in less than 8 or 10 minutes she entirely disappeared though it was a fine moonlight night and I could see for some miles to the horizon.⁸⁴² On another occasion, after a long chase **John Elliot** fired at a large French ship which promptly sank ‘with all her colours flying’. According to Beatson, *Hussar*’s rigging had been so badly damaged in the engagement she could not lower a boat to save lives from the sinking ship.⁸⁴³

On occasion, despite their approval of proceedings, their Lordships were provoked into delivering a broadside of their own: having left his station and ‘sloped off to the west following intelligence’, **Archibald Kennedy** brought in the French East Indiaman *Le Boutin*. The account of his capture was published in the *Gazette*, but the Lords were ‘much dissatisfied’ that he had left his station.⁸⁴⁴ Being in the right place was the essential prerequisite for success, and able captains who commanded sufficient ‘interest’, spent the war in the right place, and took every opportunity offered. Between February and April 1762 **William Hotham** captured eight privateers and burned a further vessel which had grounded to evade capture, as well as retaking several French prizes.⁸⁴⁵ In two years **Thomas Harrison** brought in fourteen prizes, taken on his own or in company.⁸⁴⁶

If a privateer evaded capture, its appearance was described, so that other naval patrols in the area could be alerted to its presence: ‘she is a long black sided vessel with a white bottom and small figurehead pierced for 14 carriage guns and 24 oars.’⁸⁴⁷ When **Henry John Phillips** surprised a French privateer he was most proud of the fact that so many others had not been successful in taking her: ‘I was so lucky as to surprise him in the night by running up alongside of her prepared for a fight, she observing that it so intimidated them that they did not think proper to exchange any shott, <sic> all the execution that was done was by one of our bow chasers which wounded four of her men or <sic> could they ever make sail

⁸⁴² ADM 1/2246 Captains’ Letters O 11759-61 **Ourry** 29 December 1761.

⁸⁴³ The ship was identified as *L’Alcyon* by Winfield, *British Warships* 229. Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs* Vol. 2 79. ADM 1/1759 Captains’ Letters E 1757-8 **Elliot** 28 November 1757; ADM 1/2476 Captains’ Letters S 1762 **Schomberg** 1,6,7 March 1762.

⁸⁴⁴ ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 3 February 1762.

⁸⁴⁵ ADM 1/1897 Captains’ Letters H 1762 **Hotham** 16 February – 21 September 1762.

⁸⁴⁶ ADM 1/1895-7 Captains’ Letters H 1760-2 **Harrison** 4 February 1760- 15 October 1762.

⁸⁴⁷ ADM 1/2010 Captains’ Letters K 1757-9 **Kennedy** 29 March 1759.

properly.’⁸⁴⁸ Another night exercise resulted in the taking of the 40 gun privateer *Danaé* by **William Hotham** in *Mélampe* in company with James Gilchrist’s *Southampton*.⁸⁴⁹

A final element of the report was always to record the numbers dead and wounded, although it was not always possible to tell how many had been killed in an engagement. From the seventeenth century the Admiralty paid ten pounds a gun for captured warships, and in the eighteenth century a five pound bounty, called ‘head money’, was paid for every person on board a French ship ‘taken, sunk, burnt or otherwise destroyed’ and divided and paid at the same time and in the same proportion as prize money. A certificate listing the persons on board had to be sent to secure payment.⁸⁵⁰ This list gave not only the numbers for the ‘head money’, but also indicated the intensity of the fight. **Thomas Burnett** reported from *Happy* that ‘Captain and officers said there were 75 men, so two must have been killed and thrown overboard’.⁸⁵¹ The numbers of French killed and wounded were always far higher than those in the English ships, reflecting the point of aim of the gunners.

Head and gun money, together with potential prize money, discussed below, must have helped to keep keen the appetite of the petty officers and crew for battle.⁸⁵² The captain was rewarded not just with his share and the words ‘their Lordships very much approve of his proceedings’, but with public acclaim. Reports of these encounters were paraphrased for publication in the *London Gazette*, to raise the morale of the public and to inform the rest of the naval community. News was further distributed through contemporary ballads which

⁸⁴⁸ ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1859 **Phillips** 28 January 1759.

⁸⁴⁹ ADM 1/1894 Captains’ Letters H 759 **Hotham** 25 April 1759. The song which commemorates this capture gives details which are not to be found in Hotham’s official letter. Although the ballad writers were not known for their accurate reporting, in this case it is quite possible that two French captains were in fact father and son. Firth, *Naval Songs* 216-7.

⁸⁵⁰ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 141-2; Michael Duffy, ‘The Foundations of British Naval Power’ in Duffy ed. *The Military Revolution and the State* 66; NMM ELL/400.

⁸⁵¹ ADM 1/1488 Captains’ Letters B 1757 **Burnett** 19 March 1757.

⁸⁵² ADM 1/1759 Captains’ Letters E 1757-8 **Elliot** 11 Jan 1758; ADM 1/2110 M 1758 Captains’ Letters **Man** 6 February 1758; ADM 1/2296 Captains’ Letters P 1759 **Phillips** 27 January 1759; ADM 1/2010 Captains’ Letters K 1757-9 **Kennedy** 26 November 1759; ADM /1607 Captains’ Letters C 1759-60 **Clements** 23 May 1760; ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1760-2 **Kennedy** 14 April 1760; ADM 1/2666 Captains’ Letters W 1761 **Boyle Walsingham** 19 July 1761; ADM 1/1787 Captains’ Letters F 1760-1 **Faulknor** 14 August 1761; ADM 1/1442 Captains’ Letters A 1758-61 **Affleck** 13 November 1761; ADM 1/1896 Captains’ Letters H 1761 **Harrison** 6, 16 January, 7 February, April 1761; ADM 1/2011 Captains’ Letters K 1761 **Kennedy** 3 April, 21 May 1761; ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Man** 11 April 1761; ADM 1/1897 Captains’ Letters H 1762 **Harrison** 1 January, 1 May 1762; ADM 1/2011 K 1762 Captains’ Letters **Kennedy** 2 August 1762.

were written to convey to the public the news of the day, and also what was thought important at the time.⁸⁵³

Not only French privateers were active off the English coast.⁸⁵⁴ Barrels of gin which had been stolen from a Dutch vessel were marked with a particularly distinctive brand, which was carefully reproduced by **William M^cCleverty** so that customs officials could be alerted.⁸⁵⁵ There were more than twice as many English privateers as French until unescorted French merchant shipping declined by the end of 1758. The Dutch protested vigorously against the attentions of English privateers, but while they also profited from carrying French trade their protests were unheeded.⁸⁵⁶

1.4 Attacks on enemy trade in the Atlantic, North America, West Africa and India

Historians have questioned whether fleet actions against French convoys were pursued rigorously enough. L'Étandière made a deliberate sacrifice in 1747 when the eight French escorts fought the 14 English vessels under Hawke, permitting the convoy of 250 to escape. Hawke's only solace was that a fast frigate took the news of the convoy to the West Indies in time for some to be captured.⁸⁵⁷ Should Howe have allowed the convoy to escape at the Glorious First of June? Was his demolition of the French protective screen enough to warrant 'glory'?⁸⁵⁸ There was tension between the desire for prize money which would result from attacking merchantmen and the view that while there was a large undefeated French fleet at sea it was more correct to go for the warships and win command of the sea, after which trade might be stopped more effectively. On the other hand Rodger reported Anson's regret that Captains Digby and Proby chased the escorting man-of-war for five days,

⁸⁵³ From 'Tit for tat: a sea kick for a land cuff' come the lines: 'And now the next year when the prizes we've made/By our own hands are mann'd out, we'll drive a French trade;/While the sea is our market, for squadrons we'll barter,/And give for first rates only bullets and quarter!' Firth, *Naval Songs* 199-200.

⁸⁵⁴ W.R. Meyer, 'English Privateering in the War of the Spanish Succession 1702-1713' in *The Mariner's Mirror* 69 (SNR 1983) 435.

⁸⁵⁵ ADM 1/2110 Captains' Letters M `1758 M^cCleverty 28 May, 8 July 1758.

⁸⁵⁶ E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga, 'A Competitive Ally: The Delicate Balance of Naval Alliance and Maritime Competition between Great Britain and the Dutch Republic' and N.A.M. Rodger 'The British View of the Functioning of the Anglo-Dutch Alliance' in G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger eds. *Navies and Armies: The Anglo Dutch Relationship in War and Peace 1688-1988* (Edinburgh 1990); Unger, 'Warships, Cargo ships' 48.

⁸⁵⁷ Mahan, *Influence of Seapower* 271-2; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean* 253.

⁸⁵⁸ Warner, *Glorious First of June*.

allowing the eight store ships to escape: they did not behave properly, because the French would have missed the store ships more than the man-of-war.⁸⁵⁹

1761 onwards – the extension of hostilities to Spain

Politics within Europe were played out on the Atlantic, where Spanish vessels were used to carry goods for France, despite Spain's being neutral. Edward Hawke said of Spanish vessels that: 'None of them within the limits of my command have ever met with the least molestation, while they act with regard to our enemies with a shameful partiality, and distress our trade as much as if we were at actual war with them'⁸⁶⁰ During the years of political uncertainty naval vessels were required to respect this precarious situation. William Pitt was informed that **Thomas Baillie** had saved a Spanish treasure ship by towing her into harbour when she had lost her anchors, without payment or reward, as befitting an ally.⁸⁶¹ Dutch ships were routinely involved in transporting naval goods under false papers, but Spanish ships were suspected of the same subterfuge. **Thomas Harrison** was ordered to release a Spanish vessel, laden with oars, ostensibly bound for Ostend, but with papers showing she was bound for Havre.⁸⁶² **William Fortescue** had the same experience: his pilot recognised the *Deustra Senora Delores* as having belonged to the French at St Malo.⁸⁶³ When **Archibald Kennedy** intercepted the Spanish *St Bruno* he found her to be carrying provisions bound for Quebec from Santander. She had two captains, one French, the other Spanish and a French crew. Aware of the 'Treaty embinding <sic> between the Government of Great Britain and Spain' Kennedy brought the vessel in to port.⁸⁶⁴

From 1760 Spain was being increasingly pushed by Choiseul towards ending her neutrality, which happened in 1762. It must have been a relief when captains received orders enclosing a declaration of war with Spain.⁸⁶⁵ However **Robert Man**, having detained 'two vessels belonging to Spainyards <sic>.' was warned 'to be careful of them as they will be permitted to proceed with their voyage' - presumably because they had been detained before war had

⁸⁵⁹ Rodger, *Wooden World* 316.

⁸⁶⁰ ADM 1/383 Hawke 27 November 1756.

⁸⁶¹ ADM 1/1492 B 1760 Captains' Letters **Baillie** 5 June 1760.

⁸⁶² ADM 1/1895 Captains' Letters H 1760 **Harrison** 25 May 1760.

⁸⁶³ ADM 1/1786 Captains' Letters F 1758 **Fortescue** 17 January 1758; ADM 1/2113 Captains' Letters M 1761 **M'Cleverty** 10 September 1761.

⁸⁶⁴ ADM 1/2010 Captains' Letters J 1757-9 **Kennedy** 6 August 1759.

⁸⁶⁵ ADM 1/2667 Captains' Letters W 1762 **Wallis** 2 February 1762.

been declared.⁸⁶⁶ Once Spain was as much an enemy as France, the length of the Western coast of Europe was opened up to Spanish privateers, which were then captured as fast as they were found.⁸⁶⁷

The containment of French trading posts in India, West Africa and North America

Each of the ninety vessels which made up the East India Company fleet made only four round trips. The largest ships were confined to the China trade, the smaller ones were suitable for the shallow Hooghly river and brought huge wealth back to England. The heavily armed East Indiamen were able to protect themselves from both privateering and pirate attacks, but in deference to the strong merchant interest, the navy normally provided protection for the laden vessels returning to England from St Helena, as described in Chapter 2. However, having taken Minorca, the French sent a military force to India which provoked a strong naval response.⁸⁶⁸

In 1757 **Richard Kempenfelt** was flag captain to Commodore Steevens on his expedition to the East Indies. The English and French naval forces were evenly matched, and Admiral Pocock could not bring the French to a decisive conclusion in the three engagements at Cuddagore, Negapatam and Pondicherry. Kempenfelt was outraged that the captains of the slowest ships were court martialled for not joining the line of battle, and described the efforts made by William Brereton to stay with the fleet. As Kempenfelt reported, ‘the French commanding ship which our Admiral engaged broke the line and shot ahead and to leeward of the second and about a quarter of an hour after the whole French line bore round up and crowded sail away.’⁸⁶⁹ Although the three bloody actions were indecisive, the outcome was to end the free movement of French shipping in the Indian Ocean, and spelled the end of the French East India Company.

⁸⁶⁶ ADM 1/2113 Captains’ Letters M 1761 **Man** 31 December 1761.

⁸⁶⁷ ADM 1/1897 Captains’ Letters H 1762 **Harrison** 19 March, 3 May 1762; ADM 1/1897 Captains’ Letters H 1762 **Hotham** 21 September 1762; ADM 1/1897 Captains’ Letters H 1762 **Harrison** 3, 23 October 1762.

⁸⁶⁸ Bernard Pool, *Navy Board Contracts 1660-1832* (Longmans 1966) 88; C. Northcote Parkinson, ‘The East India Trade’ in *Trade Winds* 144-5.

⁸⁶⁹ The *Cumberland* ‘sailed extremely bad and was so leaky that when it blew fresh she was frequently obliged to bring to pump her water out which else gained upon her’. ADM 1/2010 Captains’ Letters K 1758 **Kempenfelt**, 23 July 1758.

In November 1758 Commodore Augustus Keppel took a squadron to West Africa to attack the French trading post in Gorée. **William Fortescue** in *Prince Edward* took part in this and began the bombardment of the post, which surrendered.⁸⁷⁰

The French and Indian wars which had erupted in North America in 1754 escalated into all-out war.⁸⁷¹ When Boscawen was sent to the St Lawrence to stop reinforcement of the French colonies, he was prevented by fog from seizing the whole fleet, but two ships were captured. There was still no declaration of war, but Hawke had instructions to take every French ship-of-the-line he found between Ushant and Finisterre, as well as privateers and merchant men. By the end of 1755 more than 300 trading vessels had been taken, and 6,000 French seamen were in captivity, seriously reducing the ability of the French to man a naval force.⁸⁷²

Archibald Kennedy and **Joshua Loring** were both involved, as American-born officers in the British navy, and their activities and involvement in amphibious operations are discussed below. The attacks made by the French against British vessels on the lakes were a warning of the difficulties to be faced by the army in due course.

In 1760 **Thomas Burnett** took *Rochester* to North America, with **Alexander Schomberg** in *Diana*.⁸⁷³ He was part of the squadron under Lord Colville which relieved Quebec, and subsequently was occupied in guarding the mouth of the St Lawrence. His station was the Isle de Bec, and he managed to stay out in appalling winter weather. Part of this was due to the fact that he was re-supplied with essential food stuffs while he was there, through a fortuitous meeting at sea on 26 August when **John Wheelock** provided bread and beer for the *Rochester*, so allowing Burnett to stay longer on watch at the mouth of the St Lawrence. Burnett's staying out on his station meant that he missed being sent to escort the

⁸⁷⁰ Clowes, *Royal Navy* Vol. III 188-9; One of the ships in this squadron went aground off the Barbary coast. The story of the shipwreck and the plight of the survivors was told in Vice Admiral Gordon's *Abandon Ship!* (Hodder and Stoughton 1938).

⁸⁷¹ Paying for these wars caused problems for the Government, which had no idea how the costs would be met unless the colonies could be stimulated to help pay for them. Dora Mae Clarke, *The Rise of the British Treasury* (David and Charles 1969) 83.

⁸⁷² Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power* 284-5. There were 25,793 French prisoners in English hands by the end of the war. Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy* 82.

⁸⁷³ *Rochester* 4th rate 50 gun O 8.3.1747 K 24.9.1747 L 3.8.1749 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 47.

Newfoundland convoy back to England, as Lord Colville had planned.⁸⁷⁴ He was simply doing what was expected of him, and he was not commended for it.

1.5 Prize money

Prize money was divided amongst ships' companies in the proportions: 1/8 to flag officers; 1/4 to captains who received an additional 1/8 if there had been no share to flag offices; 1/8 for lieutenants and the higher ranking petty officers; 1/4 for the remaining warrant and petty officers; 1/4 to the seamen.⁸⁷⁵ Gradish quotes Beatson who commented that this division was so unfair to the inferior officers and private men that it laid an indelible stain on the Administration.⁸⁷⁶ An admiral actively engaged at sea was almost certain of a fortune from the engagements of his captains.⁸⁷⁷

There was a grey area regarding captures of French vessels before the actual declaration of war. All active captains were instructed to send in a list of such captures. How payment for these was resolved is not clear, but in 1761 the Commissioners responsible announced that expenses involved in such captures would be paid.⁸⁷⁸

The agent usually came on board and paid the ship's company their share of the prize money.⁸⁷⁹ A sequence of advertisements were printed in the *London Gazette* to warn those involved where and when to collect their prize money if not on board:

Notice is hereby given to the Officers and Company of his Majesty's ship Tartar, who were actually on board at the seizing of the French privateer L'Heureuse, in company with his Majesty's sloop Happy, that they, or their lawful attorneys, will be paid their respective shares of the said prize on board the Tartar, the next time she returns into Plymouth Sound. The recalls will be on the first Monday of every month, for three years, at Mr Thomas Hills, the sign of the White Hart, upon Plymouth Dock.⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷⁴ ADM 1/482 Commander-in-Chief North America Colville *Northumberland* to Admiralty 26 November 1761.

⁸⁷⁵ Baugh, *British Naval Administration* 112-3 n.72.

⁸⁷⁶ Each seaman at the reduction of the Havana received £3 14s 9d. Gradish, *Manning* 74-5 n. 6.

⁸⁷⁷ Julian Gwyn, *The Enterprising Admiral: The Personal Fortune of Admiral Sir Peter Warren* (McGill-Queen's University Press 1974) 15.

⁸⁷⁸ *London Gazette* Issue 10092 31 March 1761.

⁸⁷⁹ ADM 51/3799 Captain's log *Cambridge* 1 July 1759.

⁸⁸⁰ *London Gazette* Issue No 9675 and 6 2 and 5 April 1757

Despite the frisson of disquiet that *Happy's* crew might have felt, their share was carried to them in Portsmouth, and distributed to them on board on 26 April.⁸⁸¹ **Thomas Burnett** sold *Infernal* for £800, as reported by the *Gentleman's Magazine* on 20 March 1757.⁸⁸² Where and when to make such a sale of a prize was the captain's decision alone. Burnett would have found many potential buyers in the maritime world of Guernsey, and his share of the prize money was doubtless put to good use furnishing his palatial accommodation in *Cambridge*.

The chance of prize money was a powerful means of inspiring officers (and their crews), to exert themselves to the utmost, with an appetite which 'was almost canine' in the view of some contemporaries.⁸⁸³ A 'lucky' captain who sought out successful engagements would be popular with his crew. News of the riches paid out to the fortunate recipients would spread rapidly.⁸⁸⁴ Sailors were very conscious of the benefits which accrued to them, even if their share was small.⁸⁸⁵ Sailors could make good use of sums as small as £2 which would have bought a variety of silver shoe and knee buckles, shirts, stockings and a hat.⁸⁸⁶ **Thomas Baillie** was threatened with an action against him by the *Tartar's* company for allowing the *Marie Victoire* to be sold to the Government, 'the captors being offered near one thousand pounds more by the merchants'.⁸⁸⁷ Captures were surveyed by the Navy Board before they decided whether or not to purchase the vessel.⁸⁸⁸

John Elliot warned his father that he would be surprised at how little he had made from his prizes. His captures of *L'Alcyon*, *La Vengeance* and *Le Heureux* were worth nearly £2,000.⁸⁸⁹ His share of the captures of Thurot's squadron as well as five prizes of war, two privateers, half a dozen merchantmen and two retaken English ships came to a total between £4,000 and £5,000. In addition the King awarded him £1,000 for the capture of Thurot.

⁸⁸¹ ADM 51/433 Captain's log *Happy* 26 April 1757.

⁸⁸² *Gentleman's Magazine* Vol. 27 1757.

⁸⁸³ David Hannay, ed. *Letters Written by Sir Samuel Hood 1781-83* (Navy Records Society 1895) xvii.

⁸⁸⁴ A special record was made of the announcements in *The London Gazette*, in ledgers which list the remnants of the uncollected prize moneys, which were then paid to the Greenwich Hospital. The prize agents were given some years in which to distribute the prize money, but the ledger is completed by a column in which the date of the final payment was made to the Hospital. ADM 305/105 or 112.

⁸⁸⁵ Dodds and Moore, *Building the Wooden Fighting Ship* (Hutchinson 1984) 8-9.

⁸⁸⁶ Recorded in a unique document, now destroyed. Sir John Knox Laughton, *The Naval Miscellany* Vol. II (Navy Records Society 1912) 289.

⁸⁸⁷ ADM 1/1488 Captains' Letters B 1757 **Baillie** 23 May 1757.

⁸⁸⁸ ADM 1/1787 Captains' Letters F 1760-1 **Faulknor** 21 August 1761.

⁸⁸⁹ *La Vengeance* was bought by the Navy Board for £2,151.3.0d, Winfield, *Warships* 232; *La Blonde* was bought for £3,855.17.1d, Winfield, *Warships* 201;

Having taken a prize, decisions then had to be taken as to where the prize should be sold. *La Vengeance* was brought in to an Irish port, but Elliot was advised by his prize agent to spend a little money having her made seaworthy so that she could be sailed to Plymouth in order to get a fair price. Gilbert Elliot offered to have her surveyed for purchase by the navy, and since the decision as to whether she should be sold to the navy or on the open market was the captor's alone, Baillie's experience was probably not unique.⁸⁹⁰

Putting together information from different sources gives insight into the inroads expenses and other shares made into a capture's value. **William Hotham's** capture of the 38-gun 5th rate *Danaé* brought him £1,689, despite the comment that 'the deductions and drawbacks are amazing'.⁸⁹¹ The Navy Board bought her for £7,472 13s 6d, a half share of which went to Captain James Gilchrist and the *Southampton*, present at her taking.⁸⁹²

Prize money was also the reward of captains who took part in successful operations such as the captures of Havana and Manila. **Burnett, Hotham, Lindsay, Martin and Wheelock** would have had £1,600 each from Havana, the captains' share being divided into 42 parts; seamen at the Havana received £3 14s 9d.⁸⁹³ **Kempenfelt** received £1,539 from the taking of Manila, where there were no Albemarle fingers in the pie.⁸⁹⁴ The capture of Guadaloupe in 1759 resulted in small shares for large numbers of men. Fleet actions could result in numbers of prizes being taken, the proceeds from which were divided into very small amounts.⁸⁹⁵ **Kempenfelt**, commenting on his battle in December 1781, reported that it would have been to his advantage if he had stayed out with the fleet 'for the chance it gave me of taking something', but he brought in more than twenty of the French convoy of transports, leaving *Agamemnon* to bring in five further stragglers.⁸⁹⁶ Perhaps his regret at not maximising possible prize money caused him to question the Admiralty decision over a contested transport.⁸⁹⁷

⁸⁹⁰ NMM ELL 400 John Elliot to his father, cited in Rodger, *Wooden World* 257.

⁸⁹¹ A.M.W. Stirling, *The Hothams: Being the Chronicle of the Hothams* 2 Vols. (Jenkins 1918) Vol. 2 299.

⁸⁹² Winfield, *Warships* 200.

⁸⁹³ Syrett, ed. *The siege and capture of Havana* 305-311.

⁸⁹⁴ Nicholas Tracy, *Manila Ransomed* (Exeter University Press 1995) 113.

⁸⁹⁵ The proceeds from the Conflans fleet was divided between 34 crews.

⁸⁹⁶ G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen, eds *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich First Lord of the Admiralty 1771-1782* Vols. I to IV (Navy Records Society 1932-8) 17.

⁸⁹⁷ 'the Prudent having lost her prize by the capture of the French transport by a Dutch privateer and the French transport having been taken again from the possession of the Dutch and the French by persons not having a

Taking enemy ships did not always result in wealth for the captain. Disputes could result in court cases which dragged on for years. **John Wheelock's** capture of a Spanish brig off Louisburg in 1758 resulted in a court case in 1765 which threatened him with a debt of £2,800, the full value of the brig which had been wrecked in Louisburg harbour. **Thomas Burnett's** capture of the Guernsey smuggler *Two Brothers* off Isle de Bec was also disputed, and two years later a judicial committee in London ordered the ship and cargo to be restored. Expenses involved in handling and valuing the ship and its cargo reduced the profit to the captor substantially.⁸⁹⁸

1.6 Amphibious operations on French coasts

The age-old possibility of amphibious action led Julian Corbett to write:

.. great issues between nations at war have always been decided – except in the rarest of cases – either by what your army can do against your enemy's territory and national life, or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do.⁸⁹⁹

The British landings attempted and achieved on French coasts were not intended to do more than disturb the way in which the French disposed of her military forces.

To catch glimpses of Thomas Burnett and his peers and to understand odd references in their letters it was sometimes necessary to use non-Admiralty sources. At the outset the rôles they and their frigates played were of minor but significant importance

commission to take .. the prize must become a droit, liable to salvage.' ADM 1/95 **Admiral Kempenfelt** 18 January 1782.

⁸⁹⁸ ADM 1/482 Commander-in-Chief North America Lord Colville 17 January 1761; Address by the Hon. William Renwick Riddell, 17 March 1927 *The Empire Club of Canada Speeches 1927* (Toronto, The Empire Club of Canada 1928) 57-85. The Guernsey smuggler *Two Brothers* which Burnett captured was valued at £400. The various charges to be deducted came to £151, leaving £248 to be divided into three: one third for the Crown, one third to the Commander in Chief and one third to the captor. Similarly out of the £2,960 the cargo was sold for Burnett's share was £817.

⁸⁹⁹ Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis 1988) 16.

1.6 (1) Rochefort

It was a widely held view that the raids upon the French coast to divert French forces from Germany had not been successful.⁹⁰⁰ However this is not entirely borne out by the table provided by Corbett showing the numbers and quality of troops marched from Paris, Caen, Valogne, Versailles and other stations towards Rochelle.⁹⁰¹ These were not French troops from Germany, but they were the front line of the defences of Paris. It seems that a naval threat against French coasts withdrew vital forces and relieved the pressure on Frederick's forces. The potential of this strategy was well understood, for it repeated the success the British had enjoyed in the previous century, when Thomas Burnett's grandfather, Bishop Gilbert Burnett wrote that:

The honour of commanding the sea and of shutting the French within their ports gave a great reputation to our affairs ... they had many troops dispersed all along their coast, so that it put their affairs into great disorder and we were everywhere masters at sea.⁹⁰²

The amphibious actions against Louisburg, Quebec, Guadaloupe, Belle Isle and Havana during the war showed that as a result of the first attempt at Rochefort being a complete failure and providing lessons in what to avoid in the future, the navy had learned how to transport the army and support it on hostile shores. The critical weakness at Rochefort was the age and lack of decision of General Sir John Mordaunt. Moreover the beaches chosen for landing were impossible as the transports could not get close in to the land, and could not be protected by the ships of the line. On this occasion the army seemed profoundly disinclined to get its feet wet.⁹⁰³ However the lessons learned were to ensure success in every subsequent landing.⁹⁰⁴

In April 1758 the French at Basque Roads were preparing transports and other vessels for the relief of Louisburg. Hawke saw the convoy loading and arming near the Isle de Aix, and with his small squadron swept in to cut them out. **John Elliot** in *Hussar* drove a brig ashore

⁹⁰⁰ Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare* 211; J.R.Jones, 'Limitations of British Seapower in the French Wars' in Black and Woodfine, *British Navy* 37.

⁹⁰¹ Corbett, *Seven Years' War* Vol. 1 227-8.

⁹⁰² Airy, *Burnett's History* Vol. IV 277.

⁹⁰³ Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 163-177; Mahan, *Naval Officers* 115.

⁹⁰⁴ Keppel used the lessons from Rochefort in his successful attacks on Gorée in 1758, Belle Isle in 1761 and Havana in 1762. A.J. Marsh, 'The Taking of Gorée, 1758', *The Mariner's Mirror* 51 (SNR 1965) 117-130.

and burned it.⁹⁰⁵ Most French vessels escaped up the Charente, and grounded on the mud on the ebb tide. Stores, guns and ballast were thrown overboard in an attempt to lighten the ships which were then warped over the shallows using small boats to lay out their anchors. The jettisoned articles were buoyed, but Hawke's ships' boats went in and cut the buoys, so ensuring that support for Louisburg would not arrive.⁹⁰⁶ **Michael Clements** in *Acteon* was also involved.

1.6 (2) St Malo

The next amphibious enterprise was completely different both in organisation and outcome. There were two objectives: the first was to distract the French army from the King of Prussia; the second was to damage the French arsenals on the Normandy coast. Specially built flat-bottomed boats, each holding a half-company, were constructed at great speed, and a force of 13,000 men was collected in the Isle of Wight under the Duke of Marlborough. Anson and Hawke commanded the covering squadron, while Commodore Howe took the transports and smaller frigates in to Cancale Bay on 5 June.⁹⁰⁷ Having learned from Rochefort, the navy kept control of the landing force until the troops left the landing ships. Once the landing place had been agreed upon, a naval officer was responsible for getting the soldiers into the landing craft and then, in waves, onto the beach. Commodore Lord Howe conducted the landing himself.⁹⁰⁸ **Paul Henry Ourry** in *Success* was temporarily the flag ship of the enterprise when Howe left *Essex* and used the 6th rate to get closer in to supervise the landings.⁹⁰⁹ *Flamborough* under **Archibald Kennedy** was another of the frigates whose firepower was 'to cover the landing of the troops, clear the beach and silence the battery'.⁹¹⁰ The frigates themselves were rowed inshore to cover more closely the landing of the troops, and having run themselves on shore the crews were then busy all night, as the troops were landing, in keeping them upright. The bulkheads of the cabins and steerage were broken

⁹⁰⁵ *Hussar* 6th rate 28 guns O 18.4.1757 K 3.5.1757 L 23.7.1757 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 85; Clowes, *Royal Navy* Vol. 3 191; W. Kent Hackman, 'The British Raid on Rochefort 1757', *The Mariner's Mirror* 64 (SNR 1978).

⁹⁰⁶ Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 190.

⁹⁰⁷ This section is based upon two sources: the commentary by Alan Pearsall to the section 'Landings on the French Coast 1758' in N.A.M. Rodger, ed. *Naval Miscellany V* (Navy Records Society 1984) 207-243; and Intelligence Branch of the Quartermaster-General's Department, compilers, *British Minor Expeditions 1746 to 1814* (London 1884) 10-15.

⁹⁰⁸ Syrett, 'Methodology' 273.

⁹⁰⁹ *Success* 6th rate 22 guns O4.10.1739 K 30.10.1739 L 14.8.1740 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 51.

⁹¹⁰ *Flamborough* 6th rate 20 guns O11.4.1755 K 25.5.1755 L 14.5.1756 Lyon, *Sailing Navy List* 89; Syrett, 'Methodology' 275.

down and thrown overboard, and spare spars were retrieved from the booms and used to shore up the ships. Eventually they were hauled back into deeper water.⁹¹¹

Brigadier Elliot took 200 cavalry and the same number of infantry along the coast to St Servan, where they found a 50 gun ship, two 36 gun frigates, 20 privateers and 70-80 merchant ships. These and the magazines of naval stores were set alight. The rest of the army marched towards and threatened St Malo and then retreated from it, before being taken off again on the 11 and 12 June. Adverse weather prevented any further action against Cherbourg until 26 June when the fleet made its way back again, but a gale sprang up and made a further attack impossible. The fleet returned to the Isle of Wight.

1.6 (3) Cherbourg

Outside Cherbourg the bomb vessels and frigates cleared any resistance from the beach and the Guards secured the sandhills from which the French might have resisted. The troops marched along the coast to Cherbourg, where they destroyed the undefended forts, while the navy dealt with the fleet in the basin, burning 27 ships. **Paul Henry Ourry** was busy this time on shore, under Captain James of the Artillery, blowing up the fortifications at Cherbourg. The artillery destroyed 173 iron guns and some mortars, and carried away 24 brass guns. Eventually the French appeared to be about to attack in strength, and the British forces were taken off successfully.

A second landing was made at St Lunaire, not a suitable anchorage in the prevailing on-shore winds. The Grenadiers burned the shipping in the harbour of St Briac, but the weather was too unsettled for an attack on St Malo, so the fleet moved further along the coast towards St Cas. The army marched to join them, but the French appeared in force, and the army was given the order to re-embark. Many of the landing boats were destroyed by French artillery, and in the rush for the remaining boats several soldiers were drowned. General Drury and 400 soldiers of the rearguard were overwhelmed. **William Paston** was one of four naval officers responsible for the four divisions of flat bottomed boats, and all four were captured

⁹¹¹ **Ourry** lost his most of his books and papers during this feverish activity, thrown overboard with the bulkheads and partitions. He wrote asking to be paid despite not having presented his accounts for 1758. 'When *Success* was run on shore at Cancale by Lord Howe's orders under the battery most of my books and papers were lost, which prevents my accounts being passed.' ADM 1/2246 Captains' Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry** 13 March 1761.

by the French. Paston was with the campaign as he had just paid off the *Jason* and his new commission, the 6th rate *Tweed* was still building in Hull, so that he was free to be used by Howe and Duff. Paston and his colleagues were quickly exchanged, but 18 months later he had still not recovered his personal possessions, put into storage in Portsmouth.⁹¹²

General Ligonier reflected that the Army's landing force was logistically dependent upon the navy, and that 'a safe and well secured communication between the camp and sea, from whence you are to receive your supplies of all kinds, is absolutely necessary; the whole depends upon it ..'⁹¹³

1.6 (4) Belle Isle

The attack on Belle Isle took place in April 1761. Several of Thomas Burnett's peers were involved: **Joseph Peyton** in *Prince* was used by Hawke to identify potential landing places on Belle Isle.⁹¹⁴ **William Hotham** in *Mélampe* sketched the batteries and described possible approaches.⁹¹⁵ Others involved were **Alexander Schomburg** in *Essex*, **Samuel Wallis** in *Prince of Orange*, **Edmund Affleck** in *Launceston*, and **Paul Henry Ourry** in *Acteon*, while **William Fortescue** in *Hero* was part of the covering squadron. A feint landing was made before Wallis began the bombardment which silenced the battery at the entrance of the bay. Commodore Augustus Keppel then transferred into Wallis' *Prince of Orange* and the disembarkation began. The landing was resisted strongly, however, and the troops had to be retrieved. A few days later a second landing was made with more success, batteries were erected against the town and a three week attack on the town was rewarded with surrender. Major-General Hodgson reported to Lord Albemarle, Commodore Keppel's brother:

.. I hear some scoundrels have spread a report that the Commodore and I have disagreed. I believe there never was more friendships and more harmony between two persons since the creation of the world than has subsisted between us ... The two services have acted as one corps since we left England.⁹¹⁶

⁹¹² ADM 1/2296 Captains' Letters P 1759 **Paston** 3 December 1759.

⁹¹³ At Mordaunts's court martial. Syrett, 'Methodology' 276.

⁹¹⁴ Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 274.

⁹¹⁵ Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 371. On this occasion Hotham was sent back to the Admiralty with Hawke's despatches and wrote from within the office to ask for his expenses to be paid immediately. He escorted victuallers back from Plymouth. ADM 1/1895 H 1760 **Hotham** 15 November 1760.

⁹¹⁶ Clowes, *Royal Navy* Vol. III 236 n 1.

Belle Isle was held until the end of the war. Following this attack **Paul Henry Ourry** in *Acteon* was amongst those sent in successfully to attack the defensive works on the Isle d'Aix.

At the end of the war the belligerence died out immediately. **Edmund Affleck** sent in a report, gleaned from a French coasting sloop in ballast, that 'the gallies and armed vessels were dismantled at Havre and the merchant ships were preparing for the sea'.⁹¹⁷

1.7 Amphibious operations in Canada

In Canada the need for successful naval action was even more clearly understood. The attacks by the French on established trading posts had to be addressed, and the significance of the eventual outcome persists to this day. Because of the huge range of elements involved in these operations a number of Thomas Burnett's peers participated. From the individual achievements of **Joshua Loring** and **Archibald Kennedy** as transport agents to the panache of **Alexander Schomberg** in *Diana* at the siege of Louisburg to **Thomas Burnett**'s lonely vigil in *Rochester* at the Isle de Bec, this theatre gave many of the young men a chance to show individual strengths.

In 1756 **Archibald Kennedy** was commissioned by the Admiralty to command the newly-built snow *Halifax* on Lake Ontario. *Halifax*, the sloop *Mohawk* and brigantine *London* were intended to keep in check the French presence on the Lake. Before he could take up his command the British forces were overwhelmed and the ships captured.

The threat to British interests in Canada resulted in a huge concerted effort, in which the navy was responsible for hiring merchant vessels as transports; manning the naval vessels which escorted the transports; accumulating and loading the stores required to feed the army and the naval personnel involved. **Archibald Kennedy** was appointed as an agent for the transports preparing for the enterprise in the Thames.⁹¹⁸ Kennedy's meticulously detailed daily letters spell out clearly the endless excuses which he summarised as 'contrivance by master'.

⁹¹⁷ ADM 1/1442-3 Captains' Letters A 1760-70 **Affleck**, 16 October 1762, also 27 July 1756, 11 March, 1 April 1758, 7 April, 1 July 1760, 13 November 1761, 23 January 1761; ADM 1/2298 Captains' Letters P 1761

Peyton, 9, 13 November 1761.

⁹¹⁸ Syrett, *Shipping and Military Power* 160.

Eventually the convoy was collected together, conveyed across the Atlantic and discharged in America. Kennedy's responsibilities did not end there. The men who had come with him from England to serve in the *Halifax* were in need of subsistence until they were found other employment. He paid their expenses out of his own pocket, knowing that this would cause complications back at the Navy Board when he put in his accounts to be paid, but confident that he was doing the right thing and that he would not be the loser by it. Kennedy then took himself back to England as soon as he could so that he could take up an independent command of his own.⁹¹⁹

Others of his peers had been hard at work gathering troops from Scotland for the assault in Canada. **Robert Man** kept the Admiralty informed of the endless problems in gathering Highland troops from the Clyde which delayed their embarkation by four months.⁹²⁰

Joshua Loring was caught up in the business of fitting out yet further transports and embarking troops from New York for destinations in Canada.⁹²¹ Loring was desperate to be extricated from this service, but was extremely useful to the Earl of Loudoun.⁹²² Loring brought to the Admiralty's attention the existence of quantities of naval stores which had been collected in and near New York for the projected naval presence on Lake Ontario.

Lord Loudoun was recalled to Britain after the cancellation of the first attempt to take Louisburg in 1757. The combination of bad weather and bad luck meant that the navy had not been able to prevent squadrons of the French fleet joining together in the harbour at Louisburg, and they could not be tempted out for a set-piece battle. In 1758 Loudoun's plans were in the hands of Jeffery Amherst, who eventually achieved his objective of uniting three British armies at Montreal. The 40 warships which formed the naval forces were under the command of Boscawen, who co-operated throughout with the needs of the army. With Boscawen were **John Lindsay** in *Trent*, **Alexander Schomberg** in *Diana*, **Robert Boyle Walsingham** in *Boreas*, **Charles Medows** in *Shannon*, **Samuel Wallis** in *Port Mahon* and **John Wheelock** in *Squirrel*.

⁹¹⁹ Syrett, 'Maritime Strategic Mobility' 83; ADM 1/2009-10 Captains' Letters K 1751-9 **Kennedy**, 30 March 1756 – 7 September 1757.

⁹²⁰ ADM 1/2109 Captains' Letters K 1757 **Man**, 13, 23 September, 6 October, 17 November, 1 December 1757.

⁹²¹ Syrett, *Shipping and Military Power* 160.

⁹²² ADM 1/2046 Captains' Letters L 1757 **Loring**, 20 June 1757.

When Boscawen arrived with his fleet and the transports off Louisburg, they were not interfered with except by the weather. The seven week siege under Amherst and Wolfe progressed steadily once a landing place had been found. Wolfe, having learned what not to do at Rochefort, ensured that the navy was closely involved with every aspect of operations, not just of the landings. While reconnoitring in thick fog and a strong wind, **John Lindsay's** *Trent* struck on a rock. She had to unship her rudder, but with some difficulty they succeeded in getting her off. The frigates were able to assist the military efforts on land by continuous bombardment from the sea. On 14 June **Alexander Schomberg's** *Diana* was damaged and six men were killed or wounded by constant French fire.⁹²³ Under the direction of alternating captains from the frigates, sailors were used to help digging trenches, carry ammunition and supplies, and finally erect a battery of their own. A lucky shot caused *Le Célèbre* to go up in flames, and the two vessels near her were also engulfed. During the night of 26 July sailors and marines in longboats crept into the harbour under cover of fog, and both *Le Prudent* and *Bienfaisant* were boarded and captured. *Le Prudent* was found to be aground and was burned where she lay, but *Bienfaisant* was towed away by all the ships' boats. It was the end of resistance and Louisburg capitulated the next day. The fort was then demolished.⁹²⁴

During August **Joshua Loring** got to work with his shipbuilders at Fort William Henry on Lake George and first launched a sloop, the *Earl of Halifax*. Loring's vessels were intended to patrol the lake and to protect the army as it marched against the French, but, as was the local practice, could be sunk for protection during the winter. Flat-bottomed and of shallow draft, the vessels were designed for their environment. When Major General Amherst arrived to take command of the British army at Lake George, Loring was in charge of the flotilla of small vessels which carried the army to the northern end of Lake George. While Fort Ticonderoga was being rebuilt Loring built more ships, the brig *Duke of Cumberland* and the sloop *Boscawen*. The ships had to be manned from the military, as there were no naval or mercantile officers willing to serve.⁹²⁵

⁹²³ Asked to explain his short complement on his return to England, Schomberg gave the figures: 'during siege of Louisberg seven were killed; malignant fever carried off 29; 8 of the old standers have deserted since coming to Portsmouth.' ADM 1/2473 Captains' Letters S 1759 **Schomberg**, 12 January 1759.

⁹²⁴ René Chartrand, *Louisburg 1758: Wolfe's first siege* (Oxford 2000); Anon, *An Authentic Account of the Reduction of Louisburg in June and July 1758* (London 1758).

⁹²⁵ Robert Malcomson, *Warships of the Great Lakes 1754-1834* (Chatham 2001) 10-16.

In 1759, the attention of the army was focused on the St Lawrence River where Quebec commanded the use of the waterway. Wolfe was in charge, and could dictate the use he made of the naval support afforded him by Vice Admiral Charles Saunders. The French batteries, redoubts and entrenchments above and below the town could not be attacked from the water. **John Lindsay** in *Trent* fired on and dispersed floating batteries which the French used to try to set fire to British ships. Eventually the decision was made to land troops below the town. On the night of 13 September the landing boats brought British troops to Anse au Foulon. The tide carried the forlorn hope detachment past the point picked out by Wolfe, but three companies made their way up the face of the cliff.

Captain Joseph Deane's *Lowestoft* and **John Wheelock**'s *Squirrel* were part of the protecting screen providing cover for the long boats and landing boats which ferried the men ashore. Wolfe gave Wheelock detailed orders as to which flat bottomed boats were to be used, in what order, and for which troops. At the same time further ships under Admiral Knowles at Beauport Shore staged a noisy diversion, hoping to split the French defences. Montcalm brought his troops onto the plain in front of Quebec to prevent a frontal assault by the British forces. However the hastily gathered French were no match for the British, whose muskets, by Wolfe's orders, were double shotted. One discharge was enough to disperse the French, and confused fighting followed but Quebec surrendered on 18 September.⁹²⁶

The British held on to the shattered town though the winter, but were in desperate need of supplies and reinforcements by the spring. Eventually both the French forces attempting to re-take the city and the British defenders were reduced to watching for the first vessel to reach them, knowing that victory would belong to whichever side was reinforced. The British vessels which arrived, including **Alexander Schomberg**'s *Diana*, provided confirmation that Canada was securely in the hands of the British. The French vessels sent to relieve their Canadian forces was trapped between two British squadrons at the mouth of the St Lawrence, and all the stores were taken before the vessels were destroyed.⁹²⁷

The summer of 1759 had seen **Loring** and the shipwrights he hired from Philadelphia busy with more shipbuilding under Amherst's direction at Fort Niagara. Two snows were

⁹²⁶ Tom Pocock, *Battle for Empire* (Caxton 2002); Barry M. Gough, 'The Royal Navy and Canadian Dominion', *The Mariner's Mirror* 72 (SNR 1986) 9.

⁹²⁷ Stuart Reid, *Quebec 1759: The battle that won Canada* (Osprey 2003)

completed, one renamed *Onandaga* by General Amherst to please the local American Indians. Loring's naval enterprise was now totally controlled by the army, with crews of merchant seamen and soldiers. The army was moved down the treacherous waterway of the St Lawrence River towards Montreal in a flotilla of 800 small boats, the snows suffering from a lack of pilots in the uncharted waters. The *Onandaga* ran aground within range of the French batteries above Fort Levis, and Loring was severely wounded and a third of his crew killed or wounded. Despite this setback Amherst took Fort Levis and his forces met the rest of the British troops on Montreal Island. On 8 September 1760 Montreal, together with the whole of Canada, was surrendered.⁹²⁸

1.8 Amphibious operation at Manila in the Pacific

Richard Kempenfelt, as Rear-Admiral Cornish's flag captain in *Norfolk*, accompanied him to assault Manila in 1762. This was a text-book example of an amphibious assault, with the military and naval forces working closely together from the outset, and Kempenfelt one of the three captains overseeing the landing of the troops. The Spanish were completely unaware of any threat, and posed little resistance to the forces which landed without opposition. The naval guns, landed from the ships, were instrumental in reducing the citadel.⁹²⁹

1.9 The naval blockade of the French ports

1.9.1 Atlantic ports

The question of close or loose blockade of the French Atlantic ports was argued throughout the eighteenth century. Anson's solution was 'to have such a squadron always to the westward as may in all probability either keep the French in port or give them battle with advantage if they come out.'⁹³⁰

⁹²⁸ Malcomson, *Great Lakes Warships* 16-20; Corbett, *Seven Years' War* Vol. II 105-118; ADM 1/2048-9 Captains' Letters L 1759-60, ADM 1/2052 Captains' Letters L 1766-9 **Loring**, 28 November 1759, 26 August 1760, 17 July 1767.

⁹²⁹ Nicholas Tracy, 'The Capture of Manila 1762', *The Mariner's Mirror* 55 (SNR 1969); Tracy, *Manila Ransomed* 35.

⁹³⁰ Unattributed in Middleton, 'The Western Squadron' 350; Duffy, 'The Western Squadron' in Duffy, ed. *British Naval Power* 75; Jones, 'Limitations of British sea power' in Black and Woodfine, eds. *British Navy* 45.

The ongoing question was how far to the westward to keep the watching squadron.⁹³¹ Despite Boscawen's planning, three French squadrons were able to slip out during the winter of 1757: six vessels left for the West Indies, followed by a further five, then the final Brest squadron left for Louisburg. In April 1758 a merchant convoy of 40 vessels at Basque Roads was surprised and scattered by Hawke, most went aground or jettisoned their guns and stores to make their escape. But, as Middleton concluded, four years of hard work had not achieved the intention of keeping French fleets from the Channel. The French had succeeded in reinforcing North America in 1755, disguising the attack on Minorca in 1756 and saving Louisburg in 1757, with merchant and supply convoys operating comparatively freely.⁹³²

Once the war began, use of the fleet to blockade Toulon denied the French access to their commerce. By 1758 the French were feeling the effects of the blockade, to the extent that Lady Elizabeth Anson reported to her brother 'the people being hardly able to live and everything being so dear, that the same quantity of beans (the usual resource of the poor) that used to sell for two sous, selling now for eight or ten sous.'⁹³³

The thankless work of blockade was dangerous. Apart from the weather and the rocky lee shore, lone frigates, on watch for the enemy fleet, were always wary of being caught by overwhelming enemy forces.⁹³⁴

As the design of ships improved they were able to stay at sea for prolonged periods, but the blockade necessitated efficient dockyards for repair or resupply. Portsmouth was too far to the East, and Plymouth was transformed into a dockyard which rivalled the Thames.⁹³⁵ To lengthen the time the blockading vessels could stay on station, food was brought out by victuallers, arranged by Robert Pett who was appointed as Victualling Commissioner in Plymouth.⁹³⁶ Finally, Hawke was given enough ships to be able to block Brest up 'in the

⁹³¹ From quote on the frontispiece, *London Evening Post* 27 January 1757. Black and Woodfine, eds. *British Navy*.

⁹³² British Museum ADD MSS 35,376 Hardwicke papers Vol. XXVIII folio 143-4.

⁹³³ British Museum ADD MSS 35,376 Hardwicke Papers Vol. XXVIII fol.145

⁹³⁴ ADM 1/ 2047 Captains' Letters L 1758 **Lindsay**, 29 October 1758.

⁹³⁵ Duffy, 'Western Squadron', 70-3.

⁹³⁶ Pett sent out live cattle, turnips, carrots, onions, cabbages and beer, first in 9, then 11 then 22 vessels. Better beer than that brewed in Plymouth came in from eastern sources. As a result of these initiatives 14,000 men

strictest sense': his inshore flotilla was divided into two, one off St Mathew's Point, the other across Douarnenez Bay to guard the passage du Raz, while Hawke remained off Ushant, ready to be signalled if he were needed.

In addition to improved docks and victualling facilities, charts were ungraded with more information about French coasts: an Admiralty circular dated 27 October 1759 had made clear that: 'the King's service has suffered very much during this war for want of information and knowledge of harbours, roads and accessible places on the coast of France'.⁹³⁷ It is a remarkable failure on behalf of the Secretary and his clerks that despite the urgency of this memorandum, instructions to the captains were not issued until 1760 or 1761. Despite the confidence shown by the British in the French *Neptune Francois*, the French did not know their own coasts either.⁹³⁸ Le Moing suggested that Conflans may not have known about the Teignouze passage which permitted Duff to slip away from Conflans when he left Brest.⁹³⁹

The British threats against the French coast were mirrored by Choiseul's threats of invasion in 1759. Flat-boats were built and assembled at Le Havre to carry 20,000 men from Ostend to Essex. The privateer Thurot was intended to take another force to raid Ireland while the main thrust of the invasion was to take place in Scotland. Twenty thousand troops assembled at the Morbihan were to be taken to Scotland in merchantmen.⁹⁴⁰ What was clear to the Admiralty was that the French fleet at Brest, under Conflans, would need to clear the inshore British fleet out of the way before the invasions. During July Hawke left Augustus Hervey in charge of a small squadron to keep a close watch on the movements of the French. Hervey had **Michael Clements** in *Pallas* remain close inshore, where he was able to intercept five coasting vessels laden with ammunition, destined for 'some expedition that is going on from the River Nantes'.⁹⁴¹ On 21 July four large French ships tried to get out but were frightened back into Brest by Hervey's aggressive approach.⁹⁴²

were healthier at sea than they would have been on land. Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 56-8; Mackay, *Hawke Papers* 260-281.

⁹³⁷ Middleton, 'The Western Squadron', 364.

⁹³⁸ Hawke asked to have copies printed at Admiralty expense and distributed to all ships employed on the French coast. Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 81

⁹³⁹ Guy Le Moing, *La Bataille Navale des 'Cardinaux'* (Economica 2003) 131-3, quoted by Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 69.

⁹⁴⁰ Le Moing, *La Bataille des 'Cardinaux'* 10-11.

⁹⁴¹ Mackay, *Hawke Papers* 54, 263

⁹⁴² Lambert *War At Sea in the Age of Sail* 120. Le Moing, *La Bataille des 'Cardinaux'*. Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 55, 60.

1.9.2 Quiberon Bay 20 November 1759

Several of Burnett's peers were involved in Hawke's fleet in Quiberon Bay. In September nine captains were asked for their opinions on the feasibility of an attack on the French ships in the River Vannes. **Michael Clements** in *Pallas* thought it practicable 'with the loss of some ships'; **William Hotham** in *Mélampe* thought keeping a squadron at anchor in the bay would be 'a much more certain method of distressing the enemy'; **Paul Henry Ourry** in *Success* was concerned about the defences along 'the rapid and narrow river'; **Henry John Phillips** in *Juno* thought 'the advantage will overbalance the risk'.⁹⁴³

Intelligence continued to flood in to the Admiralty, and the relevant news was passed on to Hawke immediately. Relevant to his situation and the decisions he had to make was the news of the victory at Lagos discussed below, and in October news of the capture of Quebec discussed above. The westerly storm early in November drove the watching squadron back to Torbay and allowed M. Bompar's fleet from the West Indies to find refuge in Brest. The sailors from these new ships were distributed amongst Conflans' vessels, but even so officers had to be used to help work the ships.⁹⁴⁴ On 15 November Conflans led his fleet out of Brest, only to have them sighted by **Henry John Phillips** in *Juno* who sent word back to Hawke. Hawke's fleet pursued, under 'a pressure of sail', sure that the French would be encountered in Quiberon Bay.⁹⁴⁵ Conflans led his ships in a desperate race for safety, but Hawke followed him into the Bay, trusting to the French ships in front of him to show the dangers in the narrow entrance. The British lost two ships, but the French fleet was destroyed.⁹⁴⁶ Of Thomas Burnett's peers the captains mentioned above were joined by **William Fortescue** in the 3rd rate *Hercules*, **Paul Henry Ourry** now in *Acteon* and **Thomas Harrison** in *Venus*.⁹⁴⁷ **Henry John Phillips** in *Juno* sailed with Geary in support of Hawke, but was too late to be part of the engagement. They played their part in this brilliant fleet action, but as junior frigate captains did not have their careers advanced by it.

⁹⁴³ Mackay, *Hawke Papers* 301-2.

⁹⁴⁴ This shortage of men was well documented. Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 54-5.

⁹⁴⁵ Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 67.

⁹⁴⁶ Le Moing, *La Bataille des 'Cardineaux'*.

⁹⁴⁷ ADM 1/2246 Captains' Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry**, 21 November, 23 December 1759, 5 March 1760. A ballad reported the triumph of Quiberon Bay: 'Conflans was so affrighted, he could no longer stay;/The rest of them turned tail, my boys, like cowards ran away./O, then they steered for Corjack Bay, where we led them a dance./It proved to be the final blow that sunk the crown of France.' Firth, *Naval Songs* 217-8.

The French reneged on the agreement to exchange prisoners after the battle, and had to be threatened with ‘very fatal’ consequences before the men were produced. **Paul Henry Ourry**, in *Acteon*, went in to collect the guns of the *Héros* and was fired on, so Ourry flattened part of Croisic.⁹⁴⁸ Eight French ships of the line escaped from Quiberon and made their way to the Basque Roads, where Keppel went in pursuit and reported that they had shed their main armaments so that they could warp up the twisted, muddy River Charente.⁹⁴⁹ This was the most successful naval action by any definition. Seven ships were totally lost to the French, including Conflans’ flagship which he burned. The seven ships which escaped up the Vilaine were unavailable for years. The ships which escaped to Rochefort did not emerge again until the peace.

1.9.3 Landing by French in Ireland 21-25 February 1760

The naval blockade had unexpected benefits. In October 1759 a gale which blew Commodore Boys and his squadron (which included **Henry Martin** in *Danaé*) off station allowed François Thurot to slip out of Dunkirk in *Marshal Belleisle*, with *La Terpsichore* and *La Blonde* and three auxiliary ships. This was the only element of the three planned invasions to succeed, largely because Thurot sailed north from Dunkirk and evaded the British blockade. In what the French described as ‘a chimerical project’ they sailed via Gothenburg, Bergen and the Faroe Islands before arriving off the Irish coast in January, by this time without the auxiliary ships.⁹⁵⁰ After refitting off the island of Islay, Thurot landed about 600 French troops at Carrickfergus on 21 February. The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland sent urgent messages to every port in Ireland asking for support. It happened that **John Elliot** in *Aeolus*, **Michael Clements** in *Pallas* and James Logie in *Brilliant* had been blown off their stations with Hawke’s fleet blockading the French coast, and were delayed in Kinsale by dilatory victuallers. Elliot, as senior officer, responded to the alarm and the three vessels reached Belfast Lough on 25 February, and before dawn the next day sighted three French ships attempting to leave.

⁹⁴⁸ Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 259.

⁹⁴⁹ Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 82; Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* 356.

⁹⁵⁰ Corbett, *Seven Years’ War* 91.

Elliot's report to the Admiralty was typically laconic, giving just the rates and complements of the three French ships, concluding with his customary generosity, 'It is with the greatest pleasure I acquaint their Lordships that the officers of his Majestys ships behaved remarkably well on this occasion.'⁹⁵¹

The French prisoners were so numerous that Elliot had to hire a snow in Whitehaven to carry some of them back to Carrickfergus, having sent *Pallas* 'with as many as she could stow' – 450 men. He sailed back to Plymouth with 'at least thirty French officers in the cabin'.⁹⁵² Elliot undertook to repay the expenses of the local doctor in Ramsay, who offered to do everything for the care and maintenance of the casualties, the survivors of about 300 men killed or wounded. Michael Clements sent in the papers found in the purser's cabin, being used by the second captain on board *Terpsichore*.⁹⁵³ On this occasion Elliot was rebuffed by the Admiralty: his first lieutenant, George Forbes who had hauled down the *Le Maréchal de Belleisle*'s flag, was not promoted despite Elliot's recommendation.⁹⁵⁴

1.10 The naval blockade of the Mediterranean

Intelligence in the Mediterranean was just as vital as from the Atlantic: **Paul Henry Ourry**, still only a Master and Commander in 1756, was employed in the fast tender *St Antonio de Padua* to give warning of the French fleet coming out of Toulon, and whether it was bound for Minorca or not, using a system of flags to indicate the destination.⁹⁵⁵

The blockade of Toulon was achieved through a squadron at Gibraltar alerted by frigates watching from closer at hand. In 1758 de la Clue's force was sheltering in Cartagena, waiting for reinforcements to arrive from Canada. Osborne and Saunders could not approach these vessels too closely, as this would have challenged Spain's neutrality. When du Quesne did arrive he refused to go into the harbour, and for three days he and de la Clue each insisted

⁹⁵¹It appears that the church plate which had been stolen by the French from Carrickfergus Church was never recovered. ADM 1/1760 Captains' Letters Captains' Letters E 1759-62 **Elliot**, 29 February 1760. This episode was commemorated by the song 'Thurot's dream', which narrates the events in vivid detail. Firth, *Naval Songs* 220-2.

⁹⁵² NMM ELL/400 **Elliot** letter to Sir Gilbert Elliot 1 March 1758.

⁹⁵³ ADM 1/1606-7 Captains' Letters C 1757-60 **Clements**, 5 May 1760, also 19 December 1758; 3, 29 March 1759; 26 September 1762; A summary of the relative numbers of killed and wounded is given in Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 9.

⁹⁵⁴ NMM ELL/400 **Elliot** letter to his father 22 April 1758.

⁹⁵⁵ ADM 1/2245 Captains' Letters O 1751-8 **Ourry**, July 1756.

that as the more senior officer he should be joined by the other squadron. Finally the wind changed and du Quesne was blown away from land, into the arms of the waiting British fleet. Sped on their way by du Quesne's '*saufé qui peut*' signal, the French scattered. The *Orphée* was captured, the *Oriflamme* driven ashore and the *Foudrayant* hunted through the night and worsted. A month later the delighted Lady Anson was able to tell her brother about the triumph.⁹⁵⁶ Osborn's presence off Cartagena immobilised de la Clue, who escaped back to Toulon when Osborn had to refit in Gibraltar. In 1759 **William M^cCleverty** sent information to Admiral Broderick that the French fleet was busy with preparations at Toulon, and was warned by the Admiralty not to mention the names of agents in his letters, 'as they may be intercepted and be of prejudice to the persons mentioned'.⁹⁵⁷

Joseph Peyton was flag captain in *Prince George* under Rear Admiral Broderick. They were on their way to the Mediterranean to take over from Rear Admiral Saunders when *Prince George* caught fire and sank. Fortunately the ship was in company with the rest of the fleet, and there were ships' boats to help rescue those in the sea. Peyton's first charge was to save his admiral:

After Brodrick <sic> had left in the barge after repeatedly pressing him to do it, no endeavour was spared to save the ship though to no purpose. When past all hopes I ordered the ports to be left open it blowing fresh and a good deal of sea to let her sink as the preferable alternative to blowing up.⁹⁵⁸

Peyton was retained by Broderick as his flag captain, and they transferred together into the 2nd rate *Prince* when Admiral Osborn was relieved.

Battle of Lagos

Those of Thomas Burnett's peers who were in frigates were not expected to take part in the action against much larger vessels: their rôle was to shadow the enemy, pass intelligence and repeat instructions to ships of the line out of sight of the flag ship. Carrying out these activities were **Christopher Basset** in *Rainbow*, **Charles Medows** in *Shannon*, **William**

⁹⁵⁶ Lady Elizabeth Anson, 25 March 1758 *Hardwicke Papers Add MSS 35376 Vol. 28 Fol. 143-4*: Corbett, *Seven Years' War* 255-260.

⁹⁵⁷ ADM 1/2111 Captains' Letters M 1759 **M^cCleverty**, 7 January 1759; ADM 1/2246 Captains' Letters O 1759-62 **Ourry**, 21 November 1759.

⁹⁵⁸ ADM 1/2295 Captains' Letters P 1758 **Peyton**, April 1758.

M^cCleverty in *Gibraltar*, **Andrew Wilkinson** in *Glasgow* and **Thomas Baillie** in *Tartar's Prize*.

The Battle of Lagos was a fleet action which showed clearly the different attitudes of the opposing forces. The French fleet from Toulon was ordered to Martinique to retake the sugar island of Guadaloupe.⁹⁵⁹ De la Clue's fleet of twelve ships of the line had to escape from Toulon through the narrow Gibraltar straits without being caught, and managed to do so at night. Although the darkness protected the fleet, it was impossible for de la Clue to inform all the vessels that his plan to rendezvous at Cadiz had changed with the wind, and his intention instead was to go to Cape St Vincent. The rearward five of his fleet, already being harried by Boscawen, broke away from de la Clue in the darkness and steered for Cadiz. Once the shadowing frigate brought the news of the French fleet off Ceuta, Boscawen achieved the feat of getting his vessels out of Gibraltar despite their being in a state of complete disarray. Officers and men were on shore, sails were not bent, but in a matter of hours Boscawen's fleet was at sea, restoring men to their rightful ships and taking in ships' boats. He was followed out by Broderick and his squadron. Boscawen did not want to take just the French rear guard, but the ships in the van, but he did not have signals which could convey his instructions. M. de Sabran gallantly interposed his *Centaure* between de la Clue's remaining ships and the British and was fought to a standstill. By the morning, twenty four hours after his escape from the Straits, de la Clue only had four ships left: he ran his flagship *Océan* onto the rocks rather than surrender. The *Rédoutable* followed his example, and *Téméraire* and *Modeste* were taken from under the Portuguese batteries.⁹⁶⁰ With Boscawen was Broderick and his flag captain **Joseph Peyton** in *Prince*.

1.11 The West Indian campaign

In the West Indies the acquisition of political bargaining counters was extremely useful. The French did not maintain a permanent naval presence in the West Indies as the islands were avoided during the hurricane season. The trade, however, was protected by convoys. The French had no means of revictualling their ships in the islands, nor did they have docks in which repairs could be carried out. Attacks on British trade were carried out by privateers,

⁹⁵⁹ Mackay and Duffy, *British Naval Leadership* 52.

⁹⁶⁰ Mahan, *Influence of Sea power* 299; Corbett, *Seven Years' War* Vol. II 33-9; Sam Willis, 'The Battle of Lagos 1759', *The Journal of Military History*, 73 (Society for Military History 2009).

often quite small, which swarmed around the islands. In contrast the British navy was accustomed to providing protection for their trade throughout the year. Ships driven out of the St Lawrence Waterway by ice in winter could go to the West Indies for repair at Port Royal in Jamaica or English Harbour in Antigua. Salt for the fisheries was convoyed northwards from Salt Tortuga, and supplies of food and naval stores were brought down from North America. A constant succession of relieving convoys brought out fresh ships and returned those in the worst condition to England.⁹⁶¹

When **Thomas Burnett** sailed in *Cambridge* to the Leeward Islands in June 1757 he was taking part in a long-established practice of trade protection. When she arrived *Cambridge* provided evidence of one of the weaknesses of English Harbour: she was too large to get in over the bar, and had to shelter on the Northern coast where repairs could not be carried out.⁹⁶² During the hurricane season Burnett had to take her south to avoid the worst of the weather. If Spain had been an enemy during this time Burnett might have benefited from prizes taken in Spanish waters, but during this period Spain had not been brought into the conflict.

The British naval forces were divided into two commands, the western one based on Jamaica, the eastern one on Antigua, and there was always some conflict between the demands of each station. There was also a lack of co-ordination between the needs of the North American station and those of the West Indies. At times of crisis a concentration of forces would have proved useful, but the question of seniority often got in the way. The demands of the merchants further hindered efficiency. They pressed for protection of their interests, to the exclusion of the need to annoy those of the enemy. Pares argues that the blockade of French colonies did not contribute to the British victory.⁹⁶³ However by 1759 Choiseul wrote that instead of a military balance on land, what was important was a colonial and maritime balance arrived at through commerce, wealth and sea power.⁹⁶⁴

⁹⁶¹ Pares, *War and Trade* 268-282.

⁹⁶² ADM 1/305 Commodore John Moore to Cleveland, 7 March 1758.

⁹⁶³ Pares, *War and Trade* 392-3.

⁹⁶⁴ Pares, *War and Trade* 567.

Marshall Smelser's work has defined the campaign in which **Thomas Burnett** and *Cambridge* now found themselves.⁹⁶⁵ As part of the escalation of the war, *Cambridge* took part in the attack on Martinique on 16 January 1759. Four men were killed in the fight, and two more died of their wounds the next day. *Cambridge's* complement was further reduced through desertion: ten men swam from the ship while she was in Martinique.⁹⁶⁶ **Burnett** was one of three captains responsible for overseeing the landing of 4,400 troops at the Bay of Cas de Navires. This was not a successful use of the troops, who were faced by a much stronger French force, and eventually they were withdrawn to the transports.⁹⁶⁷ On the 20 January the fleet moved to Guadeloupe, a much more valuable target. *Cambridge* was one of the ships which attacked the citadel and fortresses of Basse Terre, a foretaste of the attack on the Morro two years later. Guadeloupe surrendered, as did the smaller islands of Marie Galante, the Saintes, La Desiderade and Petit Terre. Little was rescued from the fires which destroyed the town and the store houses. Bompar arrived at Martinique with a French force but did not attempt to retake Guadeloupe. Moore was unable to prevent Bompar from landing in Martinique, hampered as he was by needing to protect the military forces he had landed. **Thomas Burnett** escorted the trade convoy of more than two hundred vessels back to England in August 1759 as *Cambridge* needed to be refitted, and the work could not be done locally. Commodore Moore was replaced by Sir James Douglas as Commander-in-Chief in 1760. The real enemy in the French West Indies had not been the French, but the local diseases for which the eighteenth century had no remedy. The army lost approximately 40 per cent of its troops to disease. The Treaty of Paris gave the islands back to France, a decision which caused Britain many naval problems in the subsequent war.

Spain entered the war in January 1762. Many of the ships prepared for the Spanish navy had been designed and built by English or Irish designers, dockworkers and artisans smuggled out of British dockyards.⁹⁶⁸ The Spanish Havana was a legitimate target, and under Pocock a huge concerted amphibious attack was made on the port.⁹⁶⁹ By this time Thomas Burnett and many of his peers had been commissioned into ships more appropriate for their rôle inside a fleet rather than on its periphery. Burnett never commanded a frigate: he went straight from

⁹⁶⁵ Smelser, *Campaign for the Sugar Islands*.

⁹⁶⁶ ADM 36/5257 *Cambridge* pay book 1757-9.

⁹⁶⁷ Smelser, *Campaign for the Sugar Island* 55.

⁹⁶⁸ Larrie D. Ferreiro, 'Spies versus Prizes: Technology transfer between Navies in the age of Trafalgar', *The Mariner's Mirror* 93 (SNR 2007) 16.

⁹⁶⁹ Syrett, ed. *The Siege of Havana*

his years as flag captain in the 80 gun 3rd rate *Cambridge* to the 50 gun 4th rate *Rochester*. As soon as **Thomas Burnett** arrived from North America in *Rochester* Rodney exchanged ships with him, leaving Burnett with the ancient *Marlborough*, still however a 68 gun 3rd rate.⁹⁷⁰ Also in Pocock's fleet were the **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** in the 64 gun 3rd rate *Modeste*, **William M^cCleverty** in the 50 gun 4th rate *Norwich*, and **John Wheelock** in the 60 gun 4th rate *Pembroke*.⁹⁷¹ **Paul Henry Ourry** in the 28 gun frigate *Acteon* and **John Lindsay**, who was still in the 28 gun fir-built frigate *Trent* were the only two who remained in the smaller vessels.

All the features of a successful amphibious enterprise were present at Havana, as discussed in Chapter 1. The officers of the army and the navy worked together, each understanding perfectly the rôle of the other. Landings were supervised by naval personnel, artillery was man-handled on shore by seamen, food and stores of all kinds were carried and distributed as necessary from the ships. General Wolfe would have approved of the co-operation between army and navy. The taking of Havana effectively ended the war.

2 Spain and the Falkland Islands 1770-3

Chapter 7 discusses the reasons why Burnett and only nine members of his peer group were used in the remobilisation of 1770.⁹⁷²

Richard Kempfenfelt had been with Rear Admiral Cornish as his flag captain when they captured Manila in 1762. They had been able to carry away only part of the riches they found there, and arranged that Spain would pay the rest as a ransom. This became a major cause for friction between Spain and Britain after the war and Lord Rochford, Burnett's patron, was recalled from Madrid. The exploration by **Samuel Wallis** of the Pacific was treated by Spain as potential aggression.

⁹⁷⁰ 30 April 1762 ADM 36/6450. Corbett viewed this differently: he stated that Pocock took away Rodney's flagship, claiming that he could not do without it, and to Rodney's intense disgust 'he bundled all his staff into a sixty-four.' *Seven Years' War* Vol. II 259. It seems that on this occasion Corbett made an error in analysis. *Marlborough* was considered expendable at the attack on the Morro, and foundered in mid-Atlantic on her return to England in November 1762.

⁹⁷¹ Walsingham had been sent home by Rodney with his letters, and was too ill to return to the West Indies. Syrett, *Rodney Papers* II 449.

⁹⁷² **Affleck, Burnett, Clements, Elliot, Hotham, Lindsay, M^cCleverty, Ourry, Peyton and Wheelock.**

Spain's claim to the Falkland Islands was challenged by the establishment of the British post of Port Egmont. France was posing a challenge in India, and **Sir John Lindsay** was sent to negotiate treaties with the Indian rulers. Threats from Russia in the Mediterranean added to the tension. On 10 June 1770 Spanish soldiers forced the British garrison from Port Egmont. Preparations were made in Britain for the navy to be put in readiness, the first intimation being increasing the size of crews on guardships. **Thomas Burnett** was one of the half-pay officers to be called back into service, thanks to representations made on his behalf by Lord Rochford, as detailed in Chapter 1.⁹⁷³ A full scale mobilisation could not take place in June as the merchant vessels were still at sea, carrying the sailors who would be pressed into the navy if ships of war were commissioned. French intervention continued, and Rochford personally ordered more ships to be put into commission as a visible sign that Britain was prepared to take action. By the winter, mobilisation using every means had put almost all ships ready into commission, a freezing winter which closed the Thames losing watermen their protections. In the event Rochford suggested that all three powers disarmed simultaneously, with Spain restoring Port Egmont.

Thomas Burnett was commissioned into the 70 gun 3rd rate *Boyne* in 1770, and took her to Jamaica as part of the show of strength against Spain. In the event nothing happened, and *Boyne* returned to England in 1772 without having fired a shot.⁹⁷⁴ France did not relinquish all plans for aggression, and concerns about Russia escalated. Britain needed continued access to naval stores and was prepared to defend Russia's actions with diplomatic caution. The strength in the guardship squadron was maintained until 1773.⁹⁷⁵

3 American War of Independence

The years between 1765, when **Archibald Kennedy** saw first hand the outrage of the American colonists against the imposition of British taxes, and the outbreak of the war of Independence were years during which Thomas Burnett and his peers were not on the scene.⁹⁷⁶ In New York a station ship coordinated activity with the Governor and customs

⁹⁷³ ADM 2/96 Admiralty Outletters 1770.

⁹⁷⁴ ADM 51/129 Captain's log *Boyne* 1770-72.

⁹⁷⁵ Nicholas Tracy, *Navies, Deterrence and American Independence: Britain and Seapower in the 1760s and 1770s* (Vancouver 1988) 69-99.

⁹⁷⁶ DM 1/2012 Captains' Letters K 1763-70 **Kennedy** 7 January 1765 – 30 April 1768; Clark, *British Treasury* 159.

officials, but just as Kennedy's papers lay un-read in his file, the evidence of growing rebellion to the sequence of legislation was disregarded.

The navy was ill-prepared for the American war. New frigates and sloops were not ordered from merchant yards on the outbreak of war as they had been in 1756. Instead the laid-up navy-in-ordinary was put back into commission. Baugh argues that this was the result of financial constraint. Whereas the total spent on the navy during the years 1755-63 had been £40.5 million, the total for 1775-83 was £62 million. Most of this expenditure came late in the war, when the effort of fighting against France, Spain and Holland at sea had to be added to the cost of putting 55,000 regular soldiers onto the American continent.⁹⁷⁷ The Rockingham administration which took over in 1765 was left with the repercussions of the Grenville government's Stamp Act, which had not been thought through. The change in government caused a delay in sending the instructions and copies of the Act with the new stamped paper, all of which suffered the same fate: destruction by rioters, storage in warehouses or return to England.⁹⁷⁸

Large sums would have been needed to solve one of the problems faced by the navy, the shortage of transports and ships of the line. A huge number of transports and resources of all kinds were needed to support the army across a vast territory without easy access to local sources of supply. But the third factor, that of the great length of the American coastline which had to be blockaded, could not be overcome with the resources available to the navy. A maritime war against the combined naval forces of America, France, Spain and Holland was simply more than England could win.⁹⁷⁹

John Elliot, as senior officer in the Downs, saw evidence of the long reach of the American War of Independence off the coast of Kent. In 1777 the American privateer brig *Lexington* was taken off the coast by the cutter *Alert*, and the Admiralty had to be involved in the proper disposition of the prisoners.⁹⁸⁰ **John Elliot** was involved more closely in the American war in the following year, when he was commissioned to take to America Lord Cornwallis

⁹⁷⁷ Baugh quotes the comment made by M. Garnier to Vergennes: 'When we recall that the original purpose behind this enormous expense was to impose a small tax on America, we seem to see an Alchemist of a new kind throwing into his crucible everything that is made of gold and precious metals in order to turn it into lead: this ruinous and mad war is the reverse of the Philosopher's stone for England.' Daniel A. Baugh, 'Why did Britain lose command of the sea?' in Black and Woodfine, *British Navy* 159-60.

⁹⁷⁸ Clarke, *British Treasury* 159.

⁹⁷⁹ David Syrett, 'The failure of the British effort in America, 1777' in Black and Woodfine, *British Navy* 175; Syrett, *Shipping and the American War*.

⁹⁸⁰ ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot**, 25, 26 September 1777.

amongst the commissioners ‘for treating and agreeing upon the means of quieting the disorders subsisting in certain of the colonies in North America’. The 3rd rate *Trident* had to have accommodation constructed for his passengers, and their servants and freight. Elliot was considerably put out by the amount of baggage which was ‘past all belief’, and asked for a special payment for the service. Before he sailed from St Helens it was discovered that ‘some evil disposed person or persons’ had cut through the collar of the mainstay and the gammoning of the bowsprit.⁹⁸¹ Elliot supposed that this act of sabotage was directed against the passengers and the purpose of their journey. Despite the offer of a reward of £100 the saboteur was never identified.⁹⁸² The Commissioners and the British Government could not accept the American terms which dictated either acceptance of American Independence or withdrawal of the British troops and navy, so the war lasted another four years.

The men who were still professionally active in the early 1770s were joined by **Richard Kempenfelt** for the American war, all as senior captains in ships which reflected their status, discussed in Chapter 7.⁹⁸³ Now personages on the naval scene, their presence was deemed beneficial to the outcome of an engagement, their opinions were sought and valued. Instead of being identified in the history books by the name of their frigate, they commanded capital ships and their professional expertise could change the course of a naval battle and influence the course of a war.

3.1 New York 1776

Commodore William Hotham took to New York in the summer of 1776 a fleet of 83 vessels escorted by seven ships of the line to crush the rebellion in America. These forces, combined with those already there, were sufficient to carry out a brilliant shore-to-shore amphibious transfer from Staten Island to Gravesend Bay, Long Island, under the guns of Hotham’s protective fleet. Despite this success the American forces were not contained, and there followed a year of indecision. Once the French under d’Estaing entered the war the naval forces at New York were no longer undisputed, although William Hotham is quoted as

⁹⁸¹ Whoever did this possibly worked at night, in the heads, out of sight of the quarterdeck and even of the fore-castle.

⁹⁸² ADM 1/1761 Captains’ Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot**, 20 April 1778.

⁹⁸³ Amongst the men who retired was **Archibald Kennedy**, whose experiences in New York had provided ‘early warning’ of the American War ten years before it broke out.

saying that the mere sight of the British ‘weighed as much with the Count as the pretended difficulty of passing over the bar with his long-legged ships might do.’⁹⁸⁴

The British naval forces off Sandy Hook were in no doubt that the French were concentrating to bring about their destruction. During the night of 13 August 1778 **William Hotham** in the 50 gun *Preston* came across a French 74 which had been disabled in the storm of the previous day, but was eventually driven off by other French ships attracted by the sound of gun fire.⁹⁸⁵ Howe organised repairs for all the ships damaged in the gale, but when he came up to the position occupied by d’Estaing found he had left for the West Indies.

Still as Commodore, **William Hotham** was despatched to the West Indies with a squadron of five ships of the line to assist Rear Admiral Barrington protect the rich resources of the islands. His ships suffered from the usual problems: illness reduced the complements of the ships, a lack of naval stores prevented repairs from being carried out, and they were desperate for supplies. The French had sent out a strong contingent determined to capture Barbados, Grenada and St Vincent. St Lucia was the first object for the British, and Hotham undertook the landing of the troops with practised efficiency. Rear Admiral Barrington reported that ‘Such a spirit of cheerfulness, unanimity and resolution actuates the whole of our little force both by land and sea that we are under no apprehension from any attempt the enemy may meditate.’⁹⁸⁶ Despite French efforts by land and sea, where seven British ships held off twelve French ones, the British forces could not be dislodged and St Lucia capitulated. D’Estaing withdrew for Martinique.

3.2 **Battle of Ushant 1778**

In 1776 Augustus Keppel was given command of the Channel fleet to protect British shores from possible attack, as he had refused to fight the American colonists. Two years later he was called upon to defeat a French fleet. Part of Keppel’s squadron had been detached under Vice Admiral Byron to go to America, amongst them **Edmund Affleck** in the 74 gun 3rd rate *Bedford*, **John Wheelock** in the 74 gun 3rd rate *Sultan* and **Andrew Wilkinson** in the 74 gun 3rd rate *Grafton*.

⁹⁸⁴ Syrett, *Royal Navy in American Waters* 99.

⁹⁸⁵ Capt W.M. James, *The British Navy in Adversity: A Study of the War of American Independence* (The Scholar’s Bookshelf 1926) 106

⁹⁸⁶ James, *British Navy* 118.

With Keppel at the battle of Ushant in July were **Joseph Peyton** in the 3rd rate *Cumberland*, **Hon Robert Boyle Walsingham** in the 3rd rate *Thunderer*, **Sir John Lindsay** in the 90 gun 2nd rate *Prince George* and **Michael Clements** in the 3rd rate *Vengeance*. The first stage of the battle went according to Keppel's plan, and involved all the ships one after another attacking the French line. However, many damaged ships were slow to comply with his order to renew the attack and Palliser's division re-formed on Palliser instead of resuming the line of battle. The French fleet sailed away under cover of darkness, leaving Keppel and his damaged fleet to claim victory. Jean Boudriot, who knows more than most historians about the French navy, concluded sadly that 'the outcome was indecisive, which in France may be interpreted as a success.'⁹⁸⁷ The furore which resulted from the Keppel-Palliser courts martial split the navy. Palliser was cleared of the charges and appointed Governor of Greenwich Hospital, but the Admiralty had difficulty finding another Admiral to take charge of the home fleet.⁹⁸⁸

During the difficult period just before war was declared Sandwich had claimed that 'our navy is more than a match for that of the whole House of Bourbon.'⁹⁸⁹ The reality was quite different. With Britain at war not only with her American colonists but also with France, Spain (from 1779) and Holland (from 1780), Sandwich noted the stark choices. Britain could not fight a naval war on the other side of the Atlantic without more than one base on American soil in addition to Halifax; a separate command based on the southern coast, perhaps at Port Royal, had not even been identified, let alone set up and supplied; Britain's colonies were vulnerable to attack from France, and could not all be defended without dividing naval resources into such small squadrons that each could be easily defeated; could Britain itself be defended with her naval reserves committed at a distance?⁹⁹⁰ Without a continental war to distract France, her aggression was focused on wresting supremacy from Britain at sea. Britain could not focus on one outcome: she could not bring herself to give up the American colonies and concentrate on defending her West Indian possessions and her own shores. Added to which, there was no longer a natural leader of the navy, only disaffection and division.

⁹⁸⁷ Jean Boudriot, 'Great Hopes' in *Musée de la Marine: Palace de Chaillot, Paris*, translated by David Roberts (Association des Amis du Musée de la Marine 1994) 33.

⁹⁸⁸ Adam Temple Patterson, *The Other Armada* (Manchester 1960) 87.

⁹⁸⁹ Piers Mackesy, *The War for America 1775-1783* (Longmans 1964) 175.

⁹⁹⁰ Barnes and Owen, *Sandwich* Vol. I 327-335; David Syrett, 'Home Waters or America? The Dilemma of British Naval Strategy in 1778', *The Mariner's Mirror* 77 (SNR 1991) 365-6.

3.3 Great fleet 1779

In 1779 when there was a real threat of invasion conveyed by an allied fleet, the sixty-four year old Admiral Hardy was brought out of retirement as the only non-partisan senior officer available. **John Elliot** was offered the post of Flag Captain as Hardy needed a subordinate who could give ‘some competence’ to his appointment. Elliot deferred to **Richard Kempenfelt**, saying that he was the ‘fittest officer’, and served under him later. Mackesy quotes the judgement of Barnes and Owen that Kempenfelt was an officer whose ability had somehow failed to bring him to the top of his profession, and Kempenfelt’s letters reveal the depths of his despair at Hardy’s shortcomings.⁹⁹¹ **Robert Boyle Walsingham**, a personal friend of Sandwich, wrote to him that he was disgusted at the lack of leadership shown when Hardy retreated as far as Spithead.⁹⁹² Hardy took to sea a fleet of thirty ships of the line, sufficient in Kempenfelt’s view against ‘this great unwieldy, combined armada’. Present amongst the ‘Grand Fleet’ were **Taylor Penny** in the 3rd rate *Marlborough*, **Hon Robert Boyle Walsingham**, *Thunderer*, **Joseph Peyton**, *Cumberland*, **Richard Kempenfelt** in the 100 gun 1st rate *Victory*, **John Elliot** in the 3rd rate *Edgar*, **Thomas Burnett** in the 64 gun 3rd rate *Prudent* and **Edmund Affleck** in the 74 gun 3rd rate *Bedford*. Kempenfelt’s confidence was not misplaced: the 66 vessels of the armada were too short of sailors and food to be able to cover a landing in Cornwall, and after frightening the townspeople of Plymouth the fleet withdrew without an engagement. **Taylor Penny** was the only one who was in danger from the fleet, as he closed it in *Marlborough* without realising whose ships were emerging from the morning mist.⁹⁹³

Paul Henry Ourry’s contribution to the scare was to offer to burn Plymouth dockyard, of which he was the commissioner. He sent the dockworkers to work on the redoubts, abatis and platforms being prepared by the Army; he provided transport for the miners who were sent to work on defences, and the volunteers who were pouring in; he transferred Spanish and French prisoners to Exeter. He also had time to plan a boom to close the harbour, like the one he had fixed across Port Mahon in 1756 as commander of the *Proserpine* fireship.

⁹⁹¹ Mackesy, *War for America* 282-3; Syrett, *Royal Navy in European Waters* 61.

⁹⁹² Temple Patterson, *Other Armada* 182

⁹⁹³ Temple Patterson, *Other Armada* 181.

Eventually Commissioner le Cras was sent from the Admiralty to Plymouth for a few days to restrain Ourry's 'wild conduct'.⁹⁹⁴

John Paul Jones, a Scottish born American navy officer, brought a squadron from America which threatened shipping in British waters and actually captured the *Serapis* and *Countess of Scarborough* in Filey Bay. **Thomas Burnett** was in charge of the squadron sent, without success, to intercept him in the Firth of Forth, others going to the west coast of Ireland or across to the Texel where he had taken his captures. The fact that Holland had allowed Paul Jones to shelter in the Texel was one of the reasons why Dutch convoys were subjected to searching.

3.4 Relief of Gibraltar 1779

Once Spain was in the war she was determined to regain control of Gibraltar, and began a siege on 21 June 1779. Spain believed that only occupying a part of Britain would persuade her to give up Gibraltar, and her fleet joined with the French to achieve this, as discussed above.⁹⁹⁵ Rodney was despatched with the convoy for the West Indies and to resupply Gibraltar. His forces included the 74 gun 3rd rates commanded by **Edmund Affleck**, *Bedford*, **Joseph Peyton**, *Cumberland*, **John Elliot**, *Edgar*, **Taylor Penny**, *Marlborough* and **Samuel Wallis**, *Dublin*. On 1 January *Dublin*'s maintopmast carried away, breaking the main yard as it came down. It was some time before the wreckage could be cut free and the mast was weakened by the strain. Thereafter Wallis' station in the convoy, according to Rodney's meticulously detailed orders, was 'to attend the rear of the convoy', and to remain at the rear of the fleet on both tacks if an engagement took place.⁹⁹⁶ On the 13 January the foreyard of the *Dublin* broke and three hours later the fore top mast broke close to the cap, carrying with it the starboard side of the top. Wallis described the series of accidents to Rodney without elaboration, but added that although a few men were hurt none had been killed. Wallis could not stay with the convoy, and had to be accompanied into Lisbon where she obtained the necessary spars to rebuild her main top mast.⁹⁹⁷ The master of the *Shrewsbury* piloted the two vessels over the bar at Lisbon, as no pilot would come out to their

⁹⁹⁴ Barnes and Owen, *Sandwich* Vol.III 64-70.

⁹⁹⁵ Syrett, *Royal Navy in European Waters* 68-9.

⁹⁹⁶ David Syrett, ed. *The Rodney Papers: Selections from the Correspondence of Admiral Lord Rodney 1763-1780* Vol. II (Navy Records Society 2007) Rodney Order Book to Samuel Wallis 7 January 1780 301.

⁹⁹⁷ ADM 30/20/13 Captains' Letters to Rodney.

signals as the weather was so bad.⁹⁹⁸ The Court of Lisbon gave orders that assistance was to be given to Wallis.

3.5 Moonlight Battle 1780

Rodney's force continued on their way south, and in passing they captured a Spanish convoy of fifteen ships and the seven ship escort, all bound for Cadiz. On 16 January 1780 the Spanish fleet was sighted by **Edmund Affleck** in *Bedford*, and Rodney ordered a general chase. **John Elliot** in the recently re-coppered *Edgar* was one of the first to reach the Spanish ships. Rodney issued a sequence of orders which brought his force against the Spanish ships in a general chase followed by actions by one ship after another in rotation as the enemy were overhauled. An order to engage the enemy from the leeward allowed the British ships to fire while the leeward lower-deck gun ports of the Spanish ships were closed. The 'Moonlight Battle' consisted of individual engagements which went on all night, on a lee shore, as the British ships manoeuvred to keep the Spanish from retreating to their ports. **Edmund Affleck** in *Bedford* engaged the *Princesa* for an hour before she surrendered. The battle resulted in six Spanish ships captured, of which two could not be saved from destruction on shore, and a further one destroyed: only five escaped.⁹⁹⁹ Rodney's entry into Gibraltar with supplies and troops was triumphant, and he took the time to refit the damaged ships before departing with the West Indian convoy.¹⁰⁰⁰ Rodney took advantage of the captured Spanish ships to issue his own commissions, one of which was to **John Elliot** as Commodore responsible for Gibraltar. This was reversed by Sandwich who wanted *Edgar* back in the Channel fleet.¹⁰⁰¹

The 'booty' from this battle amounted to hundreds of thousands of pounds: **Samuel Wallis** must have been terribly disappointed at having missed out on such wealth by two days.¹⁰⁰²

⁹⁹⁸ This letter in *Rodney's Papers* Vol. II 311 is wrongly identified as having been written by Captain James Wallis. It is of course from Samuel Wallis, describing the same damage as that communicated to Rodney on 16 January 1780.

⁹⁹⁹ Erskine, *Hervey's Journal* 270-3.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Knight, 'Copper Sheathing' 299.

¹⁰⁰¹ ADM 1/1762 Captains' Letters E 1780 **Elliot**, 12 February 1780; Syrett, *Royal Navy in European Waters* 92.

¹⁰⁰² Syrett, *Rodney's Papers* Vol. II 245.

3.6 West Indies 1780

France had entered the war not so much to assist the American colonists as to reverse the Treaty of Paris, and reclaim her West Indies possessions, which accounted for a third of her overseas trade.¹⁰⁰³ Rodney met de Guichen off Martinique on 17 April 1780, an encounter notable for the behaviour of Carkett who ignored the careful preparation Rodney had made for their engagement, and attacked in such a way that his example was followed. Not being able to send instructions at a distance quickly and without ambiguity destroyed Rodney's plan, which had been to tackle the van with a large proportion of his own fleet and so ensure a complete victory. A month later there was another encounter, in which **William Hotham's** *Vengeance* was badly damaged. Shortly afterwards **Commodore the Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** arrived with the relieving squadron. Rodney's relationship with his subordinates was never happy, and the disparaging language he used in letters about them would have deeply offended any one of them.

William Hotham was given six ships of the line and smaller vessels and commanded to take over the Leeward island station. The **Hon Robert Walsingham** and Rowley had ten of the line to escort the trade home, and Rodney himself oversaw the sailing of the August convoy. They left just in time before the hurricane season began. On 20 October the worst storm for many years struck the West Indies. The **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** and *Thunderer* disappeared, presumed foundered at sea. Twenty four other naval vessels were either wrecked or dismasted.

3.7 North America 1780

In 1780 the war against the American colonists stretched the length of the East coast, testing resources to the limit. At that time Admiral Arbuthnot had assisted General Clinton landing troops and artillery at Charleston, and this 'perfect harmony' was an example of co-ordination between two forces. Arbuthnot noted that 'five post captains, two masters and commanders with a proper proportion of lieutenants and petty officers and 750 seamen and marines have been employed in different departments'.¹⁰⁰⁴ Once Rodney arrived on the coast however, this harmony disappeared. Arbuthnot did not take kindly to working with a more senior man whose lack of respect was palpable, although couched in the formality of the day.

¹⁰⁰³ Mackesy, *War for America* 183.

¹⁰⁰⁴ James, *British Navy* 227 Arbuthnot to Germain 15 May 1780.

To Rodney's fury, Arbuthnot allowed **Thomas Burnett** to detach himself in *Prudent*, together with *America*, to cruise for prizes.¹⁰⁰⁵

In December 1780 Rodney returned to the West Indies from New York to find that because of the hurricane damage he was not able to repair and refit his own damaged ships. He was joined by Rear-Admiral Sir Samuel Hood, the only senior officer who would work under Rodney. As Holland had now entered the war against Britain, their orders were to attack the Dutch West Indian islands, beginning with St Eustatius. This was intended to stop the practice of Dutch ships carrying the produce, not just of the French islands, but of goods from England and Ireland which were being traded with the American colonies. St Eustatius, a tiny, infertile, 'ragged rock' which thrived on its neutral status to draw in trade from every direction, surrendered.¹⁰⁰⁶ Kenneth Breen makes clear in his article on Rodney and St Eustatius that Rodney considered the local merchants to be 'smugglers, Adventurers, Betrayers of their country and rebels to their King'.¹⁰⁰⁷ Rodney's seizure of the fortune stored in the warehouses did not benefit him at all. Despite being under the protection of **Robert Walsingham**, the convoy in which all the goods were being transported to England was intercepted. Walsingham saved the ships of the line but the court cases instituted by West India merchants left Rodney 'in honourable poverty'.¹⁰⁰⁸

Rodney, in ill health, eventually decided to return to England with a convoy of 150 vessels leaving Hood in charge. Intelligence showed that the strong French fleet which had assembled in the West Indies was on its way to the North American coast. Hood sailed for the Chesapeake, leaving the French free to retake the islands.

3.8 Cape Henry, Chesapeake 1781

In the Chesapeake at Cape Henry on 16 March 1781 Graves and des Touches were able to undertake a classic fleet action, despite the mist and heavy sea. Graves had formed a line with his ships, and his intention was clearly to overtake the French ships which wore round to oppose this. *Robust*, in the van, turned onto the same course, which exposed Graves' leading ships to the French. Being to leeward, these had their lower-deck gun ports open and could

¹⁰⁰⁵ ADM 30/20 Rodney to Stephens 12 November 1780.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Smelser, *Campaign for the Sugar Islands* 133.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Kenneth Breen, 'Sir George Rodney and St Eustatius in the American war: a Commercial and Naval Distraction', *The Mariner's Mirror* 84 (SNR1998) 193-203; Barbara Tuchman, *The First Salute: A View of the American Revolution* (London 1989).

¹⁰⁰⁸ Breen, 'St Eustatius' 202.

direct a much heavier fire on the three helpless ships in the van. Graves manoeuvred to bring as many ships as possible into action on their opposite numbers, but he neglected to give the order for close action, thus failing to succour his van, where the destruction was concentrated on **Thomas Burnett** in *Prudent*, with *Robust* and *Europe*. They were twice raked with successive broadsides by the entire French fleet and, heavily disabled aloft, were unable to move before the French sailed away. *Prudent* suffered 7 killed and 24 wounded and had to be taken in tow by *Adamant*.¹⁰⁰⁹ *Robust* too had to be towed to Lynnehaven Bay at the end of the inconclusive engagement. Despite his reduced complement (309 mustered out of a complement of 500) **Burnett** fished his heavily damaged masts overnight, but *Prudent* in her 'crazy condition' was not safe in anything but light winds, and was eventually ordered to New York to have new masts fitted.¹⁰¹⁰ He therefore missed the subsequent 'half-begotten battle' at the Chesapeake on 5 September.¹⁰¹¹ **Edmund Affleck** in *Bedford* was not damaged.

It was at this time that de Barras, who replaced des Touches, wrote that 'it is a principle in war that that one should risk much to defend one's position and very little to attack those of the enemy.'¹⁰¹² Certainly the British were fortunate in that the French seemed determined to sail away and not to press home their advantage, always apparently intent on conserving their ships from damage.

In September all the French forces were concentrated at the Chesapeake, but Graves had an unexpected advantage when he arrived in that the French were tacking to get out of the harbour whereas his fleet was running before the wind. Instead of behaving as Hawke might have done, Graves drew up his fleet in a formal line of battle, and flew the 'line of battle' signal throughout. This forced his junior captains to maintain their positions in relation to the flagship, and not to seek out and engage individual targets. Graves sent a memorandum to

¹⁰⁰⁹ **Burnett** reported his status: We being so much disabled in our Masts, Yards Rigging and Sails we could not pursue them, at 4 employed repairing our rigging and lay to under our mizzen. At 10 the *Adamant* took us in tow. ADM 51/748 **Burnett** to Arbuthnot 16 March 1781; ADM 1/486 Commander-in-Chief Arbuthnot 20 March 1781.

¹⁰¹⁰ Timber for masts had become very scarce in Britain, and it was a failure of the Admiralty that supplies from New England were not secured in time. Halifax, within a few miles of the best timber in Canada, had no stores of masts available. Robert G. Albion, 'The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy, 1652-1862' *The Mariner's Mirror* 38 (SNR 1952).

¹⁰¹¹ James was wrong to put *Prudent*, *Robust* and *London* in the van. *Europe* was the third vessel, *London* the flag ship. James, *British Navy* 272; Charnock, *Biographia Navalis* Vol. Six 219; ADM 1/486 Arbuthnot to Stephens 16 March 1781; Hannay, *Sir Samuel Hood Letters* xxxvii; Arbuthnot had asked to be relieved before the action, and was replaced by Rear Admiral Thomas Graves.

¹⁰¹² James, *British Navy* 274, also quoted in Clowes, *Royal Navy* Vol. 3 492-3.

his officers the next day, denying that they were bound to the line. Hood's private reaction to this was amazement that discipline should be rejected in favour of what he called disorderly and irregular behaviour.¹⁰¹³ The needs of the army had been lost sight of, and Cornwallis had to surrender. The fleets prepared to spend the winter in the West Indies, **Thomas Burnett** returning eventually to the West Indies for the eighth time.¹⁰¹⁴

3.9 **Richard Kempenfelt and the second battle of Ushant 1781**

Once Hardy died Admiral Geary was appointed, with **Richard Kempenfelt** again as Fleet Captain despite being created Rear-Admiral of the Blue in September 1780, seven years before his peers were promoted.¹⁰¹⁵ His book of signals had not been received with universal acclaim, and James quotes Admiral Geary's response when signals were being made:

Now, my dear Kempy, do for God's sake, do, my dear Kempy, oblige by throwing your signals overboard and make that which we all understand, 'Bring the enemy to close action'.¹⁰¹⁶

Geary's delightful comment exemplifies the problem Kempenfelt was trying to solve: could an Admiral convey to his fleet his intentions in such a way that every individual ship knew what he was expected to do.¹⁰¹⁷

Every aspect of naval life might have benefited from **Kempenfelt's** abilities, and it was his misfortune that the navy at the time was led by men of such poor quality. He got the chance to show his abilities at the end of 1781 when, as Admiral in *Victory* he was given a small squadron and commissioned to find the French fleet, sailing to resupply the West Indies, in the western approaches. Kempenfelt took the southern squadron, while with a similar squadron, **John Elliot** in *Edgar* initially looked for them further north. On 12 December Kempenfelt found the French off Ushant, and was able to get between the convoy and some of the protective screen of ships of the line. Kempenfelt's force was to windward and could only take twenty prizes laden with military and naval stores, the rest disappearing 'the

¹⁰¹³ James, *British Navy* 294; J.A. Sullivan, 'Graves and Hood', *The Mariner's Mirror* 69 (SNR 1983) 175; Syrett, *Royal Navy in American Waters* 200; Harding, *Sailing Navy* 132.

¹⁰¹⁴ *Tartar*, 1741; *Worcester*, 1745; *Cambridge*, 1757-9; *Rochester*, 1760-1; *Marlborough*, 1762; *Boyne*, 1771-3; *Prudent*, 1779; *Royal Oak*, 1782.

¹⁰¹⁵ **Kempenfelt** was the only captain posted in 1757 to be promoted on this date. The other ten men promoted had all been made post in 1756.

¹⁰¹⁶ **Kempenfelt** to Middleton, 19 February – 14 March 1781, Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol. 1 337-348; Unattributed, James, 223

¹⁰¹⁷ Captain L.E. Holland R.N., *The Development of Signalling in the Royal Navy* (SNR 1974).

evening coming on and it blowing fresh with thick weather'. Kempenfelt was able to observe Elliot's attack on the *Triumphant* which he described as 'masterly'.¹⁰¹⁸

Kempenfelt was articulate and intelligent, and his thoughts on how the war should have been carried out were deeply felt and clearly expressed. He knew that the numerical superiority of the Seven Years' War had passed to the French by the period of the American War, and suggested that frigates should be used to observe and shadow the enemy, picking off stragglers, and bringing back good intelligence to the Admiralty. He commented that if the available fleet was divided into small forces then every encounter would be disastrous, whereas to be effective a superior force must be ready to defend that of most value. He recognised that defending both the West Indies and the Channel against invasion was too much to achieve, but suggested that slipping coppered ships out singly would keep the Admiralty's intention a secret. The King approved of Kempenfelt's appointment: whether he would have approved of his sober view of the capabilities of the navy is unknown.¹⁰¹⁹ Kempenfelt also came to the conclusion that fleet actions were fought on the wrong principles. For years the French had been mocked for firing high, and disabling the masts and rigging of their British opponents. Kempenfelt observed that the British ships were so shattered by the first encounter that they were unable to come back into action, while the French ships were able to reform and either attack afresh or withdraw. 'Unconnected to succour and support each other, what defence could they have made against the attack of a close well-formed line of battle? Why the French did not profit from this advantage they had, I can't conceive.'¹⁰²⁰

Kempenfelt suggested that instead of looking down on the French for using 'langridge' for disabling rigging, the British should have used it to keep the French from retreating, and welcomed hearing from Middleton that its use had been adopted by the Admiralty. The thinking of the period is typified by Admiral Smyth's definition of 'langrage' as 'a villainous

¹⁰¹⁸ Quoted in Barnes and Owen, *Sandwich Papers* Vol. IV 16; 'When we got amongst the convoy the *Triumphant* of 84 guns who had kept with them, in bearing down to join their squadron passed close across the *Edgar's* fore foot (the leading ship of our line), and gave her a smart raking fire. Which fortunately did not do much execution. The *Edgar's* conduct upon this occasion was masterly, she avoided being directly raked by judiciously bearing up as the enemy passed her, and immediately after luffed to the wind and brought her broadside at right angles to the enemy's stern, throwing in a well directed fire, which we could see was very effectual; the next morning we observed the *Triumphant* in the French line, with her main top mast and main yard gone.' ADM 1/95 Admiral Kempenfelt 14 December 1781.

¹⁰¹⁹ Barnes and Owen, *Sandwich Papers* Vol. IV 82-3.

¹⁰²⁰ Kempenfelt to Middleton 28 April 1779, Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers*, Vol. I 291

kind of shot, consisting of various fragments of iron bound together ... seldom used but by privateers'.¹⁰²¹ Kempenfelt's comments on the ability of the French to fight and fly are apposite when the débâcle at the Chesapeake is considered. The French fleet sailed away from Graves, stayed 'in being', denied the Chesapeake to the British and therefore brought resistance to the revolutionaries to an end. If, as Charles Middleton had suggested, Kempenfelt had taken his squadron to the West Indies instead of Rodney, the outcome might have been very different.¹⁰²²

3.10 The West Indies and the Battle of the Saintes 1782

In the West Indies in 1782 Hood had nineteen ships, not all of which were fit for action although **Commodore Edmund Affleck** brought two more from North America. Hood knew the odds against him: the fleet had no supplies of biscuit and had bought flour with which to make bread; he had to defend a number of islands and he had no idea where the French would attack first; they had at least thirty ships. Hood identified what he thought was the main French fleet off St Kitts and arranged his fleet at anchor inside the bay in such a way that it was impossible for the French to attack successfully, although they made two attempts. During the second night, at a pre-arranged time, Hood's ships cut their cables and slipped away without lights so that they escaped the French. Rodney's response, instead of applauding a feat of disciplined seamanship, called it 'a very unofficerlike action and tending to discourage the fleet in general ... running away from a fleet of only 27 sail of the line'.¹⁰²³ Rodney arrived in February with twelve ships of the line to join Hood, his second in command. De Grasse sailed for Guadaloupe from Martinique with a convoy of transports, and the first engagement with the French was south of Guadaloupe on 9 April. Variable winds kept the bulk of the British fleet out of range and **Thomas Burnett's** *Royal Oak* had been becalmed to leeward and a long way astern of her station at the start of the engagement. As the most senior captain in the fleet **Thomas Burnett** had the honour of leading the fleet on the starboard tack, but in the light and variable winds it took time for *Royal Oak* to get into position.¹⁰²⁴ She gradually caught up with her division, and as she passed the *Barfleur*

¹⁰²¹ Smyth, *Sailors' Word Book* 431

¹⁰²² Barnes and Owen, *Sandwich Papers* Vol. IV 17.

¹⁰²³ Barnes and Owen, *Sandwich Papers* Vol. IV 241.

¹⁰²⁴ ADM 30/20 Rodney to Admiralty for list of ships, printed in *London Gazette* Issue No 129614 May 1782; dates of seniority from Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers*.

Burnett manned ship and cheered Sir Samuel Hood - to which he replied with a request to know why she was so late in taking her station. In the action *Royal Oak* engaged the *Pluton* and two other ships for an hour and a half before she received a shot in her main top which brought down the topmast, and she had to bear up out of the line to clear the wreck.¹⁰²⁵ The fleets drew apart and Mahan suggested that it was an ‘act of prudence on the part of the Admiral’ i.e. de Grasse, to avoid contact for the next few days with the fleet he encountered on the 9th. Was de Grasse being prudent in that he deliberately followed a negative campaign, to avoid damage to his own ships and to protect his troop convoy?¹⁰²⁶

On 12 April there was an opportunity for Rodney to force a general engagement. He had the numerical superiority he had wanted, and the French were burdened with ships like the *Zélé* which caused more damage to her own side than to the British. The wind was changeable as the fleets manoeuvred in the narrow seas between Dominica and the Saintes. **Taylor Penny** in the *Marlborough* was the first to reach the French at 7.40 am before variable winds drifted the lines apart.

The firing reopened a little before noon and continued for nearly two hours. This second fight was a more serious affair, the French coming to closer quarters than they had done before. The wind continued to change and gaps appeared in the French line, allowing **Commodore Edmund Affleck** to pass through one gap, while Rodney passed through another. Much has been written about this manoeuvre, as has been written about every aspect of Rodney’s career.¹⁰²⁷ *Royal Oak* took possession of the surrendered *Glorieux*, and then accompanied the captured *Caesar* and *Ardent*. **Thomas Burnett**’s first lieutenant, John Gwatkin, was killed along with seven seamen, while his captain of Marines and twenty nine seamen were wounded. **Edmund Affleck** had seventeen seamen wounded and **Taylor Penny** three seamen killed with sixteen wounded.¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²⁵ J.H. Owen, ‘Rodney and Grasse 1782’ Parts 1-3 in *Naval Review* XVI (The Naval Society 1928) 221.

¹⁰²⁶ Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power* 290.

¹⁰²⁷ Kenneth Breen, ‘George Bridges, Lord Rodney, 1718?-1792’ in Le Fevre and Harding, *Precursors to Nelson*; Donald Macintyre, *Admiral Rodney* (Peter Davies Ltd 1962); Trew, *Rodney and the Breaking of the Line*; Michael Duffy, ‘“.. all was hushed up”: the Hidden Trafalgar’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 92 (SNR 2005) 216; Vincent K. Hubbard, ‘Admiral Sir George Rodney’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 93 (SNR 2007) 95; John Creswell, *British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century: Tactics in Battle* (London 1972) 163-177; ‘Account of the Action of the 12th April, by an officer of the Hector’ in John Knox Laughton, *The Naval Miscellany* Vol.1 (Navy Records Society 1902) 229-235.

¹⁰²⁸ *London Gazette* Issue No 129614 May 1782.

This was the last fleet action of the war, and if Rodney had pursued the French into the evening it might have been universally recognised as a great victory.¹⁰²⁹ **Affleck** gathered his squadron and chased after the French but found the sea deserted in the morning, so that perhaps no further captures would have been made if Rodney had pursued. The result must be seen as a whole, however, and from the French perspective their intention was completely confounded. The French expedition had been mounted in order to join the land and sea force of Spaniards and re-take Jamaica. Once the French fleet had been so severely mauled, Jamaica was safe.¹⁰³⁰

It is not to deprecate Thomas Burnett and his peers to state that the French and the British navies were fighting for different reasons and with different outcomes. For the French an outcome which ensured the success of the mission was a victory, with a battle always secondary in priority. For the British there had to be prizes taken or ships destroyed, a visible, tangible evidence of superiority. Rodney's reluctance to chase de Grasse's force after the Saintes left the French with a fleet. However, from the French perspective the fleet was so damaged that it could not complete its mission, which had been the invasion of Jamaica.

4 Conclusion

The Seven Years' War provided Thomas Burnett and many of his peers with varied opportunities for independent action and for bearing onerous responsibility, as well as providing occasions on which to display their professional expertise and courage. For reasons discussed in the next chapter, some were more fortunate than others in the opportunities they were given. **Thomas Burnett, Thomas Cornwall, Richard Kempenfelt and Joseph Peyton** were less fortunate than most of their peers in that when they were promoted from sloops it was into the obscurity of a flag ship. They lost the opportunity of independent activity. The author and their Lordships had been able to follow the daily movements of this cohort of men, but lost sight of them once they joined a fleet unless the

¹⁰²⁹ Chancellor Hardwicke's nephew Joseph Sydney Yorke was a witness to the battle, and his description of the day concluded 'I sincerely believe that if it had been daylight 4 hours longer we must have destroyed them all, but as it is they all dispersed over the West Indies'. British Library Hardwicke papers ADD 35,395 Fol. 132; R.J.B. Knight, 'Royal Navy's Recovery after the early Phase of the American Revolutionary War' in George J. Andreopoulos and Harold E. Selesky eds *The Aftermath of Defeat: Societies, Armed Forces and the Challenge of Recovery* (Yale 1994) 23.

¹⁰³⁰ Geoffrey Basil Mundy, *The Life and Correspondence of the late Admiral Lord Rodney* Vol. 2 (John Murray 1830 reprint Kessinger Publishing 2007) 225-247

Commander-in-Chief on their station thought highly enough of their actions or of the ‘interest’ they enjoyed to report them.

Thomas Burnett, who was not even peripherally involved in a fleet action during the Seven Years’ War, was at the centre of the action during engagements in 1781 and 1782. He was unfortunate at the Battle of the Capes to have been in a fleet mishandled by Graves, with the result that he and two other ships in the van were isolated from the rest and heavily damaged by the French. On 9 April 1782, the preliminary to the Battle of the Saintes, he was heavily engaged and lost his main top mast. At the Battle of the Saintes **Thomas Burnett** lead the fleet on the starboard tack because he was the most senior captain: **Taylor Penny**, six months his junior, lead on the larboard tack as the next most senior. Although he was given the *Glorieux* to tow away Burnett’s career was over.

What could a captain do to ensure that he was in the right place at the right time? Men like Harrison and Hotham demonstrated their ability over and over again, not only in single handed combat but also in fleet actions. The process by which the Admiralty determined which captains would be offered commissions in ships of the line is not documented in this thesis, except for the fact that very few of Burnett’s peers survived to take part at the centre of fleet actions. There is the world of difference and the span of a professional career, between **M^cCleverty** in a frigate signalling the escape of the French fleet from Toulon and **Elliot**’s ‘masterly’ attack on the *Triumphant* in 1781. One of the studies which remain to be done is an analysis of the stream of signals issued within fleet actions to clarify the difference between those captains who could anticipate where they needed to be and those who did not. What is clear is that the individual who had prepared himself and his men for individual combat against commerce raiders was equally prepared for fleet action when the opportunity presented itself. None of Burnett’s peers, engaged as they were in attacks at Ushant (**Clements, Lindsay, Peyton and Walsingham**) or as part of the Grand Fleet (**Affleck, Burnett, Elliot, Kempenfelt, Penny, Peyton and Walsingham**) were using skills other than those honed in convoy protection. The difficulty for researchers lies in the fact that Commanders-in-Chief were reluctant to pick out individual captains for fear of the consequent unhappiness of everyone not named.¹⁰³¹

¹⁰³¹ Warner, *Glorious First of June* 94-100.

This study has benefited from the fact that between them Thomas Burnett and his peers were engaged in almost every notable engagement of the Seven Years' War and the American War of Independence. As frigate captains they were closely involved in amphibious landings on defended coasts in three continents; they blockaded the French coast from both close at hand and at a distance; they took part in fleet actions against the French in home waters, the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. If they were not involved, there is a silence in this text.

Chapter 7 Success and failure amongst Thomas Burnett's peers

1 Possible criteria for the measurement of success

The conclusion of this study is that successful captains were the survivors of the broad based pyramid of officers, first commissioned decades earlier, who were still employed in peace time.¹⁰³² The Navy List of 1766 gives the numbers of ships laid up in ordinary or in commission and the names of their captains, as a snap shot of the peace time navy, in which six of Thomas Burnett's peers still feature: **John Elliot, Paul Henry Ourry, Thomas Harrison, Archibald Kennedy, John Lindsay** and **William M^cCleverty**. It does not give the whole picture for that group: because the date is March, John Byron is given as the captain of *Dolphin*, in which **Samuel Wallis** was about to circumnavigate the world. The 1766 list includes **John Elliot** in *Bellona*, although that commission came to an end in April. The list also includes **Thomas Harrison** who died shortly after returning from his commission in the Mediterranean in 1766, and **Archibald Kennedy** did not serve again after 1767. This list does not include ten further captains who returned to service later.

Why were only fifteen of Thomas Burnett's peers still active by the 1770s?

1.1 Health

The careers of one third of this cohort (11/35) were cut short by ill-health or premature death. Health is itself a combination of several qualities, and an analysis of the past is difficult.¹⁰³³ Two members of the original cohort, **William Shurmur** and **Stanley Spencer** never took up their commissions as post captains having been in the West Indies and therefore contributed nothing to this study beyond the statistic that 6 per cent had no career at all as a result of ill health. 'Fever', perhaps dengue or malaria brought to an untimely end the life of **Alexander**

¹⁰³² A privately owned manuscript copy of the Navy List for 1766 was transcribed and printed. E.C. Coleman, *The March 1766 Navy List* (Ancholme Publishing, 2001).

¹⁰³³ Diagnosis of tuberculosis from a description of the symptoms is relatively simple. **John Elliot**'s young nephew, William Elliot, died two years after his promotion to Master and Commander, and a mutual friend described the young man coughing up blood and warned the Admiral that he would find William 'very changed.' NMM ELL/400.

Campbell in 1758. Other men suffered ill health which shortened their careers.¹⁰³⁴ **Christopher Bassett, Robert Faulknor, Thomas Harrison** and **Henry Phillips Towry** were only in their forties when they died. **Robert Man** was killed defending a convoy in 1762, and enemy action ended the promising careers of **Thomas Baillie** and **Robert Craig** before the end of the war. **Thomas Knackston**'s fragile mental health has been discussed earlier.

Almost all of Burnett's peers suffered ill health at intervals, and throughout the years of peace **Richard Kempenfelt** used the excuse to return to Marseilles in September.¹⁰³⁵ However in 1778 when he was needed again, Kempenfelt came off half pay, and achieved his reputation in the last four years of his life. **Thomas Burnett**, who died within a few months of giving up his commission in *Royal Oak*, may have been suffering from cancer. Like others of his peers, he suffered from gout.

The men who survived into the nineteenth century obviously enjoyed longevity: **Charles Medows, Viscount Newark**, died in 1816, **Admiral Lord Hotham** in 1813, **Admiral Elliot** in 1808 and **Admiral Peyton** in 1804, all at least in their late 70s.

To summarise the contribution of health to success: nine out of the group died prematurely, and early retirement ended the careers of a further seven men. Forty six per cent of Burnett's peers were unable to fulfil whatever potential they may have had as a result of ill-health, premature death or retirement at the end of the Seven Years' War.

1.2 Birth or 'interest'

Aristocratic birth or connections assisted fourteen of Thomas Burnett's peers. **John Elliot, William Hotham** and **John Lindsay** all had the right family connections to quicken their transition to independent command and to ensure that their commissions were profitable.

¹⁰³⁴ADM 1/1761 Captains' Letters E 1763-79 **Elliot**, 20 September 1770; ADM 1/2118 Captains' Letters M 1770-3 **Martin**, 2 April 1772; **Cornewall** wrote, 'The ill state of my health during the last two years withheld me from offering my service on the present appearance of a war and I cannot flatter myself with the expectation of a speedy amendment but if in future it becomes re-established I shall think myself greatly honoured in necessity their Lordships commands.' ADM 1/1610 Captains' Letters C 1772-5 **Cornewall**, 17 January 1771.

¹⁰³⁵ADM 1/2012 Captains' Letters K 1763-70 **Kempenfelt**, 6, January 1766 – 23 December 1767; 11 September 1771 – 12 October 1778.

Thomas Burnett was able to reach across three generations for his helping hand from the Secretary of State, Lord Rochford. Personages who could dispense patronage were inundated with requests for preferment. Sandwich's Appointment Books have pages of lists of names of hopefuls who had written to him to ask for jobs.¹⁰³⁶ All of Burnett's peers who were still active had to write in to let the Admiralty know that they wanted to be put 'on the list'.¹⁰³⁷ Despite his own aristocratic birth, it seems unlikely that **John Lindsay** would have progressed as far or as fast as he did without the powerful 'interest' of his mother's brother, Lord Mansfield, behind him.

There is an element of discernable 'interest' behind several of the men whose careers continued after the Treaty of Paris, and it seems clear that some of the discussions which went on behind the scenes have not been documented or identified. It is to be regretted that this thesis has proved that the mid-eighteenth century navy was still one dominated by family and position. But the reality of life in the eighteenth century was that 'interest' was all important, in every sphere of life. It is to be presumed that those who promoted protégés were confident of a successful outcome, recognising that they would lose prestige and risk having future protégés ignored if they promoted failures. The saving grace for the navy was that, once commissioned, the young men had to prove themselves in the real world of encounters at sea against enemies dealing out death and disaster. It might be that **William Shurmur** and **Samuel Spencer**, who claimed that ill health prevented their taking up their postings, had actually decided that life at sea was not for them and took a socially acceptable way out, while enjoying half pay for decades. On the other hand, a young captain like **Henry Martin** might have the personal backing of Lord North, but he also had to have professional expertise to keep himself at sea and his crew supplied with provisions for months on end off the northern coast of Ireland. The concern for 'the people' which is so often a feature of **Alexander Schomberg's** letters is not softness: he was a very successful captain, and Sandwich was disappointed when Schomberg decided to go to Ireland.

¹⁰³⁶ Knight, 'Sandwich, Middleton and Dockyard Appointments'.

¹⁰³⁷ The only sure way of knowing which men had permanently retired was to see their names disappear from the half pay list. Others kept drawing this pay until they died, treating it as a pension, while nominally being ready and able to serve.

To summarise the contribution of ‘interest’: **John Elliot** and **William Hotham** both proved that the advantage given them by their family connections was put to good use for the benefit of the navy. ‘Interest’ could not provide courage, aggression or seamanship.

1.3 Professional Expertise

What were the criteria which made successful careers possible? Individual enterprise was demonstrated by the seven men who took prizes as commanders and were rewarded by promotion. Once the individual was in a position to take responsibility, at whatever level, he showed his quality as **Thomas Burnett** had done.

The really successful prize takers such as **Thomas Harrison** had the ‘interest’ to send them to the Lisbon station where they could demonstrate their professional ability protecting busy trade routes which attracted privateers. The captains involved had trained their crews to respond with discipline and energy to close combat and only as the battle developed would the crew need direction. **John Elliot** returned from his encounter with François Thurot having lost his voice giving orders.¹⁰³⁸ Captains such as **Edmund Affleck**, **Thomas Harrison**, **William Hotham** and **Archibald Kennedy** returned again and again to single ship combat at pistol range, where evidence of death or mutilation lay on the deck beside them.

Having a crew ready for battle meant that they had to be fit and healthy. **Henry Martin** was indignant at the failure of the Victualling Board to provide consistent quality in the casks of beef. He was not alone amongst the captains who looked after every detail of the lives of their ‘people’, and there was evident mutual respect. One of the surprises in this research was the number of occasions on which requests from ‘the people’ to follow a captain into his next command were rejected, requests which must have been the result of beneficial leadership.

A less obvious element of professional ability was being able to communicate, initially with the Admiralty, and subsequently with other subordinate officers on the station. Captains such as **Edmund Affleck** had the education to represent themselves to the Admiralty in the best possible light. Affleck’s beautifully crafted periods reveal a man able to think clearly, to

¹⁰³⁸ NMM ELL/400 **Elliot** letter to his brother Gilbert.

rationalise alternatives and objectives. **Thomas Burnett**, on the other hand, appears to have been reluctant to put on paper more than the barest minimum required by his orders. Aggression, communication skills, leadership and professional expertise can all be identified from the evidence of the letters, and would have been as manifest to the Secretary at the Admiralty. Obviously there are silences in the letters: no one would expect the writers to admit to cowardice or lack of judgement, if they occurred. But, as discussed in Chapter 4, the reluctance to take decisions which is so typical of Knackston is not repeated in any other set of letters.

It is notable that some men, like **John Lindsay** never took prizes. This might have been because he was never in the right place at the right time. Lindsay was never commissioned to stations such as Lisbon: was this by his choice or the Admiralty's? Lindsay's knighthood two years after the Havana campaign was perhaps awarded as much for the fact that his mother was Lord Mansfield's sister as for his contribution to the siege.

There were worthy captains who fulfilled their duties but whose careers did not progress after the Treaty of Paris. **William Fortescue** took part in the fleet action at Quiberon Bay and the landings at Belle Isle, but was not employed again after the war. The American born **Joshua Loring** served in the waters he knew best with skill and enthusiasm, but to his eternal regret was not taken back into the 'proper' navy. **William Paston** took part in Rodney's activities off Le Havre throughout 1760, remaining on station for months on end, and showing initiative and daring in his destruction of small craft in difficult waters, but he too was not used again.¹⁰³⁹ **Charles Medows** and **Henry Phillips Towry** were distracted from continuing careers by inheriting fortunes. **Alexander Schomberg** was an active and resourceful member of the naval force which captured Louisburg and Quebec. He showed his skills again in the Keppel expedition against Belle Isle, but naval politics drove him to Ireland, to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland's yacht *Dorset* where he remained until his death in 1804, the oldest captain on the active list, knighted by the Lord Lieutenant for his long service.

By the Treaty of Paris, therefore, sixteen of Burnett's peers had left the service, forty five per cent. Examined below in Section 2 is the next tranche, the nineteen men (fifty four per cent)

¹⁰³⁹ Syrett, *Rodney Papers* Vol. 1 357-405.

who survived the peace and were employed again. The fact that they were used at all after 1763 is evidence that these men had ‘interest’ and were valued by the Admiralty. In 1766 there were only 55 ships of the line in commission, and six of these (11 per cent) were commanded by this group of survivors.¹⁰⁴⁰

1.4 The significance of the vessels to which they were commissioned.

The sequence of ships in which each man was commissioned has been summarised in Appendix 6. In 1769 **Hotham** was informed that he would be relieved of his commission in *Hero*, as he had been in her for three years.¹⁰⁴¹ This is the only reference to what may have been a new Admiralty procedure. **Affleck** was in *Launceston* for four years, **Lindsay**’s commission in *Trent* lasted six years, her entire period of service.

The progression during the first years of independent command from sloop to frigate and then to ship of the line might be expected. For almost all men the period spent in a sloop lasted only a year. Most men then progressed to frigates, but there were exceptions. **Burnett** went straight from the sloop *Happy* to the 3rd rate *Cambridge*, and apart from two years in the 4th rate *Rochester* served thereafter only in the 3rd rates *Boyne*, *Prudent* and *Royal Oak*. **Kempfenfelt** was very briefly in a sloop and frigate before leaving for the Indian Ocean as flag captain in the 3rd rate *Elizabeth*, and then in the *Grafton* and *Norfolk*. He resumed his career in the 1770s in the 3rd rates *Buckingham* and *San Antonio*. Finally he achieved the 1st rates *Victory* and *Royal George*. **Peyton**, like Burnett, was made post straight into a flag ship, in his case the 2nd rate *Prince George* followed by the *Prince*. Thereafter he served only in 3rd rates, with the 4th rate *Leander* for his last years in the Mediterranean.

There were men who served only in frigates throughout the Seven Years’ War. After his initial sloop **Affleck** captained frigates through the rest of the War. It was not until 1778 that he was commissioned into the 3rd rate *Bedford*, but he finished his career in the 5th rates *Iris* and *Cerberus*. **Lindsay** stayed in the 6th rate *Trent* for the whole of the Seven Years’ War. **Harrison** was also in 6th rates for the entire war, moving up into a 4th rate only during his period in the Mediterranean after the war. **Hotham** spent the war in 5th rates, **Kennedy** in 5th and 6th rates.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Coleman, 1766 list.

¹⁰⁴¹ ADM 1/1899 Captains’ Letters H 1766-9 **Hotham** 5 November 1769.

A pattern can be seen in these commissions. The captains with the greatest ‘interest’ were given frigates and became the greatest prize takers. There is no doubt that the Admiralty deliberately allowed **Harrison** and **Kennedy** to operate off the Lisbon station where the pickings were richest. The frigate captains were very able, but so demonstrably was **Burnett** in *Happy*. The crucial factor was the ‘interest’ they could call on. It was different in peacetime: some stations, like the Mediterranean and New York, never required more than a frigate.

As discussed in Chapter 6, by the end of the American War when several big set piece fleet actions occurred, it was the ship of the line which was needed. All the survivors of Burnett’s peers who were commissioned for the American war were experienced and capable of making good use of a ship in the line of battle.

2 Summary of employment between the wars

Ten men were employed in the years of peace, and for them there was a variety of options. Employment in the Mediterranean in charge of a small squadron was offered to **Thomas Harrison** from 1764-6, then **Michael Clements** from 1769-71. Responsible for the security of valuable trading connections, these were diplomatic as much as naval postings, and provided valuable experience in solving problems of all kinds far from home waters.

John Lindsay was entrusted with a surveying expedition off the coast of the newly acquired Florida from 1764-6, and **Samuel Wallis** followed John Byron in *Dolphin* into the Pacific on a secret surveying expedition between 1766 and 1768.

The American born **Archibald Kennedy** was sent back to the station of New York where he had strong local connections, and was there until 1767. The Irish **William M^cCleverty** also made use of his local connections throughout the years of peace. His knowledge of local conditions apparently made him indispensable in Irish waters. Based in Carrickfergus, M^cCleverty transported recruits from Scotland to Cork for shipment to North America. Local ‘interest’ also provided for **Paul Henry Ourry**, who was commissioned to the *Hero*, guard ship in Plymouth, until 1767. **William Hotham** replaced Ourry in *Hero* in 1767, and during his three-year commission in her transported troops to Minorca. Other guard ships were commissioned, amongst which was *Belleisle* at Plymouth under **Joseph Peyton**.

As yet research has not explained why **Andrew Wilkinson** escorted the Newfoundland fishing fleet for the years 1767-9.

Three men died or retired before the brief mobilisation on the occasion of the Falkland Islands dispute brought six men back into action. Guardships at Portsmouth were commissioned by **Edmund Affleck** in the 3rd rate *San Antonio* and **Henry Martin** in the 3rd rate *Intrepid*, while **John Elliot** sailed in the 3rd rate *Portland* to St Helena to escort back the East India company ships, otherwise threatened by Spain. **Thomas Burnett** in the 3rd rate *Boyne*, **Paul Henry Ourry** in the 3rd rate *Fame* and **John Wheelock** in the 3rd rate *Modeste* sailed for Jamaica. All of these ships were battle ships, prepared for action against the Spanish.

3 Summary of careers of successful captains who did not achieve flags.

3.1 Thomas Burnett's professional career has been discussed in Chapter 1.

3.2 Michael Clements proved himself as a lieutenant by taking over command from his dying captain, and was rewarded with his own command. In *Pallas* as part of the fleet under Hawke, Clements was blown off his station in 1761 and found himself in Kinsale when, with Elliot in *Aeolus* and James Logie in *Brilliant*, he responded to the landing of François Thurot's squadron at Carrickfergus. After service in the Mediterranean in *Pallas* from 1763-4 he returned there five years later in *Dorsetshire* as Senior Officer at Smyrna. Here his activities covered an enormously wide spectrum from ship handling in unknown and uncharted waters to unfriendly relations with those on shore who controlled supplies of fresh water. Clements proved that not only was he brave and energetic, he could maintain the health and fighting potential of a small squadron of ships a long way from home.¹⁰⁴² In *Vengeance* in the action off Ushant Clements was under Keppel, and spoke at his trial, thereafter feeling that his reputation had been damaged by association. When Keppel and the Opposition took over government in 1782 it was too late for Clements who spent some years abroad after 1780 'for his health'. His last letters were written in a very frail hand, and

¹⁰⁴² NMM CLE/3/4 **Clements** private letters 1763-4; NMM CLE/3/6 **Clements** private letters 1769-71.

eventually the half pay books have a succession of notes stating that he was in ‘a state of insanity.’¹⁰⁴³

Michael Clements was the only one of the group to have been awarded the rank of ‘Yellow Admiral’, and Charnock commented that Clements deserved better than this grudging acknowledgment of his deserts. It took a parliamentary enquiry into the policies followed by the Admiralty in 1787 to obtain this reward for Clements in 1789. It appears that this was an act of charity to give a deserving officer an income higher than half pay. Did Clements know by this time that he had been rewarded with the title he craved?¹⁰⁴⁴

3.3 Archibald Kennedy was the American born heir to the Cassilis and Kennedy titles.¹⁰⁴⁵ Appointed commander of the brig *Halifax* which was captured on Lake Ontario by the French before he could take command, Kennedy was made responsible for getting the Thames transports ready for America.¹⁰⁴⁶ He showed tenacity of purpose, attention to detail, patience and the ability to write clear and succinct reports. First engaged in the amphibious operations off the French coast, Kennedy was given the *Blonde*, captured by Elliot off the Isle of Man. Kennedy proved adept at capturing French privateers, and was rewarded by employment after the Treaty of Paris on the New York station where he had family, a large town house in New York, as well as a large estate.¹⁰⁴⁷ Here he was the unwilling witness of the American determination for self rule which was to culminate in the War of Independence ten years later.¹⁰⁴⁸ Kennedy refused to store the ‘stamped paper’ on board *Coventry*, frozen alongside, against the angry mobs on shore, and in his defence brought back to London an unparalleled archive of historical evidence. Though fully reinstated by the Admiralty, his American estates required his attention and during the American War he was held captive by the rebels for three years. Despite repeated requests for re-instatement he was not employed again, but remained on half pay until 23 September 1787.¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴³ ADM 25/104 Half pay book January to June 1783.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Charnock, *Biographia Navalis* Vol. Six 222.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Julian Gwyn, ed. *The Royal Navy and North America: The Warren Papers 1736-1752* (Navy Records Society 1975) 433.

¹⁰⁴⁶ David Syrett, *Shipping and Military Power in the Seven Years' War* (Exeter 2008) 160.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Like Captain Matthew Norris in the 1720s. The Admiralty must have felt that it was appropriate to appoint men who had an interest in their station if that existed.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of the Empire in British North America 1754-1766* (Faber and Faber 2000) 677-681.

¹⁰⁴⁹ ADM 1/2014 Captains' Letters K 1777-81 **Kennedy**, 16 November 1781; ADM 25/113 Half pay July – December 1787.

3.4 William M^cCleverty found writing very difficult and spelling was beyond him, but he was an able sailor, having been well trained by Anson and Saumarez. He took part in the battle off Lagos, and was then in Howe's fleet before joining Rodney in Jamaica. It appears that M^cCleverty enjoyed both Anson's regard and an Irish connection with the Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham. He was rewarded by being employed during the years of peace with the responsibility of transferring newly raised Scottish regiments to Cork for shipment to America. This was a difficult and testing commission, which many might not have envied, but his local knowledge doubtless secured it for him.

3.5 Henry Martin showed from the outset that he was capable, energetic and backed by powerful 'interest' (his half-brother was treasurer to the Princess of Wales) which advanced him from his first commission to a posting in exactly two years. Martin was also one of the 'little navy' of officers who were Boscawen's protégés. Stationed off the north coast of Ireland, Martin had very little support as far as the logistics of supply were concerned, and his letters show the difficulties of revictualling vessels far from the great London store houses. Martin seemed to be able to take extended leave when he needed it without demur from the Admiralty, and was re-employed in 1770. Lord North was instrumental in getting an appointment for Martin as Commissioner at Portsmouth in 1780. Martin was Controller of the Navy in 1790, and Member of Parliament for Southampton until his death in 1794. Created a baronet in 1791, he was father of Admiral Sir Thomas Byam Martin.¹⁰⁵⁰

3.6 Paul Henry Ourry was married as a lieutenant to a Cornish heiress, daughter of the Rt. Hon. George Treby, Secretary at War and also benefitted from the 'interest' he could wield through his service under Captain the Hon. George Edgcumbe, subsequently Lord Mount Edgcumbe, Admiral, and dominant Plymouth area landowner. Involved in the enterprising amphibious landings on the French coast Ourry continued to be engaged in the Channel fleets, and was a successful frigate captain with prizes to his name. Having become a member of Parliament on the death of his brother, Ourry was not at sea again until briefly during the Spanish mobilisation. He was rewarded with the post of Commissioner of

¹⁰⁵⁰ T.A. Heathcote, *The British Admirals of the Fleet 1734-1995: A Biographical Dictionary* (Leo Cooper 2002) 166.

Plymouth Dockyard in 1775, a post he held until his death in 1783, while still drawing his captain's half pay.¹⁰⁵¹

3.7 Taylor Penny was stationed in the Bristol Channel and enjoyed success as a frigate captain, bringing in a succession of privateers. He was on half pay until the 1780s when he joined Rodney's fleet in the West Indies, and was engaged in the Battle of the Saintes. The reason behind this late employment has not been established, and Penny was not employed again.

3.8 Thomas Taylor was quick to take offence at what he saw as insulting behaviour from his men, but he was brave and successful in engagements with enemy forces. His employment only extended to 1761, but in 1780 he began a new career based in Paris. Taylor seems to have commissioned reports from agents in French ports, and then collated and forwarded intelligence to the Admiralty until 1783.¹⁰⁵²

3.9 Samuel Wallis spent the first four years of the Seven Years' War in American waters, and when he returned had been so long out of the Admiralty's eye that the turn back to his first letter asking for leave on his arrival read 'What is he?'¹⁰⁵³ Wallis owed his start to being a Cornish protégé of Boscawen, but by the time he returned from America Boscawen was dead. Wallis took part in the Belle Isle operations under Admiral Keppel, but it seems likely that it was Admiral Saunders, senior naval lord of the Admiralty who recommended Wallis for his next enterprise. Saunders had seen Wallis' survey work in the St Lawrence and it may be that this ensured that in 1766 Wallis sailed for the Pacific on a secret voyage of exploration, completing his circumnavigation in 1768. Wallis and his master calculated Tahiti's position so accurately that Cook was able to sail straight there.¹⁰⁵⁴ Commissioned again briefly at the time of the Falkland Islands mobilisation, Wallis took part in Rodney's fleet resupplying Gibraltar in 1780. He was an Extra Commissioner of the Navy from 1780 until 1784 and from 1787 until his death in 1795.¹⁰⁵⁵

¹⁰⁵¹ Namier, *Structure of Politics* 34.

¹⁰⁵² ADM 1/2306-7 Captains' Letters T 1780-4 **Taylor**, 7 January 1780 – 16 January 1783; Charnock comments that Taylor was retired as captain instead of promoted with a flag in 1787. *Biographia Navalis* 275.

¹⁰⁵³ ADM 1/2666 Captains' Letters W 1761 **Wallis** 27 December 1761.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Cock, 'Precursors of Cook' 46.

¹⁰⁵⁵ As Commissioner of the Navy Samuel Wallis signed the reconciliation of the Pension books which record Jane M'Cleverty's widow's pension. ADM 22/101. These dates, given in Collinge *Navy Board Officials* 147, correct the dates in Wallis' *ODNB* entry Glydwr Williams (Oxford University Press 2004 online edition 2008).

3.10 John Wheelock was a capable and experienced sailor who took part in the captures of Louisburg and Quebec. He was also at the capture of Havana, and only just managed to get *Pembroke* back to England, loaded as she was with invalids from Jamaica and a sick crew. Wheelock was engaged in the 1770s mobilisation, but had to return from the West Indies overtaken by illness just before his death in 1779.¹⁰⁵⁶

3.11 Andrew Wilkinson was an energetic and successful sloop commander, and was one of the seven men who ensured his posting by taking a privateer. He commissioned the new-built *Glasgow* and took her to the Mediterranean where he was occupied until the end of the war. In 1766 in the *Niger* Wilkinson began three years of duty off Newfoundland, escorting the fishing fleet there at the start of the season, to Lisbon with the catch at the end of the year, then back to England laden with wine. Employed again in 1777 in the newly commissioned *Grafton* Wilkinson returned to North America and the West Indies, apparently at the instigation of Lord Lauderdale, but died in 1785.

4 Promotion to flag rank

The ultimate reward for active captains who lived long enough was flag rank, which must have seemed impossibly far in the future for Thomas Burnet and his peers. For their cohort the promotions to flag rank took place exactly thirty years after they were made post. Not surprisingly, only six of the original thirty five men reached flag rank.

4.1 Commodore

There was an interim level of promotion available to the Admiralty, rather akin to that of Master and Commander at a lower level, itself offering two levels of promotion. Just as that commission allowed the Admiralty to see how effective the young man was in independent command, a Commodore could show the Admiralty that he could direct the activities of a squadron, although ‘Commodore’ was a temporary title which accompanied a particular commission. A junior Commodore was instructed to hoist his distinguishing pendant for a

¹⁰⁵⁶ The surgeons’ survey suggests prostate cancer. ADM 1/312 Commander-in-Chief West Indies Rear Admiral Byron June 1779.

specific commission. A senior Commodore was granted a flag captain who took care of the management of the vessel, leaving the Commodore time to concentrate on diplomatic duties or fleet management as **John Elliot** did at Ushant in 1781. Depending on his station, qualities of tact, discretion and political nous might be required.

The six men who reached flag rank were all first Commodores entitled to raise their broad pendants. **John Lindsay** was Commodore and Commander-in-Chief in the East Indies from 1769 to 1772. **John Elliot** was left as Commodore at Gibraltar by Rodney in 1780, but as Sandwich explained in a warm and friendly letter, although the Admiralty could spare a senior captain, they could not spare his 3rd rate *Edgar* as a Commodore's ship in the Mediterranean and asked him to return.¹⁰⁵⁷ **Harrison, Lindsay** and **Peyton** were all employed as Commodores responsible for the Mediterranean, and in 1766 **John Elliot** weighed the advantages of command in the Mediterranean: 'it is by no means a lucrative command, but on the contrary, yet as this is an agreeable part of the world and a good thing for an officer to have commanded a squadron I think I would like to succeed him ..'¹⁰⁵⁸ **Edmund Affleck** and **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** achieved their promotions in North America and the Leeward Islands respectively. These were stations which were not worth the full-time attention of an admiral in peacetime, but which needed the authority of a man with years of experience and proven ability. Premature death deprived two Commodores of their flag: **Thomas Harrison** who died in 1768 and the **Hon. Robert Walsingham** whose life was cut short in the *Thunderer* in 1780.

4.1 (a) Thomas Harrison, son of Admiral Henry Harrison, was one of the Commanders who captured a prize to ensure his posting: he brought back 106 French prisoners from his first cruise, and was posted a month later. Sent straight to the Lisbon station it took Harrison some months to train his crew and work out how best to take advantage of his situation, but he was awarded the newly commissioned *Venus*. Harrison saw action with the Channel fleet throughout 1758 and 1759, being involved in the battle of Quiberon Bay and the blockade of Basque Roads. From January 1761 he began his run of fifteen captures, as well as many recaptures, which was unprecedented in the war.

¹⁰⁵⁷ NMM ELL/400 Sandwich to **Elliot** 8 March 1780.

¹⁰⁵⁸ NMM ELL/400 **Elliot** to Gilbert 6 December 1766.

Harrison's reward was elevation to Commodore in the Mediterranean from 1764-6. Amongst his many duties he took care to report in detail the appalling treatment meted out to the British sailors in captivity in Algiers.¹⁰⁵⁹ His early death deprived the navy of a brilliant man with exactly the qualities so needed in the 1770s and 80s in the ranks of Admiral.

4.1 (b) The **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham** was a brave and energetic captain, and his family connections ensured that he was never long out of active service although he never took much part in political life as a member of parliament. Promoted to Commodore when the American War demanded a remobilisation, had he not commanded the *Thunderer* which foundered in the hurricane of 1780, there is no doubt he would have been one of those promoted to flag rank.¹⁰⁶⁰

4.2 Further promotion within the navy

Other appointments were available to the Admiralty if they wished to retain and reward the services of senior captains. The position of Governor of Newfoundland was not exactly a sinecure, as the incumbent had physically to go to Newfoundland with the fishing fleet, administer the seasonal activity there and accompany the fleet back to Lisbon. In the different political climate after the American war **John Elliot** held the appointment of Commodore at Newfoundland from 1786 until his appointment as Rear Admiral in 1787. This was a more complex appointment in that he did not accompany the fishing fleet, but was on hand to oversee relations with the French who had fishing rights in these waters too.

Other appointments were available: Commissioners of the Navy were appointed in various capacities. **John Lindsay** was Commissioner of the Admiralty from April to December 1783, a political appointment which ended with the fall of the Fox-North Coalition government. **Paul Henry Ourry** was appointed Commissioner at Plymouth Dockyard from 1775 to 1783. It was sensible to have an experienced professional in charge, even if Ourry rather lost his head in 1779. **Henry Martin** was Commissioner at Portsmouth Dockyard from 1780-90, when he was appointed Controller of the Navy. **Samuel Wallis'** appointments as Extra Commissioner of the Navy are mentioned above.

¹⁰⁵⁹ ADM1/385 **Commodore Harrison** 9 August 1764.

¹⁰⁶⁰ ADM 1/312 Commander-in-Chief West Indies 1780 **Commodore Robert Boyle Walsingham**.

4.3 Admiral

The final step to flag rank was achieved by only a proportion within each cohort of the same seniority. Analysis of the captains posted between 1740 and 1762 shows that about 20 per cent of each cohort reached flag rank.¹⁰⁶¹ Of Thomas Burnett's peers, 17 per cent reached flag rank. They had to wait longer than earlier cohorts, and more of them had died by the time the promotion which included men of their seniority was made.

It is possible to establish how long a captain had to serve before he could expect to be rewarded. The table below is taken from the dates given in Clowes.¹⁰⁶² Augustus Keppel had to wait from 1744 until 1762 before he raised his flag – eighteen years. Most men had to wait much longer.

To promote particular individuals to flag rank the Admiralty had to take from the top of the seniority list until they reached the man they wanted. In the case of the 1780 promotion they had to take eleven men to get the one they really wanted, **Richard Kempfenfelt**. Charnock quoted a newspaper report on Kempfenfelt's death which claimed that 'an extraordinary promotion was made for the purpose of including him'.¹⁰⁶³ Clowes provides the detail behind the 41 promotions dated 29 September 1780: thirty men were promoted from blue to white and then red rear admirals, then from rear to vice admiral, to make way for eleven captains from the 1756 list and Kempfenfelt, who was fortuitously the most senior of the 1757 list.

Also on the 1757 list, **Edmund Affleck** had to wait until 1784 when he was the only man promoted, perhaps as a parliamentary bribe for support. **John Elliot, William Hotham, Sir John Lindsay** and **Joseph Peyton** all waited until 1787. In that year, inspired by the Dutch crisis which caused another naval mobilisation, there was another big promotion, again to get in a particular man. Thirty men of flag rank were promoted to make room for fourteen post captains down to Sir Charles Douglas, the gunnery specialist, made post in 1761.

¹⁰⁶¹ Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers*.

¹⁰⁶² These figures exclude the Royal Princes, and the men who were passed over and made up later. William Clowes, *The Royal Navy* Vol. 3 565-7.

¹⁰⁶³ Charnock, *Biographia Navalis* Vol. Six 252.

Date of promotion to flag rank	Number raised to flag rank	Average number of years since 'post' rank
1743	1	27
1744	1	24
1747	5	14
1755	5	16
1756	6	15
1758	2	17
1759	3	17
1762	12	18
1764	1	20
1770	13	25
1775	11	29
1777	3	30
1778	11	31
1779	10	27
1780	11	24
1784	1	27
1787	16	29
1790	10	29

Table 13: Dates of promotions to flag rank

Although the men who fought through the Austrian war could have expected to be rewarded with their flag after only about fourteen years, towards the end of the century, when Thomas Burnett's peer group were being considered for flag rank, they had to serve twice as long, closer to thirty years. The long peace which followed the Treaty of Paris reduced the occasions on which the navy was mobilised. Why did the Admiralty wait until 1787 when the needs of the navy had been articulated so clearly by Kempfenfelt in 1780?¹⁰⁶⁴ That is the subject of a thesis in itself. What is clear is that Thomas Burnett's peers, having been fortunate in the timing of the Seven Years' War, were then unfortunate in the length of the peace.

Within those who achieved flag rank **Richard Kempfenfelt** stands out from the others, having had a greater influence on the navy before his premature death in the *Royal George* than any of his contemporaries.

There was an alternative to promotion available to the Admiralty Commissioners, who took the opportunity from time to time of creating what were known as 'yellow admirals without

¹⁰⁶⁴ Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol.1 293-4.

distinction of squadron', taking the opportunity to remove from the list captains who were no longer active. Of the captains posted between 1740 and 1762, 48 of them were retired as admirals, amongst whom was **Michael Clements**, who achieved this status two years after the big 1787 promotion. These men were removed from the half pay books and paid a pension instead.¹⁰⁶⁵

4.4 Edmund Affleck

Despite his being son and brother of members of Parliament, Edmund Affleck's future as Commodore and Admiral were not foreshadowed in 1759 when his request for his following in *Mercury* to accompany him into *Launceston* was rejected. Affleck appears to have had a short temper and was very quick to see 'insolent and disrespectful behaviour' in his subordinates. On the other hand, he effortlessly took on the rôle of senior officer, dealing with manning problems at Portsmouth. Affleck took a leading part in the defeat of the Spanish navy in the 'Moonlight Battle' off St Vincent in 1780. In 1781 as Commodore on the New York station he gathered intelligence on the American conflict, and reported on the activities of American privateers. Having joined Rodney's forces in the Leeward Islands Affleck was the leader of a division at the Battle of the Saintes, and by chance or good judgement broke the line on 12 April.¹⁰⁶⁶

Affleck went to the West Indies only once, in 1782. He appears to have avoided that station throughout the Seven Years' War, and managed to keep himself instead close to the Admiralty, corresponding on matters of administration on a daily basis. Whether this was deliberate or not cannot be proved.

As a local land owner and hero for his rôle at the Saintes, Affleck was voted in as Member of Parliament for Colchester in his absence, and apparently without his knowledge. Presumably this meant that he had Government support as he did not finance his election campaign.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁵ Figures from Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers*. This pension in 1783 was £319.17.6d a year. ADM 181/9.

¹⁰⁶⁶ ADM 1/1442-3 Captains' Letters A 1758-70 **Affleck**, 24 April 1759; 20 September 1759; 6 October 1762; Syrett, *Rodney Papers* Vol. 2 240; ADM 1/491 Commodore **Affleck** 1781-4.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Colchester was his home town, so it does not appear that he was awarded a seat in an Admiralty borough as a reward for distinguished service, a possibility suggested by Namier in *The Structure of Politics* 31.

Not surprisingly therefore, on his return to England Affleck was knighted, and two years later promoted to Rear Admiral of the Blue.¹⁰⁶⁸

4.5 John Elliot

The twelve-year old **John Elliot** whose unformed hand wavered across small sheets of paper wrote home when he needed money. A little older, after education perhaps at Watt's Academy during winter months, John could keep up a 'clerkly hand' for two or three lines before it broke down into boyish enthusiasm, but shortage of money was still his first preoccupation. His first commission was the result of his brother Gilbert's position as Commissioner of the Navy '... as lucky a thing as possibly could happen for me'. Ten years later, with Gilbert now the Treasurer of the Chamber, John was experienced enough to see the relationship differently. He hesitated to apply for a post in the Mediterranean:

unless it is perfectly agreeable to your own situation and easily obtained for it is not worth making a point of profit and therefore in all likelihood <sic> there will not be many candidates but you'll judge best as you are on the spot and know what's going on.¹⁰⁶⁹

The reward for his caution was the note in Sandwich's hand from the Admiralty:

Lord Sandwich sends his compliments to Mr Elliot and informs him that Capt. Elliot is this day appointed to the command of a guardship at Sheerness which he apprehends is the same thing as being at Chatham.¹⁰⁷⁰

Throughout his life John Elliot revealed to his father, and to a greater extent his brother Gilbert, a degree of depression at what he saw as a lack of appreciation by the Admiralty. It appears that after each episode of great endeavour John Elliot was seized with a feeling that his best efforts were not being recognised, not just for himself but for his men. He bitterly resented that his recommendations for promotions for his officers were not acted upon, and this despite knowing first hand from his brother how difficult it was to secure promotion for every applicant with 'interest'. Appointed as Commodore with a flag captain in *Edgar* for the fleet action of 1781 Elliot was able to demonstrate that he was a superb seaman, whatever

¹⁰⁶⁸ Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers* 2; Namier and Brooke, *House of Commons* Vol. II (HMSO 1964) 13; J.K. Laughton, revised R Morriss, *ODNB* (Oxford 2004 on-line edition 2004-7).

¹⁰⁶⁹ NMM ELL/400.

¹⁰⁷⁰ NMM ELL/400 Sandwich to Gilbert Elliot 6 May 1763.

his personal demons. As detailed in the Chapter 6, Kempenfelt with open-hearted generosity described Elliot's engagement with *Triumphant* as 'masterly'.

John Elliot must have enjoyed the difference in status when he went to Newfoundland, first as Commodore then Rear Admiral. His first communications with the Admiralty in June every year were from his home in London, and he did not go down to Spithead to *Stag* until the day before sailing, leaving all the business of departure to his flag captain. He returned in November, having seen the temporary sheds demolished and the fishing fleet on its way to Spain and Portugal before his departure. His letters contain the most perceptive insights into the changing eco-system which was the Newfoundland fishing ground, from the destruction of the Great Auk to the indolence of the native Indians.¹⁰⁷¹

Admirals had to be treated with respect and could not be ordered to go to sea as lieutenants could. In order to make sure that sufficient Admirals were available for squadrons with the proposed fleets, there had to be some in reserve. When Lord Hood offered John Elliot employment he phrased his request with caution:

Should the fleet of considerable magnitude which will demand the services of half a dozen admirals at least be sent into the Baltic, I beg to know if you would like to resume your situation under my command, and that I may have the pleasure of hearing from you soon on the subject.¹⁰⁷²

In fact Elliot did not return to active service: he mentioned problems with his eyes after his return from St Helena and blamed his ill health for turning down Hood's invitation to serve again.¹⁰⁷³

The collection of personal letters preserved in the archive at the National Maritime Museum makes it uniquely possible to trace the development of the man from the beginning of his life to the end. Elliot reveals himself through his correspondence as thoughtful, intelligent, deeply ambitious and extremely professional. At the end of his life, could the Admiralty have made better use of him? Perhaps he rejected other offers in favour of the annual expedition

¹⁰⁷¹ ADM 1/472 **Commodore then Admiral Elliot** to the Admiralty 1786 – 9; Namier and Brooke, *House of Commons* Vol. II 390-4.

¹⁰⁷² NMM ELL/400 Hood to Elliot 8 March 1791; Corbett, *Seven Years' War* 90-1; J.K. Laughton, revised A.W.H. Pearsall *ODNB* (Oxford University Press 2004 online edition 2004-7).

¹⁰⁷³ NMM ELL/400 Hood to Elliot 4 June 1791.

to Newfoundland. One of a close and loving family, John Elliot never married, but retired to Essendale in Roxburghshire.

4.6 William Hotham

William Hotham enjoyed very rapid promotion from his first commission under his patron Sir Edward Hawke in 1755 to his posting after successful actions in the Mediterranean in 1757. He was a pompous young man, but lacked nothing in courage and he brought in a string of prizes. Rewarded by almost continuous employment after the peace, he returned to action in 1776 as Commodore on the North American station. Crucially involved in the attack upon and defence of New York, he then went to the Leeward Islands in charge in English Harbour. *Vengeance* was lucky to escape the worst effects of a hurricane in 1780, and Hotham returned to England with the convoy carrying the treasure from St Eustatius. This was intercepted by the French and Hotham was powerless to do more than order the convoy to disperse.

This set back was not held against him, and further appointments as Commodore were followed in 1787 by his promotion to Admiral, still in the Mediterranean. In 1795 Hotham was twice prepared to take on the French but they had the advantage of light winds and clean ships and stayed out of reach. Nelson was exasperated by Hotham's lack of drive, but concluded that he was 'as good a man as can possibly be.'¹⁰⁷⁴ His health broke down and he returned to England. Thirty years earlier Hotham had been a successful and resourceful frigate captain, and had amply proved his courage. However, in the fleet actions in the Mediterranean he was unable to achieve superiority and his chance for glory was defeated by the lack of wind which allowed the French to do what they did best, maintain 'a fleet in being' at a distance. Aware of his inadequacy, he repeatedly requested to be relieved as age had apparently taken its toll. Hotham was a good administrator who took care of the detailed requirements of a station far from its supply base. Raised to the peerage as Baron Hotham in 1797, he died in 1813. Hotham's nephews carried on the naval tradition.¹⁰⁷⁵

¹⁰⁷⁴ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (Allen Lane 2004) 433; Andrew Lambert, 'William, Lord Hotham 1736-1813' in Peter le Fevre and Richard Harding, eds *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars: The Contemporaries of Nelson* (Chatham Publishing 2005) 42.

¹⁰⁷⁵ ADM 1/310 **Commodore Hotham** 1776-81; ADM1/98 **Admiral Hotham** 1790; J.K. Laughton rev. Andrew Lambert *ODNB* (Oxford University Press 2004 online edition 2004-7).

4.7 Richard Kempenfelt

Richard Kempenfelt was away from the European theatre of the Seven Years' War, being active in the East Indies and Pacific until he returned with the news of the taking of Manila in 1762.¹⁰⁷⁶ He was active briefly during the Falkland Islands mobilisation and then saw continuous service from 1778 until the end of his life four years later. What were the qualities that the Admiralty seized on? First of all, Kempenfelt was not tainted by the Palliser/Keppel courts martial and was prepared to serve under existing Admirals without insisting on his own rights. Knight concluded that Kempenfelt, like Hood, was able and kept his reputation.¹⁰⁷⁷

In private letters to Charles Middleton Kempenfelt wrote an indictment of Admiral Hardy when he had to serve under him. He appreciated the good nature in the man, but looked in vain for 'one grain of commander-in-chief' and concluded: 'My God, what have you great people done by such an appointment?' There is no doubt that had Kempenfelt lived, there would have been a very different ethos in the Navy. Kempenfelt was a devoted Christian who advocated services on board and had Bibles issued. It is typical of the man that he informed the Admiralty about the 170 invalids from *Victory* who had been moved out of hospital in Portsmouth into tenders 'without bedding, without fire, in the months of December and January' and who could not be discharged without their pay.¹⁰⁷⁸

Kempenfelt himself was doubtful that he would be of use to the navy at his age. He told his friend Charles Middleton that he would be honoured by a flag, but felt that 'great and increasing defects both with respect to body and mind' should prompt him to retire rather than take on more responsibility. He believed that it was a misfortune that instead of looking out for someone about forty years old 'persons are not called to places of consequence, especially in our line, until their abilities are on the decline.' Having to wait until he was sixty four years old for the final accolade may not seem a hardship in the twenty-first century,

¹⁰⁷⁶ The entry on Kempenfelt in the *ODNB* claims that Kempenfelt returned to the East Indies to resume command of *Norfolk* and brought her home in 1764. In fact Captain Curry brought her home, and Kempenfelt spent 1763-4 in London. J.K. Laughton, revised Nicholas Tracy *ODNB* (Oxford University Press 2004 on line edition 2004-7).

¹⁰⁷⁷ R.J.B. Knight, 'The Royal Navy's Recovery after the Early Phase of the American Revolutionary War' in George J. Andreopoulos and Harold E. Selesky eds *The Aftermath of Defeat: Societies, Armed Forces and the Challenge of Recovery* Yale 1994) 19.

¹⁰⁷⁸ ADM 1/95 **Admiral Kempenfelt** 27 January 1780.

but in the eighteenth century after a life at sea it is not surprising that he felt himself to be an old man.

Kempenfelt listed the qualities he felt were lacking at the top, and these can be inverted to give a positive list of desirable qualities. He wanted an Admiral who planned ahead of time so that every eventuality was prepared for in advance. This Admiral would have a natural authority, and would maintain his distance, while getting to know the abilities of his men. He would be ‘sensible, active and strict .. to brace up relaxed discipline’. He would devolve authority onto his subordinates, allowing them to take responsibility for the details of their actions. Fleet actions would be organised far enough in advance for each component to know precisely what was required to achieve success.¹⁰⁷⁹ It is interesting to see how close to this ideal Rodney proved to be at the Battle of the Saintes three years later.

Kempenfelt spent every winter travelling in France and studied French methods and training techniques. He listed the observations of eye-witnesses to the French tactics at the Battle of Ushant: their instant responsiveness to signalling and their impressive sail handling, and concluded sadly that their alertness was ‘not equalled by any of ours’.¹⁰⁸⁰

It was while the fleet was preparing to sail in August 1782 that the *Royal George* sank at Spithead, drowning Rear Admiral Richard Kempenfelt and about 900 men and women. The tragedy for the navy was that Kempenfelt was just getting into his stride as a mover and shaker within the Admiralty at the time of his death. He advocated regular fleet exercises, year-round cruises by frigates, in other words, constant employment. He recognised that the tone of the navy was set from the top, and was prepared to criticise the Admiralty itself for not setting the right example.¹⁰⁸¹ Would he have been able to make a difference? We will never know.

4.8 John Lindsay

John Lindsay had influence, particularly through Lord Mansfield. Promoted from his first commission to a posting in eighteen months, he commissioned the fir-built *Trent* and stayed

¹⁰⁷⁹ Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol. 1 290-295.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers*, Vol.1 311.

¹⁰⁸¹ Knox Laughton, *Barham Papers* Vol.1 299; ADM 1/95 **Admiral Kempenfelt** 1779-82.

in her for her entire career. He was part of the naval forces at the taking of Havana, taking a leading rôle in the amphibious action, and being involved in the movement of artillery across from the landings to the rear of Morro Castle. When Captain William Goostrey was killed on board *Cambridge* during the bombardment of the castle, Lindsay took command until she was withdrawn, but returned to *Trent* after the fall of Havana, rejecting the higher pay which went with the larger vessel and perhaps hoping for the greater prize money from a frigate. (He might also have spoken to Thomas Burnett about the sailing qualities of the *Cambridge*). Knighted in 1764, Lindsay undertook a surveying expedition at Charleston from 1764-5, and was briefly a Member of Parliament before his stint in the East Indies as Commander-in-Chief, during which he was appointed a Knight of the Bath. Lindsay's letters back to the Admiralty contain no mention of the breakdown of his communication with the East India Company, where his insistence on proper observances led to his recall.

Lindsay commissioned *Victory*, and wrote enthusiastically about her properties, but Keppel took her instead and Lindsay was in *Prince George* at the battle of Ushant. After the courts martial, refusing to command again under Sandwich, Lindsay was an Admiralty Commissioner during 1783 until the Government fell. Appointed as Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean in 1783, ill-health drove Lindsay back to England in 1785. Promoted to Rear Admiral in 1787, Lindsay died nine months later.

Lindsay was a courtier, who revelled in the niceties of salutations, courtesies and pomp. He refused to enter Gibraltar until he was accorded proper salutations by the garrison under General Elliot. Rancour over this ensured that Lindsay based himself in Leghorn, Genoa or Naples rather than on the Rock. An affair involving two deserters who were retaken from a French rowing boat went all the way to the Duc de Choiseul for resolution. The pinnacle of his professional career was the week he spent with his squadron entertaining the King and Queen of Naples, both on board and on shore. His private life is kept very private – there is no mention in his letters of his wife or his illegitimate children.¹⁰⁸²

Did John Lindsay satisfy the criteria for a successful captain? He did not capture prizes. His years in *Trent* were busy but not productive. Enthusiastic and capable during the Morro

¹⁰⁸² ADM 1/388 **John Lindsay** Commander in Chief Mediterranean 3 September 1783-12 July 1785; Namier and Brooke, *House of Commons 1754-90* Vol. 2 44.

landings as he was, would he have been knighted for his service there if he had not had influence at the highest level in the land? The difficulties he had with Sir William Burnaby during his surveying voyage to Charleston, taken in isolation, make Lindsay sound the injured party. However he had problems while in East India and a disastrous lack of communication with General Elliot in Gibraltar leads perhaps to the conclusion that he was very aware of his own importance.

4.9 Joseph Peyton

Joseph Peyton was one of a dynasty of naval Peytons. He was a born intelligence officer, and as a young commander sent back to the Admiralty detailed accounts of his forays into Cherbourg. Appointed as Vice Admiral Broderick's flag captain he sailed to the Mediterranean in *Prince George* only to lose her by fire as they crossed the Bay of Biscay. Again as Broderick's flag captain in *Prince* he took part in the battle of Lagos. Service as senior officer at the Downs saw Peyton again collecting intelligence from the French coast. After the war Peyton served in 1766 at Plymouth in the converted French East Indiaman *Le Bertin*, then the guardship *Bellisle*. Ten years later Peyton commissioned *Cumberland* to be part of the channel fleet and fought under Keppel in the battle of Ushant and was later part of the defence against the Great Fleet. In 1779 with Rodney he was part of the relief force which destroyed the Spanish in the Midnight Battle. In this substantial action Peyton occupied an aggressive rôle. In 1788 Peyton was promoted to Admiral in the Mediterranean with his son Joseph as his flag captain. He reported back to the Admiralty the naval intelligence collected by his squadron until 1790.¹⁰⁸³

Did Peyton deserve his flag? There must be some doubt about this, as he is the only Admiral not to have an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. It seems Laughton had reservations about his stature within the naval pantheon. He was not a frigate commander in the mould of Harrison or Hotham, but he carried out punctiliously his duties as Commander in Chief in the Mediterranean. In Peyton's case perhaps it was the fact that he was still on the active list in 1787 that secured the promotion, and not his intrinsic value to the navy.

¹⁰⁸³ ADM 1/389 **Admiral Peyton** 1788-90.

To return to the lists of qualities compiled by Mackay and Duffy, would any of Thomas Burnett's peers have competed with Hawke or Nelson? This thesis is not the place for conjecture, but it does appear that Elliot, Harrison, Hotham and Kempenfelt stand out for initiative. Harrison and Kempenfelt died before their potential was realised. Only Hotham and Kempenfelt survived long enough to lead a fleet into battle.

5 Luck

Of all the factors discussed above, the only one not listed so far is luck. Napoleon famously promoted 'lucky' generals, and whatever one thinks of luck, it does seem that one of Thomas Burnett's peers had less than his share. **Alexander Campbell** appears to be an exemplar of an unlucky captain. Campbell had been based in Greenock as master and commander of the *Porcupine*, engaged in escorting transports to Plymouth, when his posting in the *Portmahon* was announced.¹⁰⁸⁴ The vital letter missed him at Plymouth by two days, and **Samuel Wallis** was made post into the *Portmahon* instead.¹⁰⁸⁵ Campbell had to return to his transport duty until relieved by **Robert Man**. He then sent his effects to Leith to be brought down to England by sea, while travelling himself expensively by coach to be in London as quickly as possible to plead his case. He assured their Lordships that he was 'an dutiful although a young post captain'.¹⁰⁸⁶ He was met by a further disappointment: his commission to the *Sheerness* was countermanded the next day by one to the *Unicorn*, based on the West coast of Scotland i.e. from whence he had just dispatched his clothes and effects. His letter to the John Cleveland asked him to lay before their Lordships 'the great inconvenience it will be for me to go immediately to Plymouth without any cloathes <sic> or any other necessaries more than two or three shirts,... and to hope their Lordships will grant me a respite'.¹⁰⁸⁷

In the event Campbell was not given another commission until October when he took command of the 6th rate *Rye*.¹⁰⁸⁸ On the West African coast Campbell caught some undefined disease and was dying when *Rye* arrived in the Leeward Islands. His condition was described by Commodore John Moore: 'Captain Campbell has just arrived from Guinea

¹⁰⁸⁴ ADM 6/16 Commissions book 4 April 1757.

¹⁰⁸⁵ ADM 6/16 Commissions book 8 April 1757.

¹⁰⁸⁶ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Campbell** 18 July 1757.

¹⁰⁸⁷ ADM 1/1606 Captains' Letters C 1757-8 **Campbell** 26 July 1757.

¹⁰⁸⁸ ADM 6/16 Commission dated 25 October 1757.

being in so deplorable condition having lost the use of his limbs and being in so weak a state that his life is despaired of'.¹⁰⁸⁹ Moore gave Campbell leave to resign his commission so that his successor could be appointed to take over the running of the ship, and Alexander Campbell died the same day. Luck has to be taken as a whole, but it does appear that Campbell would not score as a lucky captain.

6 The characteristics of a successful captain

With luck left out of the list of factors, the characteristics of successful captains in the mid-eighteenth century navy are listed below.

6.1 Timing

The date of his birth determined whether or not a man could take advantage of the next round of promotions, as discussed in Chapter 2.¹⁰⁹⁰ To take a captain to flag rank required, most of all, longevity. Astrologers have no place in an academic thesis, but there is no doubt that the dates of birth of the men in this sample did affect their chances of achieving flag status. Rodger makes the point that the most important factor governing an officer's prospects was his date of birth, and suggested that being born twenty years before a major conflict was beneficial. Better still, was to have been born in time to be poised for promotion, and to have the influence to profit from the situation.¹⁰⁹¹

The accident of birth gave some men the advantage of experience when events demanded promotions, and others the advantage of being ready for promotion when influence was being brought to bear on their behalf. It is interesting that of Burnett's peers three men fall into each category: **Kempenfelt**, **Affleck** and **Lindsay** were experienced at the outbreak of the war, while **Elliot**, **Hotham** and **Clements**, whose rapid promotions was backed by powerful interests, had only just been first commissioned. Both categories did equally well, perhaps reflecting the efficacy of war-time experience as a teacher. The big flag promotion which took place in 1787 was too late for Burnett, and made **Elliot**, **Hotham** and **Lindsay** wait thirty years and **Peyton** wait forty four years from their first commissions for their flags.

¹⁰⁸⁹ ADM 1/2109 C-in-C letters Leeward Islands **Moore** 19 November 1758.

¹⁰⁹⁰ N.A.M. Rodger, 'Commissioned officers' careers' in *e-Journal of Maritime Research* (NMM 2001) 3.

¹⁰⁹¹ Rodger, 'Commissioned officers' careers' 7.

6.2 Family ‘interest’

This can be seen clearly in the careers of **Burnett, Elliot, Harrison, Hotham, Kempenfelt, Lindsay, Ourry, Phillips Towry** and **Boyle Walsingham**. All these men had help in achieving the positions in which they could then demonstrate that the Admiralty had acted wisely in allowing ‘interest’ to influence their selection. As can be shown, ‘interest’ came too from other than family sources. Without it a man had little chance of displaying his abilities.

6.3 Professional expertise

This is seen in the careers of many of the men, particularly those who were successful frigate captains with opportunities to demonstrate courage and seamanship in the most difficult circumstances. Annoying the enemy was their *raison d’être*, and the ones who were really good at it stand out from the list: **Affleck, Elliot, Harrison, Hotham** and **Kennedy** all secured multiple successes. These men all display the qualities listed by Wareham (see Introduction). Those without aptitude for the task could, and did, retire from the fray.

6.4 Longevity i.e. good health

This is exemplified by those who possessed it such as **Elliot, Hotham, Medows, Peyton** and **Schomberg**. It is also exemplified by those who didn’t have good health, such as **Campbell, Man, Philips Towry, Shurmur** and **Spencer**. ‘Interest’ may have provided employment for young men, but it was no use being a Harrison if you died so young that your potential was denied the Admiralty.

To be successful, by any method of accounting, the men in this study had firstly to use the family or professional ‘interest’ which got them into the navy; secondly they had to make use of the stations to which they were sent to achieve fame and fortune; thirdly, they had to live long enough, and still be active, to be rewarded at the time of the next round of promotions. The summary of their professional careers contained in the extended spread sheet attached as Appendix 5 shows vividly the way in which the numbers of active captains diminished year by year. From the original thirty five young men posted in 1757, thirty years later the five

survivors were Rear Admirals **Affleck, Elliot, Hotham, Lindsey** and **Peyton**. Their peers had died or retired.

7 Why did these men go into the navy and did they achieve what they sought?

Many of these men followed their fathers or uncles into the navy, and naval dynasties are well represented, although all the ramifications of relationships have not been unravelled amongst members of the **Affleck, Cornwall, Faulknor, Harrison, Hotham, Man, Martin, Peyton, Schomberg, Taylor** and **Towry** families, spanning many generations.

It is not surprising that sons should follow fathers into a profession. The interest lies in newcomers to the scene. For younger sons without financial resources like the orphaned **Thomas Burnett** or the fourth son, **John Elliot**, the navy provided a socially acceptable profession.¹⁰⁹² Although Thomas Burnett was the first member of the Burnet family to go into the navy, his Biddulph grandsons followed his example, although the reduction in employment after the Napoleonic wars meant that they were still lieutenants when they left the navy.

Some men, like **Archibald Kennedy** and **Charles Medows**, did not need money, having financial resources of their own. It appears that for them, serving King and Country was the only incentive they needed. **Richard Kempfenfelt** was also inspired by the principles of service.

The American-born **Joshua Loring**'s background was not naval, but he went to sea and became master of a privateer during the war of Austrian Succession. With the rewards from this enterprise he bought a large estate in Massachusetts.

For some men wealth and titles were not the result of their naval careers. Inherited property took **Henry Phillips Towry** out of the navy. **Charles Medows** inherited vast properties and was created Viscount Newark in 1796 and Earl Manvers in 1806, not as a result of his naval

¹⁰⁹² **Thomas Burnett** was named as a Trustee in the will of his aunt Mary's husband David Mitchell, sufficient proof of social status. Alongside Burnett as fellow Trustees are two men who are both his third cousins: the Rt. Hon. Philip 2nd earl of Stanhope and his brother-in-law the Hon. George Baillie. All four men were part of an extended family of aristocrats and landed gentry with estates in Scotland and England.

experiences but through political affiliations. **Archibald Kennedy** inherited the titles of 11th Earl Cassilis, and 13th Lord Kennedy but right at the end of his life in 1792. On the other hand, **William Hotham** was rewarded with titles, being created Baron Hotham of South Dalton in 1797. **John Lindsay** was created a baronet in 1764, **Edmund Affleck** in 1784, **Henry Martin** in 1791. **Alexander Schomberg** was knighted by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1777.

Other young men wanted to be busy in a challenging and rewarding environment where they could enjoy independence and autocracy. The huge financial rewards gained by some were known to all: everyone would have gone to sea hoping that on this cruise, round that headland, would be found the treasure ship which would bring a fortune. The rewards won from prize money have not been evaluated for these men. That in itself is a task worthy of a thesis. A study of the wills left by the most successful men has revealed the wealth they accumulated after a life-time in the navy.

For some men the accumulation of wealth was a driving force, and sources such as Augustus Hervey's journal reveal the craving for a frigate and an appropriate station.¹⁰⁹³ The wills they prepared with great care reveal their desire for the proper distribution of property. It took up much legal time, but it was obviously important to **Thomas Taylor** that his wife should have the benefit of the farm in Buckinghamshire, including all the farming utensils, horses, cows, sheep, wagons, carts and all the stock in the barns. She also had the use of the plate, jewels, watch, sword and firearms, annuities 'and all money due from the paymaster of the navy', for the duration of her life. Everything was then to go to their son Captain Thomas Taylor and his heirs.¹⁰⁹⁴

All the men were concerned that wives and daughters were protected by the full weight of the law. **Samuel Wallis** specifically left nothing to his son, as he had been amply provided for under his parents' marriage settlement. His concern was for his daughter Betty who was to receive £2,000 when she reached the age of twenty one, or £3,000 on her marriage, having had £80 a year for her maintenance until her marriage or her majority.¹⁰⁹⁵

¹⁰⁹³ Erskine, *Augustus Hervey's Journal* 47, 52, 72, 250.

¹⁰⁹⁴ PROB 11/1291 Will of Captain Thomas Taylor.

¹⁰⁹⁵ PROB 11/1258 Will of Captain Samuel Wallis.

Thomas Harrison left his daughters each £2,000, and a number of small bequests, such as £50 to his surgeon, and ‘to Mrs Constantine Blake for the great care she took of my children whilst abroad and also of me in my illness £100’.¹⁰⁹⁶

Men without families of their own like **John Elliot, William Hotham, Richard Kempenfelt** and **John Wheelock**, left their fortunes to their brothers and nephews. These men had, throughout their lives, shown a determination to support their families which reached its conclusion in their declarations in favour of future generations.¹⁰⁹⁷

Unique amongst these testaments is that of **William M^cCleverty**.¹⁰⁹⁸ Research has not yet revealed the share he received of the treasure from the *Centurion*, but there is no doubt that this unlettered man had invested his money extremely shrewdly, and knew how to work the system. It appears that he had married the daughter of a man who owned a plantation on St Croix. His wife Jane’s income from annuities was limited to £49 from all sources, so that she would be entitled to the annual pension of £45 due the impoverished widow of a captain in the navy.¹⁰⁹⁹ The income from all his investments was to be shared equally amongst his children, save that his daughter Ann (now Apsley) had already received £500 on her marriage. The family was to live together, enjoying ‘the use of the house and all furniture viz. plate, china, bedding, table linen, horses and post chaise and whatever can be called furniture with the garden belonging to the house and lands’. If any child married without the consent of their mother and brothers the share was forfeited, as it was if one departed without the consent of the others. The eldest son, the luckless George Anson McCleverty, was left ‘my gold watch swords and wearing apparel with the boats and tackling and all things belonging to fishing and shooting’.

Although he never bought property, **Thomas Burnett** left his wife Mary and daughter Ann enough money to make them both socially independent, as outlined in Chapter 1. His will

¹⁰⁹⁶ PROB 11/941 Will of Captain Thomas Harrison.

¹⁰⁹⁷ PROB 11/1489 Will of Admiral John Elliot; PROB 11/1544 Will of Rt. Hon. William Lord Hotham; PROB 11/1095 Will of Admiral Richard Kempenfelt; PROB 11/1051 Will of John Wheelock.

¹⁰⁹⁸ PROB 11/1073 Will of Captain William M^cCleverty. This pension was humanely administered: if women did not realise that they were entitled to it and applied years after they were widowed the grant was backdated. The dates on which this pension was paid were advertised regularly, and dispensing offices were found at all the major ports and sea side towns. *London Gazette*, Issue No 9788 2 May 1758 etc.

¹⁰⁹⁹ ADM 22/101 Pensions to widows 1783.

does not mention his son John, who at the time of his father's death was already a Captain in the 8th Kings Regiment of Foot, his earlier commissions bought for him by his father.

Does the study of wills give worthwhile information about the characters of these men? It is sobering to see that many of them stipulate burial 'in the most private manner', or 'in decent plain and orderly manner': all of them were aware of the alternative, like that of **Robert Man**, whose body was 'consigned to the deep'. It is also of interest that despite a lack of precise information about income from prizes, substantial properties like **John Peyton's** Wakefield Place were the norm rather than the exception. **Paul Henry Ourry**, whose wife already owned all their lands, left her only his books.

A final conclusion has been drawn from **William M^cCleverty's** relationship with the **Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham**. It seemed extraordinary to find a letter from Boyle Walsingham asking the Admiralty to discharge the three young M^cCleverty boys from *Romney* so that they could be educated by their father 'on shore'.¹¹⁰⁰ But the network of relationships which has underpinned so much of this study provided the answer. Boyle Walsingham's father was the earl of Shannon, and he would have had sympathy with a fellow Irishman, even if his fortune was Spanish, invested in Antrim and not centuries old.

Lastly, who amongst these men achieved professional success? Two out of the cohort (**William Shurmur** and **Samuel Spencer**) had no independent careers at all. A further fourteen men did not serve after the Seven Years' War, either as the result of premature death or effective retirement. A further three men, **Thomas Cornewall**, **Robert Faulknor** and **William Fortescue**, died or retired before the 1770s. The promotion to flag rank which took place in 1787 was too late for a further ten men who had either died or retired before this date. Rewards in the shape of baronetcies and Commissioner status was awarded to **Henry Martin** and **John Lindsay**, and **Alexander Schomberg** remained in action in the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland's yacht. Only six men lived long enough and were still active as Admirals – the final accolade.

¹¹⁰⁰ ADM 1/2667 Captains' Letters W 1762 **Walsingham** 9 October 1762; only George Anson M^cCleverty followed his father to sea, Henry and James choosing to make their fortunes elsewhere.

8 Conclusion

To return to the questions posed at the outset. The mid-eighteenth century navy needed to be brought to life through a study of the men who were making history. The captains' letters to the Admiralty have provided vivid and immediate accounts of their lives, across a range of subjects of interest to these professionals. The degree to which the captains were controlled by the Admiralty was certainly unexpected, although the presence throughout the century of the ghost of Samuel Pepys was perhaps not a surprise. The silences which occur when ships stopped being individual vessels and were subsumed into fleets were disconcerting. Other silences, about dishonour or misconduct have to be seen against the evidence of matter-of-fact reporting of honour and bravery.

While reading their letters the captains became lively individuals, full of self-importance from Hotham, *joie de vivre* from Kennedy, steady professionalism from Wheelock, Martin, Towry, humanity from Kempenfelt and desperate inadequacy only from Knackston.

Has this study provided a justification for this method of study? By taking a cohort of men through the most important years of their professional lives and comparing the outcomes it has been possible to reach a conclusion about promotion which would not otherwise have been possible. It is clear that provided a man had the 'interest' to get him aboard at the right time, if he was an active captain and had the blessing of longevity, he would achieve the coveted flag.

And finally, does this thesis succeed in giving substance to the shadowy figure of Thomas Burnett, once just a name on a family tree and about whom so little was known? There is no doubt that seeing his professional career against those of his peers has made possible an understanding of his value to the navy that nothing else would have done. Burnett was not an Elliot or a Harrison, sent to the right places in the right ships. He was a skilled professional who could be relied on in testing times, but without skills in communication Burnett lacked the ability to bring himself constantly and advantageously to their Lordships' attention. Despite his very adequate social background Burnett wrote freely on only two occasions, when moved by exhilaration and rage.

Despite the paucity of evidence from letters, Burnett has emerged as worthy of Rodney's desire that he should be rewarded for his long service. Having spent his first three years at post rank in the Leeward Islands, always under more senior captains, Burnett never had the opportunity to gain the experience of organisation and decision making that his peers had. He missed out on the opportunity of experience as Commodore. Of the seven men of his cohort who were still active in the 1780s, he was the only one not rewarded with a flag. If he had lived until 1787 would he have been granted a flag? Perhaps at the Admiralty when he returned, a hint was given that he could expect a flag with the next tranche of promotions. This might be the basis of the otherwise meaningless 'Captain Thomas Burnett, later Admiral' on the family tree. But this must remain pure speculation.

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