

THE SEA OFFICERS



Gentility and Professionalism in the Royal Navy 1775–1815



Evan Wilson
University College

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Short Abstract

This thesis argues that British naval officers provide a useful category of analysis for social and cultural historians. While previous scholarship has largely ignored naval officers or treated them as equivalent, socially and professionally, to army officers or the traditional professions, the present study argues that the nature of service at sea presented challenges to officers' social status. Drawing on thousands of recently-digitized sources, as well as extensive archival materials, it explores the formation of naval officers' social identity, the forces that shaped their careers, and the changing landscape of social status at the end of the eighteenth century. The demands of life at sea placed naval officers in a liminal social space. Their claims to gentility were contingent and contested. They needed to be proficient in practical as well as theoretical skills. At the same time, officers were expected to be gentlemen. How officers shaped, and were shaped by, the changing definitions of that term provides the framework for the thesis.

It makes three central contributions to the fields of British social and naval history. First, it emphasizes the continuing significance of social status boundaries in Georgian Britain. The existing literature misconstrues the chronology of the changing nature of gentility and misunderstands the relationship of naval officers to issues of gentility and professionalism. Second, it recalibrates our understanding of the nature and mechanisms of patronage networks. Social backgrounds made relatively insignificant contributions to shaping officers' careers; patrons used a much wider range of criteria when selecting clients. Finally, it questions the traditional separation of naval history from social and cultural history. The Navy and naval officers were central to British life at the end of the eighteenth century and cannot be effectively analysed separately. The Navy was both socially unique and uniquely important to Britain during the crisis of the Wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

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Long Abstract

Michael Lewis' book, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815*, is frequently cited by historians of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain because it provides estimates of the social makeup of the Navy's officer corps. Lewis, however, visited no archives when researching his book; instead, he relied on biographical dictionaries published decades after the end of the Wars. The first goal of this thesis is to revise Lewis' work and provide an archival foundation for our understanding of the social origins of naval officers. At the heart of the thesis is a large database of biographical information about more than a thousand officers who lived and worked in the Navy's wardrooms during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. It is a random sample of more than ten per cent of the population, and it includes both commissioned and warrant officers. In addition to archival sources, the database draws on thousands of recently-digitized sources. The result is a fuller and more accurate picture of officers' social origins and career arcs.

Revising Lewis' work opens up a number of avenues of exploration. British naval officers provide a useful category of analysis for social and cultural historians. While previous scholarship has largely ignored naval officers or treated them as equivalent, socially and professionally, to army officers or the traditional professions, the present study argues that the nature of service at sea presented challenges to officers' social status. The second goal of this thesis is therefore to reconceptualise officers' social status. The demands of life at sea placed naval officers in a liminal social space. Their claims to gentility were contingent and contested. They needed to be proficient in practical as well as theoretical skills: seamanship required manual labour and years of experience, while navigation required expert knowledge of spherical trigonometry. At the same time, officers were expected to be gentlemen. How officers shaped, and were shaped by, the changing definitions of that term provides the framework for the thesis.

In addition to revising Lewis' work, the thesis makes three central contributions to the fields of British social and naval history. First, it emphasizes the continuing significance of social status boundaries in Georgian Britain. The existing literature misconstrues the chronology of the changing nature of gentility and misunderstands the relationship of naval officers to issues of gentility and professionalism. Second, it recalibrates our understanding of the nature and mechanisms of patronage networks. Social backgrounds made relatively insignificant contributions to shaping officers' careers; patrons used a much wider range of criteria when selecting clients. Finally, it questions the traditional separation of naval history from social and cultural history. The Navy and naval officers were central to British life at the end of the eighteenth century and cannot be effectively analysed separately. The Navy was both socially unique and uniquely important to Britain during the crisis of the Wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter one describes the population of commissioned officers by analysing the database. It moves methodically through a collective biography, drawing a number of important conclusions about the makeup of the Navy's officer corps. Some of the conclusions can be briefly summarized here. Comparing the birth dates provided by candidates sitting the lieutenants' exam with the birth dates available through parish church records demonstrates that the practice of falsifying birth certificates was both more common than any previous study has guessed and increasing over time, as unemployment became more common. Officers were overwhelmingly from the south and southwest: one in every six commissioned officers was born in Devon or Cornwall. Most future officers joined the Navy as teenagers, but the chapter also discusses those whose careers fell outside the normal pattern, such as James Bowen. Officers were educated in a haphazard fashion: some spent time ashore in academies; more learned their profession, and whatever else they could, at sea. After commissioning, most officers were never promoted past lieutenant. Unemployment was rampant in peacetime, surprisingly common in wartime, and worst for commanders. Command styles varied widely, as did officers' responsibilities. Few died on active duty as a result of enemy action; more died of disease and shipwreck. Some of these conclusions are not new, but, unlike much of the existing scholarship, the chapter provides a comprehensive survey of officers' careers based on archival sources and a statistically meaningful sample.

Chapter two describes the population of warrant officers. Each category of warrant officer interacted with the Navy slightly differently. Defining each position's responsibilities and exploring its administrative history is therefore essential. Unlike

commissioned officers, warrant officers were civilians with particular skills necessary on board. All were supervised at least in part by civilian organizations, often through an entrance or qualifying exam. Surgeons were more likely to come from the Celtic fringe, and both surgeons and chaplains tended to be better-educated than their colleagues in the wardroom. Masters and pursers, chapter two argues, were trained rather than educated, often in the Navy or in another maritime context. Officers' opportunities for returning to civilian employment shaped the duration of their naval careers: chaplains were the most likely to have short careers, while masters found their best employment prospects in the Navy.

Chapter three combines the populations of commissioned and warrant officers to examine the social makeup of the wardroom by focusing on the occupations of officers' fathers. Its major conclusion is that commissioned and warrant officers shared similar social backgrounds. Only commissioned officers came from the nobility, but titled officers were rare. Much more common were officers from professional or commercial backgrounds. The data on commissioned officers' backgrounds revises the historiography to emphasize that they came from lower down the social spectrum than previously thought; the data on warrant officers' backgrounds is an almost entirely new contribution to the literature. Lieutenants and warrant officers lived and worked in close quarters together in the wardroom. Their similar backgrounds facilitated comradery and effective collaboration; when relationships broke down, social backgrounds do not seem to have featured frequently in their disputes.

Chapter four combines the data on officers' career patterns in chapters one and two with the data on officers' backgrounds in chapter three to explore the relationship between social backgrounds and promotion prospects. Its key finding is that, above a certain threshold, social background did not play a significant role in shaping officers' careers. Instead, talent and timing were more important. The Navy was not a meritocracy, but it was in the interest of high-ranking officers to surround themselves with talented subordinates, regardless of their pedigree. Chapter four also serves to identify the two major groups of naval officers: one large and one small. The larger consisted of roughly nine in ten commissioned and warrant officers who tended to have poor employment prospects, and, as a consequence, had fewer chances to distinguish themselves in battle or earn prize money. The small group consisted of elite commissioned officers who rose to the top of the British social hierarchy through promotion and prize money earnings. In other words, combining chapter three's discussion of officers' social backgrounds with the

section on prize money in chapter four reveals that the distinction between warrant and commissioned officers was not as socially significant as the distinction between elite commissioned officers and the rest.

Chapter five compares the larger group of low-ranking naval officers to a range of domestic and international peer groups. It explores how naval officers used the term ‘professional’, and the extent to which they meet the criteria for a profession as defined by a number of modern historians. Naval officers sit awkwardly next to the traditional professions of the law, medicine, and the church; they were also different from army officers in meaningful ways. The most similar domestic group to naval officers were artillery and engineer officers, but naval officers would have rejected such a comparison. They would have welcomed the international comparisons which chapter five makes. The demands of life at sea were constant across the Atlantic and European world, but each navy’s officers grappled with the demands slightly differently. French commissioned officers, who held noble titles, approached their education and training substantially differently from British officers. Similarly, Danish officers grappled with a variety of challenges unknown to the British, such as how to gain combat experience during a century of peace. Chapter five also follows officers after their seagoing careers in the Navy ended to explore what the opportunities available to them indicate about their social position.

Chapter six discusses the extent to which naval officers were gentlemen. It begins by surveying the various definitions of gentility before dealing separately with the two groups of officers identified in chapter four. The elite had all the markers of those at the top of the social hierarchy: titles, wealth, and, in some cases, land. But they nevertheless interacted uncomfortably with the traditional aristocracy and landed gentry because of the unique nature of their profession. At the same time, elite officers were well-placed to help shape the national conversation about social status, the service elite, and the place of military officers in society. The larger group of low-ranking officers had a much lower profile: they had no titles, little wealth, and no land. But they too considered themselves to be gentlemen professionals, and chapter six explores the implications of this claim for our understanding of gentility in the late eighteenth century. It also discusses how naval officers’ understanding of honour and duty changed over time; related topics include the practice of duelling and the rewards available to military heroes.

‘[I]n this ship I took my degrees (not as a doctor of Oxford, thank God!) but as a midshipman in the cockpit of H.M. ship *Panther*, with some of the best fellows that ever graced the British Navy.’

James Anthony Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches: The Recollections of James Anthony Gardner*, ed. C. Lloyd (London, 1955), p. 10.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS

Abbreviations

ACAD	A Cambridge Alumni Database, <i>University of Cambridge</i>
CSO	R.L. DiNardo and D. Syrett, <i>The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy, 1660–1815</i> (NRS, 1994).
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich
NMRN	National Museum of the Royal Navy
NRS	Publications of the Navy Records Society
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

Conventions

All figures, tables, and statistics, unless otherwise cited, derive from the database described in the introduction. Sources cited in the text only in the context of particular officers in the database do not appear in the bibliography; sources used to gather information about multiple officers do appear in the bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the officers who served in the Royal Navy from 1775 to 1815. Its argument is that naval officers are a useful category of social analysis. Their distinctive mixture of technical expertise and social prominence provides powerful insights into the mechanisms that determined social status in the age of sail. This argument can be applied to most European nations, but naval officers are particularly useful to study in the context of Britain at the end of the eighteenth century. In no other nation was the navy such a fundamental component of national identity, and in few other times were naval operations so crucial for national survival. Invasion scares punctuated by massive fleet battles characterized the final two wars of the long eighteenth century, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The men who commanded the Navy's ships during those twenty-two years of conflict were the first line of Britain's defence and the subject of this thesis.

British naval officers of the period were significant, but they were also only one small part of the enormous and complex infrastructure of the most expensive activity undertaken by the British government of the period, namely funding, supplying, and operating the Navy.¹ One useful consequence of the challenge presented by the scale of the Navy was that to meet it, Admiralty administrators kept remarkably thorough personnel records for officers. Using these records, it is possible to reconstruct the framework of officers' careers, and in some cases, much more, including their family backgrounds. It is a fortunate time to undertake an analysis of those records because they can now be easily verified and contextualized. Recent digitization projects have opened up thousands of previously inaccessible sources on all aspects of eighteenth-century social history. This thesis aims to take advantage of the opportunities offered to social historians both by the

¹ J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War and the English State, 1688–1783* (London, 1989), pp. 29–36.

sources available and by the nature of naval officers. Naval historians, despite the records available to them, have never managed to collect and analyse statistically significant data about officers' careers; social historians, in contrast, have tended to ignore or misrepresent the Navy. Bridging the gap between the two camps is essential for understanding naval officers' social status, and for answering N.A.M. Rodger's call 'to put naval affairs back into the history of Britain'.²

In many ways the central question about naval officers' social status is the validity of their claim to gentility. Chapter six examines this question at length, and surveys the historiography of gentility at the same time. Here, at the outset, it is important to discuss the theoretical relationship between status markers and identity. In the eighteenth century, identity meant 'the sameness or agreement of two or more things with one another'.³ Elements of that definition remain in the modern conception of identity, but identity can also be what makes someone unique—what identifies them.⁴ Naval officers identified as gentlemen, meaning that they saw themselves as similar to other men who displayed characteristics of gentility. What those characteristics were, and how they changed over time, is, again, the subject of chapter six. This thesis therefore culminates in a discussion of identity as defined in the eighteenth century: to what extent could naval officers identify with gentlemen?

Carrying this type of analysis to its extreme can lead to some uncomfortable, and undoubtedly incorrect conclusions. Gentility was not akin to a class, in the Marxist sense of the word. Instead, naval officers provide yet another exception to the monolithic structures of Marxist historians. They challenged and tested contemporary definitions of

² N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), p. lxiii.

³ H. French and J. Barry, *Identity and Agency in England, 1500–1800* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 2.

⁴ Dror Wahrman argues that the modern conception of identity, of self, was created in the long eighteenth century. Wahrman's argument is persuasive, but the focus here remains on the eighteenth-century conception of identity. D. Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 2004), p. xii.

gentility. Furthermore, gentility was only one aspect of an officer's identity: gender, ethnicity, education, wealth, and countless other categories provided officers with opportunities to connect with others.⁵ To what extent officers could control their identity as gentlemen will be explored at some length. Gentility could be an uncontrollable aspect of an officer's identity if it were defined by his parent's wealth and status. But it could also be controlled, or at least determined by behaviour rather than birth: honour, comportment, education, profession, and income were also possible determining factors. Officers' families link birth and behaviour, since families played a significant role in moulding future officers.⁶ Either way, officers' identities as gentlemen were not akin to a class consciousness. Rather, in the status-obsessed world of the late-eighteenth century, gentility was one of the most significant aspects of officers' many identities. Exploring the boundaries of gentility and its impact on the lives of naval officers is the challenge of this thesis.

Structure and Historiography

The structure of the thesis is pyramidal. The capstone is chapter six's analysis of naval officers as gentlemen, but that analysis relies on a much broader foundation to provide the necessary support and context. Chapters one and two describe the careers of commissioned and warrant officers. Chapter three argues that historians have overestimated officers' social backgrounds and discusses the wardroom as a social space. Chapter four introduces the idea that there were two kinds of naval officers. Rather than discussing commissioned and warrant officers separately, it contends that the most significant division, socially, was between an elite group of post-captains and admirals and a large, relatively undifferentiated group of lieutenants and warrant officers. Chapter five compares officers

⁵ French and Barry, *Identity and Agency*, pp. 2–4, 21–2.

⁶ L. Davidoff, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract, and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (London, 1999), p. 55.

to domestic and international peer groups: army officers, engineer and artillery officers, members of the traditional professions, French naval officers, and Danish warrant officers. It emphasizes the degree to which naval officers were unique. Finally, chapter six, as has been mentioned, addresses the issue of gentility.

Each chapter interacts with a different historiography. Chapters one and two are mainly naval in focus. Chapter three attempts to place naval officers in a social history context, while chapter four addresses the narrower historiographies of prize money and patronage. Chapter five grapples with existing studies of professionals and army officers to demonstrate how naval officers have been overlooked and misunderstood. Chapter six draws on a broad range of studies of social hierarchies, as well as histories of celebrity and honour. Situating the thesis in relationship to this menagerie of existing studies requires treating each chapter's contribution to the historiography separately, which will be done shortly. In its simplest form, though, the historiographical target of the thesis is Michael Lewis' 1960 book, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815*.⁷ Much about Lewis' work is valuable: he paid attention to warrant officers and the lower deck; he used data to describe officers' backgrounds and careers; and his prose is lively. His methodology, however, left something to be desired, he was writing from within the Royal Navy, and he was apparently allergic to archives. It is time to update and revise Lewis' important study.

Chapters one and two provide a rigorous statistical analysis of officers' careers and contrast that analysis with Lewis' approach. For his study of commissioned officers, Lewis relied entirely on the work of two biographers, John Marshall and William O'Byrne. Marshall compiled a multivolume and multipart biographical dictionary of all living officers at the rank of commander and above during the 1820s.⁸ O'Byrne added lieutenants

⁷ M. Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815* (London, 1960).

⁸ J. Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography* (4 vols., London, 1823–35).

to his tome, but he was working in 1849.⁹ Both men solicited the biographies from the officers themselves, which explains why they were only interested in living officers. The problems with these dictionaries as sources are manifold and discussed in more depth in chapter three. Summarized briefly: any officer who died before 1823 (for Marshall) or 1849 (for O’Byrne) was omitted. To give a sense of how much time had passed from O’Byrne’s work to the Wars, Nelson would have been ninety-one in 1849. Meanwhile, lieutenants made up the majority of all officers; they are a significant omission in Marshall’s work. The biographical dictionaries also provided officers a perfect opportunity to burnish their careers by filtering the information they sent to the biographers. Despite these problems, Lewis used them as the foundation of his work. Combining all of Marshall and O’Byrne means that Lewis’ sample of officers is huge—Marshall has eight volumes or parts, and O’Byrne’s book is more than a thousand pages long—but significantly skewed. The databases underpinning this study were specifically designed to correct many of Lewis’ errors and omissions.

Lewis’ book is not the only study of commissioned officers. There are a number of more recent and reliable attempts to study their careers, though none are as large or comprehensive as Lewis’. Rodger took a large sample of officers spread over most of the eighteenth century to provide a preliminary look at officers’ career patterns; the present database focuses attention on the last quarter of the century and gathers more extensive data.¹⁰ Both *The Wooden World* and *Command of the Ocean* explore officers’ careers in depth by relying on a combination of archival and printed sources; neither work pre-empts the data-driven story told in chapter one.¹¹ Sam Cavell created a large database of future officers when they were midshipmen and quarterdeck boys. This approach gives her a

⁹ W. O’Byrne, *A Naval Biographical Dictionary* (London, 1849).

¹⁰ N.A.M. Rodger, ‘Commissioned Officers’ Careers in the Royal Navy, 1690–1815’, *Journal for Maritime Research* 3, no. 1 (2001), pp. 85–129.

¹¹ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), pp. 252–327; Idem, *Command of the Ocean*, chapters 25 and 33.

unique perspective on officers' careers. She also sampled boys in ten-year intervals, allowing her to carry her data into the post-war Navy. The problem with her methodology is that it forces her to draw conclusions from just three years' worth of data on the Great Wars (1791, 1801, and 1811), and in any case, boys are notoriously difficult to track and catalogue. Many disappear from the archival record before they become officers.¹² D.A.B. Ronald also explored the world of boy sailors, but while he brought archival sources to bear, he did not approach the topic systematically or attempt to create a database.¹³ Tom Wareham's work has focused on frigate captains, so his sample of 208 officers is both smaller than the present database and unconcerned with men below post rank. He also relies heavily on Marshall and O'Byrne for biographical data, even though forty-one per cent of his sample were dead by 1822.¹⁴

The existing historical literature on warrant officers is much less developed in comparison to commissioned officers. Only Lewis and Rodger have attempted to incorporate warrant officers into larger social histories of the Navy. As with Lewis' work on commissioned officers, his allergy to archival sources is a serious flaw. Furthermore, he does not attempt to provide a statistical foundation for his claims about warrant officers because there are no published biographical dictionaries similar to those of commissioned officers. Instead, he relies on published memoirs from his favourite officers, William Dillon and James Anthony Gardner. He also samples heavily from the memoir of Chaplain Edward Mangin. The result is an entertaining survey of anecdotes about warrant officers. There is a good deal of value in Lewis' work because he highlights many of the prickly social status issues that undermined the harmony of many ships' wardrooms. But when he

¹² S.A. Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the British Navy, 1771–1831* (Woodbridge, 2012).

¹³ D.A.B. Ronald, *Young Nelsons: Boy Sailors during the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 2009).

¹⁴ T. Wareham, *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2001), pp. 18, 30.

makes claims about the social background of all late-Georgian pursers, he does so armed only with the descriptions provided in published works by his chosen officers.¹⁵

Rodger's work on warrant officers is scattered throughout his extensive catalogue. Perhaps surprisingly, one particularly important work is his *Naval Records for Genealogists*, in which he describes warrant officers' career structures as a framework for discussing their archival records. His much more famous *Naval History of Britain*, in contrast, does not devote separate chapters or section headings to warrant officers (the lower deck and commissioned officers do receive separate chapters), but instead it discusses them in the context of how their roles fit into naval administration and operations. *Safeguard of the Sea* traces the origins and definitions of warrant officers back to the Tudor Navy and earlier. *Command of the Ocean* recreates the duties and shipboard lives of warrant officers in a manner similar to that attempted by Lewis, but with an archival foundation and a much clearer description of the administrative responsibilities of each warrant officer. *The Wooden World* contains the fullest treatment of warrant officers, particularly pursers, but neither the *Naval History* nor *The Wooden World* attempt to provide a detailed social history of the origins and career patterns of warrant officers.¹⁶ Both works do address issues that will appear in this thesis: why warrant officers joined the Navy, their responsibilities on board, and their perceived social status.

Drilling down from the broad perspective of Lewis and Rodger to studies of groups of warrant officers, the remainder of the existing historiography exists on a spectrum. At one extreme are the surgeons, who have received by far the most attention. The history of medicine has undergone a significant change in the last few decades. Formerly written by doctors and featuring doctors as the heroes of a Whiggish narrative of the conquest of

¹⁵ Lewis, *Social History*, pp. 233–55.

¹⁶ N.A.M. Rodger, *Naval Records for Genealogists* (Public Record Office Handbook No 22, 1998); Idem, *Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660–1649* (London, 1997); Idem, *Command of the Ocean*; Idem, *The Wooden World*, pp. 87–98.

disease, the new history of medicine has gone a long ways towards placing doctors in an appropriate historical context.¹⁷ Naval surgeons have often featured in this new literature: they were at the forefront of many of the great medical campaigns in the eighteenth century, including smallpox and typhus as well as scurvy, and they kept excellent records. One common approach has updated the old doctor-as-hero approach by drawing on the new medical history to contextualize the biographies of leading surgeons. Brian Vale and Griffith Edwards used this approach for their biography of Thomas Trotter.¹⁸ Laurence Brockliss, John Cardwell, and Michael Moss used a biography of William Beatty as a starting point for a discussion of naval medicine and Nelson's death.¹⁹ Both biographies are useful but problematic. They have a tendency to argue from their subject out, rather than the other way around. Each step on their subject's journey is explained as being a perfect example of what all surgeons did, and both Trotter and Beatty are too frequently described as visionary heroes responsible for, in Trotter's case, ending the slave trade and solving the naval plagues of scurvy and alcoholism.

Edited volumes by Geoffrey L. Hudson and David Boyd Haycock and Sally Archer take a shotgun to the topic of naval medicine, and their volumes hit their target more often than the biographies.²⁰ Both Patricia Crimmin and Margarette Lincoln, contributors to Hudson's volume, argue persuasively that commissioned officers played a crucial role in determining the health outcomes of eighteenth-century sailors. Surgeons, of course,

¹⁷ The one exception remains the historiography of scurvy, which continues to be misunderstood both from the perspective of the nature of the disease and the steps taken to alleviate it. For an example of the doctor-as-hero approach, see S.R. Brown, *Scurvy: How a Surgeon, a Mariner and a Gentleman Solved the Greatest Mystery in the Age of Sail* (Chichester, 2003). A better treatment remains Kenneth Carpenter's classic work, *The History of Scurvy and Vitamin C* (Cambridge, 1986), which uses the succession of theories about the disease as its organizing theme.

¹⁸ B. Vale and G. Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet: The Life and Times of Thomas Trotter, 1760–1832* (Woodbridge, 2011).

¹⁹ L. Brockliss, J. Cardwell, and M. Moss, *Nelson's Surgeon: William Beatty, Naval Medicine, and the Battle of Trafalgar* (Oxford, 2005).

²⁰ G.L. Hudson (ed.), *British Military and Naval Medicine* (Amsterdam, 2007); D.B. Haycock and S. Archer (eds.), *Health and Medicine at Sea, 1700–1900* (Woodbridge, 2009).

advised captains of best practices, but Crimmin and Lincoln's arguments demonstrate an understanding of the broad sweep of naval operations and administration.²¹ They also reflect the consensus view of surgeons' training and background: surgeons were generally poorly trained and of low social status, particularly on board.²² The consensus derives from Lewis, who proposes that surgeons came from relatively poor backgrounds, were prone to alcoholism, and had little medical knowledge.²³ Rodger is more willing to concede that some surgeons were dedicated and he emphasizes their rising social status, but he also agrees that quality varied.²⁴ Vale and Edwards tend to emphasize the wide range of surgeons' educational experiences.²⁵ It is only John Cardwell, writing in Haycock and Archer's book, who makes an attempt to find trends in the broad population of surgeons. His chapter is a prosopographical study of surgeons during the Napoleonic Wars.²⁶ It is similar in scale and technique to the warrant officer database, and Cardwell largely succeeds in providing appropriate background and context for the lives and careers of naval surgeons. The differences between the databases will be explored in chapter two. This thesis' database provides, at the very least, a useful point of comparison; it also asks some questions that Cardwell does not.

No database similar to Cardwell's exists for any other warrant officer category, nor, indeed, have any other warrant officers been studied as closely as surgeons. At the other extreme on the spectrum of the historiography of warrant officers are pursers. Despite their essential function on board ship, their backgrounds and careers have never before been studied. Eighteenth-century masters have also been ignored, though their tarpaulin

²¹ P.K. Crimmin, 'British Naval Health, 1700–1800: Improvement over Time?' and M. Lincoln, 'The Medical Profession and Representations of the Navy, 1750–1815', in Hudson (ed.), *British Military and Naval Medicine*, pp. 183–200, 214.

²² Crimmin, 'British Naval Health', p. 191; M. Lincoln, 'The Medical Profession', p. 202.

²³ Lewis, *Social History*, pp. 243–6.

²⁴ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, pp. 20–1; Idem, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 527.

²⁵ Vale and Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet*, p. 10.

²⁶ J. Cardwell, 'Royal Navy Surgeons, 1793–1815: A Collective Biography', in Haycock and Archer (eds.), *Health and Medicine at Sea*, pp. 39–62.

predecessors in the Stuart Navy have received some attention.²⁷ Both masters and pursers appear in existing studies in the context of their administrative or shipboard duties.²⁸ Rodger discusses masters while describing the advances in navigation practices in the sixteenth century, for example, and he outlines the responsibilities of a purser in the context of a broader description of victualing and corruption.²⁹ The prosopography described in this thesis is the first attempt to sketch the outlines of the populations of pursers and masters.

Between the extremes of the new research on surgeons and the absence of research on pursers and masters sits the historiography of naval chaplains. Much like the older history of medicine, the two major studies of chaplains were written by former chaplains. Waldo Smith's 1961 book provides a useful survey of the variety of experiences of chaplains in the sailing navy, as well as the role that chaplains played in the welfare and discipline of seamen, particularly after the munitions of 1797.³⁰ Gordon Taylor's *The Sea Chaplains* is much more ambitious in scope: he begins with St Paul in 60 A.D. and finishes with Cold War chaplains. Where Smith's work is organized thematically in places, Taylor uses individual chaplains to drive his narrative, and the result is a series of anecdotes. He supplements this work with extensive appendices, one of which purports to list every chaplain who served in the Navy from 1685 to 1903.³¹ Rodger, in his article on chaplains in the eighteenth century, comments that Taylor's study 'does not pretend to a systemic analysis'.³² Rodger's own analysis focuses more on the role of religion in the Navy and the question of how frequently and with what purpose services were conducted at sea. He

²⁷ Rodger, *Safeguard of the Sea*, pp. 304, 409–10.

²⁸ For example, pursers are occasionally referenced in J. Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (London, 2006).

²⁹ Rodger, *Safeguard of the Sea*, pp. 304–6; Idem, *The Wooden World*, pp. 87–98.

³⁰ W.E.L. Smith, *The Navy and Its Chaplains in the Days of Sail* (Toronto, 1961).

³¹ G. Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains: A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy* (Oxford, 1978).

³² N.A.M. Rodger, 'The Naval Chaplain in the Eighteenth Century', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995), p. 33.

addresses career patterns and outcomes as well, and his article provides a modern academic spine to support the work of Smith and Taylor.³³ Nevertheless, there is certainly room in this historiography for the chaplains in the database, particularly because none of the existing works explicitly places them in the context of other warrant officers.

Chapter three returns to Lewis' work and uses his categories to sort officers' fathers' occupations. It aims to remedy his research failings while still treating his results as a useful comparative marker. He divides British society into five parts, and he orders them by social prestige rather than income. His five sections are, in order: titled people, landed gentry, professional men, business and commercial men, and the working class.³⁴ Lewis effectively distinguishes between individuals based on how they earned their income, rather than how much. Titled people and the landed gentry earned their incomes from land ownership; professionals provided highly specialized knowledge or skills in exchange for a salary or an honorarium; business and commercial men bought and sold goods; and the working class sold their labour. He does not directly solve the problem of where to put the men who could claim genteel status—no ranking system could. But he does isolate the two groups where genteel status was contested: professionals and businessmen. Lewis' system is a rough but useful snapshot of British society that provides a starting point for investigating the boundaries of gentility within each group.

Mapping the members of the databases onto Lewis' categories undermines much of what has been written by eighteenth-century historians about naval officers' social backgrounds. Jeremy Black, Stephen Conway, David Cannadine, and Linda Colley all rely on Lewis to argue that naval officers increasingly came from the upper reaches of the social spectrum. Black and Conway are forced to shoehorn Lewis' data on naval officers' backgrounds into their arguments. Black describes the explosion in size of armed forces

³³ Rodger, 'The Naval Chaplain', pp. 33–45.

³⁴ Lewis, *Social History*, p. 31.

over the course of the eighteenth century, but notes that larger armed forces did not challenge the social realities of their societies: increased opportunities for nobles and inequality were still characteristics of both armed forces and societies.³⁵ Conway disagrees, arguing that there were opportunities for officers from humbler backgrounds to serve. However, he claims that the ‘upper ranks of the Royal Navy were perhaps even more dominated by the aristocracy and great gentry families than the army’s, despite the fact that no one could buy a naval command’.³⁶ Challenging Lewis’ data alters both arguments. Cannadine and Colley rely on Lewis for their discussion of aristocratic participation in the Navy. But Lewis does not have much to say about aristocratic participation, so both make an exception just for the Navy and include landed gentry families in chapters or books otherwise concerned only with titled people. Suddenly, Lewis’ claim that forty per cent of all naval officers in the Napoleonic Wars were members of the landed gentry is worth citing.³⁷ As chapter three demonstrates, Lewis’ officers’ backgrounds are too high on the social spectrum; revising his analysis will consequently revise much of what has been written by leading historians about officers’ social backgrounds.

Chapter four is concerned with prize money and promotion prospects. The historiography on which it relies is remarkable for its range of methodologies. Admiral J.R. Hill’s exploration of the naval prize system takes a bureaucratic and legal approach to the subject, while Dan Benjamin’s unpublished article on prize money takes an economic and game theory approach.³⁸ For promotion prospects in the Navy, Charles Consolvo’s article

³⁵ J. Black, *European Warfare, 1660–1815* (London, 1994), pp. 235–6. See also R. Morriss, *The Foundations of British Maritime Ascendancy: Resources, Logistics and the State, 1755–1815* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 264–5.

³⁶ S. Conway, *War, State and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2006), p. 75.

³⁷ D. Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy* (London, 1995), p. 22; L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, revised edn. (London, 2009), pp. 183–4.

³⁸ J.R. Hill, *The Prizes of War: The Naval Prize System in the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815* (Stroud, 1998); D.K. Benjamin, ‘Golden Harvest: The British Naval Prize System, 1793–1815’ (Unpublished paper, 2009).

in *The Mariner's Mirror* is the most direct antecedent. His sample, however, is smaller than the commissioned officers in the database, and he tends to mimic Lewis' ideas about the role that 'interest' played in officers' careers.³⁹ Christopher Dandeker's article describes patronage and naval officers from the perspective of a Weberian sociologist, though again his analysis relies heavily on Lewis.⁴⁰ There is also a broader historiography of patronage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. J.M. Bourne usefully defines the asymmetrical intimacy of patronage and argues that it survived the onset of industrialization and urbanization relatively unscathed.⁴¹ Leonore Davidoff disagrees, arguing that the vertical ties of patronage networks were 'being subtly transmuted by more contractual market-based relationships' in the late eighteenth century.⁴² Chapter four sidesteps that debate to describe the criteria that naval patrons used to select clients for promotion. Patronage remained the mechanism of career advancement in the eighteenth-century Navy, even if its importance was in relative decline.

Chapters five and six situate naval officers in a domestic and international context while exploring the essential question of gentility. They are, in some ways, extended historiographical essays, and so they spend much of their energy describing how their arguments interact with existing studies. It is necessary here only to mention some of the more prominent of those existing studies. Chapter five highlights the ways in which naval officers differed from the traditional professions by relying on the work of Penelope Corfield, Wilfrid Prest, and Geoffrey Holmes, among others.⁴³ Few historians have paid proper attention to naval officers, and even fewer have thoroughly understood what made

³⁹ C. Consolvo, 'The Prospects and Promotion of British Naval Officers, 1793–1815', *The Mariner's Mirror* 91, no. 2 (2005), pp. 137–59.

⁴⁰ C. Dandeker, 'Patronage and Bureaucratic Control—The Case of the Naval Officer in English Society, 1780–1850', *The British Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 3 (1978), pp. 300–320.

⁴¹ J.M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1986).

⁴² Davidoff, *Family Story*, pp. 81–2.

⁴³ P.J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700–1850* (London, 1995); W. Prest (ed.), *The Professions in Early Modern England* (London, 1987); G. Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State, and Society 1680–1730* (London, 1982).

naval officers unique. Chapter five also incorporates the historiography of British army officers to provide another point of comparison.⁴⁴ How popular and political attitudes towards the two services changed over the course of the eighteenth century—the focus of recent work by Sarah Kinkel—rounds out the domestic historiography.⁴⁵ The international historiography is primarily French and Danish and described at length in chapter five. Chapter six uses Cannadine's work on social classes as a framework for discussing categories of gentility.⁴⁶ Paul Langford's summary of social status in the middle of the century helps describe how it changed over time.⁴⁷ Throughout chapters five and six, the analysis generated from the databases provides the foundation for exploring how naval officers should be situated in the existing historiography. Answering that question requires a good deal of nuance, and is best left to those chapters.

Sources and Methodology

The goal of the two major databases at the heart of this study was to gather as much information as possible about the officers in command of the Royal Navy's ships during the Great Wars with France. This section describes the parameters, size, and sources for first the commissioned officers' database and then the warrant officers' database.

To examine the commissioned officers in the Great Wars with France, it is necessary to define a database that includes officers who had already reached senior command positions in 1793 as well as officers whose careers did not begin until the Wars

⁴⁴ C. Barnett, *Britain and Her Army: A Military, Political and Social History of the British Army, 1509–1970* (London, 2000); D. Chandler (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Army*, new edn. (Oxford, 1994); J.A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715–1795* (Oxford, 1981).

⁴⁵ S. Kinkel, 'Disorder, Discipline, and Naval Reform in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain', *The English Historical Review* 78, no. 535 (2013), pp. 1451–82; Idem, 'Saving Admiral Byng: Imperial Debates, Military Governance and Popular Politics at the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War', *Journal for Maritime Research* 13, no. 1 (2011), pp. 3–19.

⁴⁶ D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London, 2000).

⁴⁷ P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989).

were well underway. Therefore the scope of the database is not restricted to the period 1793 to 1815: doing so would omit significant portions of the careers of many officers, particularly senior officers who passed for lieutenant during the American War. Nelson's career provides a rough outline: he passed for lieutenant in 1777 and was a post-captain with fourteen years seniority at the outbreak of war in 1793.⁴⁸ With men like Nelson in mind, the outbreak of war in America in 1775 demarcates the beginning of the period of study for commissioned officers. In contrast, by the end of the Great Wars, the most junior officers were only just beginning careers that took place largely after 1815: for example, an officer who passed for lieutenant in 1814 would not have had much opportunity to make an impact on the course of the Great Wars; it is even likely that he would have been born after the wars began. The victory over the combined fleets at Trafalgar in 1805 provides an appropriate stopping point: three decades after the American War began, Trafalgar marked the last of the major fleet actions of the Great Wars, but there was still a decade of operations left for newly-commissioned lieutenants in 1805 to have the chance to command ships in combat. Therefore commissioned officers in the database for this study were selected by randomizing the pages of Bruno Pappalardo's index to lieutenants' passing certificates and selecting officers on the page who passed between 1775 and 1805, inclusive.⁴⁹

As with any database, the key tension was between ensuring that it was small enough for in-depth research about each officer but large enough to be able to draw statistically significant conclusions. The first task was therefore to determine the size of the population of officers during the Great Wars. It is surprisingly difficult to determine exact

⁴⁸ CSO, s.v. 'Nelson, Horatio, Viscount'.

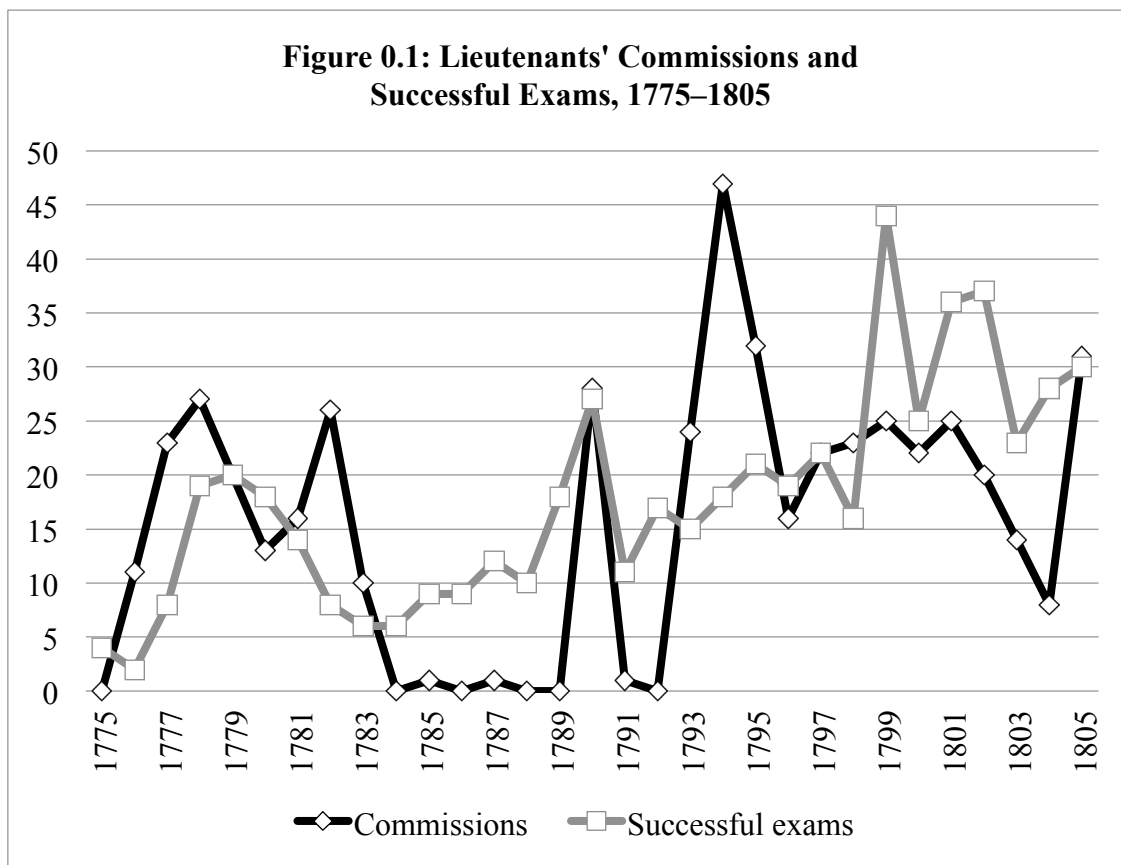
⁴⁹ B. Pappalardo, *Royal Navy Lieutenants' Passing Certificates 1691–1902* (2 vols., Kew, 2001), pp. 6, 8, 13, 18, 20, 33, 46, 50, 71, 119, 120, 124, 161, 166, 171, 190, 193, 202, 211, 213, 237, 240, 242, 245, 246, 256, 259, 264, 309, 327, 329, 332, 341, 367, 369, 378, 405, 419, 422, 451, 453, 456, 457, 470, 506, 511, 514, 517, 521, 525, 530, 543, 560, 563. See the Appendix for a full list of officers in the database.

figures, but in his late-Victorian history of the Navy, William Laird Clowes, without citing his sources, states that the number of commissioned officers increased from 3,693 in 1803 to 5,016 in 1815. A parliamentary study from 1833 supports these figures roughly: it lists 2,230 officers in 1784, 3,168 in 1800, and 4,549 in 1810.⁵⁰ The commissioned officers' database includes 556 men, which is twenty-five per cent of the 1784 figure, fifteen per cent of Clowes' 1803 figure, and eleven per cent of his figure for 1815. It is sufficiently large to provide results with ninety-five per cent confidence and slightly less than a four per cent margin of error for questions in which the sample is normally distributed. There are certain questions for which the sample was not normally distributed, but time constraints meant it was not possible to conduct sufficient research on a larger sample; in any case, this is the largest randomly selected database of its kind for commissioned officers during the period in question.

A secondary concern was that the sample of lieutenants' passing certificates should roughly correspond to the rate at which lieutenants were commissioned over the course of the thirty years of the study. A successful exam did not guarantee that a commission would follow, but in cases when it did, it usually followed within a year or two. Therefore, if the distribution of successful exams from 1775 to 1805 roughly matched the rate of commissions, it was possible to conclude that passing certificates would provide a sufficient survey of the commissioned officers of 1793-1815. Figure 0.1 shows the number of successful exams each year of the study compared to the number of commissions that Rodger found in his aforementioned article on officers' careers.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 86.

⁵¹ Personal correspondence between Rodger and the author.



Rodger's sample of 529 lieutenants' commissions is nearly the same size as the 556 lieutenants' passing certificates, and the data match well. When the two data sets diverge, they do so for predictable reasons. During the peace following the American War, for example, more officers passed than were commissioned. This suggests that even though there was little hope of obtaining a commission, aspiring officers nevertheless sat lieutenants' exams so as to be eligible for a commission when the Navy mobilized again. The other discrepancies between the two data sets also match the historical record: the mobilizations in 1790 and 1793, for the Nootka Sound crisis and the outbreak of war, respectively, saw commissions spike, but by the end of the period there were more successful exams than commissions, reflecting the Navy's surplus of officers. Thus the random sample from Pappalardo's index was distributed appropriately across the thirty-year timeframe.

Passing certificates form the primary archival source for the commissioned officers' database.⁵² This has two advantages. First, passing for lieutenant was a necessary step in every officer's career, and the vast majority of officers in the Navy have passing certificates on file. Second, passing certificates provide not only a record of an officers' first experience at sea but also key biographical information. Towards the end of the period, most passing certificates include the original copy of the officer's birth or baptismal certificate. In contrast, commissions, the other logical archival material from which this database could have been compiled, provide far less useful data. There is no biographical information on a lieutenant's commission, nor are commissions as easy to access and search in the archives as passing certificates. Furthermore, there were a significant number of aspiring officers who passed for lieutenant but were never commissioned; their stories would be lost without their passing certificates.

After the archival copies of each officer's passing certificate, the next major source for the database is the promotion and biographical data contained in Syrett and DiNardo's volume of commissioned sea officers.⁵³ In addition, Patrick Marioné performed the herculean task of compiling a short biographical outline of the lives of all the officers who appeared on the Navy list between 1793 and 1815. His CD-ROM is a crucial resource for the database.⁵⁴ Many officers also have birth or baptismal records in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' *FamilySearch*.⁵⁵ This provides the foundation for most of the analysis of officers' ages at key moments in their careers. The Admiralty survey sent to

⁵² TNA, ADM 1/5123/3 (Admiralty, and Ministry of Defence, Navy Department: Correspondence and Papers. Lieutenants' Passing Certificates from Foreign Stations, 1794–1803); TNA, ADM 6/88–103 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Lieutenants' Passing Certificates, 1775–1805); TNA, ADM 107/6–33 (Navy Board: Royal Navy Passing Certificates, Examination Results, and Certificates of Service. Lieutenants' Passing Certificates, 1775–1805).

⁵³ CSO, passim.

⁵⁴ P. Marioné, *The Complete Navy List of the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815*, CDROM (Brussels, 2004).

⁵⁵ *FamilySearch*, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://familysearch.org>.

officers in 1817 helped confirm the details of those key events for officers who were alive and able to send in responses.⁵⁶ This combination of archival sources and recently-compiled databases proved to be sufficient for most of the analysis in chapter one.

For the analysis on social backgrounds in chapter three, however, much more was required. The National Archives' digitized copies of Seamen's Wills and Probate Wills confirm some family relationships and assist in analysing officers' fathers' incomes.⁵⁷ Other key archival sources include the petitions of naval widows applying for pensions, and, in some cases, estate assessments.⁵⁸ Contemporary periodicals such as the *London Gazette*, the *Times*, and the *Gentleman's Magazine* often provide obituaries and other biographical information.⁵⁹ For high-profile officers, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* has detailed entries, as does the *History of Parliament* for officers or officers' fathers who served in parliament. Officers who served aboard a ship present at the battle of Trafalgar have short biographies in the *Trafalgar Roll*.⁶⁰ The online databases at sailingnavies.com and threedecks.org are also useful, though generally not as reliable as the printed sources.⁶¹ Finally, many officers appear in remote corners of the digital world that only Google's search engine can find. This is particularly true of the least-reliable

⁵⁶ TNA, ADM 9/1–17 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services, 1817–28).

⁵⁷ 'Wills of Royal Navy and Royal Marines Personnel 1786–1882', The National Archives, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/seamens-wills.htm>; TNA, ADM 48/14–105 (Navy Board, Navy Pay Office, and Admiralty, Accountant General's Department: Seamen's Wills, 1786–1805); 'Wills 1384–1858', The National Archives, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/wills.htm>; TNA, PROB 11 (Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers, 1722–1858).

⁵⁸ TNA, ADM 6/339–356 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates, 1802–18); TNA, PROB 31 (Prerogative Court of Canterbury: Exhibits, Main Class, 1722–1858).

⁵⁹ *The London Gazette*, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk>; *The Times Digital Archive 1785–2006*, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://find.galegroup.com/ttda>; *The Gentleman's Magazine*, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://books.google.co.uk>.

⁶⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com>; *History of Parliament*, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org>; R.H. Mackenzie, *The Trafalgar Roll: The Ships and the Officers*, new edn. (London, 2004), passim.

⁶¹ *Sailing Navies 1650–1850*, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://www.sailingnavies.com>; *Three Decks – Warships in the Age of Sail*, accessed Jan.–Nov. 2012, at <http://threedecks.org>.

sources, family genealogy websites.⁶² Such websites occasionally provide crucial pieces of the puzzle of an officer's life. Google also searched digitized copies of millions of books and turned up both obvious results, such as Francis Venables Vernon's own memoir, *Voyages and Travels of a Sea Officer*, and obscure ones, such as a description of a horse owned by Frederick Tuting's father in *The Turf Register, and Sportsman & Breeder's Stud-book*.⁶³

The two sources missing from the previous paragraph have already been mentioned but deserve a separate discussion. Marshall's multivolume compilation of officer biographies and O'Byrne's later single-volume dictionary of naval biographies are undoubtedly valuable sources, but they do not form the foundation for the database.⁶⁴ Only 185 officers in the present study have entries in Marshall's work, and a mere 123 are described in O'Byrne. Furthermore, of O'Byrne's group, nearly three quarters of them also have entries in Marshall. That leaves 340 officers in the commissioned officers' database—sixty-one per cent of the total—with entries in neither Marshall nor O'Byrne. It is worth returning here to Michael Lewis, for whom Marshall and O'Byrne were the only sources for his statistical analysis. Lewis has more than three times as many officers in his study—1,800 compared to 556—but the strength of the present study's database is its wide range of source material.⁶⁵ Lewis could undoubtedly have worked harder to ensure that his study was not skewed by the biases and omissions of Marshall and O'Byrne, but it is also worth acknowledging that many of the sources of this database were not available to him. Digitization projects such as archive.org and databases like *FamilySearch* have made

⁶² For example, see Thomas Hullah's father: 'Edward Hullah', *RootsWeb*, accessed Nov. 2012, at <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=janeath&id=I0900>.

⁶³ F.V. Vernon, *Voyages and Travels of a Sea Officer* (London, 1792). Google eBook, accessed Nov. 2012, at <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=1yIUAAAAQAAJ>; W. Pick and R. Johnson, *The Turf Register, and Sportsman & Breeder's Stud-book* (London, 1803), p. 364. Google eBook, accessed Nov. 2012, at <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=pfEIAAAAQAAJ>.

⁶⁴ Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography*, passim; O'Byrne, *Naval Biographical Dictionary*, passim.

⁶⁵ Lewis, *Social History*, p. 31.

enormous quantities of data instantly searchable. The result is a much more nuanced, detailed, and balanced picture than Lewis could have possibly produced of the commissioned officers during the Great Wars with France.

The warrant officers' database was compiled in a manner similar to the commissioned officers' database, but there were some important differences and challenges that need to be explained. The first problem when attempting to address the considerable gaps in our understanding of warrant officers is determining exact numbers. In the chaos of the wars, the Admiralty often had little way of determining the veracity of its seniority lists. There are no comprehensive contemporary lists of chaplains, but even for pursers, masters, and surgeons, seniority lists can be frustrating sources. Admiralty clerks produced printed seniority lists and then edited them heavily as they discovered new information about officers: the most senior often died, while more junior members were sometimes struck off the list for disciplinary or personal reasons. The first run of the list was never completely accurate, and the clerk had to add omissions by hand. Publishing one list per year was far too ambitious, with the result that new additions to the ranks of warrant officers would stretch for more than five years into the blank pages at the end of the lists. For example, the surgeons' seniority list published for 1 January 1791 was still being edited in the Admiralty on 17 August 1796.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it is possible to state with some confidence the estimated populations for surgeons, masters, and pursers at various times during the Wars:

⁶⁶ TNA, ADM 118/191 (Admiralty: Officers Seniority Lists. Surgeons, 1791).

Table 0.1: Numbers of Warrant Officers⁶⁷

Position	1779	1783	1793	1796	1799	1806	1809	1810	1811	1814
Surgeons	300	450	550	655	634	720		854		864
Masters					716	559	615			
Pursers								920	860	

Given that each ship in the Navy had one purser, one surgeon, and one master, it is unsurprising that the numbers are roughly comparable across the groups. Not every ship had a chaplain, but Taylor lists 581 chaplains who served at sea between 1775 and 1810.⁶⁸ Which ships had chaplains and which did not will be discussed in chapter two. In any case, the numbers in the table do not tell the whole story. As a point of comparison, Cardwell estimates that there were 2,000 surgeons who served during the Wars. It seems likely, from the data presented in Table 0.1, that his estimate is slightly high. 422 surgeons who appear on the 1796 list do not appear on the 1810 list, meaning that in those fourteen years, sixty-four per cent of all surgeons dropped out of the Navy. Adding the 422 dropouts to the 1810 total generates 1,276 total surgeons through 1810, which is well below his estimate of 2,000. Nevertheless, there were undoubtedly surgeons who joined after 1796 but left or died before 1810; there were also surgeons who joined the Navy in the last five years of the Wars. A more accurate estimate of the total number of surgeons is perhaps 1,500. The attrition rate for masters from the 1799 list to the 1809 list is almost identical to that of the surgeons: slightly more than sixty per cent disappear from the Navy's records. This result is slightly surprising, since, as we will see, masters tended to have longer naval careers than surgeons. It is likely that there were slightly fewer active masters than active surgeons. Pursers are more difficult to estimate, and there are more of them at the end of

⁶⁷ TNA, ADM 118/191; TNA, ADM 104/72 (Admiralty: Medical List, 1810); D. McLean, *Surgeons of the Fleet: The Royal Navy and Its Medics from Trafalgar to Jutland* (London, 2010), pp. 9–10; TNA, ADM 6/132 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Seniority List of Masters, with previous services, 1809); TNA, ADM 118/190 (Admiralty: Officers Seniority Lists. Masters, 1791); TNA, ADM 118/192 (Admiralty: Officers Seniority Lists. Pursers, gunners, boatswains and carpenters, 1810).

⁶⁸ Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, Appendix V.

the Wars than there are masters and surgeons. It is reasonable to assume that somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 pursers served in the Navy during the Wars.

In an attempt to replicate some of the results of the commissioned officers' database, ten per cent of a rough average of the snapshots in Table 0.1 were randomly selected and added to a database. This generated samples of the following sizes: 120 masters, 89 pursers, 58 chaplains and 85 surgeons. Only the masters, who were more heavily sampled because their seniority lists were catalogued in a different way from the others, approach an actual ten per cent sample of the population of officers who served in the Wars. The pursers' sample is ten per cent of those active in 1810 and 1811, but it does not account for pursers whose service came much earlier in the Wars. The surgeons are the weakest sample, but since they have received the most scholarly attention, the goal of the present sample was merely to provide a point of comparison to Cardwell's larger database. Time constraints dictated that the samples compiled for the present warrant officers' database are not as large, proportionally, as that compiled for the commissioned officers' database. Their results should therefore be treated with more caution.

Each entry in each database was then subjected to the same kind of scrutiny used to research commissioned officers, described earlier in this introduction: archival data provided career outlines and often information about abnormal career happenings in which the Admiralty or Navy Board were involved; digitized sources provided most of the information about their social backgrounds. Unfortunately, warrant officers do not have documents equivalent to commissioned officers' passing certificates, and, as a result, there are no birth certificates in the Admiralty archives for warrant officers. The social background analysis presented for warrant officers in chapter three therefore suffers from a much weaker foundation. However, it was still possible to locate birth records and parents for a sizeable portion of officers. For example, alumni directories proved invaluable for

chaplains' records, so fathers' occupations exist for more than half of the chaplains. In contrast, it was only possible to find out the occupations of a quarter of the pursers' fathers. Masters' records are even worse, but surgeons do better: almost forty per cent of surgeons' fathers have known occupations. The other major advantage of passing certificates as a first source was that they provided information about commissioned officers' careers before they passed for lieutenant. Similar information does exist for some warrant officers, but it is much more scattered. It was not possible to conduct a systematic search for each officers' early career records.



In attempting to tell a story about a large population of both commissioned and warrant officers, the thesis stands in stark contrast to the largest category of naval historiography, which has not yet been mentioned: biographies, and in particular, biographies of Nelson. An endlessly fascinating man, Nelson has deservedly received significant recent scholarly attention, much of it published to coincide with the two hundredth anniversary of his death in 2005. Roger Knight's understated *The Pursuit of Victory* stands at the head of the class, but there are dozens more, and new contributions every year.⁶⁹ Famous naval officers lend themselves to a biographical approach, but focusing on Nelson has tended to obscure his peers. There are, understandably, very few biographies of Nelson's contemporaries who were not famous captains or admirals in their own right, or not associated with Nelson in some way.⁷⁰ If nothing else, this thesis attempts to provide a collective biography of the

⁶⁹ R.J.B. Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory: The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson* (London, 2005); Other examples include: M. Czisnik, *Horatio Nelson: A Controversial Hero* (London, 2005); D. Cannadine, *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy* (Basingstoke, 2005); A. Lambert, *Nelson: Britannia's God of War* (London, 2004); J. Sugden, *Nelson: A Dream of Glory* (London, 2004).

⁷⁰ M. Adams, *Admiral Collingwood: Nelson's Own Hero* (London, 2005); S. Taylor, *Commander: The Life and Exploits of Britain's Greatest Frigate Captain* (London, 2012); K.D. McCranie, *Admiral Lord Keith and the Naval War Against Napoleon* (Gainesville, 2006). There are a

thousands of forgotten men who orchestrated the everyday work of the Navy.⁷¹ In addition to calling attention away from Nelson, it will also provide useful context for future Nelson biographers in the hopes that he can be studied as a mostly ordinary sea officer, rather than a man of destiny or god of war.

few exceptions in the *Trafalgar Chronicle*: well-researched biographies of otherwise obscure officers who happen to have some Nelsonic link.

⁷¹ For an examination of the men who actually carried out the work, see J. Ross Dancy, *The Myth of the Press Gang: Volunteers, Impressment and the Naval Manpower Problem in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2015).

CHAPTER ONE

Some of the Best Fellows

Commissioned Officers' Careers

On 23 September 1783, Thomas Swinnerton Dyer, just a month short of his thirteenth birthday, joined the *Union* as a captain's servant.¹ But as he wrote many years later, he was in fact a 'young gentleman' destined for command. Over the course of the next decade, he served in eight ships under eight different captains as a captain's servant and a midshipman. He saw action at the relief of Gibraltar in 1783, travelled to the West Indies and the Mediterranean, and endured the boredom of life on guard ships and at school. He served on the *Union* and the *Victory*, both among the largest ships in the Navy, and on the sloop *Bulldog*, which was among the smallest. In 1793, when the Navy mobilized for war with France, he was commissioned as a lieutenant and joined the *Egmont*. For the next seventeen years—with the exception of the Peace of Amiens—he was employed as a lieutenant on fifteen ships in home waters, the Mediterranean, and the North American station. Once again, his experiences were varied. He spent parts of 1803 and 1804 ashore in the Sea Fencibles, commanding volunteers in anticipation of the French invasion. But he also saw plenty of seaborne excitement, particularly while a passenger on *L'Athenienne* in October 1806. His notes on the experience are worth reproducing in full:

Wrecked on the Esquerques Rocks, a passenger the 20 October 1806 near the Island of Sardinia in the Mediterranean, Sailing at the Rate of 8 miles and $\frac{3}{4}$ per hour. Washed out of the Ship in the Launch with about 90 men and saved in her 100. Made the Island of Maritimo Distance 50 miles the next night. (About 230 Drowned.) The 23rd October proceeded in the Launch to Palermo to Sir W.S. Smith Commander in Chief in the Mediterranean.²

¹ *Complete Baronetage*, ed. G.E. Cokayne (4 vols., Exeter, 1900–1909), IV, p. 106.

² TNA, ADM 9/4/1049 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services. Commanders' Services, Thomas Swinnerton Dyer, 1817).

His extraordinary survival provides a useful reminder about the high standard of seamanship among the Navy's officers, even those who were not overly successful. Dyer was lucky enough to be promoted to commander in 1810 and even managed to secure employment at that rank, though only briefly. By 8 January 1811, when his sloop the *Driver* was paid off in Portsmouth, his active career in the Navy had effectively ended: he spent the remainder of his life without a ship on half pay.³

Other than the shipwreck story, Dyer's career is relatively unremarkable and is unlikely to feature in any of the histories of the period or even the existing social histories of naval officers. His entry in Marshall is less than half a page and includes more information about his brother and his daughter than it does about his career.⁴ Nevertheless, he was in a position of authority on more than sixteen ships over the course of nearly the entire Great Wars: in short, he is precisely the kind of officer that this thesis seeks to understand. To do so, it is necessary to place Dyer in the context of the population of naval officers of the Great Wars. This is a surprisingly difficult task. As Rodger has noted, 'Anyone who has ever investigated the social history of the Royal Navy in the eighteenth century, and particularly the history of its officers, will have encountered a surprising lack of basic information.'⁵ One potential source of basic information is also the source for the description of Dyer's career above. In 1817, the Admiralty sent out a survey to every officer it could find asking for a record of his career to date. Most officers provided the bare minimum: dates served, ranks held, and ships commanded.⁶ Dyer, though, found the time in his unemployment to embellish his survey with dozens of little notes and stories, of which the description of his shipwreck is but one. However, most survey returns were not as fully realized as Dyer's, so they cannot serve by themselves as a foundation for a social

³ TNA, ADM 9/4/1049.

⁴ J. Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography* (4 vols., London, 1823–35), III, part II, p. 396.

⁵ N.A.M. Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers in the Royal Navy, 1690–1815', *Journal for Maritime Research* 3, no. 1 (2001), p. 85.

⁶ TNA, ADM 9/1–17 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services, 1817).

history of naval officers. Thus even the Admiralty's own attempt to provide the basic information necessary for contextualizing officers' careers falls short.

This chapter seeks to solve this problem by drawing on thousands of newly-available sources, described in the introduction, to examine the career arcs of late-Georgian commissioned naval officers. It aims to answer Rodger's call for a better understanding of officers' careers by revising and focusing the research he conducted for his article and chapters on the subject.⁷ It will also provide a comparative marker for the description of warrant officers' careers in chapter two. It is important to begin by defining the stages of a commissioned officer's career, particularly for readers unfamiliar with the Navy. What follows is a typical career path; the chapter will, of course, describe officers whose careers differed from the one outlined here, but it should nevertheless serve as a useful baseline of key terms.

Most officers entered the Navy in early adolescence as ratings. They were theoretically equivalent in the naval hierarchy to the men who manned the ship rather than her officers. In practice, twelve-year-old boys destined for command often had different responsibilities from ordinary and able seamen, even if they were listed as one of the latter ratings on the ship's muster books. Over the course of a minimum of six years, the future officer learned seamanship, mathematics, and command skills; when he had mastered these and could prove that he was at least twenty years old, he was eligible to sit the rigorous lieutenants' exam. If he passed, he was then eligible for—but not guaranteed—a commission as a lieutenant, the most junior rank of commissioned officer. This step was the most important in any officer's career. Lieutenants sometimes commanded very small ships, but more likely they served under a captain or commander; their responsibilities on

⁷ Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', pp. 85–129; Idem, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), pp. 380–94, 507–27.

board ship included commanding a division of seamen and standing watches, which meant that they were responsible for sailing the ship when there was no crisis at hand.

Upon receiving his commission, a lieutenant embarked on the second phase of his career: seeking promotion to a position of independent command. If he was lucky or had a powerful patron, a lieutenant could hope to be promoted to commander and, again if his luck was in and there was a position open, take charge of a non-rated vessel: these were the smallest ships in the Navy, the sloops and brigs that were woefully out of place during major fleet actions but nevertheless performed a vital role in everyday naval operations. A good or lucky commander who managed to distinguish himself hoped to make the second key step in an officer's career, namely to be made post. He became a post-captain, eligible to command a rated or 'post' ship. First, second, and third rates were the ships of the line: they served as the backbone of the fleet, sailed in the line of battle during major fleet actions, and usually carried between seventy-four guns (third rates) and a hundred guns or more (first rates). Fourth, fifth, and sixth rates included frigates, which operated as fleet scouts, escorted convoys, and sometimes embarked on independent cruises against enemy shipping. A post-captain could be confident that, if he lived long enough, he would die an admiral: promotions from post-captain to admiral were done by seniority only, though only connected or talented post-captains became admirals who served on active duty. Admiral's ranks, from Rear-Admiral of the Blue to Admiral of the Fleet, proceeded by seniority as well; admirals on active duty became commanders-in-chief of far-flung stations or took charge of detached squadrons.

That, then, is the basic outline of the career arc and responsibilities of a naval officer in the late eighteenth century.⁸ This chapter covers the first major stage of an

⁸ In the early eighteenth century, sea officers' career arcs were less well-defined. The Duke of Bedford's Admiralty Board of 1744–8, whose most notable members were Sandwich and Anson, reformed the rank system to that described here and defined sea officers' ranks in

officer's career—before he received his commission—in the sections entitled 'Birth and Baptism', 'Joining the Navy', and 'Education'; it covers the second stage—from his commission to his death—in the sections entitled 'Commissions and Employment Prospects', 'Command', and 'Retirement and Death'.

Birth and Baptism

Let us begin at the beginning. The range of birth dates of the officers in the database spans almost two generations. The oldest officer in the database is Edward Shapcote, who was born in London on 30 January 1732.⁹ The youngest is James Richard Dacres, who was born in Suffolk more than fifty-six years later, on 22 August 1788.¹⁰ Neither officer's birthdate appears in Admiralty archival records or in Marshall or O'Byrne. This section explains how the database dealt with the problem of officers' birth dates, and, by extension, how all of the data dependent on officers' ages that appears in this thesis was calculated.¹¹ Seven officers from the database, including Shapcote and Dacres, illustrate the variety of issues with birth data, as well as the wide range of evidence and sources used to address them.

Some officers' birth dates appear in the database as no more than estimates. Charles Lock, born probably around 1759, is one example. The only evidence that suggests 1759 as his birth year is his passing certificate, which stated simply that Lock 'appears to be more than twenty-one Years of Age' on 20 April 1780.¹² His birth or baptismal

relation to army ranks. See N.A.M. Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl: A Life of John Montagu*, 4th Earl of Sandwich (London, 1993), p. 33.

⁹ 'England, Births and Christenings, 1538–1975: Edward Shapcote, 1732', *FamilySearch*, accessed Nov. 2012, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/NL5Y-RYY>.

¹⁰ *The Gentleman's Magazine* 195 (1854), p. 201.

¹¹ Whenever possible, the database used birth dates rather than baptismal dates; luckily, most eighteenth-century new-borns were baptised within a month, so any discrepancies between birth and baptismal dates did not skew the data significantly.

¹² Passing certificates can be found in three places: TNA, ADM 1/5123/3 (Admiralty, and Ministry of Defence, Navy Department: Correspondence and Papers. Lieutenants' Passing

certificate, which he had to provide to prove his age, has not survived in the archives. The certificate would not only have provided Lock's parents' names—crucial for the analysis in chapters three and four—but also a place of birth. Without the ability to narrow the search geographically, there are simply too many Charles Locks born in the years around 1759 to be able to confirm his birth on *FamilySearch*. Marioné's database is similarly unhelpful, because Charles Lock unfortunately died before 1787, the first year Marioné records. Google produced no results for his birth, so the database records his birth year as 1759 but notes its uncertainty, allowing Lock to be removed from age-based calculations if necessary. About fifteen per cent of the officers in the database have similarly uncertain birth dates.

The aforementioned Edward Shapcote is, happily, an example of an officer whose uncertain birth date was confirmed. He passed for lieutenant in 1782, and his passing certificate states only that he was more than forty-four years old—his birth certificate has also been lost.¹³ Perhaps because Shapcote is a less common name than Lock, both *FamilySearch* and a Shapcote family website turned up an Edward Shapcote born in London on 30 January 1732, and the family website narrated events in his career that matched the archival record.¹⁴ Thus it was possible to conclude with a reasonable degree of confidence that the Edward Shapcote born in 1732 was, in fact, the future Lieutenant Edward Shapcote, RN, even though the passing certificate record suggested he was born in 1738.

Certificates from Foreign Stations, 1794–1803); TNA, ADM 6/88–103 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Lieutenants' Passing Certificates, 1775–1805); TNA, ADM 107/6–33 (Navy Board: Royal Navy Passing Certificates, Examination Results, and Certificates of Service. Lieutenants' Passing Certificates, 1775–1805). Charles Lock's certificate survives in two places: TNA, ADM 6/89/206 and TNA, ADM 107/11/182.

¹³ TNA, ADM 107/8/220.

¹⁴ 'England, Births and Christenings, 1538–1975: Edward Shapcote, 1732', *FamilySearch*; 'The Shapcote Family of Stepney and The "Second Convict Fleet"', *Shapcott Family*, accessed Nov. 2012, at <http://stepneyshapcotes.shapcott-family.com>.

For officers whose birth or baptismal certificate survived, the results are usually even better. The one exception is officers whose birth certificates survive in the Admiralty records but cannot be confirmed elsewhere. For example, according to his birth certificate, Thomas Walker was born in London to Andrew and Amy Walker on 21 July 1767.¹⁵ *FamilySearch* does not turn up any results that match the information that Walker provided, nor does Marioné. Further online research immediately runs into the problem that Thomas Walker is a common name. It is likely that 21 July 1767 is a good approximation for Walker's birth and probably more accurate than the estimate of Charles Lock's birth mentioned above, but the database nevertheless notes that Walker's birth certificate is unconfirmed. Fourteen per cent of the officers in the study share Walker's problem. For most officers with surviving birth certificates, though, it was possible to confirm them. For example, Gordon Falcon was born on 10 July 1778 according to his birth certificate, *FamilySearch*, and Marioné.¹⁶

Why, though, is it necessary to confirm birth certificates? The answer is the Admiralty's age requirement: an officer had to be at least twenty years old in order to sit the lieutenants' exam. Ambitious teenage officers who had served the required six years at sea therefore had a significant incentive to falsify their birth certificates. James Richard Dacres is an example of an officer who did just that: he was only sixteen when he passed for lieutenant in November 1804, though his passing certificate claimed that he was twenty-one.¹⁷ Dacres' false birth certificate does not survive in the archives, but plenty of other officers' certificates do. Many officers kept the correct month and date of their birth, but they simply asked (or bribed) the parish clerk to change the year in their favour.

¹⁵ TNA, ADM 107/18/51.

¹⁶ TNA, ADM 107/24/377; 'England, Births and Christenings, 1538–1975: Gordon Thomas Falcon, 1778', *FamilySearch*, accessed Nov. 2012, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/N58D-1VF>; P. Marioné, *The Complete Navy List of the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815*, CDROM (Brussels, 2004) s.v. 'Falcon, Rear-Admiral Gordon Thomas (1777–1854)'.

¹⁷ TNA, ADM 6/102/077; *The Gentleman's Magazine* 195 (1854), p. 201.

William Henry Whorwood made a minor adjustment: his false birth certificate said he was born on 29 April 1777, when in fact he was born on 29 April 1778.¹⁸ The largest confirmed falsification in the database belongs to John Toup Nicolas, who claimed to be twenty-two but was only fifteen.¹⁹

How common this practice was has been the subject of considerable debate and uncertainty. Lewis only discusses false birth certificates in the context of his favourite officer, William Dillon, who passed at sixteen. Rather than attempt to analyse his large sample to determine what percentage of them may have passed early, he launches into an unhelpful discussion of eighteenth-century public morality—in other words, how officers could justify lying to the Admiralty about their ages.²⁰ Rodger, on the other hand, is circumspect: ‘it was not unknown for [candidates] to gain a year or two with a false baptismal certificate.’²¹ Surveying lieutenants who passed in 1795 and 1800, he concludes that some certificates were probably false, but that it was unclear just how many officers would have benefitted from a false certificate. Without easy access to the officers’ birth dates, he refrains from proposing a percentage of infringing officers.²² Consolvo searches his sample for candidates who failed to produce evidence that they were twenty and, unsurprisingly, finds that none did so (though he later learns from published biographies that nine of his sample passed early). He proceeds to take all but two of their birth certificates at face value.²³ Wareham, here discussing all officers and not simply frigate captains, also fails to settle on a consistent argument. Initially, he is less willing to

¹⁸ TNA, ADM 107/22/352; ‘Lords of the Manor 2: The Whorwoods (1613–1849)’, *Headington.org*, accessed Nov. 2012, at http://www.headington.org.uk/history/famous_people/lordssofmanor2.htm.

¹⁹ TNA, ADM 107/30/021; *ODNB*, s.v. ‘Nicolas, John Toup (1788–1851)’.

²⁰ M. Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815* (London, 1960), pp. 163–4.

²¹ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 382.

²² N.A.M. Rodger, ‘Lieutenants’ Sea-Time and Age’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 75, no. 3 (1989), pp. 269–72.

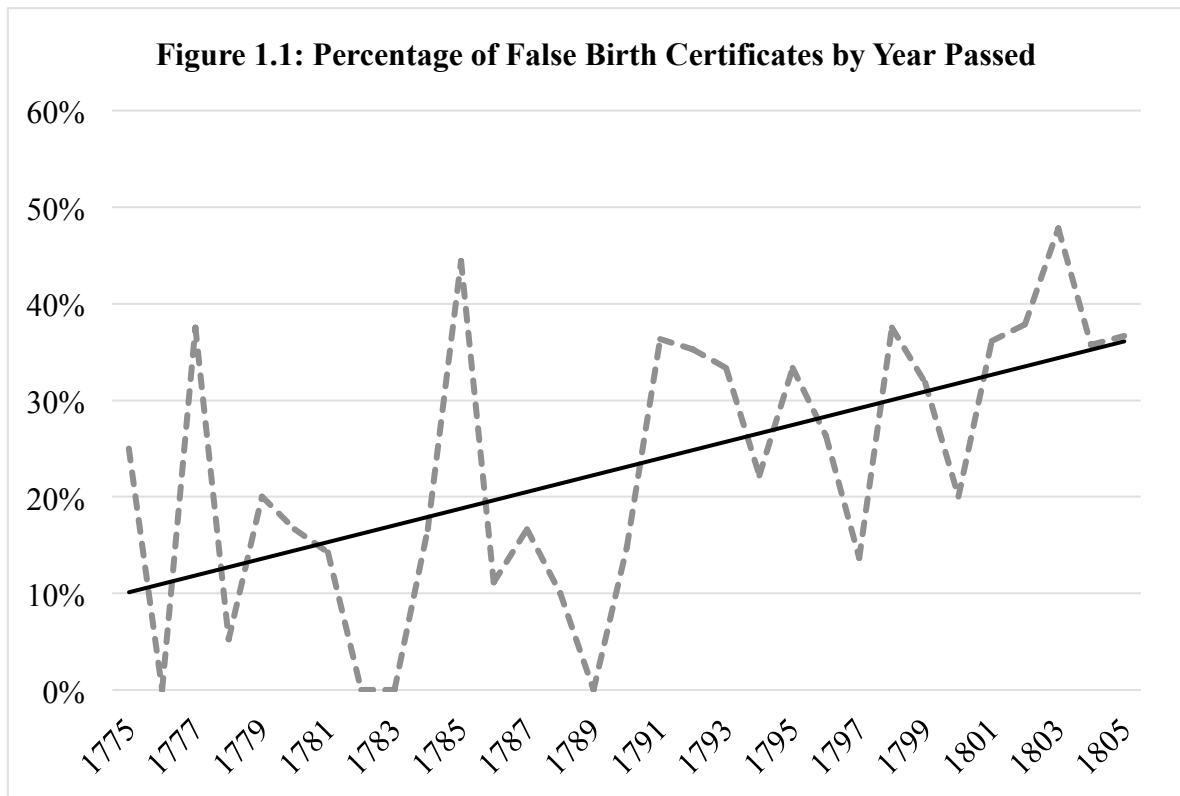
²³ C. Consolvo, ‘The Prospects and Promotion of British Naval Officers, 1793–1815’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 91, no. 2 (2005), p. 140.

acknowledge that the practice was widespread, describing the evidence as anecdotal and arguing that the practice was ‘probably uncommon’. He even goes so far as to argue that most officers who falsified their birth certificates had ‘significant interest behind them’. But he concludes that there are ‘many examples’ of officers who cheated, though ‘there seems to be little evidence that the majority of officers entered for and passed the examination prematurely.’²⁴ Most recently, Cavell concurs with Wareham in arguing that the practice was largely restricted to young men from well-connected families or, even better, well-connected naval families. But she hints that the practice may have been more widespread than Wareham admits: nineteen per cent of her 1791 sample of quarterdeck boys circumvented the age regulation thanks to a false birth or baptismal certificate.²⁵

The evidence in the database for this study suggests that the practice was more widespread than any previous study has found. Figure 1.1 shows the percentage of officers who passed for lieutenant under false pretences, broken down by the year that they passed.

²⁴ T. Wareham, *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2001), p. 19.

²⁵ S.A. Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the British Navy, 1771–1831* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 83–4.



Messy as the data is, the trend line indicates that the practice seems to have increased over time. By the beginning of the Napoleonic War, more than a third of all officers passed for lieutenant with a false birth certificate. Wareham's conclusion that this practice was uncommon cannot be supported, though he is technically correct to say that a majority of officers did not deceive the Admiralty. It is likely, though, that false certificates were even more widespread than Figure 1.1 shows. Officers who passed before 1789 rarely have surviving certificates, which makes determining their precise age at passing difficult. As discussed earlier, without the ability to confirm an officer's exact birth date, it is unlikely that any of the available databases would provide conclusive proof that he was younger than twenty years old when he passed: there are simply too many Charles Locks or Thomas Walkers born at approximately the same time. As the quality of the data improves, though, the incidences of false birth certificates increase. This is not to argue that we should fill in the gaps in the data and claim that a third of the officers who passed during the American War falsified their birth certificates—the slope of the trend line is too steep

and there are reasons to think that the practice should be more common later in the period than earlier. As seventeen- and eighteen-year-old master's mates learned from their peers that it was relatively easy to pass the exam early, more and more decided to try. The Admiralty was certainly aware of the practice, and in 1806 they lowered the minimum age to nineteen, in effect admitting the reality displayed in Figure 1.1.²⁶

Both Wareham and Cavell claim that an officers' social background predicted whether he would have a false birth certificate. The relationship between social backgrounds and promotion prospects will be covered extensively in chapter four, but it is worth discussing briefly here. There is no evidence in this study to suggest that an officer's father's income and occupation had any bearing on his son's ability to secure false paperwork. In fact, more officers who came from the poorest backgrounds recorded in the study had false birth certificates than those from the landed gentry. Even naval families were not significantly more likely to falsify birth certificates than non-naval families. Forty-two per cent of sons of naval officers had false papers, compared to only thirty-one per cent of sons of nobility. But farmer's sons falsified at an even higher rate than naval officers and at roughly the same rate as officers from the wealthiest—though not necessarily noble—backgrounds. Admittedly, there are far more naval officers' sons than farmers' and nobles' sons, and eighteenth-century income data is slippery at best. Both issues will feature prominently in chapters three and four. But in the absence of any definitive results, it is unwise to conclude that well-connected officers were more likely to falsify their birth or baptismal certificates than their peers.

Joining the Navy

²⁶ Wareham, *Star Captains*, p. 19.

We will return to the process of passing for lieutenant and providing a birth certificate later; first we must trace the path of future commissioned officers from birth to the day they first stepped aboard a ship in commission. Some examples from the database of men who joined the Navy in 1779 will demonstrate the variety of entry options for future officers. In May, Robert Boyle Crosbe, who was only ten years old, joined the *Princess Amelia* while she was refitting in Portsmouth harbour.²⁷ Not coincidentally, his father was currently serving as her first lieutenant.²⁸ Earlier that year, thirteen-year-old Robert Lloyd had joined the *Valiant*.²⁹ Unlike Crosbe, Lloyd does not seem to have had any obvious connection to her officers or captain. James Bowen also joined the Navy in 1779, but he was a significantly different kind of entrant from Crosbe or Lloyd. Bowen was twenty-eight years old and assumed a position of authority immediately upon entry. He had been afloat on merchant ships for at least a decade by the time he became master of the *Alert*.³⁰ Furthermore, to begin a career in the Navy as a warrant officer with such significant responsibilities indicates that Bowen was not only a competent seaman but also comfortable with the spherical trigonometry necessary for navigation. Such skills were both necessary for all commissioned officers and difficult to learn; therefore the Admiralty created, in 1729, the third possible entry path into the Navy, the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth.³¹ When William Burgh enrolled at the Academy in 1779, he embarked on a curriculum that was intended, in part, to teach him in a classroom the skills that the older Bowen had learned through experience on board merchant ships.³² Each of these three entry paths will be explored to demonstrate the important role that officer recruitment

²⁷ TNA, ADM 107/17/21; TNA, ADM 9/6/1897.

²⁸ TNA, ADM 36/9165 (Admiralty: Royal Navy Ships' Musters (Series I), Ship: *Princess Amelia*, 1 January 1779 – 30 September 1781).

²⁹ TNA, ADM 6/89/122; TNA, ADM 107/10/6.

³⁰ TNA, ADM 107/18/91.

³¹ H.W. Dickinson, 'The Portsmouth Naval Academy, 1733–1806', *The Mariner's Mirror* 89, no. 1 (2003), p. 17.

³² TNA, ADM 107/12/117.

played in shaping the experiences of the generation of officers in command during the Great Wars.

All that was required to join the Navy for most future officers was finding a captain willing to take them on board. Those best positioned to find a willing captain were, naturally, sons of naval officers. Some officers did not have to look far or wait long to begin their naval careers: James Richard Dacres' father was the captain of the *Sceptre* when he joined four months shy of his fifth birthday; George Truscott joined his father William on board the *Ganges* as an eight-year-old in 1794. Thus Robert Boyle Crosbe's path into the Navy was a common one. Nelson is the best-known example: he joined the *Raisonnable* in 1771 because his uncle was her captain.³³ Later in Nelson's career, the roles were reversed. Though he had no son of his own, he took his stepson Josiah Nisbet to sea at the outbreak of war in 1793. Also on board Nelson's *Agamemnon* that year was young William Bolton, an officer in this study. His connection to Nelson was less direct—he was the nephew of Nelson's sister—but nevertheless Nelson agreed to take him on board and look out for him.³⁴ Writing about the early nineteenth century, Davidoff argues that 'despite the formalization of entry into the professions through impersonal qualifications and examinations, it was still primarily family connections which opened doors and oiled the wheels of the law, the Church, and the military'.³⁵ Davidoff's argument holds true for many officers, but family connections were not necessary. Lloyd, son of a Welsh gentleman, had no connection to the Navy that we can determine.

Why, then, would a teenage son of the landed gentry like Lloyd choose a life at sea? French and Rothery argue that members of the landed gentry in this period carefully managed their adolescent sons' education and 'entry into the world'. Exposing young men

³³ ODNB, s.v. 'Nelson, Horatio, Viscount Nelson (1758–1805)'.

³⁴ *Nelson's Letters to His Wife and other Documents 1785–1831*, ed. G.P.B. Naish (NRS, 1958), p. 68.

³⁵ L. Davidoff et al., *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (Harlow, 1999), p. 41.

to adult responsibilities and environments was risky, but many parents saw it as a necessary developmental stage.³⁶ There were plenty of contemporary commentators eager to provide advice about how to handle this difficult transition. A prominent strain argued that the traditional Grand Tour caused young men to emulate the French and lose their Englishness. Kenelm Digby, Catherine Macaulay, Vicesimus Knox, and William Barrow all called for more active educational practices, though none went so far as Dr John Moore. He proposed a dystopian educational system in which young men would be sent to a castle, taught to fight each other with a spear and armour, and only boys with ‘stout constitutions’ would survive.³⁷ Military service provided a useful compromise for some families: parents could be confident that their child would be in a structured environment with adults present, while the boy looked forward to moving away from his parents’ supervision.

The young men’s agency in this process should not be overlooked. The possibility of an adventure could be irresistible. The famous letter from five-year-old Charles Manners to Sir Edward Hawke after the latter’s victory at Quiberon Bay in 1759 gives some sense of the allure of naval life:

Sir Edward Hawke,
I hear you have beat the French fleet when they were coming to kill us and that one of your captains twirled a French Ship round till it sunk. I wish you was come home, for I intend to go to sea if you will take me with you.
I am Lord Granby [*sic*] second son, Charles Manners³⁸

Major fleet victories certainly helped raise the Navy’s profile, but they were not solely responsible for inspiring young men. Some young men ran away to sea to escape: Edward Pellew was due to be flogged at his grammar school in Truro for persistent fighting with

³⁶ H. French and M. Rothery, “‘Upon your entry into the world’: Masculine Values and the Threshold of Adulthood among Landed Elites in England, 1680–1800’, *Social History* 33, no. 4 (2008), pp. 402–22.

³⁷ M. Cohen, “‘Manners’ Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750–1830’, *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005), pp. 312–30.

³⁸ Quoted in N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), p. 255.

his classmates; he ran away to the Navy instead.³⁹ Frederick Marryat provided some insights from his own experience in the Navy of the Napoleonic Wars in his 1841 novel

Masterman Ready:

Every high-spirited boy wishes to go to sea—it's quite natural; but if the most of them were to speak the truth it is not that they so much want to go to sea, as that they want to go from school or from home, where they are under the control of their masters or parents.⁴⁰

Securing a position on board a ship at a young age was also easier for members of maritime communities. For example, William Hills was a member of a shipbuilding family in Kent whose eldest sons, over several generations, inherited running the yard, while the younger sons used the family's naval connections to join the Navy.⁴¹ The map of officers' origins in Figure 1.2 provides some data to support the correlation between maritime communities and naval service.

³⁹ S. Taylor, *Commander: The Life and Exploits of Britain's Greatest Frigate Captain* (London, 2012), p. 20.

⁴⁰ Quoted in C. Lloyd, *Captain Marryat and the Old Navy* (London, 1939), pp. 9–10.

⁴¹ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, p. 255; B.F. Hills, 'Shipbuilding for the Royal Navy at Sandwich in the Eighteenth Century', *Archaeologia Cantiana* 94 (1978), p. 195; R. Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail, 1793–1817* (London, 2005), s.v. 'HMS Recruit'.

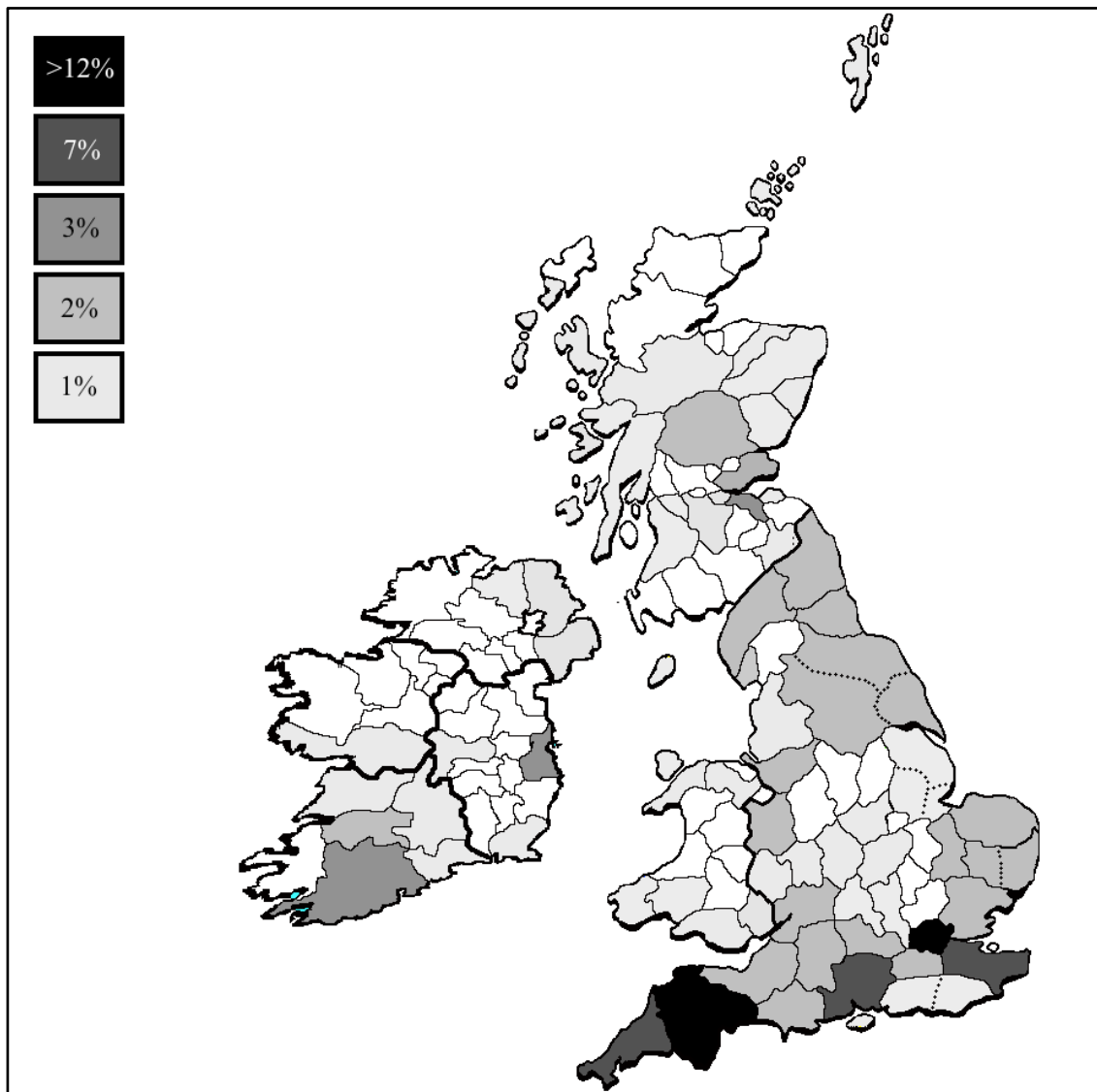
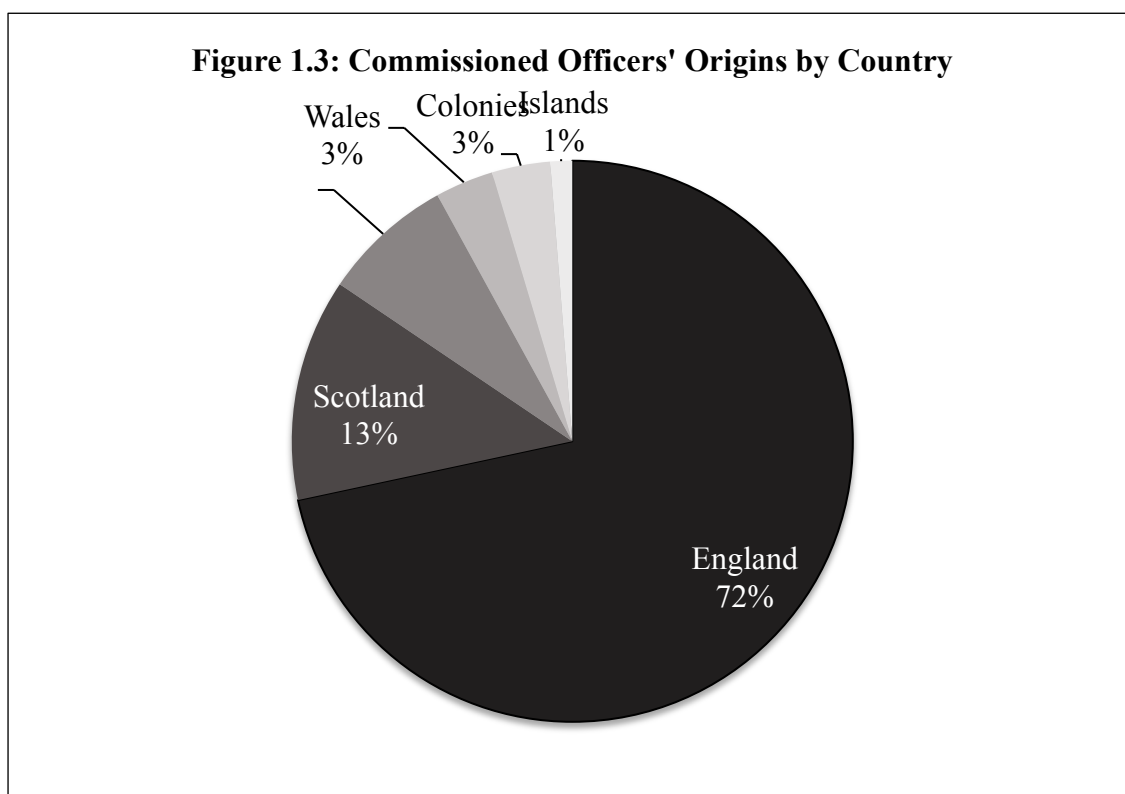


Figure 1.2: Commissioned Officers' Origins by Historic County. The shading indicates the percentage of British and Irish officers in the database who were born in that county.

Seventy-two per cent of officers were English, but they were unevenly distributed across England's historic counties. The county with the single largest contingent of officers was Middlesex, but the next four counties were all comparatively sparsely populated and maritime: in descending order, Devon, Kent, Hampshire, and Cornwall. The southwest is particularly heavily represented. Though less than three and a half per cent of the estimated 1801 population of the British Isles (including Ireland) lived in Devon and Cornwall, the two counties nevertheless supplied more than seventeen per cent of the Royal Navy's

officers.⁴² In other words, more than one in six officers serving during the Great Wars were from the southwest.

Contemporary accounts of the lower deck often stressed its cosmopolitan nature. Volunteer Robert Hay's shipmates included a 'sunburnt Portuguese', a 'kilted Highlander', and a 'haughty Spaniard'; his fellow sailors spoke 'Irish, Welsh, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Swedish, [and] Italian'.⁴³ Jeremiah Dancy's data suggests that Hay was exaggerating for effect, but nevertheless about eight per cent of the lower deck was foreign born.⁴⁴ In contrast, the quarterdeck seems to have been much more heavily staffed by men born in the British Isles. Those who were born overseas were usually colonials. Figure 1.3 shows the breakdown of officers by country or principality of origin.



⁴² Marioné, *Complete Navy List*. He relies on B.R. Mitchell and P. Dean, 'Abstract of British Historical Statistics' (Cambridge, 1962), and the 1821 Census.

⁴³ Q. Colville, 'Life Afloat', in Q. Colville and J. Davey (eds.), *Nelson, Navy & Nation: The Royal Navy and the British People, 1688–1815* (London, 2013), p. 83.

⁴⁴ J.R. Dancy, 'British Naval Manpower during the French Revolutionary Wars, 1793–1802' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil thesis, 2012), p. 83.

‘Islands’ refers to the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man—different places, admittedly, but geographically similar enough to be worth counting together as maritime communities. These officers are a small percentage of the total, but the population of these islands was even smaller compared to the population of the British Empire. Officers with colonial origins are overwhelmingly from coastal outposts: New York, Jamaica, Gibraltar, and Halifax are all represented. None of these conclusions, it should be said, are particularly surprising. The geographical distribution within the British Isles and Ireland generated by the database of the present study matches both Lewis’ and Cavell’s data well: in fact, all three studies agree that Middlesex, Devon, Kent, and Hampshire were the four most common home counties for officers.⁴⁵ The percentage of foreign-born officers is also similar: Lewis’ figure is less than half a percentage point higher than the present study’s, while Cavell has only a handful of midshipmen born outside of the British Empire in her database.⁴⁶

The maritime origins of the Navy’s officers did not mean that boys and young men from coastal communities were prepared for a life at sea. A ship of the line was an intimidating and eye-opening place. Ten-year-old Crosbe grew up in the busy port of Newcastle and his father was a lieutenant, but he was not immediately comfortable on board the *Princess Amelia*.⁴⁷ Conditions on board were cramped, crowded, and dark, particularly in the cockpit where midshipmen like Crosbe lived. In a ship of the line like the *Princess Amelia*, the cockpit was buried below the aft part of the lower gun deck: in

⁴⁵ For a more in-depth discussion of officers from Devon, see N.A.M. Rodger, ‘Devon Men and the Navy, 1689–1815’, in M. Duffy et al. (eds.), *The New Maritime History of Devon* (2 vols., London, 1992), I, pp. 209–15.

⁴⁶ Lewis, *Social History*, pp. 60–80; S.A. Cavell, ‘A Social History of Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the Royal Navy, 1761–1831’ (University of Exeter Ph.D. thesis, 2010), pp. 208–15.

⁴⁷ W.J.C. Moens, *The Publications of the Harleian Society* (London, 1893), *The Internet Archive*, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://www.archive.org/stream/publicationsofha36harluoft/publicationsofha36harluoft_djvu.txt.

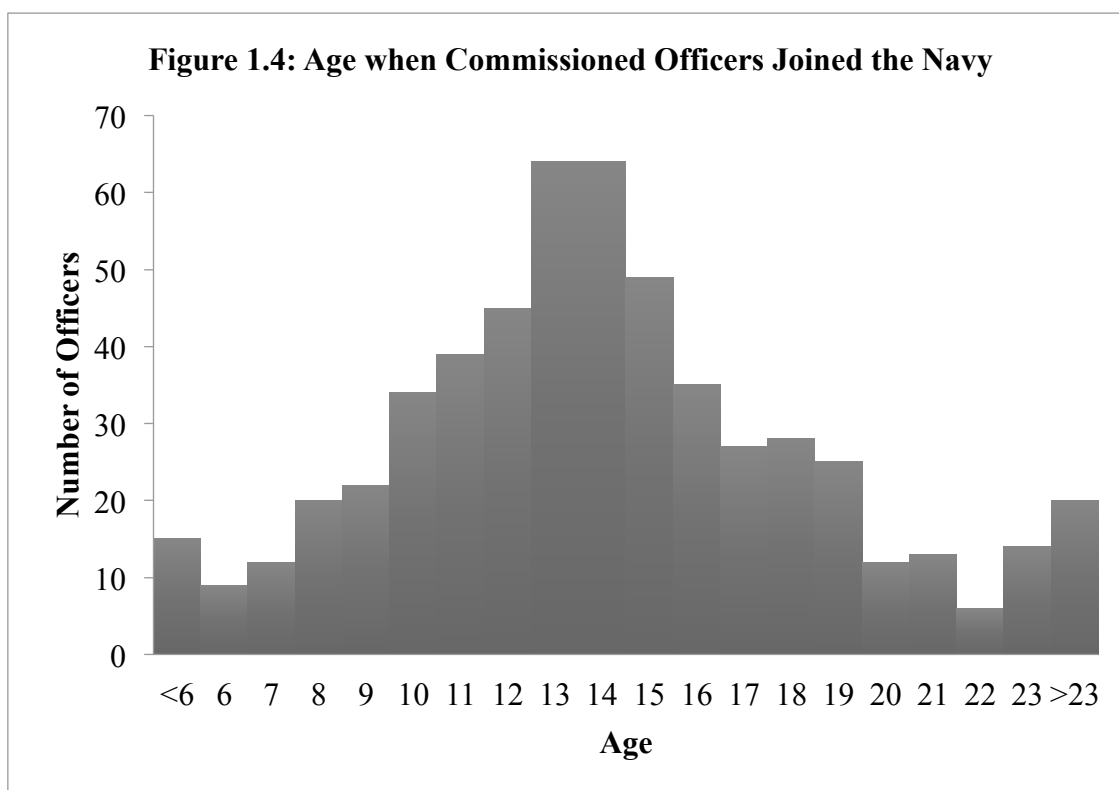
other words, it was a far cry from the spectacular sweep of the windows in the captain's cabin. James Anthony Gardner's first berth on the *Panther* was ten feet wide by eight feet long, but it felt even smaller since the height between the decks was only five feet five inches and he shared it with all the other midshipmen.⁴⁸ Boys from wealthy families were often shocked at the conditions and the food, but of more concern to most over the course of a voyage were the shipmates one was unable to escape. Francis Venables Vernon was twelve when he joined the *Terrible*, and he was unimpressed with his companions in the cockpit, who formed 'as motley a crew, as maybe [*sic*] supposed to arise from difference of countries, difference of age and descent, and difference of education.'⁴⁹ Boys with little experience of the world soon gained enough for any mature adult. Vernon describes the scene when the *Terrible*, having done well from prizes, returned home: 'Our ship's company could now revel in the delights of Portsmouth, and filled the ship with hundreds of those obliging females, who desert the capital during the war, and reside in the genteel recesses of Portsmouth, and other naval towns.'⁵⁰

The reason so many officers first went to sea as boys and experienced the full sweep of naval life before, perhaps, their parents would have liked, was the lieutenants' exam they hoped to pass. Two of the eligibility requirements are relevant here: the aforementioned minimum age regulation was combined with the additional requirement that the candidate had to spend six years at sea before sitting the exam. Simple subtraction therefore produces fourteen as the latest age at which an officer could go to sea and still hope to qualify for his commission at the youngest possible age (provided he did not plan to falsify his birth certificate). As Figure 1.4 demonstrates, that calculation is easily supported by the database.

⁴⁸ J.A. Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches: The Recollections of James Anthony Gardner*, ed. C. Lloyd (London, 1955), p. xii.

⁴⁹ F.V. Vernon, *Voyages and Travels of a Sea Officer* (London, 1792), p. 6.

⁵⁰ Vernon, *Voyages and Travels*, p. 9.



Forty per cent of officers joined the Navy between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Except for James Bowen, the officers highlighted as examples so far in this chapter all joined at about that age: Crosbe was young at ten, but Lloyd was thirteen and Burgh enrolled in the Academy at fourteen. Crosbe and Lloyd, if they were lucky enough to spend six consecutive years at sea, were prime candidates for false birth certificates since they would gain sufficient sea time at least a year in advance of their twentieth birthday. And indeed Lloyd did just that: he presented evidence to his examiners that he was born in 1762 when in fact he was born in 1766.⁵¹ Thus the Navy's own regulations meant that many officers who joined at usual ages had an incentive to falsify their certificates.

Returning to the distribution of officers' ages when they joined the Navy, it is worth discussing those who fall outside of the normal range. Fourteen per cent of officers

⁵¹ Moens, *Publications of the Harleian Society*; Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Lloyd, Vice-Admiral Robert (1) (1766–1846)'; 'Vice-Admiral Robert Lloyd' and 'William Burgh', *FamilySearch*, accessed Nov. 2012, at <http://histfam.familysearch.org/getperson.php?personID=I125064&tree=Welsh> and <https://histfam.familysearch.org/getperson.php?personID=I235719&tree=Welsh>; TNA, ADM 107/10/6.

joined before their tenth birthday, and almost three per cent joined before their fifth birthday. It is difficult to imagine a toddler on board a ship of the line, but in at least two of the cases in the database it is probable that the officer in question was actually on board. William Truscott and James Richard Dacres both joined their respective father's ships before their fifth birthdays, so parental supervision was not far away.⁵² Similarly, George and John Fielding were aged nine and seven, respectively, when they joined the *Tiger*: their uncle was the *Tiger*'s first lieutenant.⁵³ In other cases, though not exclusively in the case of toddlers, officers were entered onto the books of a ship in commission to gain qualifying sea time, even though they were not on board. This is maddeningly difficult to determine more than two centuries later. Much of the evidence comes from Marshall and O'Byrne, where some officers mentioned their misdemeanour years later. In this study, it is possible to confirm that only twenty-three officers—less than five per cent—were entered onto a ship's books illegally. The actual number is undoubtedly higher than that, but it is impossible to make any kind of educated guess. The Admiralty was quick to make an example of captains who blatantly falsified their books: William Walker was dismissed the service in 1800 for drawing the pay of more than fifty men who didn't exist and entering his one-year-old son, who remained ashore.⁵⁴ Most captains were not nearly so brazen and managed to escape the Admiralty's punishments; unfortunately, the precise percentage of illegal entries is unknown.

At the other end of the chart in Figure 1.4 are the men who joined much later, such as the aforementioned James Bowen. Twelve per cent of officers were over the age of twenty when they joined the ship that first appears on their passing certificate. For these

⁵² Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Truscott, Lieutenant William'; 'England, Births and Christenings, 1538–1975: William Truscott, 1778', *FamilySearch*, accessed Nov. 2014, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/N57V-W4W>; *The Gentleman's Magazine* 195 (1854), p. 201.

⁵³ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, p. 254.

⁵⁴ *The Naval Chronicle*, ed. J.S. Clarke and J. McArthur (40 vols., New York, 2010), iv, p. 75.

men, their first experience of the Navy would not have been as transformative as it was for twelve-year-old midshipman Vernon. The arrival of hundreds of prostitutes to greet a ship of the line would not have shocked Bowen, and furthermore his quarters as a master were a significant improvement from the squalor of the cockpit. But Bowen is something of an exception because most sailors his age did not join the Navy as warrant officers. In some cases, it is possible that the officer in the database had joined the Navy earlier than he listed on his passing certificate. For example, the first ship listed on George Shaw's passing certificate is the *Kite*, which he joined at the age of twenty-seven. His first rating was as an able seaman, coxswain and yeoman of the sheets.⁵⁵ It is highly unlikely that, despite the problems with taking ratings at face value discussed shortly, this was his first seagoing experience since each of those ratings should in theory go to an experienced seaman. But it was only necessary to demonstrate six years of sea time on a passing certificate, and Shaw may have listed the *Kite* first because he did not want to bother recalling prior ships. Ratings are much more challenging to trace than officers, so it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about older seamen. In all, the database contains nineteen men who first appear on their passing certificates over the age of twenty-five. Of them, at least one other officer besides Bowen began his career in merchantmen, while another joined the Russian service first. Most of the rest were probably experienced seamen like George Shaw.

Further complicating matters is that how a future officer was listed in the muster book was often meaningless. Young entrants' first years in the Navy are an administrative nightmare. Commissioned officers' ranks are straightforward: from the most junior lieutenant to Admiral of the Fleet, there is a clearly defined hierarchy of ranks and precisely determined degrees of seniority. Before receiving his commission, though, future

⁵⁵ TNA, ADM 107/30/237.

officers could be assigned any combination of a surprising number of ratings, with some officers moving back and forth between ratings seemingly at random. For example, Crosbe joined the *Princess Amelia* as an able seaman, despite being only ten years old and clearly incapable of performing the duties of an actual able seaman. Two months later his rating changed to the more appropriate midshipman.⁵⁶ Lloyd's story is similar: his captain first entered him as an ordinary seaman; eight months later he, too, was a midshipman.⁵⁷ But Crosbe and Lloyd's first cruises were relatively straightforward in administrative terms compared to William Burgess, who was rated as a cooper, able seaman, and quartermaster during the course of his first cruise alone.⁵⁸ Parsing the differences between the various ratings is challenging and often pointless. Therefore it is worth defining what we can say with certainty about officers as ratings while exploring the administrative history that contributed to the confusion.

As with so much of an aspiring officer's career before receiving his commission, his administrative identity was largely shaped by the requirements of the lieutenants' exam. The history of the exam provides some insight into the reasons why ratings were so confusing. In the early seventeenth century, entry into the Navy was entirely controlled by individual captains: they were responsible for recruiting and training future officers, and the results were decidedly mixed. Dating from 1677, the lieutenants' exam was in many ways the opening salvo in the Admiralty's attempt to wrest control of the population of potential officers from individual captains and to ensure that officers met a certain standard of competence. Initially, the Admiralty only extended its regulations to cover three years before the exam: to be eligible to sit the exam, an officer had to have served at least one year as a midshipman and three years in total at sea. From 1703, the Admiralty extended

⁵⁶ TNA, ADM 107/17/21.

⁵⁷ TNA, ADM 6/89/122; TNA, ADM 107/10/6.

⁵⁸ TNA, ADM 107/7/58.

those requirements to four years at sea, with two of those as a midshipman or master's mate. Finally, in 1729, the Admiralty added an additional two years to the required sea time, making a total of six required years, with two of those as a midshipman or master's mate.⁵⁹ This requirement explains the convoluted nature of young gentlemen's ratings. The number of master's mates and midshipmen were proportional to and fixed for the ship's rate, but there were usually more young gentlemen on board than positions available. Captains moved young gentlemen in and out of these positions as they became available to make up their required sea time. Midshipman and master's mate were not interchangeable ratings and derived from different origins—midshipmen were petty officers in the seventeenth century, for example—but by the end of the eighteenth century, a midshipman usually indicated a young man who aspired to a commission, while a master's mate usually indicated a midshipman with more seniority who was nearly ready to sit or had recently sat the lieutenant's exam.⁶⁰ Because of the mandate of the lieutenants' exam, it is possible to state with some confidence that each officer in this study spent at least two years on board a ship in commission as a midshipman or master's mate, but those are the only two ratings common to all officers in the database.

It is not possible to predict with any degree of certainty what a future officer's rating would have been in the other four years he spent at sea. Despite the Admiralty's reforms, captains continued to retain control of the bulk of the entry process. From 1700 to 1794, captains could appoint four servants for every hundred men they commanded, and many of those positions would be reserved for young gentlemen destined for command. The Admiralty had no power to regulate these positions, and the captains were happy to keep it that way. Appointing servants allowed captains to maintain followings of favoured future officers from ship to ship and to ensure that the sons of friends and family gained

⁵⁹ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 121, 381; Idem, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 89.

⁶⁰ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 119.

sufficient sea time. A captain also collected his servants' pay, providing a tidy supplement to his income.⁶¹ Thus captain's servant was a common rating for the officers of this study: 157 officers (twenty-eight per cent) joined the Navy with an initial rating of captain's servant. But this was in no way binding: captains were able to rate future officers as they pleased. Surveying the first ratings of all the men in the database does not reveal any meaningful trends before 1794. Able seaman was a common rating for future officer entries, but in a given year anywhere from zero to fifty-seven per cent of officers in the database joined at that rating; entries as a captain's servant range from thirteen to eighty per cent depending on the year; servants of warrant officers from zero to fifty-four per cent. To summarize, then: the administrative designations of the officers in this study when they joined the Navy varied wildly and bore little relationship to their first experience on board. Nearly every officer served for two years as a midshipman or master's mate and for close to six years at sea before attempting the lieutenants' exam, but they appeared on ships' books as a variety of ratings.

After 1794, the new rating of volunteer first class joined midshipman and master's mate as the only ratings that consistently separated future officers from the men of the lower deck.⁶² The reasons for the introduction of this rating will be explored in much greater detail in the discussion of social status and backgrounds in chapter three, but it can also be seen as part of the Admiralty's campaign to standardize the process of joining the Navy and limit the options for captains. It was generally successful: no officer in the database joined as a volunteer before 1794, but in every year from 1796 to 1799—the last four years in which officers joined the Navy in the database—a plurality were rated as volunteers in their ships' muster books.⁶³ It is important to note, however, that this rating

⁶¹ Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys*, p. 19.

⁶² Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys*, pp. 88–92.

⁶³ In theory, every future officer should have been rated as a volunteer first class, but many captains continued to rate young gentlemen as they pleased through the French Revolutionary Wars.

only applied to forty-eight of the youngest members of the generation of officers in this study; its impact was more significant on the next generation that was just coming into positions of command when the Great Wars ended in 1815.

Another way the Admiralty acted to control entry into the Navy was the much-maligned and marginalized Royal Naval Academy. Its foundation in 1729 coincided with the Admiralty's decision to double the requirements for sea time for the lieutenant's exam. The Academy was part of a wider European movement towards formal education for officers dating from sixteenth and early seventeenth century, when the first academies were founded in Italian states. The assumption underpinning early modern military education was that being well-born was insufficient training for command in combat.⁶⁴ In Britain, the Academy provided an alternative to the chaotic captain's entry system. Its curriculum reflected what the Admiralty thought every officer (and, significantly, gentleman) should master. Students studied a wide range of subjects, from mathematics and French to fencing and dancing. Instructors took small groups of senior students to sea on small vessels to teach seamanship and navigation. Cesare Vignola, a Venetian visitor to Portsmouth in 1766, admired the Academy's blend of theoretical and practical training, particularly for members of the ruling elite. He saw the Academy as forming the foundation of the Royal Navy's 'greatness and reputation', and used the Academy as a model for reforming the Scuola Nautica in Venice.⁶⁵

In theory, an Academy graduate like the aforementioned William Burgh would be better prepared to conduct himself as a gentleman commander than men like Crosbe and Lloyd, whose education was haphazardly administered aboard a ship. But in reality, it was

The Admiralty condemned the practice in 1802. See Consolvo, 'Prospects and Promotion', pp. 139–40.

⁶⁴ J.R. Hale, *Renaissance War Studies* (London, 1983), pp. 225–9; J. Black, *European Warfare, 1660–1815* (London, 1994), p. 236.

⁶⁵ T. McEvoy, 'An Enlightened Education? The British and Venetian Nautical Schools in the 18th century', *Trafalgar Chronicle* (June 2012).

unlikely that an Academy graduate would be noticeably more polished than his peers. Academy students had a reputation for drunkenness notable even in a port city such as Portsmouth: St Vincent famously described the Academy as ‘a sink of vice and abomination [that] should be abolished’.⁶⁶ H.W. Dickinson argues that this reputation is slightly unfair: it endured for almost three quarters of a century before finally closing in 1806, and it spawned a larger, more elaborate, and ultimately much more successful institution, the Royal Naval College.⁶⁷ But James Anthony Gardner’s memoir tends to support St Vincent’s assessment over Dickinson’s: Gardner’s only stories about his time there are of being beaten by a schoolmaster, playing pranks on a local farmer, and raiding a gipsy encampment.⁶⁸ Regardless of the quality of education provided, the Academy remained on the margins of the naval world because it only trained a small cadre of future officers: its initial enrolment target was forty students, but it struggled to meet even that modest goal. In the present study, only seven officers, or slightly more than one per cent, joined the Navy by enrolling in the Academy.

One explanation for the failure of the Academy is that its admissions requirements were too steep: applicants were required to demonstrate ‘considerable proficiency in the Latin tongue’.⁶⁹ Another is that it was too expensive: Rodger estimates that it cost families £70 or £80 per year to support their son’s studies; contemporary estimates put the cost at £60.⁷⁰ Sending a boy to sea was comparatively cheap. Most captains wanted their young gentlemen to have about £20 per year to defray food and drink costs. Furthermore, spending four years in a classroom ashore was far less likely to generate professional contacts and connections than four years on active duty at sea. The other major advantage

⁶⁶ Dickinson, ‘The Portsmouth Naval Academy’, pp. 17–19.

⁶⁷ Dickinson, ‘The Portsmouth Naval Academy’, p. 18.

⁶⁸ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, pp. 9–10.

⁶⁹ *Naval Administration, 1715–1750*, ed. D. Baugh (NRS, 1977), p. 58.

⁷⁰ J.H. Thomas, ‘Portsmouth Naval Academy: An Educational Experiment Examined’, *Portsmouth Archives Review* 3 (1978), pp. 16, 32.

of joining a ship was that seamanship was a practical skill best learned through total immersion in the daily life of a ship at sea.⁷¹ Captain Graham Moore argued in his journal that ‘you may make a good private soldier in six months but a sailor must have served five or six years in a merchant ship before he can be deemed an Able Seaman, and even then he has much to learn’.⁷² It is not surprising that of the seven Academy students in the database, none are the sons of naval officers or merchant ship captains and only one is from a maritime county: those familiar with the sea knew that their sons were better served at sea than ashore. There were some modest benefits to joining the Academy, chief among them the reduction in sea time necessary for sitting a lieutenant’s exam. After graduating, they joined their first ship as able seamen; two years later they could be rated midshipman or master’s mate; after two years at that rating, they were eligible to sit the exam.⁷³ But as we have seen, only a small minority of officers chose this route; the majority joined a ship in commission as an adolescent via the patronage of her captain. During the subsequent six years at sea, they learned the skills that would enable them to pass the lieutenants’ exam and launch a career in the Navy.

Education

Lieutenants’ passing certificates are helpfully explicit about the skills the candidate demonstrated during his examination:

He can Splice, Knot, Reef a Sail, work a Ship in Sailing, shift his Tides, keep a Reckoning of a Ship’s Way by Plain Sailing and Mercator; observe by Sun or Star, and find the Variation of the Compass, and is qualified to do the Duty of an Able Seaman, and Midshipman.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 387–8.

⁷² T. Wareham, *Frigate Commander* (Barnsley, 2004), p. 214.

⁷³ Dickinson, ‘The Portsmouth Naval Academy’, p. 20.

⁷⁴ TNA, ADM 1/5123/3, ADM 6/88–103, or ADM 107/6–33.

Examining each skill in detail will provide not only some key nautical definitions for readers unfamiliar with the Navy; it will also display the remarkable variety of both hands-on and intellectual skills required of a naval officer.

To splice and to knot are perhaps the most familiar terms. To splice the ends of two ropes together means weaving the ropes' strands into one another to join them.⁷⁵ There are three categories of knots that sailors use: bend, hitch, and knot. A bend joins two ropes together; a hitch attaches a rope to an object, often a spar, or another rope; and a knot, in its technical definition, means making a knob at the end of a rope or a loop, such as a noose. Each bend, hitch, or knot has a unique name, pattern, and purpose, and the young gentlemen hoping to pass the lieutenants' exam had to memorize and master all of them. Modern reference works on sailing, such as Cyrus Day's *The Art of Knotting and Splicing* from 1947, list more than two hundred varieties of bends, hitches, knots, and splices, but contemporary works contained even more.⁷⁶ David Steel's *The Art of Rigging*, published in 1796, begins with a dictionary of nearly five hundred terms used in his descriptions of how to rig a ship. In addition, he listed more than one hundred terms under the heading 'preparatory rigging' before describing the rigging for each of the forty sails on a twenty-gun square-rigged ship.⁷⁷

In addition to memorizing the correct layout of a ship's rigging, the lieutenants' exam required midshipmen to apply their knowledge. To reef a sail and work a ship in sailing are related terms in that they involve operating the incredibly complex machinery of a square-rigged ship. To reef a sail is to shorten it by securing part of it to the spar on which it hung.⁷⁸ This reduces its ability to capture the wind's energy and therefore slows the ship. It is often used in heavy weather when a full sail would be in danger of tearing or

⁷⁵ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 766.

⁷⁶ C. Day, *The Art of Knotting and Splicing* (Southampton, 1947), passim.

⁷⁷ D. Steel, *The Art of Rigging* (London, 1796), passim.

⁷⁸ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 763.

flying. To understand how to reef a sail properly, an officer had to be familiar with the physical demands of working aloft, high in the ship's rigging. Working a ship in sailing means understanding the relationship between the ship, the direction and strength of the wind, and the desired destination. An officer had to understand how and when to tack or to wear so as to induce the ship to move—slowly—into the wind.⁷⁹ Tacking was a particularly complicated and multi-step manoeuvre that required careful coordination of the whole ship's company; what the examination tested, then, was whether the candidate understood the series of commands necessary to execute it smoothly.

The first four skills on a passing certificate required physically manipulating ropes or responding to changing weather conditions; the next four skills required a mastery of advanced mathematics. To demonstrate that he could 'shift his tides', an aspiring lieutenant had to prove that he could calculate how local tidal conditions would affect his ship.⁸⁰ By measuring the location and phase of the moon using a sextant and consulting *The Nautical Almanac* (first published in 1767), it was possible to determine the schedule of the tides at a given location.⁸¹ This was crucial for any operation conducted near land, even one as simple as weighing anchor and sailing out of a harbour. To keep a reckoning of a ship's way by plain sailing and Mercator meant keeping track of a ship's movements. Plain sailing was the simpler method of the two, but the terminology is slightly misleading. In the eighteenth century, plain sailing was a synonym for plane sailing, which, as the spelling of the latter suggests, meant calculating a ship's position by assuming that the earth was flat. This assumption simplified the mathematics, since it only required keeping

⁷⁹ The best reference work for sailing terminology from this period is J. Harland, *Seamanship in the Age of Sail: An Account of the Shiphandling of the Sailing Man-of-War 1600–1800, Based on Contemporary Sources* (London, 1984).

⁸⁰ 'Shift', 13b, *Oxford English Dictionary* online (OED), accessed 28 Nov. 2012, at <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/178085>.

⁸¹ 'The History of HM Nautical Almanac Office', *HM Nautical Almanac Office, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory*, accessed Nov. 2012, at <http://web.archive.org/web/20070630074456/http://www.nao.rl.ac.uk/nao/history>.

track of how far in each cardinal direction the ship had travelled, but it was imprecise.⁸²

Keeping a ship's reckoning by Mercator, on the other hand, meant incorporating spherical trigonometry into the calculations. Mercator's projection flattens the globe so that lines of latitude and longitude intersect at right angles, distorting the polar regions; plotting a ship's course on a map was therefore easier, since the lines could be drawn straight, but the calculations of how far and in what direction a ship had travelled had to account for the earth's curvature.⁸³

Keeping a reckoning of a ship's way by either method was pointless if the candidate could not locate his ship accurately on a featureless ocean. To observe by sun and star was to determine the ship's location by measuring the angle between a celestial body and the horizon and comparing it to the tables in *The Nautical Almanac*. The charts specify when the sun, moon, and dozens of stars appear directly above a point on the earth's surface. Using a quadrant or sextant to measure the angle to the horizon, it was possible to determine the relationship between that point and the ship's location. For example, measuring the angle of the sun to the horizon at noon would generate the ship's latitude. Longitude was more difficult because it required very accurate timekeeping to determine the relationship of the ship to the prime meridian. The difference between local noon and noon in Greenwich, as recorded by the ship's chronometers, provided the foundation for the calculation. Though John Harrison's 1761 chronometer proved sufficiently accurate for navigation, its prohibitive cost—and the necessity of having two or three on board to ensure accuracy—meant that most officers navigated by lunar distances. By measuring the distance between the moon and a well-known star, it was possible, using charts, to determine Greenwich time. The technique was not, however,

⁸² J. Nourse, *Navigation*, 2nd edn. (London, 1764), p. 2.

⁸³ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 759, 761.

particularly accurate or reliable.⁸⁴ Further complicating navigation was the added calculation needed to determine true north. Compasses point toward magnetic north, but the magnetic north pole and the geographic North Pole are in different places. Therefore a candidate had to prove to the examiners that he could account for the difference between the two, known as the variation of the compass.

How did an officer manage to learn all these skills? One clue can be found in the penultimate item on the passing certificate: the candidate demonstrated the ability to do the duty of an Able Seaman. This is a remarkable statement because it implies that officers were expected to be able to do all of the tasks that they ordered their men to do—though from the time they were commissioned, they rarely did them. This concept will play a prominent role in discussing officers' social status in later chapters. For now, it only serves to highlight the first of the three primary instructors for future officers: his 'sea-daddy'. Often the captain would assign young gentlemen to be tutored in the art of seamanship by an experienced able seaman. James Anthony Gardner was, along with another youngster, instructed by the captains of the foretop and the maintop of the *Panther* how 'to knot and splice and to reef a sail; and for their attention we remunerated them with our grog.' Gardner's description of what he learned is lifted almost word-for-word from his passing certificate, though of course the certificate omits the payment plan. Joe Moulding, the captain of the foretop, also made Gardner and his friend memorize a 'catechism', which was a nonsense paragraph they had to recite before running up to the top of the foremast to 'blow the dust out of the topgallant clueline blocks'. This was just an excuse to get the young men practice in climbing the treacherous rigging. Gardner claimed to remember the catechism fifty years later: it began 'So fine the Conflustions!! of old Mother Damnable, who jumped off the fore-topsail yard and filled the main-topgallant sail;' and continued for

⁸⁴ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 382–3.

another ten lines.⁸⁵ His memoir is not always the most reliable source, but it nevertheless provides a colourful picture of the unique pedagogy of ‘sea-daddies’.

Higher up the ship’s hierarchy, senior midshipmen, the lieutenants, the warrant officers, and ultimately the captain were also all partially responsible for the education of future officers. Thomas Peckston was only a captain’s clerk, but his captain was happy to delegate some of the necessary instruction of midshipmen because Peckston was ‘well acquainted with Navigation and Nautical Astronomy’.⁸⁶ The final skill listed on the passing certificate was that the candidate could do the duty of a midshipman. Unlike splicing two ropes together, this skill was difficult to define and depended heavily on the midshipman’s age and experience. In 1779, both George Gilbert and John Walker were twenty-year-old future officers, but their responsibilities were very different: Walker had only just joined the Navy that year and probably struggled with the most basic elements of seamanship, whereas Gilbert had been at sea for four years on board three different ships.⁸⁷ It was the captain’s responsibility to ensure that future officers learned the basics before putting them in positions of command. Thus, as Rodger summarizes, ‘We meet a midshipman of fourteen taking charge of a watch, and another of the same age still sucking his thumb.’⁸⁸

The Navy’s officer training programme was, by design, immersive. From the first day on board, young gentlemen were surrounded by the complex machinery of the ship and the perils and requirements of life at sea. Combat and shipwreck could have powerful effects on future officers. In one calendar year, midshipman Graham Moore survived a

⁸⁵ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, pp. 22–3.

⁸⁶ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, J. Wainwright to Thomas Peckston, 26 January 1818. Wainwright was writing a letter of recommendation for Peckston; Peckston had been his clerk from 1805 to 1807.

⁸⁷ TNA, ADM 6/89/040, ADM 107/08/118 and 175; TNA, ADM 107/19/148.

⁸⁸ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 508.

fleet action and a hurricane.⁸⁹ Chaplain Edward Mangin was struck by the casual approach to life and death among naval men after he was in a small boat that rescued two midshipmen who had capsized. Neither the lieutenant who rescued them nor the midshipmen treated the incident as significant, causing Mangin to conclude that on land, 'life is ... thought of greater value'.⁹⁰ Lincoln points out that one of the key aspects of officer training was placing boys in a male environment characterized by extreme hardships. They were encouraged to adopt a carefree attitude towards violence, and to endure pain with little complaint.⁹¹ Young gentlemen who survived were, in theory, better prepared to assume leadership positions.⁹² In combat, the example set by senior officers emphasized how little regard young men were supposed to have for their own safety: the captain's responsibility was to stand exposed and unflinching on the quarterdeck as shot and splinters whirled around him.

That the Admiralty required six years at sea indicates both the emphasis placed on experiencing shipboard life first-hand and the difficulty of mastering such complex skills. Advanced mathematics were not easy to learn on board a ship. Officers rarely had time to devote to instructing young midshipmen, and only a gifted few of the latter could teach themselves spherical trigonometry. Recognizing this, the Admiralty addressed the problem in two ways. The first way was unsuccessful, but it was also the third major source of on-board instruction for young gentlemen, after his sea-daddy and the officers: the schoolmaster. In 1702 Queen Anne introduced the position of schoolmaster-at-sea and tasked them with instructing future officers in the practical aspects of navigation. Unfortunately, poor working conditions and low pay failed to attract qualified and

⁸⁹ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. xv.

⁹⁰ *Five Naval Journals, 1789–1817*, ed. H.G. Thursfield (NRS, 1951), p. 17.

⁹¹ M. Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750–1815* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 31–2.

⁹² Unless, of course, they suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. See R. Pietsch, 'The Experiences and Weapons of War', in Colville and Davey (eds.), *Nelson Navy Nation*, p. 187.

motivated candidates. The schoolmaster's position in the shipboard hierarchy was equal to junior midshipmen—his students—and there were no opportunities for promotion. In many naval memoirs, schoolmasters appear as incompetent drunks.⁹³ Admiralty reforms in 1806, which also re-founded the Royal Naval Academy, raised the profile and status of schoolmasters, but the reforms came too late for the officers in this study.⁹⁴

The second way the Admiralty addressed the problem of educating officers in the mathematical and language skills necessary for command was by allowing an informal and unwritten exception to the requirement that an officer be on board a ship in commission for six years prior to taking the lieutenants' exam. The understanding was that if a ship in commission was in port for a length of time, a young gentleman on her books could spend time ashore at school. If the ship sailed, the young gentleman needed to go with her or be removed from the books. This provided a useful compromise between the necessity of gaining sea time and the difficulties of on-board education.⁹⁵ Joseph Wright, for example, attended Manchester Grammar School, which was famous for its mathematical instruction. Peter Heywood went to St Bees School in Cumberland.⁹⁶ Both are examples of the growing network of schools that provided a mathematical education for a range of professions, including accountants and surveyors as well as naval officers.⁹⁷ Reeve's Academy on Bishopsgate Street in London claimed to instruct 'Young Gentlemen ... in the Several Branches of Science, necessary to qualify them for Employment, whether the Computing House, Public Offices, Se[a], Army, & c.'⁹⁸

⁹³ Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys*, pp. 25–6.

⁹⁴ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 510.

⁹⁵ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 512.

⁹⁶ Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Wright, Lieutenant Joseph (1) (1784–1803)', 'Heywood, Captain Peter (1772–1831)'.

⁹⁷ E.G.R. Taylor, *The Mathematical Practitioners of Hanoverian England, 1714–1840* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 79.

⁹⁸ Quoted in M.R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (London, 1996), p. 63.

Other officers were educated before they joined the Navy, and they often gained at least a foundation in classical languages. Francis Venables Vernon received, in his words, ‘an academical education preparative to the naval service’, and he demonstrated that it included a heavy dose of Latin on the title page and in the preface of his memoirs.⁹⁹ Such knowledge was probably rare for sea officers, as later chapters will discuss; it is difficult to determine exactly how many officers received a classical education ashore. Official naval channels do not seem to have been concerned with the matter: in 1749, the headmaster of the Portsmouth Naval Academy declined to hire a Latin teacher because ‘it would Interfere with, and be Prejudicial to their other Studies, more Essentially Necessary in the Profession for which they were designed’.¹⁰⁰ One alternative available to some officers was to use peacetime demobilizations to fill gaps in their education. Graham Moore went to France after the peace in 1783 to make ‘what other improvements’ he could, beginning with learning French.¹⁰¹ James Anderson is the only officer in the study known to have attended an institution of higher education, in his case the University of Aberdeen.¹⁰² But there was no reason for the Admiralty to record such information, so most of the evidence derives from later biographers or from indirect sources. George Clarke brought back a large collection of plants from Russia, for example, which suggests that he had some non-naval education; he may also have just been transporting it for a family member without any interest in its contents.¹⁰³

How prepared an officer was for his lieutenants’ exam—and by extension for his subsequent career as an officer and a gentleman—therefore depended on a wide range of

⁹⁹ Vernon, *Voyages and Travels*, title page, pp. v, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, ‘Portsmouth Naval Academy’, p. 28.

¹⁰¹ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. xvi.

¹⁰² Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. ‘Anderson, Captain James (1) (1765–1835)’. Scottish university lectures were public, and it was both easy and customary for interested non-students to improve their education by attending them.

¹⁰³ E.D. Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa* (2 vols., London, 1810), I, p. vi.

factors. We can say that at some point before he sat the exam, the officer needed to learn the practical, basic elements of seamanship. It is likely that an able seaman on board a ship in commission would have taught him these skills, unless he had extensive seagoing experience prior to joining the Navy. He also needed to learn how to manoeuvre a ship in an infinite combination of seas, winds, tides, and tactical situations; the only way to learn this was through years of experience. Mathematics was challenging, particularly if he struggled to find time to attend a school ashore or if he was unlucky in finding a competent schoolmaster or conscientious captain. For a small minority, the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth solved enough of these problems to be worth its cost. Mastering all the necessary skills was ultimately the responsibility of the future officer, but he was dependent on his parents and his superiors to provide the appropriate opportunities.

The exam itself was rigorous and practical, and candidates did fail. At home, candidates presented themselves to the Navy Board examiners, while abroad, candidates faced an intimidating panel of three captains convened by the commander-in-chief of the station. Though the most feared Navy Board examiner of the period, Captain Sir Andrew Snape Hamond, only failed candidates at a rate of five per cent, it was clear that midshipmen did not view the exam as a formality.¹⁰⁴ Adding to the stress was a significant amount of paperwork that could easily trip up a hopeful midshipman. In addition to securing a birth certificate that proved he was the required age, a candidate also needed journals that he had kept during his six years at sea. These contained the record not only of his work but also of the ship's activities. In some cases, artistically-inclined midshipmen embellished them with sketches. The sketches were not whimsical: drawing was occasionally a useful skill, particularly for officers serving in remote locations. Depicting

¹⁰⁴ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 511–2.

unfamiliar coastlines helped highlight important navigational markers.¹⁰⁵ A candidate would not be failed because of the poor quality of his sketches, but it was important to present his journal to the examiners. Midshipmen who had seen action or survived a shipwreck often failed to provide their journals to the examiners because they had been lost at sea. This was not usually an impediment to passing, so long as the rest of their exam went well: there are many passing certificates in the archives accompanied by a sworn statement from the candidate stating that his journals had been lost. Another administrative hurdle helped corroborate the candidate's suitability, particularly in cases of lost journals: he needed references from at least two former captains stating that he was a young man of good character who could handle the responsibilities of command.¹⁰⁶ Despite all these challenges, the majority of candidates did pass the exam and became eligible to receive a commission and, as will be discussed in later chapters, the social prestige that accompanied it.

Commissions and Employment Prospects

The key phrase from the previous sentence is 'became eligible': passing for lieutenant did not guarantee the young gentleman a commission. Indeed, the evidence from the database suggests that seven per cent of men who passed the lieutenants' exam never received commissions. Some of these men probably died shortly after passing, but the death data for non-commissioned passed master's mates is poor. Robert Curry Hillier passed in 1795 and died in 1798, but, as will be discussed shortly, in wartime most officers received their commission within three years of passing, so his death was probably not the cause of his

¹⁰⁵ G. Quilley, *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain, 1768–1829* (New Haven and London, 2012), pp. 25–8.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, ADM 1/5123/3, ADM 6/88–103, or ADM 107/6–33.

failure to receive a commission.¹⁰⁷ Instead, passed master's mates for whom we have sufficient evidence generally fall into two categories: men who pursued other careers, and men who simply failed to secure the necessary patronage for a commission but remained in the Navy. In the former category is Sir Robert Crown, who was master of two ships from 1778 until 1782, when he was made acting second lieutenant of the *Diana*. Hoping that this was the beginning of a career as a commissioned officer, he took and passed the lieutenants' exam in 1783. Unfortunately his career stalled after he fell out with Lord Howe, and he decided to try his luck in Russia. His subsequent success—dying an admiral in the Russian service with a British knighthood—was atypical for men who failed to receive commissions in the Royal Navy, but his decision to look elsewhere for his career was common.¹⁰⁸ Venables Hind passed for lieutenant during the peace, in 1785, but by the time he died in 1792, he was a captain in an army regiment.¹⁰⁹ John Spicer Young passed for lieutenant the year Hind died, but his future lay with the East India Company.¹¹⁰ The second category—passed master's mates who remained in the Navy—is similarly varied: John Lochty became the acting lieutenant and commander of the *Safety* guard vessel at Tortola Roads in the Virgin Islands; Matthew Gunthorp took command of an excise cutter to combat smuggling along the Norfolk coast; and John Hills became the captain of the *Humber*, a hired armed ship on Baltic convoy duty.¹¹¹ It is likely that all three men lacked the talent or connections necessary to secure a commission, and, unlike Crown, were unable to find much success in their subsequent careers.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, ADM 6/94/128; 'Robert Curry Hillier', *RootsWeb*, accessed 28 Nov. 2012, at <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=infilms&id=I5231>.

¹⁰⁸ *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* (London, 1841), pp. 611–16.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, ADM 107/10/41; *The Gentleman's Magazine* 71 (1792), p. 388.

¹¹⁰ J. Mathison and A.W. Mason, *A New Oriental Register and East-India Directory* (London, 1802), p. 213; 'Drake in the County of Devon', *RootsWeb*, accessed Nov. 2012, at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~brouwergenealogydata/Devon/p28.htm#i167984>.

¹¹¹ TNA, ADM 354/233/155 (Navy Board: Bound Out-letters, 22 Sept. 1808); K. Hipper, *Smugglers All: Centuries of Norfolk Smuggling* (Dereham, 2001), p. 80; TNA, ADM 354/215/230.

The majority of officers did have the talent or connections necessary to earn their commissions. As mentioned earlier, the time between passing for lieutenant and being commissioned was usually short: fifty-eight per cent of officers received their commission within a year of passing for lieutenant, and more than eighty per cent were lieutenants within three years. Timing mattered: of the sixty-four officers who passed between 1784 and 1789, when the Navy was largely demobilized, only two received their commissions within a year. Officers who passed during those years had to wait an average of four years and eight months for their commissions, which stands in stark contrast to officers who passed during the next six years (1790–1795), who had to wait an average of only eighteen months. A few officers—three per cent of all commissioned officers in the study—did not have to wait at all because they received their commission before they passed the lieutenants’ exam. Thus Joseph Wright had been serving as an acting lieutenant from 14 March 1802, but he passed the lieutenants’ exam on 7 July of that year; the Admiralty agreed to date the seniority of his commission from 14 March. Wright’s adjustment was minor, but James Marshall, Henry Ball, and James Young all passed for lieutenant more than four years after the date of their commission. In all three cases, the probable explanation is that because they had been made acting lieutenants during the American War, they were unable to find the time to prepare for and sit the lieutenants’ exam until they rotated off active duty or the war ended.¹¹²

The commission itself was a straightforward document. It listed the officer’s name and the ship to which he had been appointed, and it charged the officers and men on board that ship who were subordinate to the lieutenant to obey him. The commission concluded with a famous and intimidating warning to obey Admiralty regulations and superior officers or face court martial: ‘Hereof nor you nor any of you may fail as you will answer

¹¹² Calculated from respective officers’ passing certificates and entries in *CSO*.

to the contrary at your peril.’ At the bottom was a date and the signatures of the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, on behalf of the Lord Admiral.¹¹³ On the surface, these signatures do not appear to hold much significance, but in fact they were a source of complaint for many eighteenth-century naval officers. Army officers held commissions from King George III himself, and it was his name that appeared at the top of their commissions.¹¹⁴ Though both practically and legally there was no distinction between holding a king’s commission and holding a commission from the Admiralty, there was a sense that because naval officers were two degrees removed from the sovereign, their commissions were less prestigious. This is a topic that will be explored in more detail in later chapters, as will the significance of the first task for any newly-commissioned lieutenant: purchasing a uniform and a sword.

After ensuring that he was properly attired, a lieutenant then reported for duty on board the ship in which he had been commissioned. A lieutenant’s duties varied widely depending on the size and mission of the ship he joined. A ship of the line would have a minimum of four other lieutenants, and a lieutenant fresh from his exam would usually be the most junior. He would be assigned a division of ratings to command; in combat, this might consist of the men responsible for firing a section of the ships’ cannons. But combat was rare, and so most days the lieutenant would carry out more mundane tasks, primarily ensuring that his men were present, well-behaved, and sober. The lieutenant would also be responsible for standing watches. The naval day was organized into seven watches, of which five were four hours long and two were two hours long (the dog watches).¹¹⁵ The officers divided up the responsibilities for standing watches: the officer of the watch was

¹¹³ ‘Commission of Francis Godolphin Bond’, *Sailing Texas*, accessed 29 Nov. 2012, at <http://sailingtexas.com/England/FrancisBond/178205commission.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ ‘William Wharton’s Commission to the 85th Regiment of Foot’, *Waterloo 200*, accessed 29 Nov. 2012, at <http://www.waterloo200.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Commission-document-W-Wharton.jpg>.

¹¹⁵ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 770.

responsible for sailing the ship, and this system ensured that there was a commissioned officer—or senior warrant officer such as the master, as will be discussed in chapter two—commanding the ship at all times. On frigates, there would be fewer officers, so a lieutenant would be responsible for a larger percentage of the men and would be the senior officer of a watch more frequently.

The most senior lieutenant usually served as the first lieutenant. In modern terms, this position was most similar to that of executive officer, and it brought with it an unwelcome range of responsibilities. Graham Moore described them as the ‘common daily [duties]’, which meant keeping the ship ‘clean and in order’. First lieutenants monitored morale and were the officers most directly responsible for maintaining discipline.¹¹⁶ They also did not usually stand regular watches but instead acted as floating supervisors, sometimes called ‘Day Officers’. Seen from below, the first lieutenant wielded great powers. Sailor Robert Wilson describes the first lieutenant as ‘the principal person in the ship. Nothing is transacted without his knowledge and sanction; all addresses or complaints are made through him to the Captain’.¹¹⁷ From the perspective of the lieutenant himself, though, his power was less obvious. Moore’s diary reveals the potential frustrations of such a command structure. As first lieutenant of the *Adamant*, Moore complained: ‘I believe if I have the charge of carrying on the duty in this ship long I shall run some risk of becoming peevish, for there are so many little petty objects independent of the ship’s duty to attend to that I cannot help fretting. O that I were a Captain.’ Lacking the authority of a commanding officer, first lieutenants could easily find themselves caught in an uncomfortable position if senior officers abused their authority. When both his admiral and his captain insisted on using skilled seamen for menial tasks at their houses in

¹¹⁶ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, pp. 27–8.

¹¹⁷ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 250, 334.

the port, his men made it clear that they were unhappy. Moore complained to his journal: 'I am continually on the fret about these things which I cannot remedy.'¹¹⁸

The one redeeming aspect of service as a first lieutenant was that it put an officer in the best possible position to secure promotion to master and commander. Leaving talent and patronage aside for now, the two factors that influenced a lieutenant's promotion prospects were his employment and the size of the ship in which he was employed. Despite the impressive series of administrative and educational hurdles that stood between officer hopefuls and commissions, the Navy actually contained far more officers than could be gainfully employed at sea. Rodger's analysis suggests that older lieutenants were particularly vulnerable to unemployment throughout the period in part because young, recently promoted lieutenants were generally fitter and better able to endure the demands of life at sea. A lieutenant's first commission usually ensured employment once, and employment tended to be easier to secure in the first five years of a lieutenant's career. But it was never guaranteed: half of the lieutenants in Rodger's sample were unemployed in 1810, and those who had been commissioned most recently were most likely to be unemployed.¹¹⁹ The Admiralty's 1817 survey returns provide a similar estimate of unemployment prospects: slightly more than half of the lieutenants who survived and filled out returns spent at least five wartime years unemployed.¹²⁰

Using data from the Admiralty list-books, it is possible to take a more systematic approach to analysing officers' employment prospects. Seniority lists were notoriously unreliable and filled with officers unfit for service, but they are the only convenient method of counting commissioned officers. Five-year snapshots of the number of officers at each rank were combined with estimates of the number of positions available, derived

¹¹⁸ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, pp. 27–8.

¹¹⁹ Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 99.

¹²⁰ TNA, ADM 9/1–17.

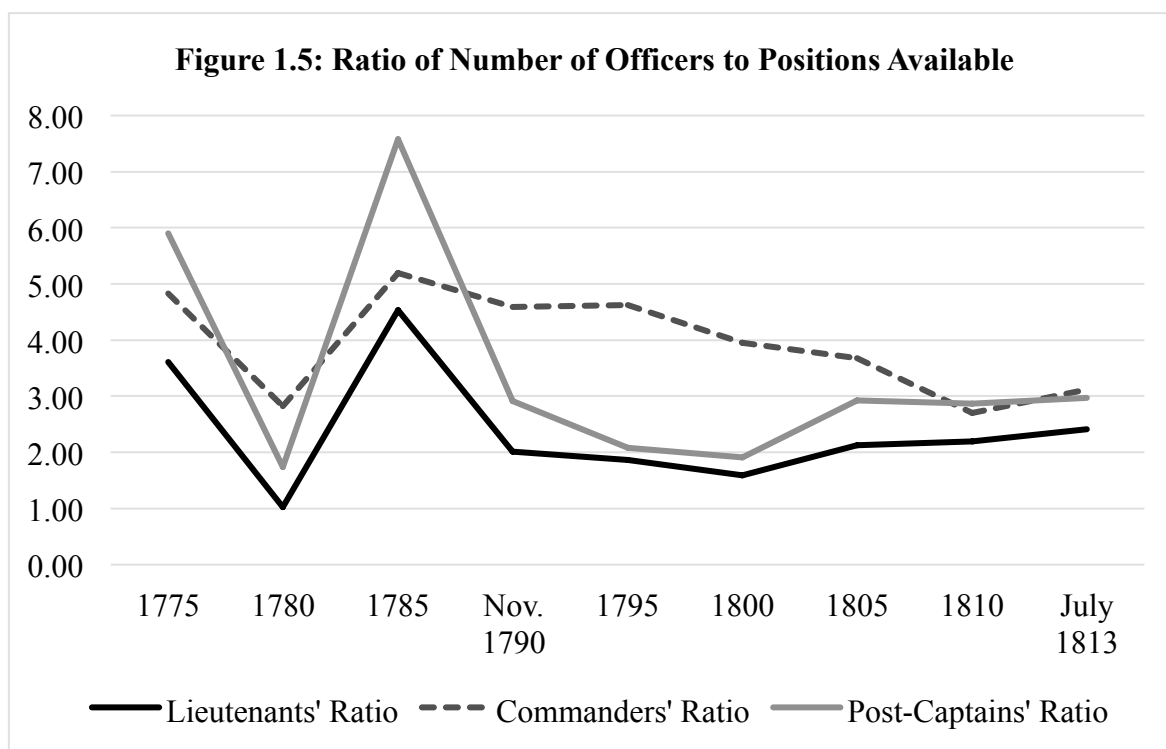
from the summaries at the end of the month of January in the Admiralty's list book. The two exceptions were 1790 and 1813. In the former case, November's list book was used to capture the Nootka Sound mobilization; in the latter, the Admiralty stopped compiling list books after July 1813, so it was not possible to cover 1815 in the same way. Rated ships equated to one position for a post-captain; non-rated vessels categorized as 'sloops' produced one position for a commander. Lieutenants' positions were the most challenging to estimate. The following formula was used:

Table 1.1: Estimate of Lieutenants' Positions by Rate

1 st Rate	7 Lieutenants
2 nd Rate	6 Lieutenants
3 rd Rate	5 Lieutenants
4 th Rate	4 Lieutenants
5 th Rate	3 Lieutenants
6 th Rate	2 Lieutenants
Sloops	1 Lieutenant
Other Vessels, including store ships, armed vessels, fire ships, schooners, etc.	1 Lieutenant

Figure 1.5 shows estimates the ratio of the number of officers to the available active-duty positions in five-year snapshots¹²¹:

¹²¹ TNA, ADM 8/51–100 (Admiralty: List Books (Showing the disposition of Ships, names of Officers, &c.), 1775–1813).



Briefly summarized, peacetime employment prospects were very poor, with ratios of five or more officers to each available position common across all ranks. During the American War, lieutenants were likely to be employed, and lieutenants perform consistently better than commander and captains throughout the period. However, during the Great Wars, even lieutenants could expect two officers for every available position, indicating an unemployment rate of roughly fifty per cent. Commanders' prospects are generally the poorest, though they get better towards the end of the Wars. There is much more to say, and Figure 1.5 is crucial to understanding officers' career trajectories. The next few pages explore these patterns at some length for each rank in turn, since no similar analysis of employment patterns exists in the historiography.

An officer was most likely to be employed as a lieutenant throughout the period, but the longer he remained at that rank, the lower his chances of employment were. One reason for optimism for lieutenants was that the fifty per cent unemployment rate for lieutenants suggested by Figure 1.5 and by other historians does not take into account shore based appointments such as signal stations and the bloated nature of the seniority

list.¹²² Nor were all lieutenants equally likely to be unemployed. Rodger, as noted above, suggests that unemployment among lieutenants with more than five years' seniority was rampant.¹²³ Many older officers struggled to remain active. John Smith was thirty-six when he received his commission in 1793, and he only managed to secure employment on two ships. His seagoing career ended in 1795, but he was still ready to answer the Admiralty's survey in 1817 and he lived until 1835.¹²⁴ He is also a good example of the challenges presented by Admiralty record keeping, since he appeared on the active list throughout the Wars despite twenty years of unemployment. With each passing year, his employment grew less and less likely.

As we will see shortly, unemployment destroyed lieutenants' promotion prospects. But for lieutenants lucky enough to find work, the size of the ship also influenced their career trajectories. It was possible for lieutenants to be in a position to exercise independent authority, often as the senior officer on the Navy's smallest ships. Tenders and cutters commanded by lieutenants were not powerful enough to cruise against enemy shipping, so their primary duties were to support frigates and ships of the line. A second significant feature of the data behind Figure 1.5 is the dramatic expansion of this small-ship Navy. Even though the number of lieutenants more than doubled from 1790 to 1815, the number of small vessels in the Navy nearly kept pace. Invasion scares motivated the Admiralty to bolster its presence in the Channel, and men like Richard Crossman and William Mercer benefitted. Crossman made a career out of independent commands as a lieutenant: he is a rare officer who was given his first commission 'for rank', so he never served as a commissioned officer on a ship in which he was not in command. After being unemployed for more than eighteen months following his commissioning in January 1805,

¹²² Consolvo, 'Prospects and Promotion', p. 144.

¹²³ Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 99.

¹²⁴ TNA, ADM 107/9/177; TNA, ADM 9/6/1787; Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Smith, Commander (Rtd) John (04) (d. 1835)'.

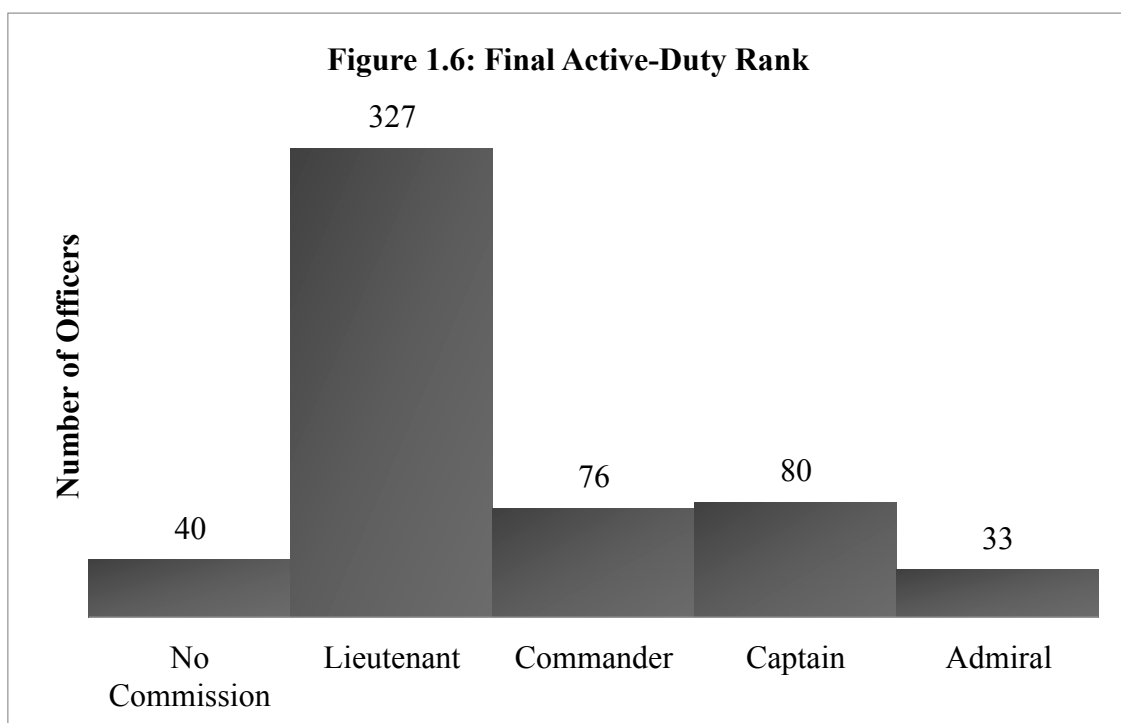
Crossman spent the next decade in command of six different small gunboats and cutters, usually in home waters but occasionally as far afield as the West Indies.¹²⁵ Mercer was commissioned when he was twenty-five, and he spent a few weeks as a lieutenant on board the frigate *Polyphemus* in May 1794; the remainder of his active service in the Navy was as the commander of first the *Dolphin* and then the *Dover*, both cutters operating in the Channel. But after the Peace of Amiens, he was ashore, unemployed, for the duration of the Napoleonic Wars.¹²⁶

Mercer and Crossman's experiences in the small-ship Navy were typical. Commanding a cutter was not the primary goal of most lieutenants because it provided few opportunities to be promoted to commander. Recall Moore's lament while serving as a first lieutenant, 'O that I were a Captain': his goal was to command a non-rated ship such as a sloop or brig boasting up to twenty guns. Service in the Navy's smallest ships was better than unemployment, but it did not usually provide many opportunities to secure promotion. In contrast, the first lieutenant of a flagship was in prime position to receive the first vacancy in the squadron, and even the first lieutenant of a frigate could hope for an action or a few prizes to bolster his chances of promotion.

With at least two lieutenants for every position and a growing small-ship Navy, it is unsurprising to see in Figure 1.6 that the majority of officers—almost sixty per cent—never managed to secure promotion from lieutenant to commander.

¹²⁵ TNA, ADM 9/8/2505.

¹²⁶ TNA, ADM 9/6/1798; 'Scotland, Births and Baptisms, 1564–1950: William Mercer, 1762', *FamilySearch*, accessed Nov. 2012, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/XY7G-4S9>.



The implications of this for officers' social standing will be addressed in later chapters; here it is merely worth highlighting the distorted focus of most histories of the Navy's officers. No lieutenants feature in the hagiographic biographies of Nelson's 'Band of Brothers'. When lieutenants performed heroic deeds, they were usually quickly promoted to commander, so the population of lieutenants in Figure 1.6 does not include any men whose exploits fill the pages of Lewis' work or of Wareham's—after all, it was not usually possible for someone like Lieutenant Mercer in the tiny *Dolphin* cutter to make his name as a 'star captain'. This is not to argue that heroic deeds alone separated commanders, captains, and admirals from lowly lieutenants: as the Great Wars drew to a close, young officers became increasingly desperate to stand out by committing some act of gallantry.¹²⁷ Furthermore, this analysis ignores the great debate about the relative roles of merit, patronage, and family backgrounds that will form the heart of the analysis in chapter four.

If an officer managed to earn promotion from lieutenant to commander, he generally fell into one of two categories: either he was a young commander whom his

¹²⁷ Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 104; Idem, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 525.

superiors had marked out for rapid promotion to post rank, or he was an older commander whose promotion was a reward for long service as a lieutenant. Officers in the latter category were unlikely to see further active employment, and because a commander's half-pay was greater than a lieutenant's, the promotion served as a kind of retirement bonus. This is not a new argument—Rodger has identified the two types of commanders anecdotally¹²⁸—but the database provides the first empirical support for it. There are 76 officers in the database whose final active-duty rank was commander, and there are 113 officers who managed to make the next, crucial step from commander to post-captain. Rodger's thesis holds up: those whose careers ended at commander were older, with an average age of thirty-five when they were promoted to that rank; those whose careers continued were, on average, six years younger when they were promoted. Thus John Marsh was thirty-seven when he was promoted to commander, and he spent the remainder of his time in the Navy ashore in the Sea Fencibles.¹²⁹ In contrast, George Palmer was nineteen when he became a lieutenant and twenty-one when he became a commander; after only two years, most of which he spent as the commander of the *Vulcan*, he was made post and on his way to his final rank of Admiral of the White.¹³⁰ There are exceptions: William James Hughes was twenty-three when he became a commander but never progressed past that rank, and John Gourly was forty-two on his promotion but managed to be made post nine years later.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the two categories of commanders holds true across the broader population.

¹²⁸ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 519.

¹²⁹ 'England, Births and Christenings, 1538–1975: John Marsh, 1757', *FamilySearch*, accessed 29 Nov. 2012, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/N599-RT1>; TNA, ADM 9/4/885.

¹³⁰ 'England, Births and Christenings, 1538–1975: George Palmer, 1759', *FamilySearch*, accessed 29 Nov. 2012, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/N5ZN-F6B>; TNA, ADM 9/1/35; CSO, s.v. 'Palmer, George (1)'.

¹³¹ 'The Descendants of William Hughes and Ann Richards', *Island Register*, accessed 29 Nov. 2012, at <http://www.islandregister.com/hughes7.html>; CSO, s.v. 'Hughes, William James'; Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Gourly, Rear-Admiral (Rtd) John (1) (d. 1854)'; CSO, s.v. 'Gourly, John'.

The reason there were two types of commander is that the Navy had a problem rewarding junior officers. Above them, admirals and post-captains could not be promoted, but they could receive knighthoods or even peerages. Below them, ratings could be given money. But the only way to reward junior officers was promotion, even though it was often not in an officer's interest to be promoted because his chances of employment plummeted.¹³² The most fundamental problem for commanders was that there were not enough ships to go around, and there were always at least twice as many commands for post-captains as there were for commanders.¹³³ As seen in Figure 1.5, from the American War through the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars, the ratio of commanders to commands in wartime was consistently twice as high as the comparable ratio for post-captains and lieutenants. Intriguingly, commanders' prospects improved during the Napoleonic Wars, though they were never better than lieutenants'. As noted earlier, what changed was the denominator, not the numerator: small ships, including the sloops that were the usual domain of commanders, became increasingly numerous, but lieutenants continued to be rewarded with promotion to commander.

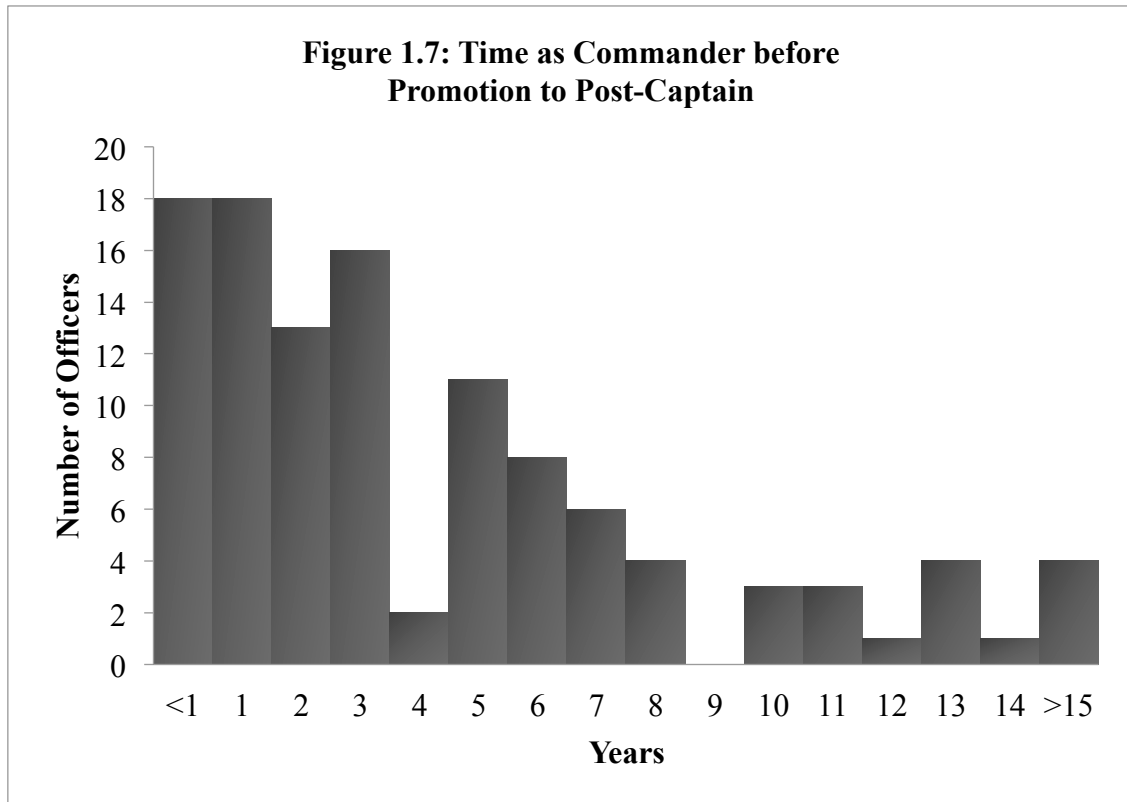
The best-placed officers were promoted from lieutenant to commander at a relatively young age early enough in the wars to have a chance to take the next step. They also tended to be employed directly after their promotions. Sir Henry Nicholls was promoted to commander and given command of the fourteen-gun *Barracouta* in the same week in December 1782. He also made post directly into the *Expedition* in 1788.¹³⁴ John Giffard had a similar story: his promotion to commander coincided with his appointment to the *Raven* in 1796. That ship was his only command at that rank, because he was promoted to post-captain and given command of the *Mignonne* frigate only eight months

¹³² Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 520.

¹³³ Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 101.

¹³⁴ TNA, ADM 9/1/43.

later.¹³⁵ His rapid promotion was typical of officers with good timing. Figure 1.7 focuses on the younger group of commanders to demonstrate that most were on their way to command a rated ship within three years of their promotion to commander:



The chart above is messy, but it does provide a glimpse of the Navy's rising stars moving quickly from lieutenant to commander to post-captain.

Command

The day-to-day responsibilities for both commanders and captains depended, in part, on the size of the officer's ship and her mission. Blockade duty required a captain to maintain discipline and morale in frustrating and boring conditions. Independent cruises against enemy shipping required a captain to demonstrate initiative and energy. Convoy duty required a captain to liaise diplomatically with the merchant captains in his convoy. Some

¹³⁵ TNA, ADM 9/2/19.

captains excelled at one mission, but the Navy's wide range of responsibilities meant that captains had to be flexible and multi-talented. Chaplain Edward Mangin described the responsibilities of Captain Robert Williams:

I saw him responsible for the government and regulation of a new ship, with many refractory and ignorant men on board; in the midst of a hot war, and in front of a powerful enemy, on whose coasts we mostly lay; and where we experienced some heavy gales of wind, and other accidents of a much more distressing nature to a Commander of quick feelings, and long acquaintance with his formidable profession.¹³⁶

A captain was not alone, of course: he relied on his officers for assistance with the day-to-day running of the ship. The master helped him navigate, the purser helped him keep the books, and his lieutenants maintained discipline and the watch schedule. Maintaining good working relationships with his wardroom officers was an essential part of a captain's job. Mangin argues that that naval etiquette, which seemed strange to outsiders, was 'of the utmost importance to the well-being of Naval society; and [*sic*] association of men full of passions and prejudices, huddled together in a floating prison, where even a momentary dereliction of forms might prove fatal to the general interest'.¹³⁷ Thus when Captain William Cumming repeatedly bullied and yelled at his officers, his authority collapsed in recriminations and courts martial. The master, whom he shoved with a speaking trumpet, reported that his feelings were hurt and he was 'degraded and lessened' in the eyes of the ship's company. Cumming was acquitted, but his reputation had suffered a serious blow.¹³⁸

However a captain handled (or mishandled) his relationships with his officers, ultimate responsibility for the ship and her crew rested with him alone. Robert Wilson noted that one consequence of captains' immense power was that each ship was unique:

There are, to be sure, printed directions for to be observed by all King's Ships, but then, generally speaking, most officers have plans of their own which the crews over which they command do follow; and it's a common saying, 'different ships,

¹³⁶ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 15.

¹³⁷ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 16.

¹³⁸ *Naval Courts Martial, 1793–1815*, ed. J.D. Byrn (NRS, 2009), pp. 595–6.

different rules,' for it must be considered that every commanding officer of a vessel of war is like unto a prince in his own state and his crew may be considered as his subjects, for his word is law.¹³⁹

No two ships were the same because no two captains took exactly the same approach to discipline and morale. Much has been written about punishment on board Royal Navy ships during this period.¹⁴⁰ That literature does not need to be summarized here, but it is worth noting the variations from captain to captain highlighted by Wilson. A useful comparison, made by some historians, is to heads of households.¹⁴¹ Surgeon Peter Cullen noted, helpfully if rather pompously, that '[a] seaman looks up to his officer, as a son to his father, whom he knows to be more wise, more experienced, and more skilful than he possibly can be, because scientifically taught [*sic*]'.¹⁴²

Some officers abused this power; others were more skilful. Indeed, as will be noted again and again in this thesis, the common denominator for successful officers seems to have been whether they knew what they were doing. The fundamental dangers of life at sea can never be overlooked. Cullen reminds his readers, 'For promptitude in obeying orders may be the only safety of a ship, or of a fleet.'¹⁴³ There was not always one correct way to handle these perils, and just as each captain handled disciplinary issues differently, each captain responded to the weather, wind, and enemy differently. According to Spanish Admiral Don Domingo Perez de Grandallana, the freedom and independence given to

¹³⁹ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 243.

¹⁴⁰ Some examples include: *Shipboard Life and Organisation, 1731–1815*, ed. B. Lavery (NRS, 1998), pp. 369–416; M. Eder, *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy of the Seven Years' War, 1755–1763* (Aldershot, 2004); J.D. Byrn, *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy: Discipline on the Leeward Islands Station, 1784–1812* (Aldershot, 1989); A.G. Jamieson, 'Tyranny of the Lash? Punishment in the Royal Navy during the American War, 1776–1783', *Northern Mariner* 9 (1999), pp. 53–66; J. Neale, *The Cutlass and the Lash: Mutiny and Discipline in Nelson's Navy* (London, 1985); A.V. Coats and P. MacDougall (eds.), *The Naval Mutinies of 1797: Unity and Perseverance* (Woodbridge, 2011); Rodger, *The Wooden World*, pp. 205–28; Idem, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 489–96; Wareham, *Star Captains*, pp. 208–27.

¹⁴¹ K. Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 1–5.

¹⁴² *Five Naval Journals*, p. 105.

¹⁴³ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 105.

British captains was the Royal Navy's great strength. British officers, he wrote, 'fix their minds on acting with zeal and judgment upon the spur of the moment, and with the certainty that they will not be deserted'. The only expectation was that captains would be bold and support each other in battle. French and Spanish officers, Grandallana complains, operate under a system that 'leans to formality', causing them to hesitate when presented with a dynamic and evolving situation at sea.¹⁴⁴ His assessment is necessarily too simplistic, but his thesis that British officers tended to be more confident in their abilities than their opponents is sustainable. Cullen, again:

For a thoroughbred commander of a ship, whether commercial or naval, must of necessity be a man of science. Mathematics, Astronomy, Navigation, Gunnery, etc. are sciences which the officer must know or he cannot be an officer ... When talking of officers, they must be understood as being men full qualified. There are fools in all professions, which we put aside, and pity or condemn. They may have the name, but not the substance of an officer.¹⁴⁵

Luckily, the Navy had invested a good deal of time and money into ensuring that an officer was worthy of the name, from the education that he received in his six years at sea as a midshipman to his experience as a lieutenant on board a variety of ships around the world. Most men did well enough to avoid court-martial, as will be discussed shortly, and the Navy's record during the Wars suggests that many did far better than that.

Officers who seized their opportunities early in their careers to earn their promotions to post rank were in particularly fortunate positions. As we saw earlier in Figure 1.5, post-captains' employment prospects were generally better than commanders'. Rodger's study estimated that between sixty-one and seventy-three per cent of post-captains were usually employed afloat in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁶ The evidence from the 1817 Admiralty survey suggests that roughly the same percentage had at least one opportunity to command a rated ship. Of the 113 men in the database who were made post,

¹⁴⁴ A. Nicolson, *Men of Honour: Trafalgar and the Making of the English Hero* (London, 2005), pp. 183–4.

¹⁴⁵ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 105.

¹⁴⁶ Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 101.

62 of them survived to 1817 and provided the Admiralty with a summary of their careers. Forty-six of the survivors—or just shy of seventy-five per cent—served as the commanding officer of a rated ship. Since one would expect the number of officers who were employed at least once to be significantly higher than the number of officers usually employed, it is tempting to conclude that Rodger's results are too high; however, the results from the 1817 survey are skewed by the inclusion of a number of men who became post-captains during the flurry of promotions at the end of the Great Wars. For example, James Veitch and James Gifford were both made post on 12 August 1812, and neither commanded a ship again in the Navy; Charles Warde was made post three months after Waterloo, on 18 September 1815, which meant his window to command a ship in wartime had closed.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, post-captains' employment records support the conclusion that there were greater opportunities for them than for commanders.

All post-captains, regardless of their employment prospects, could look forward to being promoted to Rear-Admiral because promotion proceeded by seniority alone. The key difference between a post-captain's responsibilities and an admiral's was the scope of his command. An admiral was no longer responsible for only his ship, and indeed he was not even in direct command of the ship in which he slept. Instead, his responsibilities extended to the squadron, fleet, or station that he commanded. Some newly-promoted admirals had experience commanding squadrons because they had served as commodores. This was a temporary rank used when there was no flag officer present but it was necessary for a senior post-captain to command multiple ships. When a flag officer arrived, or when the squadron disbanded, the commodore lowered his flag and returned to his usual position on the post-captain's seniority list. But few post-captains served as commodores, so a new

¹⁴⁷ TNA, ADM 9/3/647; TNA, ADM 9/3/649; TNA, ADM 9/3/820. Wareham's figure is similar: he records that almost thirty per cent of his sample of post-captains were never employed at that rank. See Wareham, *Star Captains*, p. 21.

admiral generally had limited, if any, experience in managing the egos and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the captains under his command. Even those challenges, though, paled in comparison to those of the most senior admirals who served as commanders-in-chief. Vice-Admiral Sir James Saumarez's tenure in the Baltic from 1807 to 1812 coincided with the imposition of Napoleon's Continental System, a coup d'état in and subsequent 'fake war' with Sweden, and Napoleon's invasion of Russia. Cuthbert, Lord Collingwood's tenure in charge of the Mediterranean fleet after Trafalgar required him to understand the intricacies of British foreign policy from Gibraltar to Algiers to Naples to Istanbul, and then respond appropriately when events changed dramatically, such as the Spanish revolt in 1808. The stress contributed to his premature death in 1810.¹⁴⁸ Much of this chapter has been spent calling attention to the thousands of anonymous and forgotten officers, but for a select few, the pinnacle of the naval profession brought them into a position to influence geopolitical events.

The emphasis must remain on the broader population, though, because Saumarez and Collingwood were in rarefied positions. The time from an officer's promotion to post-captain and his promotion to Rear-Admiral of the Blue was usually so long that many officers did not survive it. The determining factor for an officer's chances of a relatively swift path to the top of the seniority list was the timing of his initial promotion, which will be explored more fully in chapter four. The increase in the number of officers over the course of the wars meant that the post-captains' section of the Navy List grew considerably, slowing the process by which dead (and later, retired) admirals were replaced by a new crop of senior post-captains. Note also that neither gallant conduct nor a strong patron could move an officer from his position on the list. Therefore only a lucky dozen of the officers of this study—all of whom were made post before 1796—managed to

¹⁴⁸ E. Wilson, 'The Careers of James, Lord de Saumarez and Cuthbert, Lord Collingwood, 1748–1836' (University of Cambridge M.Phil thesis, 2008), *passim*.

hoist their flag before the end of the Great Wars, and only one, George Palmer, managed to do so before Trafalgar.

With Trafalgar in mind, it is worth pausing for a brief tangent here to Nelson's career since it dominates the historical literature on the period. As mentioned in the introduction, Nelson's lieutenants' exam is a rough marker for the beginning of the period of the study, and yet not only was he in a position to fly his flag at Trafalgar, but he had been an admiral for seven years. This seems to mark Nelson out as a historical anomaly whose talent and fame elevated him above his peers. But one of the important benefits of the random sample of officers' careers in the present study is that it emphasizes just how ordinary Nelson's career arc was. He was a talented officer with two powerful patrons, and from 1797 to 1805 his success and fame were unmatched. But he still cleared the same career hurdles in the same order and at roughly the same ages as many of his peers in the study. Nelson was a lieutenant at eighteen and a post-captain at twenty.¹⁴⁹ This places him near the head of his class, but it does not explain his later success. Both Edward Leveson Gower and Robert Fanshawe were even more precocious—they were both post-captains at nineteen—but neither officer had the opportunity to command the Mediterranean fleet at Trafalgar. The luckiest aspect of Nelson's career was that he was made post so early in the period, in June 1779. In contrast, Gower was made post in 1795 and Fanshawe in 1801. Thus by the time of the general promotion after the Battle of St Vincent in 1797, Gower was one of the most junior post-captains and Fanshawe was still a midshipman, but Nelson was atop the seniority list and ready to receive his flag. Seven years later, Nelson was the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean and in a position to win the glory he sought, but Gower was still a post-captain and Fanshawe was dead.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Nelson, Horatio, Viscount Nelson (1758–1805)'.

¹⁵⁰ *CSO*, s.v. 'Gower, Edward Leveson' and 'Fanshawe, Robert'; 'Pedigree Resource File: Edward Leveson Gower', *FamilySearch*, accessed 30 Nov. 2012, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.2.1/9HCD-PRG>; Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v.

Nelson's flag came before many of his peers', but the nineteen years he spent waiting for it as a post-captain was typical. (What happened during those nineteen years was not, of course: in addition to his great successes in 1797, the other extraordinary aspect of Nelson was that his career managed to survive his mishandling of Captain Prince William Henry in the Leeward Islands.) For the dozen officers in the study whose promotion to admiral came before 1815, nineteen years was the average time they spent as post-captains. The remainder of the admirals in the study had to wait much longer. None of them were promoted to post-captain before 1796, and the end of the Great Wars delayed their promotions to an average of thirty years later.¹⁵¹ For many officers, Waterloo marked the end of their active careers; their promotion to Rear-Admiral did not reflect their continuing service in the Navy. There were exceptions, of course: James Bowen was Commissioner of the Navy from 1816 to 1825, and Sir Frederick Lewis Maitland was the superintendent of the Portsmouth dockyard from 1832 to 1837.¹⁵² But notice that both appointments were land-based: very few of the officers in the study had active, sea-borne careers after 1815.

Retirement and Death

There were three ways for an officer's career to come to an official end: retirement, court-martial, or death. This section will examine each in turn to provide a rough sketch of the duration and termination of officers' careers, but it is important to emphasize at the outset that the underlying data here is generally poor. The first problem is that the Admiralty struggled to maintain an accurate Navy List, so it is unlikely that two hundred years later

'Fanshawe, Captain Robert (2) (1782–1804)'; *ODNB*, s.v. 'Nelson, Horatio, Viscount Nelson (1758–1805)'.

¹⁵¹ Wareham's figures are similar: he records an average wait of twenty-one years for officers posted in 1783 and 1784. Surprisingly, his sample shows that those posted in 1793 reached flag rank only seventeen years later. It is important to keep in mind that the sample sizes for post-captains are necessarily small. See Wareham, *Star Captains*, p. 20.

¹⁵² *ODNB*, s.v. 'Bowen, James (1751–1835)' and 'Maitland, Sir Frederick Lewis (1777–1839)'.

we will do much better. The second problem is that death data is spotty: some officers simply disappeared from accessible records once their careers ended. Finally, the *de jure* and *de facto* ends of officers' careers were often decades apart. For example, Lieutenant John Smith was mentioned earlier in the context of employment prospects because his active career as a commissioned officer lasted a mere two years, from 1793 to 1795. Yet twenty-two years later, he was ready to answer the Admiralty's survey.¹⁵³ This indicates that, while he was never going to be employed again, he considered himself, in some sense, eligible for employment. He appears in the analysis here as an actively-serving, non-retired officer in 1817.

Despite the problems with the data, it is possible to estimate the average length of an officer's career. There are remarkable extremes in the database: John Manning joined the Navy in 1796 and had only just received his commission when he died in 1802; Sir Davidge Gould joined the Navy in the American War and remained on the active list until his death, even though he lived to be nearly ninety. Manning's career barely lasted six years, while Gould's spanned more than seven decades. The average career length across the database is a more reasonable thirty-five years, and the median is thirty. This suggests that a 'typical' career began in adolescence and lasted through middle age. Removing the primary impediments to a long career from the data sample—deaths and court-martials—generates an average career span of more than forty-five years. In other words, a healthy and competent officer could expect to remain on the active list—without necessarily being active—into his old age.

Unfortunately for the Admiralty, a surprising number of officers fulfilled both criteria, and the result well into the nineteenth century was an aging and bloated Navy list filled, largely, with the officers in this study. The three factors that contributed to the

¹⁵³ TNA, ADM 9/6/1787.

growth of the Navy list have already been mentioned individually. First, officers with poor career prospects such as Lieutenant John Smith insisted on remaining on the active list. The social capital associated with a commission in the Royal Navy was such that few officers were willing to admit the reality of their employment prospects; in any case, there were often few incentives for them to do so, as we will see. Second, though the Navy was engaged in operations around the globe in the decades following the Great Wars, the chances of an officer dying in combat dropped, while at the same time, medical care improved. Thus junior lieutenants who raised their glasses to toast ‘a bloody war or a sickly season’ did so more in hope than in expectation. Finally, the Admiralty had never had such a problem before, and there was no standard retirement scheme in place to deal with it. Therefore the Admiralty’s attempts to cull officers from the list were piecemeal and often ineffective.¹⁵⁴

The word ‘retirement’, in the modern sense of ending one’s career, was in use from the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁵ There was not, however, an official Admiralty retirement programme, so the evidence available in the database cannot be analysed in such a way as to draw sweeping conclusions about how and when officers’ careers ended. Instead, the database’s information is anecdotal. For example, on 1 January 1816, immediately following the end of the Wars, the Admiralty convinced five of the lieutenants in the study to apply for superannuation as a commander. All were over the age of fifty and their active careers were clearly at an end; superannuation was a way to give them a nominal but honourable promotion to commander with the understanding that they would never be employed at that rank, or any other, ever again. A similar scheme in 1830 convinced ten lieutenants and one commander in the study to be effectively retired at the rank of commander. Again, the benefits of an honorary promotion outweighed the costs of

¹⁵⁴ C.J. Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power 1815–1853* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 43–7.

¹⁵⁵ *OED*, s.v. ‘retirement’, 4a.

being removed from active service. The quality and quantity of benefits necessary to tempt an officer to retire increased with seniority, though, and senior officers proved to be the most difficult to eradicate. In 1843, for example, the youngest rear-admiral was fifty-three, but the average full admiral was seventy-six. This did not bode well for the Navy's effectiveness: as one new admiral said, 'Few officers are really good for much after fifty or fifty-five years of age.'¹⁵⁶ Fewer than half of the officers in the database who were on active duty at the age of fifty were successfully retired by the Admiralty. Thus the single most common way for an officer's career to end was a natural death in old age.

In contrast, the least common way for an officer's career to end was a court martial. Fourteen of the officers in the study—about two and a half per cent of the total—were dismissed from the service and never restored. Their crimes covered a wide range. At one extreme was Lieutenant Henry Robert Allen, who was hanged for buggery in the West Indies on 22 April 1797. He was the only commissioned officer in the study to be executed as a result of a court martial.¹⁵⁷ Another unique case was the aforementioned Lieutenant William Walker, who added fifty fictional men to the muster of the *Sparkler* gunboat in order to draw their pay; he also entered his one-year-old son on her books as an able seaman.¹⁵⁸ Commander Robert Tucker was captured while in command of the *Surinam* in the West Indies in 1802. He was exchanged after two years in captivity, but upon his return, he was sentenced to be placed at the bottom of the seniority list and rendered incapable of ever serving again because he had signed a declaration pledging his obedience to the Dutch governor of Curacao.¹⁵⁹ Most of those dismissed from the service were convicted of crimes that fall under the broad category of insubordination: Lieutenant Thomas Walker disobeyed orders while in command of the *Trusty* on convoy duty and was

¹⁵⁶ Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁷ Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Allen, Lieutenant Henry (2) (d. 1797)'.

¹⁵⁸ *The Naval Chronicle*, IV, p. 75.

¹⁵⁹ Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Tucker, Captain (Rtd) Robert (1) (1769–1846)'.

dismissed; Lieutenant Charles Inglis did not abide by the judgment of his first court martial, so he was dismissed after a second.¹⁶⁰ A similar cause of dismissals was neglect of duty: both Lieutenant Archibald Gilchrist and Captain William Smith were dismissed for this reason.¹⁶¹

Duelling and issues of honour will be themes of chapter six, but it is worth noting here that since duelling was illegal, it was possible to be dismissed from the service for it. Lieutenant William Gibson was court-martialled and dismissed for going ashore without leave to fight a duel. Lieutenant William Hill was probably headed for a similar fate when he insulted and shook his fist in the face of a Lieutenant Collet in 1802. Instead, he was court-martialled and dismissed for insubordination rather than challenged to a duel.¹⁶² The most famous example of insubordination is Sir Eliab Harvey, whose reputation for irrational behaviour, alcoholism, and gambling seems to have been well-deserved. After inheriting an immense fortune, he nearly lost £100,000 of it in a dice game; luckily, his opponent allowed him to win back £90,000. The incident that ended his naval career came in 1809 when, frustrated that he did not receive the command he desired, he barged into Admiral Lord Gambier's cabin and 'used vehement and insulting language to Gambier ... showed great disrespect to him ... and treated him in a contemptuous manner'. A year later his connections and strong record of service helped him get reinstated, but he was never again employed at sea.¹⁶³

Despite the examples of dismissals above, being court-martialled did not inevitably result in disciplinary action. On the contrary, courts martial were held whenever a ship was lost, and if the officers had done nothing wrong to cause the loss of the ship, they were

¹⁶⁰ Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Walker, Lieutenant Thomas (d. 1803)' and 'Inglis, Lieutenant Charles (4)'.

¹⁶¹ Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Gilchrist, Lieutenant Archibald (1)' and 'Smith, Captain William (04) (nl 1806)'.

¹⁶² Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Gibson, Lieutenant William' and 'Hill, Lieutenant William (1)'.

¹⁶³ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Harvey, Sir Eliab (1758–1830)'.

honourably acquitted. Some officers sought a court martial to clear their name of any potentially dishonourable associations.¹⁶⁴ Charles Tovey Leaver would not have sought a court martial because he had almost certainly done something wrong. Luckily for him, his court martial was dismissed on a technicality. Leaver had behaved in a cruel and un-officer-like fashion towards John Ansell, a boy on the *Martial* sloop. In fact, even that accusation is an understatement: Ansell died as the result of the punishments inflicted by Leaver. But the complaint against Leaver had not been submitted within a year of the crime, so the case was dismissed.¹⁶⁵ Thirty-six officers in the study, or slightly more than six per cent, appear in court-martial records, and ten of them were acquitted. The percentage of officers who endured a court martial at some point in their careers is probably higher, though, because it was not possible to search all the archival records of courts martial. The Navy Records Society published a volume of court-martial records, but it was not intended to be comprehensive.¹⁶⁶ Officers who were acquitted by a court martial could easily have escaped the notice of the research conducted for the database.

A second, relatively uncommon way for an officer's career to end was premature death. Only twelve per cent of officers in the database died from causes related to their service in the Navy, but this number should be treated with care. Double that number—twenty-four per cent—died from unknown causes at an age and time that suggests that they, too, could have died on active duty. It would be unwise to argue either that twelve per cent is an accurate representation of the rate of unnatural death among all the officers of the period or that we should add the two groups together to produce a rate of thirty-six per cent. We can, however, draw some general conclusions about causes of death. For example, only four per cent of the officers in the database were killed in combat. Because

¹⁶⁴ *Naval Courts Martial*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁵ Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Leaver, Lieutenant Charles Tovey (d. 1826)'.

¹⁶⁶ *Naval Courts Martial*.

commissioned officer casualties were usually well-publicized, few of the officers with unknown causes of death died in combat. In other words, despite more than two decades of almost uninterrupted operations, death in combat was rare for the Royal Navy's officers: most survived encounters with the enemy or avoided them altogether. Similarly, the same number of officers in the database died in shipwrecks as died in combat, and this, too, is probably an accurate reflection of the rate in the population of naval officers. But the third major killer, disease, presents problems. There are sixteen cases in the database of officers who died from confirmed diseases: fourteen of them were yellow fever in the West Indies, one was cholera, and one was smallpox. Whereas an officer killed in combat was worthy of some attention, either in contemporary newspaper accounts or in subsequent histories, an officer who died from yellow fever was not. Of the twenty-four per cent of officers with unknown causes of death, many probably died from a disease like yellow fever. More data is necessary for firmer conclusions.

A survey of the other confirmed causes of death for officers in the database indicates that disease, though a major killer, was not the only danger. Three officers committed suicide: two were lieutenants, but one, John Conn, was a post-captain who threw himself overboard while commanding the *Swiftsure* near Bermuda.¹⁶⁷ A fourth officer, Commander John Wesley Wright, was found dead in his cell in French captivity; the French claimed he committed suicide. Given that from 1804 until his death in 1805, Commander Wright had attempted to land Royalist insurgents on the French coast, conspired to assassinate Napoleon, and attempted to escape, it is much more likely that he was murdered.¹⁶⁸ Lieutenant Thomas Connell also died in French captivity, but, in all

¹⁶⁷ Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. 'Conn, Captain John (1764–1810)'. There is some debate about the cause of Conn's death. See the discussion at <http://www.ageofnelson.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=130&start=0> (accessed Nov. 2012) and C. White, *The Trafalgar Captains* (London, 2005) for more information.

¹⁶⁸ *The Naval Chronicle*, XXXIV, pp. 177–264; *The European Magazine, and London Review* (London, 1815), Vol. 68, pp. 515–19.

probability, neither his captors nor even the living conditions were responsible.

Commander Wright was imprisoned in the Temple in Paris, whereas Lieutenant Connell enjoyed the relative freedom and luxury of the British community established in Verdun.¹⁶⁹ Three officers in the study died while fighting the greatest threat to a wooden sailing ship—fire—and two of them died in the same incident: Andrew Todd was the captain of the *Queen Charlotte* when she caught fire off Leghorn in 1800, and William Bainbridge was one of his lieutenants. It was later reported that Captain Todd shot himself amid the flames to avoid a more painful death.¹⁷⁰ Finally, Charles John Cary, 9th Viscount Falkland, was dismissed from the service by court martial for drunkenness and ungentlemanlike conduct; two years later, he became the only officer in the database to die in a duel.¹⁷¹ Overall, though, survival rates for officers were good. For officers for whom birth and death dates can be sufficiently estimated or confirmed, only fifteen per cent died before their thirtieth birthdays. Sixty per cent died before their sixtieth birthdays, but both the mean and median ages at death for the officers in the database were just short of fifty-three, indicating that a large percentage of officers lived well into and past middle age.



In many ways, the rough outline of this chapter is well-known: a ‘typical’ officer joined the Navy in adolescence, often through naval connections; he spent six years at sea and passed for lieutenant around his twentieth birthday; and he struggled to secure gainful employment in peacetime. But this outline misses key elements of his experience that this chapter identified. First, the range of ages at which future officers joined the Navy varied widely, though forty per cent did enter between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Since

¹⁶⁹ Marioné, *Complete Navy List*, s.v. ‘Connell, Lieutenant Thomas (d. 1811)’.

¹⁷⁰ *The Naval Chronicle*, IV, pp. 301–3.

¹⁷¹ *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage*, I, p. 1383. Published online by *The Peerage*, accessed 30 Nov. 2012, at <http://thepeerage.com/p2642.htm#i26412>.

seamanship was best learned at sea at a young age, there were strong incentives for parents to place their children on board a Navy ship at a young age. Young entrants often spent the required six years at sea well before their twentieth birthdays, so a combination of pressure to get a step ahead of their peers and sheer convenience meant that, by the end of the period, nearly forty per cent falsified their birth certificates. Even those who passed earlier in the period falsified birth certificates at a much higher rate than has been previously assumed, and there does not seem to have been a correlation between an officer's social background and his tendency to lie to the Admiralty. Thus even before an officer was commissioned, the spectre of impending unemployment put pressure on him to distinguish himself from his peers.

Commissioned officers' employment prospects were not good, even in wartime. There were usually two lieutenants and two post-captains for every open position; during the French Revolutionary Wars, there were as many as five commanders for every sloop and brig. Rodger's proposal that there were two types of commanders—those destined for a quick promotion to post rank and those destined for retirement—is supported by the analysis in this chapter. What has not been noted before, though, is how few officers became either kind of commander: sixty-three per cent of all commissioned officers never served on active duty as anything other than a lieutenant. These men, forgotten by most historians, formed the core of the Navy's officer corps. This chapter has gone some way toward rescuing them from obscurity.

One reason lieutenants rarely receive the attention they deserve is that the Navy seems to be full of heroes: Nelson dominates the literature, but dashing frigate captains like Cochrane and Pellew and talented statesmen like Saumarez and Collingwood have also provided generations of historians with great stories. The database serves as a reminder that such men and such stories were rare: for example, only six per cent of

officers served as admirals, and only a very select few received peerages for their service. This chapter shifts the historical emphasis down the Navy's ranks to the thousands of officers who carried out the Navy's everyday tasks. It demonstrates that, despite chronic unemployment problems, the Navy's officers were a diverse group of expertly-trained men whose successes defended Britain from invasion, ruined Napoleon's Continental System, and supplied Wellington's army. They also protected innumerable merchant ships, projected British power to every coastline in the world, and, after a difficult start, successfully waged a second war with the United States. Ironically, these successes raised the Navy's profile and attracted more young men to its ranks, exacerbating the unemployment problem. But the Navy's glory touched even the most downtrodden and unemployed junior lieutenant. After examining the careers of his colleagues in the wardroom and his social origins, this thesis will examine the implications of that phenomenon for the officer and for eighteenth-century British society.

CHAPTER TWO

Particular Skills

Warrant Officers' Careers

At the beginning of October 1813, HMS *Phoebe*, a thirty-six-gun frigate under the command of James Hillyar, arrived at the mouth of the Tumbes River, near the border of present-day Peru and Ecuador. *Phoebe* was a well-travelled ship: she had relayed Nelson's signals at Trafalgar, assisted with the invasion of Java, and, most recently, chased down three American privateers in the Atlantic.¹ Her present mission was to find a much more dangerous foe, the thirty-six-gun American frigate *Essex*, currently preying on British whaling vessels in the Pacific. *Phoebe* had arrived at the anchorage on 3 October and was undergoing a much-needed refit. Her crew was employed re-setting the rigging and ferrying fresh water, meat and vegetables from shore to ship. By 9 October, the refit was nearly complete, and Captain Hillyar sent the ship's purser, John Surflen, ashore to settle the ship's accounts. Surflen had had a busy week: it was his job to account for all the ship's supplies. He filled his pockets with silver dollars from his chest and joined Lieutenant Jago and a few crewmen in the waiting boat. Neither Jago nor Surflen made it to shore. Even though the officers and men of the *Phoebe* had spent nearly a week learning how to deal with the tricky sandbar at the river's mouth, the boat capsized in the surf. Hillyar immediately sent boats to attempt a rescue, but Jago, Surflen, and able seaman Joseph Findley all drowned.² Surflen was particularly unlucky: as Hillyar later explained to his widow, the weight of the silver dollars in his pockets dragged him under the water.³

¹ R. Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail, 1793–1817* (London, 2005), s.v. 'HMS *Phoebe*'.

² TNA, ADM 51/2675 (Admiralty: Captains' Logs. *Phoebe*, 3–9 Oct. 1813).

³ TNA, ADM 6/323–6 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Register of officers' widows & orphans applying to the Compassionate Fund, 1809–27).

Losing an able seaman, a warrant officer, and a commissioned officer while thousands of miles from home was not quite disastrous, but it certainly put pressure on the ship's company. The accident forced some men into unfamiliar positions with significant responsibilities. Hillyar's immediate priority was to replace his second lieutenant. He had plenty of options, even though the *Phoebe* was far from a British base. There were eleven midshipmen and master's mates on board, and he chose Henry Gardner, a nineteen-year-old master's mate from Scotland. His second priority was to replace his purser, and for that role he chose one of his clerks, Nicholas Nickenson. Gardner's responsibility was greater in terms of the ship's sailing and performance, but Nickenson's job was also crucial. On the far side of the world with a dangerous chase of unknown length ahead of them, Hillyar had to trust that Nickenson could keep an accurate account of the ship's supplies. To ensure that Nickenson made no mistakes—and to satisfy the regulations of the Victualing Board—Hillyar and the ship's master, John Miller, both recorded the current state of supplies in their respective logs the same day that Nickenson was appointed.⁴ There was no margin for error.

Despite their importance in the day-to-day operations of the Royal Navy's ships in the wars with France, pursers like Surflen and Nickenson and masters like Miller have been largely neglected by historians. Far more attention has been paid in the historical literature to commissioned officers. Yet commissioned and warrant officers lived and worked side by side in the wardroom and on the quarterdeck. It is important to note at the outset that the term warrant officer is rather unhelpful in this context. The boatswain, gunner and carpenter were also warrant officers, but they were not deemed to be 'of wardroom rank'. Even some ratings, such as the armourer and the master at arms, were technically warrant officers. To be more specific, then, this chapter focuses on the warrant

⁴ TNA, ADM 51/2675; TNA, ADM 52/4237 (Admiralty: Masters' Logs. *Phoebe*, 11 Oct. 1813).

officers of wardroom rank: masters, pursers, chaplains, and surgeons. Even this grouping is problematic since chaplains and surgeons were not guaranteed a wardroom place. One study argues that warrant officers' social status determined whether they were members of the wardroom on a case-by-case basis.⁵ Those who were of sufficient status dined and socialized with commissioned officers. Membership of the wardroom was prized because of the status it brought, but also for more practical concerns: members could access the wardroom quarter-gallery, otherwise known as the officers' latrine. Marine officers were also wardroom members with access to the latrine, but there is neither time nor space to discuss their career structures here. In any case, the recent work of Britt Zerbe covers much of the relevant material.⁶ The same cannot be said for the other members of the wardroom, though, and this chapter is aimed at filling that glaring hole in the current historiography. Its goal is to restore warrant officers to their rightful place alongside the Navy's celebrated commissioned officers.

To make meaningful comparisons with chapter one, this chapter describes the career arcs of warrant officers. It is organized thematically and much of it is comparative, both among warrant officers and to commissioned officers. Such an approach presents one challenge in particular: warrant officers were not a homogenous group. Masters were skilled mariners and navigators, while chaplains often had no prior experience at sea or, indeed, any clearly defined role on board. Surgeons and pursers were experts in their own fields, but there were few similarities between their skills and those of other officers. Some made careers out of the Navy, just as commissioned officers did, while others used the Navy as a training ground for a later career spent largely ashore. A comparative approach emphasizes the diversity of the Navy's wardrooms and provides a platform for examining

⁵ B. Vale and G. Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet: The Life and Times of Thomas Trotter, 1760–1832* (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 39.

⁶ B. Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines, 1664–1802* (Woodbridge, 2013).

the wardroom as a social space in chapter three. What emerges from this research is the first clear picture of the career patterns of warrant officers.

Finally, as with commissioned officers, this chapter also approaches the population of warrant officers from the perspective of Admiralty administrators. The Admiralty's failure to regulate the labour market for commissioned officers, discussed in chapter one, extended to warrant officers as well. Whereas the Admiralty could not control commissioned officer entries and had a surplus of qualified men, they faced a shortage of warrant officers. Examining the labour market for warrant officers fills in the missing pieces of the quarterdeck manpower problem, which has largely escaped the notice of historians of British naval administration. The Admiralty's repeated efforts to solve the lower deck manpower problem stands in stark contrast with its hands-off approach to regulating and recruiting warrant officers.⁷ Of the three labour markets—lower deck, warrant officers, and commissioned officers—the warrant officer market was the smallest. But that does not diminish its importance: masters, pursers, and surgeons were essential members of every ship's company.

Definitions and Administration

Pursers, chaplains and surgeons were 'essentially landmen whose particular skills were needed afloat'.⁸ Masters' particular skills were seamanship and navigation. How the four warrant officer positions came to be housed together in the wardrooms of the eighteenth century Navy is the focus of this section. It must, therefore, briefly reach far outside the chronological bounds of the thesis to the medieval Navy to uncover the origins of warrant officer positions.

⁷ J. Dancy, 'British Naval Manpower during the French Revolutionary Wars, 1793–1802' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil thesis, 2012).

⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, *Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660–1649* (London, 1997), p. 306.

Richard of Doncaster is perhaps the first purser (or supply officer) whose name we know; he was the clerk of the York galley in 1295. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century pursers sometimes had to stake a significant amount of their own money to pay the men and supply the ship, and for that reason they often served as the owner's representative on merchantmen. They had more responsibilities than their eighteenth-century descendants. In addition to keeping the books, victualing the ship, and mustering the company, pursers were often also responsible for paying for necessary repairs. They handled money on board and kept accounts, and before the sixteenth century they did so largely independent of the state. With that history in mind, Rodger calls the creation of a naval administration in 1546 'the single most important achievement of sixteenth-century England in relation to sea power' because it made England capable of maintaining a permanent Navy. The new positions of Treasurer, Controller, and Surveyor of the Navy were particularly significant for pursers because they brought victualing under central control for the first time.⁹

Eighteenth-century pursers inherited a reformed and expanded version of this Tudor administration. The relationship between pursers and the Victualing Board lacked the crucial element of trust, however, and pursers' daily responsibilities often put them in financial distress.¹⁰ The remnants of the medieval purser's ties to the owners of merchantmen can be seen in the ways in which the Board held pursers personally accountable for the slightest discrepancies in incredibly complex accounts. Pursers tracked the consumption of every man on board. Shipboard life for a purser therefore meant spending a good deal of time shuttling between his books and the hold. A useful image can be found in the *Mary Rose* museum: the purser's skeleton survived the centuries underwater, and the display describing his position on board shows him sitting alone on his

⁹ Rodger, *Safeguard of the Sea*, pp. 221, 306.

¹⁰ J. Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (London, 2006), pp. 92–6. Financial issues are covered more fully in chapter four.

chest in a dark cabin under the water line as the ship sinks.¹¹ Isolated and often resented on board, it was the purser's duty to track and limit the consumption of all foodstuffs, particularly alcohol. Savvy pursers worked hard to ensure that the cooper was an honest ally in their regular surveys of the quantity and quality of the ship's perishable supplies. But pursery was in general a thankless task.¹²

Chaplains could also be shipboard pariahs, particularly if, as was sometimes the case, they preached about the evils of piracy on board sixteenth century privateers. Reforms in 1626 provided the first official establishment of chaplains in the Navy, but as far back as the fifteenth century there is evidence of chaplains on board Navy ships. Priests have served on vessels at sea since there have been vessels at sea, of course, and so one historian's claim that the first chaplain in the British Isles was a priest named Utta in 651 cannot be discounted.¹³ Our knowledge of the sixteenth century Navy rests on firmer ground. Thirteen chaplains sailed against the Armada; each, though, was in the retinue of a nobleman rather than on the pay books of the Navy.¹⁴ It was not until the seventeenth century that naval administrators began to regulate chaplains consistently. The Admiralty delineated chaplains' responsibilities in 1677. The first resolution was 'that care be taken as much as may be, that no ship or vessel in His Majesty's do go to sea without a chaplain'. Many ships did just that, as we will explore in more depth later. But the second resolution garnered better results: 'That no chaplain be employed till he hath first been approved by his Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of London.'¹⁵ Chaplains now had at least a nominal barrier to entry into the Navy, and the warrants they

¹¹ 'The Men of the *Mary Rose*', *Mary Rose* Museum, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://www.maryrose.org/discover-our-collection/her-crew/the-people-on-board/>.

¹² N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis, 1986), pp. 87–98.

¹³ G. Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains: A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy* (Oxford, 1978), p. 1.

¹⁴ Rodger, *Safeguard of the Sea*, pp. 139, 306–7.

¹⁵ Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, pp. 92–3.

were issued subsumed them into the growing naval bureaucracy. The sixteenth-century practice of noble officers bringing personal chaplains on board was not dead—William Hogarth’s famous painting of Lord George Graham and his retinue, chaplain included, dates from 1744.¹⁶ But Graham’s chaplain was also the ship’s chaplain, and by the end of that century, most chaplains went to sea independently and were paid by the Navy.

In theory, a chaplain’s daily responsibilities were straightforward. The officers and crew were his parishioners, and he ministered to them in much the same way that he would ashore. Divine service was to be performed twice a day, and the chaplain would preach on Sundays. In practice, however, chaplains in the eighteenth century often struggled to carve out a place for themselves in shipboard life. The first three quarters of the century are notable for the general absence of worship services on Navy ships at sea. One warrant officer claimed in 1743 that he had heard prayers on board once in his life. Surviving accounts of divine services usually describe them as taking place while the ship was in port. Wartime operations and foul weather tended to take precedence over divine service, though there are examples from early in the century of chaplains being called upon to lead prayers for a favourable wind. Later in the century, divine services became more common and more chaplains found a home on board ship. Religion, though, was often a secondary consideration. Instead, divine services, some officers thought, could help shore up discipline in the face of threats to social stability such as revolutionary France or the mutinies of 1797.¹⁷ Chaplains were not necessary even then, however: the *Phoebe*’s captain conducted divine services frequently without a chaplain on board.¹⁸ In combat, the chaplain’s purpose was clearer: he ministered to the wounded and dying. Arthur William

¹⁶ W. Hogarth, ‘Captain Lord George Graham, 1715–47, in his Cabin’, oil on canvas, 1742–4, NMM, Object ID BHC2720. For a fuller treatment of early modern chaplains and their patrons, see H. Adlington et al. (eds.), *Chaplains in Early Modern England: Patronage, Literature and Religion* (Manchester, 2013), especially chapter ten.

¹⁷ N.A.M. Rodger, ‘The Naval Chaplain in the Eighteenth Century’, *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995), pp. 33–42.

¹⁸ TNA, ADM 51/2675.

Devis' famous painting of the death of Nelson features Alexander Scott, the *Victory*'s chaplain, rubbing Nelson's chest to relieve pain.¹⁹

Chaplain Edward Mangin, whose journal is frequently cited in the exiting literature on chaplains and was cited in chapter one, deserves a brief consideration. He admits at the beginning of the manuscript of his journal that his goal was 'to show how much out of place a clergyman is in a ship-of-war, especially in war time'. Unsurprisingly, then, little that he wrote about his time on board the *Gloucester* in 1812 reflected well on the daily role of naval chaplains. He bemoaned that he was 'with a gentleman's education but without a sufficient income'; upon joining his ship, he suffered 'many vicissitudes' including 'dwelling in a prison, within whose narrow limits were to be found Constraint, Disease, Ignorance, Insensibility, Tyranny, Sameness, Dirt and Foul air: and in addition, the dangers of Ocean, Fire, Mutiny, Pestilence, Battle and Exile'. Mangin's descriptions of the hardships he endured are useful, up to a point, and many of the contradictions he highlights between the theory of naval chaplaincy and the reality of life at sea are legitimate. For example, he was unwelcome in the sick-bay because '[t]he entrance of the clergyman is, to a poor seaman, often a fatal signal'. However, as other historians have noted, he was temperamentally unsuited to naval life. His hyperbolic declarations undermine his arguments: '[T]o convert a man-of-war's crew into Christians would be a task to which the courage of Loyola, the philanthropy of Howard, and the eloquence of St Paul united, would prove inadequate.'²⁰ It would be unwise to take Mangin's journal as representative of the state of naval chaplaincy in the wars.

The same 1626 reforms that established the position of chaplain also established the position of surgeon. As with chaplains, there are numerous examples of surgeons at sea

¹⁹ A.W. Devis, 'The Death of Nelson, 21 October 1805', oil on canvas, 1807, NMM, Object ID BHC2894.

²⁰ *Five Naval Journals, 1789–1817*, ed. H.G. Thursfield (NRS, 1951), pp. 7–14, 37.

well before then. The 1513 fleet had four master surgeons and ‘diverse other petty surgeons’, and even more sailed in the Spanish War at the end of the century. The mid-century Tudor reforms even created some provisions for employing physicians on the largest warships, though surgeons were more common.²¹ Those reforms also created the Navy Board, which ran the civil branch of the Navy: its dockyards, supplies, and shipbuilding activities. Medical practice at sea and the supervision of surgeons also fell under its purview because the Navy Board supervised the Commissioners for Sick and Wounded Seamen, known more commonly as the Sick and Hurt Board. The administrative history of this body is not one of steady progress and growth. It tended to exist only in wartime: from 1689 to 1698, and again from 1702 to 1715, for example.²² The Sick and Hurt Board provided primarily financial and administrative oversight; though there were two physicians included in its 1702 to 1715 manifestation, most of the supervision of surgeons was done by men with no medical training.²³ Instead, the Navy relied on the Company of Barbers and Surgeons, later just the Surgeons’ Company, to examine candidates for warrants.

The examination process will be described later. A newly warranted surgeon’s first task was to purchase his medical supplies with his own money. Supplies could be very expensive: a petition from naval surgeons to the First Lord in 1780 claimed that the initial outlay could be as high as £60.²⁴ Once on board, his purview was the sick bay.²⁵ He visited

²¹ Rodger, *Safeguard of the Sea*, p. 306.

²² N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), pp. 194–5.

²³ Vale and Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet*, pp. 20–21.

²⁴ *British Naval Documents, 1204–1960*, eds. J.B. Hattendorf et al. (NRS, 1993), no. 318.

²⁵ Or at least it was supposed to be. Graham Moore, uncharacteristically, intervened to prescribe his own treatment for a ‘putrid fever’ in the West Indies. The surgeon treated one patient ‘by purging, vomiting and a keeping him on a diet of sago and bark’. Moore gave a second patient cold baths. Neither treatment worked, as both patients died, though Moore’s lived three days longer. Wareham records that Moore had ‘little time for the medical man’s opinion, believing that he knew as much as the Doctor when it came to treatment’. T. Wareham, *Frigate Commander* (Barnsley, 2004), p. 201.

the sick twice a day and kept a journal and a record of cases for the Sick and Hurt Board. Surgeons' journals were closely inspected, and surgeons who neglected to send them to the Board could face severe penalties.²⁶ Of more immediate relevance was the sick-list he presented to the captain. His mates were responsible for mustering the sick for his inspection. They also helped him track his medical supplies, and they performed the necessary menial tasks around the sick bay. Mangin has a typically disparaging description of the sick bay of the *Gloucester*, a seventy-four:

[The sick bay] is forward on the half-deck, and close to the ship's head, which is the general water-closet for the crew. Add to this, that, whenever it blows fresh, the sea, defiled by a thousand horrible intermixtures, comes, more or less, into the hospital ... augmenting most severely the misery of the patients who amounted to the usual number of eighteen or twenty men, labouring under the common afflictions to which seamen are liable.²⁷

The 'common afflictions' included ulcers, bruises, hernias, difficulty breathing, lacerations, dislocations and fractures from falls, 'and one or two cases of burning fever'.

Mangin continues his description of the sick bay:

The place [is] less than six feet high; narrow, noisesome and wet: the writhings, sighs, and moans of acute pain; the pale countenance, which looks like resignation, but is despair; bandages soaked in blood and matter; the fœtor of sores, and the vermin from which it is impossible to preserve the invalid entirely free!²⁸

In combat, the surgeon and his mates retreated from the exposed sick bay to the orlop deck, a dark and dank space below the waterline and just above the hold. Protected from the worst of the fighting, he and his assistants set up an operating area, gathered the necessary instruments, and awaited the onslaught of casualties.²⁹

Masters' origins are the most complicated of the warrant officers. Medieval masters were analogous to commissioned officers: as the title 'master' suggests, they were once in

²⁶ See, for example, the case of John Hallett: TNA, ADM 11/40 (Admiralty: Officers' Service Records (Series I). Analysis of surgeons' services for superannuation, 1808) and TNA, ADM 104/12 (Admiralty: Service Registers and Registers of Deaths and Injuries, 1774–1807).

²⁷ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 28–9.

²⁸ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 29.

²⁹ D. McLean, *Surgeons of the Fleet: The Royal Navy and its Medics from Trafalgar to Jutland* (London, 2010), p. 4.

command of ships. Thirteenth-century ships had a crew with a steersman in command. By the fourteenth century, the steersman had become the master. Rodger summarizes, ‘The master of a ship in the Middle Ages was in almost all circumstances of peace or war in sole command of his ship, and it was common for the masters of merchantmen also to be their owners.’ The master remained in overall command even when senior military officers were present, and he was only subordinate to an admiral. In the fifteenth century, ships’ masters gained the new title of captain, but they continued to be the experts in seamanship and navigation. The degree of expertise in those areas in the fifteenth century was, however, limited. Until the 1550s, masters were essentially coastal pilots, and few had ventured out of sight of land. But in part thanks to Philip II’s efforts, knowledge of navigation in England advanced rapidly so that, by the end of the century, English mathematicians had leapfrogged their continental contemporaries and were making new discoveries.³⁰ As with the other warrant officers, Tudor reforms created the administration that monitored masters. Trinity House in Deptford gained its royal charter from Henry VIII to regulate pilotage on the Thames; by the seventeenth century, their responsibilities had expanded to include examining masters on behalf of the Navy.³¹

Unlike other warrant officers, for whom administrative oversight created a permanent position in the Navy, masters suffered from the Navy’s newfound administrative coherence and rising social status. Eighteenth-century masters were little different in terms of their skill set and background from their medieval predecessors, but the Navy around them had changed. No longer were masters the only experts in seamanship and navigation on board. In the late sixteenth century, gentlemen captains began to seize the opportunities offered by trans-oceanic navigation and the administrative

³⁰ Rodger, *Safeguard of the Sea*, pp. 137–9, 160, 304–6

³¹ ‘A Brief History of Trinity House’, Trinity House, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://www.trinityhouse.co.uk/pdfs/info-sheets/a_brief_history_of_trinity_house.pdf.

and financial support of the state to infringe on the professional territory of masters. By the 1630s, gentlemen captains began to consider the Navy as a career. The creation of the rank of lieutenant particularly rankled masters because it created a parallel career structure and path to command. Some masters did manage to become captains—the famous so-called ‘tarpaulins’—but more were crowded out by the influx of career-oriented young men of good birth.³² Though the conflict between gentlemen and tarpaulin captains had been largely resolved by the creation of a professional standard for commissioned officers at the end of the seventeenth century, eighteenth-century masters were leftover casualties of that conflict. If commissioned officers could sail and navigate, then masters were redundant. Yet masters endured throughout the period and were considered essential for all ships. Bureaucratic momentum is surely one explanation, but another is that it was not possible to have too many experienced sailors and navigators on board. Lewis has a useful turn of phrase: ‘[T]he main quality required of a Master was trustworthiness, for no one on board, perhaps, had so many opportunities of drowning the whole Ship’s Company.’³³ Captains often relied heavily on masters’ expertise, as indicated by the usual practice of the captain simply copying the navigational record from the master’s log into his own. Master Thomas Fotheringham remembered from his experience at the battle of Copenhagen in 1801: ‘My Captain, being all anxiety to get up, stated that my honour was at stake as well as his ... and desired to know what was best to be done.’³⁴

Masters had such an important place in the shipboard hierarchy because they were the only warrant officers who normally stood watches. A master’s daily responsibilities therefore included four or more hours spent as the senior officer on duty. At noon, he joined the commissioned officers and midshipmen on the quarterdeck to measure the

³² Rodger, *Safeguard of the Sea*, pp. 137–9, 160, 304–6, 409–10.

³³ M. Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815* (London, 1960), pp. 240–41.

³⁴ TNA, ADM 11/2 (Admiralty: Officers’ Service Records (Series I). Survey of Masters’ Services, Nos.3–249, 1833–5).

distance from the sun to the horizon. He recorded his calculation of the ship's position in his log, as well as the state of the wind and weather. In all matters of navigation, the master was second only to the captain in importance. He was also one of only three men, along with the captain and the first lieutenant, who signed all the important documents of the ship such as the muster and pay books.³⁵ Robert Wilson described the duty of a master as navigation first, followed by 'to be a check on the purser' by inspecting the ship's books. 'He is on par with the lieutenants', Wilson writes. Captain William Pryce Cumby, in his order book, made monitoring the ship's provisions the master's first responsibility, before mentioning anything about the master's log or navigation.³⁶ Such responsibilities were not taken lightly. Graham Moore records an incident in which a master refused to sign a receipt for ship's provisions because he knew that the food was substandard. The admiral put enormous pressure on him to sign the documents to avoid a time-consuming and frustrating dispute with the contractors, but the master refused and won the argument because signing the receipts would have 'materially [affected] his conscience'. Moore also emphasized the degree to which commissioned officers could rely on masters when he confidently left a ship fitting for sea to go visit a friend ashore because, he wrote, 'the duty would go on equally as well under the eye of the Master'.³⁷ Unquestionably a member of the wardroom, the master often lived in one of the two the aft-most cabins, across from the first lieutenant. In a seventy-four gun ship, the master's cabin often contained a coveted stern window.³⁸ In an emergency, or in combat, the master would assume more responsibility for the ship's course and safety. The captain held ultimate responsibility, but the master was an important advisor.

³⁵ Lewis, *Social History*, pp. 240–41.

³⁶ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 250, 337–8.

³⁷ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, pp. 29, 5.

³⁸ B. Lavery, *The 74-gun Ship Bellona*, revised edn. (London, 2003), p. 80.

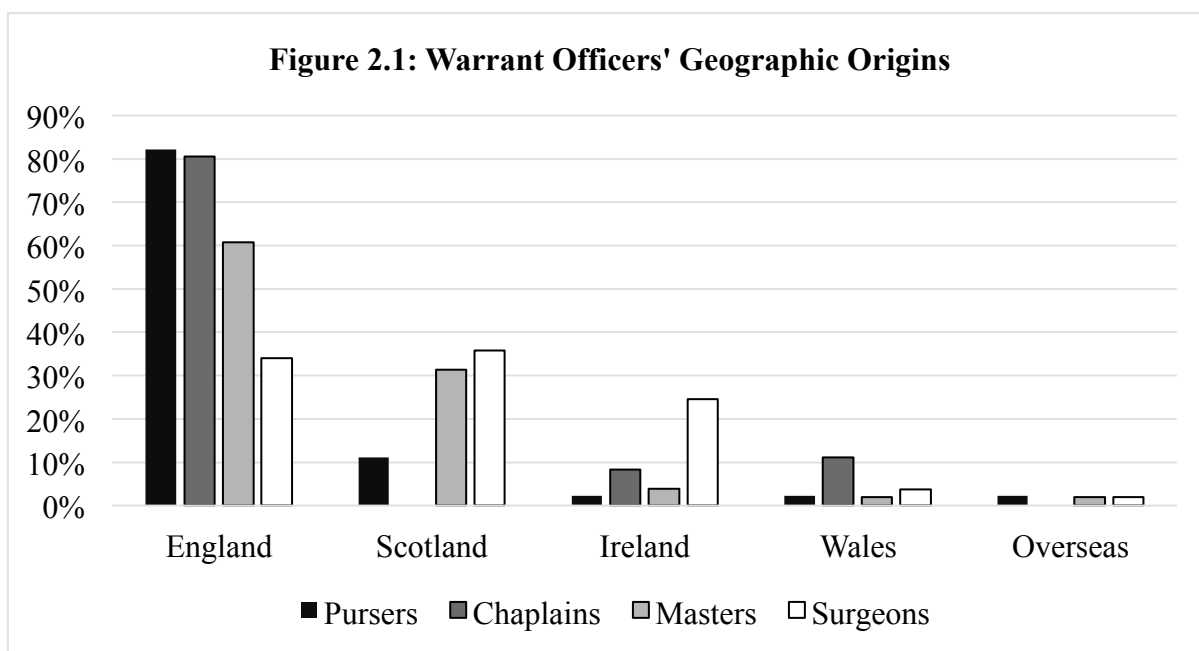
To summarize, each warrant officer on board a ship in the eighteenth century could trace the origins of his position back to the medieval Navy. Each also reported to a different civilian administrative body: masters obtained their qualifications from Trinity House, surgeons from the Surgeons' Company, and chaplains from the Bishop of London or the Archbishop of Canterbury. The civil branch of the Navy supervised pursers. In other words, warrant officers often had one foot in the civilian world and one foot in the military world. They came to live together in the wardroom alongside career-oriented commissioned officers. Collectively, they were responsible for the daily operations of the ship.³⁹

Geographic Origins

The geographic origins of warrant officers are revealing but unsurprising. For example, Cardwell's study of surgeons confirmed what naval historians had long suspected: surgeons were disproportionately Scottish and Irish.⁴⁰ The present database can confirm that result, and it also reveals the patterns of the geographic origins of the other members of the wardroom. As noted in chapter one, members of the Navy's wardrooms were less likely than members of the lower deck to be born overseas. Figure 2.1 shows the places of birth by percentage for each warrant officer group in the database:

³⁹ Though they were heavily reliant on the other warrant officers not of wardroom rank, namely the boatswain, gunner, and carpenter, and their mates. Restricting the present analysis to wardroom officers obscures the essential role that these other warrant officers played in daily operations and discipline.

⁴⁰ J. Cardwell, 'Royal Navy Surgeons, 1793–1815: A Collective Biography', in D.B. Haycock and S. Archer (eds.), *Health and Medicine at Sea, 1700–1900* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 40.



Scottish and Irish surgeons are immediately obvious in the chart. There are only minor differences between the present database and Cardwell's: the percentage of Scottish surgeons is nearly identical—thirty-six versus thirty-seven—but the English and Irish percentages are reversed. Cardwell found one third of all surgeons were born in Ireland, while the present database found that one third were born in England.⁴¹ The overarching point, that surgeons were anomalies in the wardroom in terms of their origins, does not change. The simplest explanation for this pattern is that educational opportunities were significantly greater for surgeons in Ireland and Scotland, as will be discussed later.

The other anomaly is masters, whose Scottish origins have not been previously uncovered. Nearly one in three masters in the present database seems to have been Scottish, but, unlike surgeons, the remaining majority was heavily English rather than split between England and Ireland. The sample size here is small—masters' records were the most difficult to uncover—and the percentage of Scottish masters may be considerably exaggerated. If not, however, then it is likely that the explanation for the pattern is that many Scottish masters came from the coasting and fishing trade, particularly in the North

⁴¹ Cardwell, 'Royal Navy Surgeons', p. 40.

Sea. Murdo Downie, from Aberdeen, had a side career publishing charts and descriptions of his tricky home waters: he surveyed the east coast of Scotland in 1792 and published a chart; later in his long career, he was cited as a North Sea expert in *The New Seaman's Guide, and Coaster's Companion*.⁴² Donald McNiven was the master of at least two merchant ships during the American War. A merchant career was common for masters, as we saw with James Bowen and will discuss later, but what sets McNiven apart is that the Americans captured him in both vessels. The second, the *Argyle*, is described in the archives as a Scottish fishing vessel.⁴³ Both Downie and McNiven grew up in the maritime communities of Scotland, and those communities may have provided a disproportionate number of expert masters to the Navy. English-born masters such as James Bowen were also likely to come from maritime communities: seamanship, as emphasized in the first chapter, was a lifelong skill.

Pursers' geographic origins are not particularly noteworthy. Of the wardroom officers, their background profile most closely matches that of commissioned officers: a large majority were from England, and the largest minority group was from Scotland. There are fewer Irish and Welsh pursers than there are Irish and Welsh commissioned officers, but it is unlikely that this is a significant result. Finally, chaplains came, unsurprisingly, from Church of England territory: there are no Scottish chaplains in the database, nor are there any from overseas. Non-English chaplains were Welsh or Irish, and the latter tended to come from the north: examples include Joseph Pilkington and George Forster, both born in Louth, or Andrew Hamilton, from Tyrone, and John Davis, from

⁴² G. Chalmers, *Caledonia: or, An account, historical and topographic, of North Britain; from the most ancient to the present time* (London, 1810), p. 59; J. Chandler, *The New Seaman's Guide, and Coaster's Companion* (London, 1809), title page.

⁴³ TNA, HCA 32/370/1 and HCA 32/273/7 (High Court of Admiralty: Prize Court: Papers. Prize Papers of the War of 1775–1783).

Armagh.⁴⁴ Overall, the geographic profile of most wardrooms in the Navy was heavily English. Nearly three-quarters of commissioned officers were English, and it seems that even more pursers and chaplains were as well. Masters may have been frequently Scottish, but the majority were still English. Only surgeons were more likely than not to be Scottish or Irish rather than English.

Education or Training

Unlike commissioned officers, who usually joined the Navy as teenagers and never left, warrant officers' paths to the Navy often included extensive experience or training elsewhere. Such experience shaped the way they interacted with the other members of the wardroom. Chaplains boasted a classical education, and some surgeons did as well. Masters and pursers, on the other hand, were trained rather than educated. They were literate, of course, but knowledge of Latin and Greek was not necessary. Instead, they needed a good background in mathematics and years of familiarity with naval operations, both seaborne and administrative. They gained this knowledge by holding lower-ranking roles for a number of years rather than by attending an educational institution. The distinction between training and education is perhaps semantic, but it provides a useful framework for understanding two themes underpinning the variety of paths that warrant officers took to the Navy. This section will explore how each officer came to be qualified to be given his warrant.

Masters required extensive training in seamanship and navigation. Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of masters in the database: those who received that training in the Navy, and those who received it on merchant ships. In the process of describing the

⁴⁴ Forster, Pilkington, and Davis can be found in 'The Book of Trinity College, Dublin, 1591–1891', *The Internet Archive*, accessed Apr. 2013, at http://www.archive.org/stream/bookoftrinitycol00trin/bookoftrinitycol00trin_djvu.txt; *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1715–1886*, ed. J. Foster (4 vols., Oxford, 1888), s.v. 'Hamilton, Andrew'.

necessary qualifications for all masters, the Admiralty explicitly acknowledged the two groups by equating two years as a master's mate in the Navy with one year as a chief mate of a merchant ship.⁴⁵ The latter group often had more command experience than that. When James Bowen questioned Lord Howe's order at the Glorious First of June, telling the admiral that he was in danger of colliding with a French ship, he demonstrated confidence that came with a decade of experience commanding merchant vessels in his own right.⁴⁶ There are no such episodes of borderline insubordination in John Buyers' career that have survived in the historical record, but his experience commanding the merchant ship *Margaret* would have given him a great deal of maritime authority in a wardroom. The *Margaret* spent more than three years trading in the south Pacific before she was wrecked on a reef. Using considerable ingenuity and expertise, Buyers and his crew fashioned a raft from the wreck and managed to sail it back to Tahiti.⁴⁷ No commissioned officer would ever question his seamanship skills. William Priest had a less exotic career, but he did have extensive command experience: he was in charge of the brigs *Mary Ann* and *Zealous*, both sailing out of Great Yarmouth, before he came to the Navy.⁴⁸ Men like Bowen, Buyers and Priest were unquestionably experienced mariners and they wielded considerable authority in a wardroom.

A transcript of a master's examination from 1780 survives in the papers of HMS *Dryad*, which was a navigation school in the early twentieth century. It is impressively exhaustive: the examiners asked more than one hundred questions of the candidate, and expected very precise answers. The master in question was hoping to qualify for service in the Channel, so the questions proceeded geographically from one end to the other. First,

⁴⁵ TNA, ADM 6/135–68 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Masters' Passing Certificates, statements of service, 1800–50).

⁴⁶ ODNB, s.v. 'Bowen, James (1751–1835)'.

⁴⁷ 'Explorers of the Pacific: European and American Discoveries in Polynesia', *Victoria University of Wellington Library*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-BucExpl-t1-body-d20.html>; J. Turnbull, *A Voyage round the World* (London, 1813).

⁴⁸ TNA, ADM 6/159.

they asked him about the peculiarities of the Downs anchorage: ‘What is your mark for anchoring in the Downs when Deal Castle bears West?’; ‘How would you unmoor a Ship in the Downs with the Wind at North?’ When they were satisfied with his answers, the questioners moved west to Spithead: ‘What are your marks going into Spithead, and what water have you got into the Fair way?’ Similar questions were posed about Plymouth and Torbay. Sometimes the examiners asked a question with a straightforward answer, but then threw in an extra variable in a follow-up, as in this exchange about the Downs anchorage:

QUESTION: How would you work a Ship out of the Downs with the Wind Southerly?

ANSWER: I would come no nearer the Goodwin than 12 Fathom, nor to the Main than 8 Fathom: as I come nearer, the Foreland, no nearer than 10 Fathom to the Foreland.

QUESTION: Suppose a Gale of Wind at S.W. or S.S.W. put you from Anchors, what means would you use to save the Ship?

ANSWER: I would set my Mizzen [*sic*] and Fore staysail and stand towards the Goodwin until I bring the South Foreland Lights to bear S.W. by S. then steer N.N.E or N.E. by N. keeping in 9 Fathom: until the Light on the North Foreland bear N.W. by W. Then I might with Safety haul out, or in Margate Roads.⁴⁹

This exam was no formality. Masters were expert seamen and navigators, and they boasted extensive knowledge of Britain’s home waters.

Much as the master’s exam shared a number of similarities with the lieutenants’ exam, masters trained in the Navy often had early careers largely indistinguishable from commissioned officers. George Forbes joined the Navy as an able seaman in 1787. Over the next five years, he served as a quartermaster’s mate and then a quartermaster; he spent time as a midshipman in 1795 and an acting lieutenant in 1796 before receiving his first warrant as a master.⁵⁰ His authority in the wardroom derived in part from the similarities between his experience and that of a commissioned officer. Frederick Ruckert is another good example of a master who was trained in the Navy rather than in merchant service. He

⁴⁹ NMM, DRY/10 (H.M.S. *Dryad*, 1780).

⁵⁰ TNA, ADM 36/16549 (Admiralty: Royal Navy Ships' Musters (Series I). Ship: *Swiftsure*, 1805); TNA, ADM 29/1/60 (Admiralty: Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Coastguard and related services: Officers' and Ratings' Service Records (Series II). Navy Pay Office: Entry Books of Certificates of Service, 1802–14).

is also the only master born outside of the British Isles. The description of his career enclosed in his application to qualify as master of a fifth rate is worth quoting in full:

This person is a native of Prussia. In 1793 he entered on board the *Speedy* at Gibraltar and was immediately moved into the *Vanneau* Brig and continued in her till 1796 when he was moved as midshipman into the *Captain* and from her as Second Master in the *Ville-de-Paris*, when he was appointed by Sir John Jervis Master of the *Mutine*, Warrant for which is enclosed. After the *Mutine* he was appointed Master of the *Genereux* and was paid off at Portsmouth August 1802.⁵¹

Both Ruckert and Forbes may have initially entertained thoughts of passing the lieutenants' exam and earning a commission. The present section is not the place to parse the social status distinctions between warrants and commissions. Rather, Ruckert and Forbes' careers merely highlight the similarities between the training that commissioned officers received and the training that some masters received.

Pursers were also trained rather than educated once in the Navy, but many would have joined after time spent at the growing network of mathematical schools mentioned briefly in chapter one.⁵² Pursers did not require navigational training, but they, like accountants and bankers, needed to be comfortable with some advanced mathematical concepts. Education alone was not sufficient to become a purser, however, and most pursers seem to have been trained as clerks. Nicholas Nickenson stepped into his new role in the *Phoebe* after serving as a clerk for the first two years of the voyage. Thomas Major presented his service record as a clerk to the Admiralty 'in order to be promoted to Purser'. He was certainly well trained and experienced, having served continuously from 1796 to 1804 on three ships.⁵³ James Pottinger had a similar trajectory: he was a ship's clerk for at least six years before he became a purser.⁵⁴ Purser John Mitchell's boast on his application for employment in 1834 that he knew 'Greek and other languages' could indicate that he,

⁵¹ TNA, ADM 6/161.

⁵² E.G.R. Taylor, *The Mathematical Practitioners of Hanoverian England, 1714–1840* (Cambridge, 1966); M.R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (London, 1996), p. 63.

⁵³ NMM, ADM 354/214/265 (Navy Board: Bound Out-letters, 22 March 1804).

⁵⁴ TNA, ADM 29/1/122.

alone among pursers in the database, had received a classical education.⁵⁵ It is more likely, however, that he was referring to modern Greek, and that he had experience trading in the eastern Mediterranean, where Greek sailors were common. Purser Thomas Peckston did read Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, but he was probably atypical of pursers.⁵⁶ The exact details of pursers' early careers are difficult to find, but extensive education beyond a mathematical school and training outside of a clerkship in the Navy seems to have been rare.

Both the mean and median age for a purser when he received his first warrant was twenty-five. Surgeons, interestingly, received their first warrant at nearly the same time: their mean age was twenty-five and median was twenty-four. If we assume that pursers and surgeons left home at roughly the same time, we can conclude that it took about as long for a clerk to learn how to manage a ship's accounts as it did for a surgeon to learn the basics of the medical profession. That conclusion is too simplistic since there are certainly other factors involved in shaping the age at which pursers and surgeons received their first warrants—employment opportunities are one example. Nevertheless, the similarity in ages between pursers and surgeons highlights the complexity of a purser's job. He was not simply an accountant: he was also the ship's shopkeeper and an important advisor to the captain. A new regulation passed in 1813 required new pursers to be examined by three experienced pursers.⁵⁷ The regulation came too late to apply to the pursers in the database, but it indicates that naval administrators recognized that a corrupt or incompetent purser could endanger the ship. Recall that the master and the captain both recorded the state of the *Phoebe*'s stores when John Surflen's death forced them to appoint the clerk to be the acting purser.

⁵⁵ TNA, ADM 6/193–5 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Survey of age and services of Pursers, Nos.1–450, 1834).

⁵⁶ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Thomas Peckston to Mary Peckston, 27 July 1812.

⁵⁷ Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, p. 92.

Surgeons' early careers are surprisingly varied. Unlike pursers and masters, where there seems to have been one or two paths taken more often than others, surgeons arrived on board Royal Navy vessels with a wide range of experiences. Some had enrolled at a teaching hospital in London.⁵⁸ Others boasted a university education, with or without a degree: Thomas Downey attended 'extramural' classes in Edinburgh before establishing himself in practice in his native Devon.⁵⁹ Thus Downey joined the Navy with both independent medical experience and a smattering of university education. Only those seeking a medical degree at Edinburgh were required to demonstrate fluency in Latin, though, so Downey may not have had that ability. Cardwell concludes that most surgeons were educated locally when they were children and learned at least the fundamentals of Latin, which was essential for medical practice.⁶⁰ Peter Cullen, for example, attended a grammar school in Glasgow for four years before matriculating at the College of Glasgow; he began his apprenticeship with a local surgeon when he turned fourteen.⁶¹

Some young men joined the Navy not only with far less education and experience than Downey and Cullen, but with only their schoolboy Latin. A former surgeon lamented the 'absurdity' of employing 'raw apothecaries' boys ... whose whole education had been acquired in the course of a year or two behind the counter'.⁶² John McHugh was more than just an assistant—he was licensed as an apothecary in Dublin in his own right—but many others were mostly untrained.⁶³ In his 1748 novel *Roderick Random*, Tobias Smollett famously portrayed conditions on board ships as a 'stinking ordeal' that the surgeon was helpless to combat. At his exam, Random is asked, 'If during an engagement at sea, a man

⁵⁸ Cardwell, 'Royal Navy Surgeons', p. 49.

⁵⁹ W.N. Boog Watson, 'Two British naval surgeons of the French wars', *Medical History* 13, no. 3 (1969), p. 220.

⁶⁰ Cardwell, 'Royal Navy Surgeons', p. 45.

⁶¹ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 44–5.

⁶² Quoted in Vale and Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet*, p. 22.

⁶³ *Parliamentary Papers 1829*, xxii (235), 'Return of Persons examined and certified as Qualified by Apothecaries' Hall in Dublin, and Number of Prosecutions, 1791–1829'.

should be brought to you with his head shot off, how would you behave?’ This work more than any other helped shape popular perceptions of surgeons as incompetent and untrained, even if Smollett was aiming more for black humour than truth.⁶⁴ Lewis is typically understated in his judgment: ‘[T]he naval surgeon was something of a by-word for inefficiency.’⁶⁵ But the standard historical narrative is that the quality of naval medicine in this period was improving, and with it the education of surgeons.⁶⁶

The key hurdle for an aspiring surgeon, described briefly in the earlier section on administration, was to pass an examination by the Surgeons’ Company. The candidate arrived at the Company’s headquarters near Newgate Gaol at one of its twice-monthly meetings. There, with other candidates for service as surgeons in the armed services and the East India Company, he was interviewed by one of the examiners. The examination was entirely oral and tested his knowledge of anatomy, physiology and surgery. Successful candidates were presented to the chairman of the selection panel and charged a guinea for their troubles. They could then make their way to the Navy Board to solicit a warrant.⁶⁷ In one sense, the examination tells us surprisingly little about the education necessary to become a surgeon in the Navy. Passing certificates do not explain the nature of the candidates’ qualifications in any detail, and it is likely that there were considerable variations in difficulty and approach among the examiners. Nevertheless, it is clear that despite the range of quality of surgeons’ educational experiences, there was an accepted standard of quality for naval surgeons. Often the most straightforward way for an aspiring surgeon to meet that standard was to join the Navy as an assistant surgeon. There was no

⁶⁴ G.L. Hudson, ‘Introduction: British Military and Naval Medicine, 1600–1830’ in G.L. Hudson (ed.), *British Military and Naval Medicine, 1600–1830* (Amsterdam, 2007), p. 10; M. Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750–1815* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 167.

⁶⁵ Lewis, *Social History*, p. 243.

⁶⁶ G. Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State and Society, 1680–1730* (London, 1982), p. 10; C. Kelly, *War and the Militarization of British Army Medicine, 1793–1830* (London, 2011).

⁶⁷ Vale and Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet*, pp. 21–2.

qualifying exam for assistant surgeons, so the barrier to entry was much lower. Shipboard life usually provided the leisure time to study Latin, anatomy and physiology, as well as ample practical experience in treating illnesses and wounds. As the contemporary commentator John Atkins argued, ‘I know of no better School to improve in, than the NAVY, especially in Time of War, Accidents are frequent, and the Industrious illustrate Practice by their Cures.’⁶⁸ In this, surgeons are most similar to pursers: just as a few years as a naval clerk was the best preparation for a career as a purser, so too was a few years as an assistant surgeon the best preparation for a career as a surgeon. There are many in the database: John Irvine, for example, spent two years as an assistant surgeon before qualifying for a surgeon’s warrant.⁶⁹ Cardwell estimates that most surgeons spent three years as an assistant before earning their first warrant.⁷⁰ Thus surgeons brought a mixture of experiences to their exam: some came from universities or civilian practices; others received most of their training in the Navy.

By the letter of Admiralty regulations, chaplains were also interviewed before they could join the Navy. In a number of cases, though, it is not likely that an examination took place. Mangin stated only that he obtained ‘the proper certificates’, which seem to have consisted of a few letters of recommendation.⁷¹ Creditors chased Henry Duckworth into the Navy, and he cleverly managed to get the Navy to pay him for his services as chaplain while simultaneously escaping to Jamaica. He probably did not pause while on the run to attend his interview with the Bishop of London. In any case, his naval service was brief: when he arrived in Jamaica, he ‘got a good living’ and stayed for some years; unfortunately, he died at Portsmouth within an hour of his return to England.⁷² Daniel

⁶⁸ J.D. Alsop, ‘Warfare and the Creation of British Imperial Medicine, 1600–1800’, in Hudson (ed.), *British Military and Naval Medicine*, p. 31.

⁶⁹ TNA, ADM 196/8/154 (Admiralty: Officers’ Service Records (Series III), 12 July 1803).

⁷⁰ Cardwell, ‘Royal Navy Surgeons’, pp. 54–5.

⁷¹ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 5.

⁷² ACAD, s.v. ‘Duckworth, Henry Robert’.

Batwell also used the Navy to escape, but he was running from American rebels, not creditors. He was a distinguished preacher in London before he became a missionary for the Society for Propagating the Gospel and rector of a parish in York, Pennsylvania in 1774. Two years later, his parishioners accused him of betraying the American cause and threw him in prison. He eventually fled to New York, where he became the chaplain of a battalion of volunteer loyalists. The Navy provided his ultimate escape when the war ended, and he served as a naval chaplain for his return to England in 1782.⁷³ As will be discussed in the section on chaplains' career structures, it is clear that neither Duckworth nor Batwell saw the Navy as a permanent posting. Their adventures led them to the Navy out of necessity rather than desire. John Holmes, on the other hand, probably joined the Navy because he saw few opportunities to establish himself on land, and his early career is more typical of other warrant officers. Born in Oxford, he worked his way through Magdalen College, Oxford as first a chorister and then a singing clerk, which suggests that he did not come from a particularly wealthy family. Furthermore, the labour market for clergy ashore was poor, so he probably joined the Navy both for steady employment and for the chance to meet a potential patron. He joined his first ship, the third-rate *Thunderer*, in April 1805; six months later he survived Trafalgar, and he continued to serve for another five years.⁷⁴

Holmes' Oxford education was normal for chaplains. Table 2.1 shows the educational affiliations of the chaplains in the database:

⁷³ W. Stryker, *The New Jersey Volunteers' (loyalists) in the Revolutionary War* (Trenton, 1887). *The Internet Archive*, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://archive.org/stream/cu31924032743423/cu31924032743423_djvu.txt.

⁷⁴ *Alumni Oxonienses*, s.v. 'Holmes, John'; TNA, ADM 24/66–7 (Navy Board, and Admiralty, Accountant General's Department: Officers' Full Pay Registers. Full Pay Ledgers: Chaplains 1 and 2, 1795–1817); Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p. 218.

Table 2.1: Chaplains' Educational Affiliations

University	Percentage
University of Oxford	39.7%
University of Cambridge	20.7%
Trinity College, Dublin	8.6%
Unknown	31.0%

The disparity between the English universities and Trinity College, Dublin is unsurprising as it reflects the geographic origins of chaplains. The disparity between Oxford and Cambridge is harder to explain. There does not seem to be any possible reason why Oxford would produce nearly twice as many naval chaplains as Cambridge, and it is likely that the disparity is a quirk of the sample. It is also possible that the unknown category contains more alumni of Cambridge than Oxford. In any case, the nature and quality of the education they received would not have varied much: all three universities would have provided a classical education emphasizing the study of Greek, Latin and theology. It need hardly be noted that there was no training specifically designed to prepare chaplains for the unique challenges of service at sea.

Masters, chaplains and surgeons often brought experience from the civilian world with them when they joined the Navy, and each group's path to the Navy was different. Masters and pursers tended to have the most seagoing experience when they received their first warrant, and for many masters, that experience was not in the Navy. Chaplains and some surgeons had university experience, though in very different places and with very different purposes. Again, the differences between warrant officers are easier to find than the similarities. It is important to remember, though, that all warrant officers were in a liminal position in the naval hierarchy. They were among the elite on board any ship: they had extensive education and training; they were highly skilled in unique tasks; and their responsibilities were essential for the smooth running of the ship. But no matter how well they performed, most were in a terminal position: it was not technically possible to promote a chaplain or a master, except, as we will see in chapter four, into a larger ship.

Lieutenants, on the other hand, had a clear, though difficult, promotion path ahead of them that could move them out of the wardroom and into a position of independent authority. In many respects, the foundation upon which the warrant officers earned the respect of the other members of the wardroom was their education, training and experience.

Naval Careers

A few warrant officers joined the Navy out of convenience or necessity, as we saw with chaplains Batwell and Duckworth. But most warrant officers were not running from creditors or rebels when they joined their first ship: some aspired to serve on the Navy's largest ships or to receive training for a more lucrative career as a civilian, while others hoped simply for employment and a steady career. Chapter five will explore the fate of warrant officers who left the Navy, but this section will explore the three major factors that influenced why warrant officers joined the Navy and how long they remained in it: the age at which they joined the Navy; whether their skills were transferrable to civilian life; and their prospects for employment within the Navy.

As with other sections, a key theme here is the diversity of warrant officers' career arcs. William Eales Ross became purser of the *Albatross* sloop in January 1808. It was his only warrant, as far as we can tell, and his naval career seems to have ended there. On the other end of the spectrum is William Price, who became master of the *Isis* in 1776 and ended his career as master of the *Britannia* in 1823, forty-seven years later. Other examples of long careers include William Purdo, who served for nearly three decades, as did Methuselah Wills and William Hudson.⁷⁵ Price, Purdo, Wills and Hudson were all

⁷⁵ The data on warrant officers' careers was compiled from a wide variety of sources in The National Archives. It is not possible to list them all here, nor to give them their full citations. However, some of the more important reference numbers include: seniority lists (ADM 118/92–207, ADM 6/132), passing certificates and statements of service (ADM 6/135–168, ADM 106/2908–2950), surveys and analyses of services (ADM 11/2–5), succession books (ADM 6/192), and pay registers (ADM 24/66–7). The best source for exploring warrant

masters. There are examples of surgeons and pursers with careers spanning more than four decades, but as Table 2.2 shows, on average masters tended to have longer careers than other warrant officers:

Table 2.2: Career Lengths for Warrant Officers

Warrant Officer	Mean Career Length	Median Career Length	Mean No. of Warrants	Median No. of Warrants
Masters	12.5 years	12.3 years	6.4	6
Pursers	11.0 years	6.7 years	4.1	4
Surgeons	9.8 years	6.3 years	5.0	4

Chaplains were not included because there were too many gaps in the data describing the duration of their service. Some chaplains did make careers in the Navy, though the longest-tenured chaplain in the database served for only fourteen years. Batwell and Duckworth, our runaway chaplains, were unique in their circumstances but not in the duration of their naval careers: one-fifth of the chaplains in the database appear on the books of only one ship.

A warrant officer's age when he joined the Navy often played an important role in determining his career trajectory. Unlike commissioned officers, whose ages when they joined the Navy are normally distributed around thirteen and fourteen years old, warrant officers' ages are dispersed widely. The database contains a purser who was seventeen at his first warrant and a chaplain who was sixty. As noted in the previous section, pursers and surgeons tended to join at approximately the same age, while chaplains and masters were more spread out. Roughly three-quarters of pursers and surgeons joined in their twenties, compared to only half of all masters and chaplains. It is important not to read too much into this analysis, though, since the sample sizes are small, but the pattern does make some sense. Though many masters joined the Navy with the intention of making a career in it, the other common career path—spending time in merchant ships first—skews the age

officers' archival records is N.A.M. Rodger, *Naval Records for Genealogists* (Public Record Office Handbook No 22, 1998).

data. It was more likely that a purser or surgeon would join the Navy early in life after receiving training, as described in the previous section, and fewer began naval careers past the age of thirty.

Unsurprisingly, the older a warrant officer was at his first warrant, the shorter his naval career tended to be. Donald McNiven, mentioned earlier as a master of fishing vessels during the American War, was forty-four when he joined the Navy. He served on only three ships during his naval career, and his last known warrant was dated a mere three and a half years after his first. Contrast his career with George Forbes, who, as described above, was trained in the Navy. Forbes served as a master for thirteen years, and he spent a total of more than two decades in naval service. Frederick Ruckert's last known warrant, to be master of the *William and Mary* yacht, dates from 1818, a quarter of a century after he first joined the *Speedy* at Gibraltar.⁷⁶ Compared to men who joined after years in merchant ships, men like Ruckert and Forbes tended to be younger when they joined and have longer careers. There are certainly exceptions: purser Thomas Jennings received his warrant at thirty-six, the oldest age recorded in the pursers' database, but enjoyed a very long naval career. After spending seventeen years out of the Navy when the Great Wars ended, he returned in 1832 and served continuously until his retirement at the age of seventy-seven in 1847.⁷⁷

Whether a warrant officer's skills were transferrable to civilian life played a crucial role in shaping his career. Masters had the longest naval careers largely because their skills were only useful in a maritime context. The Navy was the largest single maritime employer in Britain, and masters enjoyed, as we will see later, good employment prospects. Other than merchant or fishing ships, there was little civilian demand for their

⁷⁶ TNA, ADM 6/161.

⁷⁷ 'Naval General Service 1793 Medal, 2 Clasps, Guadaloupe, The Potomac 17 Aug 1814; Thomas Jennings, Purser', *Jäger Medals & Militaria*, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://jaegermedals.com/Updates/101011/jm266/jm266_full.pdf.

skills. Pursers' careers were only slightly shorter on average than masters', which is slightly surprising. Not only did they have skills that were transferrable to civilian life—bookkeeping and accounting in particular—but they were also poorly paid and required to undertake considerable personal risk to victual a ship. It seems likely that more would have sought civilian employment, which is perhaps reflected in the large gap between the mean and median career lengths presented in Table 2.3: a minority of pursers remained afloat for long careers, skewing the mean length up, while a majority moved ashore after six years or so.

Chaplains and surgeons had skills that were entirely unique in the wardroom but central to civilian life. Unsurprisingly, they tended to have the shortest careers and were most likely to leave the Navy for better opportunities ashore. As noted earlier, the longest-tenured chaplain served for only fourteen years in the Navy, suggesting that few chaplains made careers out of naval service. Even the most famous and successful naval surgeons did not tend to remain afloat for long. George Vance spent ten years in the cramped orlops of nine ships before he secured a shore appointment at Haslar Hospital in 1804. By 1822, he had moved to Greenwich Hospital, and in 1825 he became Surgeon Extraordinary to the Duke of York.⁷⁸ There are, however, a few examples in the database of surgeons who decided to remain in the Navy for their entire careers. Robert Tainsh, for example, spent more than three very active decades in the Navy. He saw action at St Vincent, Tenerife and the Nile. During the campaign that culminated in the siege of Acre, he was so successful in preventing an outbreak of the plague that the crew of the *Theseus* presented him with a gold watch. He also held two shore appointments, both naval: at Greenwich Hospital in

⁷⁸ TNA, ADM 11/40; TNA, ADM 104/12; *The London Gazette* (Issue number 18153, 9 July 1825), p. 1196.

1809 and the Woolwich Marine Division in 1810.⁷⁹ More often, though, surgeons looked ashore for a good practice after about six years, on average, in naval service.

Those who remained in the Navy usually enjoyed good prospects for employment. The labour market for warrant officers more closely resembles the market for able seamen than it does the market for commissioned officers. Describing warrant officers' employment in any kind of detail is, however, challenging. It is possible to track officers from warrant to warrant via the Admiralty's succession books, but it is very time-consuming and still likely to result in omissions. In theory, warrant officers should have remained with ships longer than commissioned officers because warrants tied officers to particular ships in a way that commissions did not.⁸⁰ In reality, turnover from ship to ship for both commissioned and warrant officers was high. There are nearly seven hundred ships in the masters' database alone, and some masters' careers are incomplete. Analysing only masters with complete careers, the database suggests they joined a new ship on average every twenty-one months. Though the same analysis is not possible in the commissioned officers' database because it does not track each officer from ship to ship, a superficial analysis of the survey returns from 1817 suggests that commissioned officers turned over at slightly higher rate. Commander George Truscott served on seven ships in the ten years after earning his commission; Lieutenant Charles Burlton averaged one new commission for each of the twelve years he served on active duty; and Lieutenant John Connor Field held five posts in three years.⁸¹ Both commissioned and warrant officers probably averaged between one and two years per ship in commission, but warrant officers

⁷⁹ TNA, ADM 118/191; TNA, ADM 11/40; TNA, ADM 104/12; TNA, ADM 6/326.

⁸⁰ Macdonald and Morriss both make this mistake. Macdonald writes that warrant officers 'tended to stay with one ship for many years'. See J. Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (London, 2006), p. 92; R. Morriss, *The Foundations of British Maritime Ascendancy: Resources, Logistics and the State, 1755–1815* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 264.

⁸¹ TNA, ADM 9/4/1152 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services. Commanders' Services. Nos. 867–1257, 1817); TNA, ADM 9/6/1823 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services. Lieutenants' Services. Nos. 1651–2044, 1817); TNA, ADM 9/6/1955.

were more likely to remain with a ship for closer to two years. However, it is important not to overstate the differences: warrant officers had a high turnover rate, which suggests that their wartime employment prospects were very good.

Masters, in particular, seem to have been in high demand. Only eighteen per cent of the masters in the database spent significant time fit for service but unemployed during wartime. That percentage does not indicate an unemployment rate; rather, it suggests that over eighty per cent of masters were employed whenever they were fit and willing. Furthermore, few of the eighteen per cent who did experience unemployment remained unemployed for the rest of their careers. Another clue about the high demand for masters during wartime comes from a series of letters from the Navy Board to the Admiralty in 1821: 'We request that you acquaint the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty that the difficulty of procuring suitable Masters for small Vessels, which was so much felt during the War, has not been removed since its termination.'⁸² The problem was that once a master had passed for a high rate, he was not likely to want to serve in a small ship. David Blackburn reluctantly accepted a warrant as master of the *Supply*, which was headed to Australia with the First Fleet in 1787. He complained to his sister, 'She is a brigg [*sic*] and I shall be paid only as a sixth rate viz. £5 per month, which of itself is a hardship as I have passed for a third rate which is £7 monthly.'⁸³ Pay and promotion will feature prominently in chapter four. For now, it is important to emphasize that in the peacetime employment market, Blackburn had no choice but to accept the appointment. In wartime, though, he would have had more options. Qualified masters enjoyed good promotion prospects into larger ships, which encouraged them to remain in the Navy.

Determining demand for other warrant officers is even more difficult, but it is fair to say that it was highest in the Navy's unhealthiest postings. Surgeon Charles Bunting, for

⁸² TNA, ADM 106/3571 (Navy Board: Records. MISCELLANEOUS, 26 September 1821).

⁸³ D. Neville, *Blackburn's Isle* (Lavenham, 1975), p. 116.

example, suffered from ‘Attacks of Fever’ during his service in the West Indies and requested a transfer, ‘but with this he could not succeed on account of the great want of Surgeons’.⁸⁴ There was also always and on all stations a ‘great want’ of qualified and competent surgeons: the complaint about the prevalence of ‘raw apothecaries’ boys’ from the previous section is worth repeating here.⁸⁵ But there was also a shortage of surgeons of any quality. Peter Cullen noted in 1793 that ‘[m]edical officers were very scarce at this time’, and was surprised when, in 1796, he applied for a ship and was told there were no vacancies. The very next day, though, he met an old friend who was taking command of a ship and requested his services.⁸⁶ The Sick and Hurt Board complained in 1805 that the Navy was ‘[suffering] materially in the present war from want of surgeons and surgeons’ mates’.⁸⁷ Qualified surgeons willing to risk service in dangerous climates for comparatively low pay had no trouble finding naval employment.

Some pursers suffered through spells of unemployment, though. A survey of pursers’ services from 1834 asked respondents to calculate the number of years they had served in the Navy, how many of those years were served in ships afloat in wartime, and how many in ships afloat during peacetime. Few pursers served afloat in peacetime, unsurprisingly, and most listed extensive service in wartime. The average percentage of wartime years spent afloat is sixty per cent, though this number should be treated with extreme caution.⁸⁸ It is likely, however, that pursers’ employment prospects in wartime were not quite as good as those for masters and surgeons. There were nearly three hundred more pursers than masters on the Admiralty’s seniority lists in 1809 and 1810, suggesting that the imbalance in the employment market for pursers was on the supply rather than the

⁸⁴ TNA, ADM 6/323.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Vale and Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet*, p. 22.

⁸⁶ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 75, 91–2.

⁸⁷ M. Crumplin, ‘Surgery in the Royal Navy during the Republican and Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815)’ in Haycock and Archer (eds.), *Health and Medicine at Sea*, pp. 72–3.

⁸⁸ TNA, ADM 6/193–5.

demand side.⁸⁹ The Admiralty constantly needed masters and surgeons and frequently risked dangerous shortages of both; pursers were more readily available.



Warrant officers' career structures were different from commissioned officers. Some joined the Navy as teenagers, but many more joined their first ship as adults. Pursers and surgeons often spent a few years receiving on-the-job training as an assistant surgeon or clerk, but unlike commissioned officers, they were not required to gain experience in the Navy. Masters needed comparatively more expertise, as the transcript of the exam demonstrated. Chaplains flitted in and out of the Navy, and few sought to minister to sailors on a permanent basis. For pursers, surgeons, and masters, they usually remained with a ship for about two years. Pursers were the most numerous of warrant officers, perhaps because of the ready supply of clerks, but the result was that they could suffer bouts of unemployment, even in wartime. Again, the range of career paths and patterns is the dominant feature of the analysis presented in this chapter.

Warrant officers straddled the civilian and military worlds. Because they could seek non-naval employment with relative ease, committing to a naval career was not a given. The Admiralty struggled to attract and keep warrant officers in naval service, and shortages of surgeons and masters, in particular, were common. Civilian medical practice was generally more attractive than naval service, and no naval postings compared favourably to a good living. Masters and pursers, on the other hand, found their best opportunities in the Navy. The contrast between the poor employment prospects for lieutenants and the good employment prospects for masters was stark. There should have been a simple solution: if the Admiralty had encouraged unemployed or under-employed lieutenants to become

⁸⁹ See Table 0.1.

masters, they could have alleviated the over-supply of lieutenants and under-supply of masters. Masters were navigators; they were the most senior warrant officers; and, as we have seen, many spent time as teenagers with ratings similar to those of future commissioned officers. The position of master's mate reflects the historical similarities between commissioned officers and masters discussed earlier. Incentivising lieutenants to become masters would have been relatively straightforward and required no additional training.

But Admiralty administrators did not attempt to interfere in the labour market in that way. The reason they could not do so provides a useful preview of the issues addressed in the next few chapters: such a move would have been socially unacceptable to the majority of lieutenants. None of the lieutenants who described their careers in the 1817 Admiralty survey became masters when they could no longer secure employment at sea during wartime. Instead, they joined the Impress Service, became transport agents, or commanded signal stations. These postings, though clearly inferior to service at sea, were marginally acceptable to lieutenants; becoming a master was not. It was much more likely for a master to follow James Bowen's path: as we saw in chapter one, he began his career as a master but managed to make the crucial leap to become a successful and long-serving commissioned officer thanks to his efforts at the Glorious First of June. The social barrier between commissions and warrants that Bowen cleared constrained the Admiralty's options when it came to grappling with the supply and demand of officers. Too many young men sought commissions, and too few sought warrants. Encouraging downward social mobility was not a possible solution. The result was that many commissioned officers' careers stalled at the rank of lieutenant, which was not particularly prestigious. They operated under the assumption, which few would have discussed or thought about consciously, that it was better, socially, to be an unemployed lieutenant on half pay than a

gainfully employed master. The next chapter will combine the populations of warrant and commissioned officers to parse the relative social positions of the members of the Navy's wardrooms. Meanwhile, the Admiralty was desperate to fill the vacant masters' warrants. Their solution, which is discussed in more detail in chapter four, was to increase pay for warrant officers in a series of reforms in 1807. But as the complaint from the Navy Board in 1821 indicates, they were unsuccessful in attracting skilled navigators to the Navy.

CHAPTER THREE

The Society of the Polite?

The Wardroom as a Social Space

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the wardroom as a social space. As with chapters one and two, its approach is driven by the data in the commissioned and warrant officers' databases. It will address how officers' close proximity to one another forced them to leave many of the social pretensions of civilian society behind, but first it describes the wide range of family backgrounds that officers brought with them to the Navy. In other words, it asks how many officers were gentlemen by birth? Prince William Henry, third son of the king, certainly was. But Captain Thomas Fife and Lieutenant Robert Baley were not: Fife was the son of a woolcomber and Baley's father was a farmer.¹ Whether Fife and Baley were perceived as gentlemen by their peers is the subject of chapter six. Here, the goal is to determine the percentage of commissioned and warrant officers who came from the landed elite.

As discussed in the introduction, Michael Lewis attempted a very similar exercise in 1960 when he gathered information on officers' family backgrounds available in published biographical dictionaries. In patriarchal eighteenth-century Britain, it is possible to be even more specific: Lewis targeted an officer's father's occupation and its perceived social worth. Lewis' approach has drawbacks, which will be discussed in detail shortly. But his work has served as the foundation for much of the social history of sea officers in this period, so despite its flaws, using his divisions of the British social hierarchy and his

¹ 'Fife Descendants', *Ancestry.com*, accessed Nov. 2014, at <http://boards.ancestry.com/surnames.fife/19/mb.ashx>; TNA, IR 26/362/516 (Board of Inland Revenue and Predecessors: Estate Duty Office and predecessors: Registers of Legacy Duty, Succession Duty and Estate Duty. Country Courts. Abstracts of Administrations and Probates of Wills: Lincoln Consistory and Archdeaconry: Abstract of Administration of Samuel Bailey, Farmer of Coningsby, Lincolnshire, 23 May 1804).

emphasis on the significance of an officer's father allows us to revise the existing historiography most effectively.²

Understanding the potential pitfalls of Lewis' approach is nevertheless important. The problems can be divided into two categories: problems with the source material and problems relating to Lewis' methodology. Recall the discussion of Lewis' work in the introduction: he relied entirely on biographical dictionaries published decades after the close of the Napoleonic Wars. The officers supplied much of the material for Marshall and O'Byrne themselves, and they were therefore likely to exaggerate their family's wealth and status. Marshall, writing in the 1820s, and O'Byrne, writing in the 1840s, also treated the same men differently, as Lewis admits: 'The kind of people who are "respectable" in Marshall are Warrant Officers, R.N., Merchants and Attorneys (but not Barristers). Sometimes, even, a Surgeon is "respectable". But, in O'Byrne, such folk have mostly blossomed into Esquires: or, if not bolsterable [*sic*] enough, are simply omitted.'³ The database that underpins this study relies primarily on contemporary records of officers' fathers' occupations to avoid such issues. This approach does not completely solve the problem: the challenge of distinguishing between merchants and shopkeepers remains, to give one example, as does determining the income of members of the landed gentry. In other cases, officers' fathers self-report their social standing. But using third-party sources such as professional organizations or lists of freeholders can help combat the inconsistencies Lewis identified in Marshall and O'Byrne. Such sources are particularly useful when Marshall and O'Byrne are silent on an officer's parents, which is the case for many of the officers in the present study, or when the officer did not survive to fill out Marshall's survey, which is the case for fully two-thirds of the officers in the database.

² Examples of prominent historians reliant on Lewis can be found in the introduction. It is worth adding B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 144.

³ M. Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815* (London, 1960), p. 31.

Another problem with the source material, which Lewis does not address, is that it is not possible to find the occupation of the father of every officer. In Lewis' case, neither Marshall nor O'Byrne attempted to research every officers' father, so his data is necessarily incomplete. In the case of the commissioned officers' database, officers for whom no birth information is known presented a particular challenge: without their fathers' names, the chance of finding their fathers' occupation was very slim. Even officers whose father's names are known were not always easy to research. George Bennett Allen's father was Thomas Allen, but the trail goes cold there, at least in part because Thomas Allen is such a common name. For now, the arguments presented in this section deal only with officers whose fathers' occupations are known; those whose fathers' occupations are unknown will receive more extensive treatment in the section on social status and promotion prospects in chapter four. It was possible to link about two-thirds of the commissioned officers in the database to their fathers' occupations. This is a reasonable return for such an exercise and produces a sample of 365 commissioned officers.

Lewis did not attempt to uncover the social backgrounds of warrant officers. His rationale was sound: there were no biographical dictionaries that would have provided the necessary information, and he did not have access to the thousands of digitized sources used in the present database. But his omission also reflects the difficulty of researching warrant officers' fathers even with digital sources. Warrant officers' fathers were much more difficult to uncover than commissioned officers. Without passing certificates (and the baptismal certificates that often accompanied them) it was often not possible to uncover any information about a warrant officer except his name and date of seniority. Chaplains had the most available information thanks to their educational affiliations, but masters and pursers were often dead ends. Therefore, the analysis of

warrant officers' family backgrounds should be treated with substantially more caution than the commissioned officers.

Lewis' emphasis on the patriarchal transmission of social status also presents problems. There were other elements in a family's socio-economic fortunes, as Bourdieu's research has suggested. Women played a crucial role in translating cultural and social values to the next generation because they were responsible for upbringing and education; furthermore, their dress, comportment and musical talents were markers of social status. Bourdieu also emphasizes the role of extended family clans in creating patronage networks.⁴ Davidoff's work follows similar lines, emphasizing the role of family in creating and shaping identities.⁵ Both theoretical frameworks are useful, but unfortunately, tracking officers' mothers is significantly more difficult than tracking officers' fathers. To conduct the research in a timely manner, and to provide a useful comparison with Lewis' results, the present study focused only on the patriarchal transmission of social status. This approach has the added advantage that it is possible in many cases to estimate officers' fathers' incomes, which provides a second prism through which social background can be analysed. Despite Bourdieu's arguments about other family members, it is undoubtedly the case that officers' fathers played the most significant (though admittedly not the only) role in determining their social status. An officer's father's occupation will serve here as a useful—if imprecise—proxy for his family's social background.

Much of the uncertainty about an officer's father's social status derives from Lewis' attempt to categorize occupations. Sons of 'professional men', for example, include both the son of the vicar of a poor provincial church and the son of a doctor who waited on the queen. There was a wide gap between the two men socially, which the income data can

⁴ S. Gunn, 'Translating Bourdieu: Cultural Capital and the English Middle Class in Historical Perspective', *The British Journal of Sociology* 56, no. 1 (2005), pp. 55–7.

⁵ L. Davidoff et al., *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (Harlow, 1999), p. 51.

help address. Lewis also has no place in his study for minor but independent farmers. James Rees, for example, was the son of Thomas Rees, who is described in a lease agreement as a farmer in Glamorgan; there is no evidence to suggest that he was a major landowner, and it is likely that his primary source of income was agricultural produce from his farm.⁶ Contrast the Rees family with the Gulletts: John Gullett appears on a similar lease agreement for a small parcel of land, but he is also listed as a gentleman trustee of a charity in Exeter.⁷ The Gulletts do not appear to have been particularly prosperous, but the sources indicate that John Gullett was more likely to have been a gentleman landowner living off the rents from his estate than Thomas Rees. As far as was possible, the present study separated small-time independent farmers from the landed gentry based on the source of their income. This creates a small sixth category for which Lewis provides no comparison. Lewis may have been tricked by O'Byrne's tendency to elevate the social origins of his subjects and moved men like Rees into the landed gentry. Or, more likely, such men did not provide information about their parents.

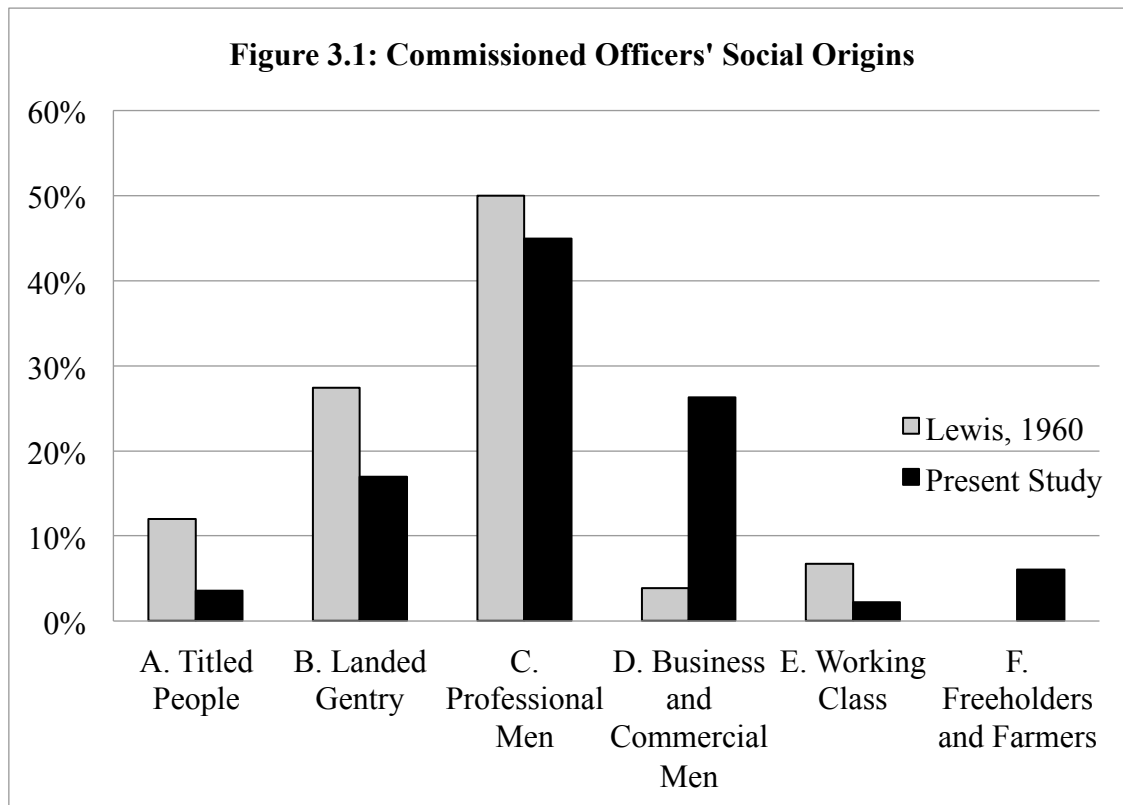
Commissioned Officers' Social Origins

Turning now to the results, Figure 3.1 shows Lewis' 1,800 commissioned officers' fathers compared with 365 officers' fathers from the present database⁸:

⁶ 'D/D Bap 40: Swansea General Baptist Church', *City and Council of Swansea*, accessed 15 Apr. 2013, at <http://www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=27088>.

⁷ 'Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, 149/87, 26 November 1778', *Access to Archives*, accessed Apr. 2013, at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=028-149&cid=16-5-13#16-5-13>; 'Potters Charity', in *Accounts and Papers* (7 vols., 1829), III, p. 92.

⁸ Lewis, *Social History*, p. 31.



The similarities are worth highlighting first: both Lewis and the present study identify roughly half of the population of naval officers as having come from ‘professional’ backgrounds. This includes the three traditional professions of law, medicine, and the church, as well as the military. Second, both studies find very few officers from what Lewis calls the working class: the aforementioned Thomas Fife, whose father was a woolcomber, falls into this category, as do a few officers whose fathers were ordinary or able seamen. That less than ten per cent of officers came from very humble origins should not be surprising; there is little evidence in this study, despite the conclusions about the relationship between social connections and merit in chapter four, to suggest that eighteenth-century British society was characterized by dramatic upward social mobility. Indeed, twenty-two per cent of the officers in the database were sons of commissioned naval officers, warrant officers, or officers in the marines—the largest single occupational category in the database.

The differences between the two studies are perhaps more interesting to explore. Category D, ‘Business and Commercial Men’, is the category with the greatest disparity: thirty-six per cent of the officers in the database came from such a background, while in Lewis’ study, only four per cent did so. One possible explanation for why Lewis’ number is so low is that commercial occupations were seen as relatively disreputable in the mid-nineteenth century, when his sources were compiled. He acknowledges the ‘sad falling off’ of his data from the peak of category C into the trough of category D. He explains that the paucity of business backgrounds is a product of men choosing to describe themselves as members of the gentry rather than businessmen in the 1840s: ‘for those who kept an unwearying [*sic*] eye open for such things might well suspect a “gentleman engaged in commerce” of being a “tradesman”, or “worthy merchant” of being mere camouflage for “shopkeeper”. And Trade—especially Retail Trade—was *not* genteel in the “forties.”’⁹ Lewis’ argument is almost certainly part of the story. Category B—the landed gentry—is skewed in the opposite direction as category D, and it is probable that some of the men in Lewis’ study preferred to portray their backgrounds as the former rather than the latter for the reasons that Lewis highlights.

Ultimately, though, Lewis’ explanation is necessary but not sufficient. He skirts by the selection bias in his methodology, which goes some ways towards explaining why categories A and B have so many more members in his study than in the present database. The problem here is the non-random nature of Lewis’ study. He did not attempt to conduct a statistically rigorous study of the officers of the Navy; or rather, if he did attempt to do so, he failed. By collecting data on all the officers he could find in Marshall and O’Byrne, Lewis selected for officers more likely to provide such information: hence his large sample of titled people, for whom their father’s title was worth reporting. A random sample, in

⁹ Lewis, *Social History*, p. 30.

contrast, is as likely to choose the son of a woolcomber as it is to choose the son of an earl. Lewis' methodology generates a much higher rate of return for officers for whom their backgrounds were something to boast about rather than a source of embarrassment. Category F, small-time farmers, is missing from Lewis' data for similar reasons: given his sources, the son of a minor farmer was likely either to report having descended from a genteel family or to omit his parentage. Only third-party sources can reveal these connections, and they reinforce the major conclusion from Figure 3.1: Lewis' data skewed the perception of the parentage of naval officers towards the upper reaches of British society. In fact, officers came from a wider range of backgrounds that tended to be more commercial and less socially prominent than Lewis' study showed. Twenty per cent of all commissioned officers came from either titled or landed gentry backgrounds, which is a large percentage. But that percentage is half of Lewis' forty per cent, suggesting that only one in every five naval officers was a gentleman by birth. According to recent research by other historians, sixty per cent of articled attorneys and forty per cent of army officers came from landed or titled backgrounds.¹⁰ Naval officers, in contrast, were more commonly from middling, professional, or commercial backgrounds: categories C and D account for seventy-one per cent of all naval officers.

Commissioned officers' marriage patterns exhibit a similar pattern. It was not possible to gather marriage data systematically, but the anecdotal evidence suggests that officers' wives came from backgrounds as diverse as their own. A few officers seem to have successfully married up: John Giffard, whose father was a grocer, married the daughter of Sir John Carter, a prominent Whig politician; Charles Thomas Thurston, son of

¹⁰ R. O'Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England, 1450–1800* (Harlow, 2000), p. 175; A.B. Wood, 'The Limits of Social Mobility: Social Origins and Career Patterns of British Generals, 1688–1815' (London School of Economics and Political Science Ph.D. thesis, 2011), pp. 36–43. These comparisons are more fully explored in chapter five.

a lawyer, married the sister-in-law of the Earl of Macclesfield.¹¹ More common, though, are officers who married daughters or sisters of other officers. Sir William Bolton married into Nelson's family, and Lestock Francis Boileau married the sixteen-year-old daughter of Lieutenant Joseph Packer.¹² John Hiatt probably met his wife while on active duty: her father was the Master Builder of the dockyard in Jamaica.¹³ One useful source for officers' marriage patterns are widows' petitions to receive charitable support following their husbands' deaths. Wives uncovered through this source tend, unsurprisingly, to come from lower down the social spectrum. George Hire's wife could only put her mark, rather than her signature, on the application, and William Carr's wife swore that her annual income was less than eighty pounds.¹⁴ What stands out is the wide range of officers' wives' social backgrounds; at the same time, most officers married members of professional or commercial families.

Another way to emphasize the middling origins of British naval officers in this period is to slice the data with a different kind of knife. Between 1801 and 1803, the Scottish statistician and magistrate Patrick Colquhoun compiled a series of tables describing the occupations and incomes of Britain's men and women. Published in 1814 as *A treatise on the wealth, power, and resources of the British Empire*, Colquhoun's data has since been revised by economic historians to provide a relatively accurate picture of the

¹¹ J. Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography* (4 vols., London, 1823–35), I, part II, p. 751; Gwynedd Archives, Meirionnydd Record Office, GB 0220 Z/DAD (Thruston Family Papers, Pennal, 1684–1927), accessed Nov. 2014, at http://anws.llgc.org.uk/cgi-bin/anw/desclist1_nofr?inst_id=38.

¹² *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage*, II, p. 2873. Published online by *The Peerage*, accessed Nov. 2014, at <http://thepeerage.com/p5759.htm#i57585>; D. Lowe, 'The Descendants of Captain Theophile de la Cour DesBrisay and Madeleine Boisrond de St. Leger', accessed Nov. 2014 at <http://www.desbrisay.ca/DesBrisay6.pdf>, p. 14.

¹³ P. Marioné, *The Complete Navy List of the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815*, CDROM (Brussels, 2004), s.v. 'Hiatt, Lieutenant John'.

¹⁴ TNA, ADM 6/341/13 and ADM 6/345/17 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates: Certificates and other papers submitted by applicants to the Charity, 1804–1808).

British socio-economic hierarchy at the turn of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ It is worth testing the reliability of these results by examining the entry for naval officers. Colquhoun's revised tables state that there were approximately seven thousand active naval officers in Britain and that, on average, each officer earned £149 per year.¹⁶ The 1833 Parliamentary study mentioned in chapter one only uncovered 3,693 officers in 1803.¹⁷ Colquhoun's income data is better: by the 1700 establishment of sea pay, a lieutenant of a third rate earned £72 16s per year, which increased to £91 per year for all ships in 1797. The captain of a third rate did much better, earning £245 14s, and a Rear-Admiral earned more than £600 per year.¹⁸ Given that two-thirds of officers were never actively employed at a rank higher than lieutenant, though, from Colquhoun's perspective the lower end of the scale is more relevant. At first glance, then, £149 per year probably overestimates the average officer's income. However, recent research into prize money suggests that an active frigate captain could expect to earn as much as three to five times his monthly wages; this multiplier does not apply to lieutenants, who earned a much smaller share of prizes than their captain, but nevertheless the scale of the incentives is clear.¹⁹ High unemployment also helps to temper the potential incentives of prize money. Therefore, Colquhoun's £149 per year estimate—a fifty per cent increase on a lieutenants' annual earnings but half that of an active-duty post-captain's—seems to be as good an estimate as is possible for such a challenging exercise. Applying this analysis to the other categories on Colquhoun's table suggests that his results can be treated as relatively reliable, but in no way should they be

¹⁵ P.H. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, 'Revising England's Social Tables 1688–1812', *Explorations in Economic History*, 19 (1982), pp. 385–408.

¹⁶ Lindert and Williamson, 'Revising England's Social Tables', p. 401.

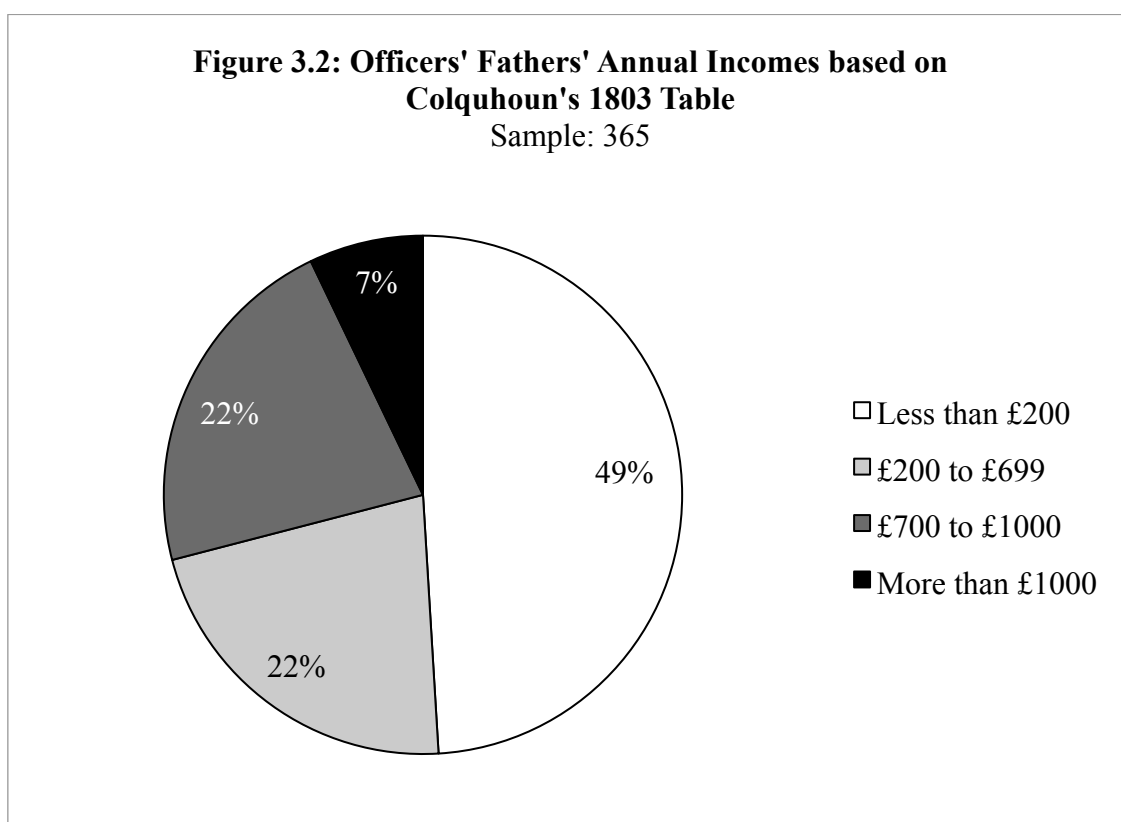
¹⁷ N.A.M. Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers in the Royal Navy, 1690–1815', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 3, no. 1 (2001), p. 86.

¹⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), pp. 622–4.

¹⁹ D.K. Benjamin and C.F. Thornberg, 'Comment: Rules, Monitoring, and Incentives in the Age of Sail', *Explorations in Economic History* 40, no. 2 (2003), p. 208. Chapter four discusses officers' pay and prize money in greater detail.

taken as precise or definitive statements. Thus when Colquhoun claims that fifty thousand Britons were licensed innkeepers and publicans, it is probably fair to conclude that he is accurate about the order of magnitude; similarly, when he posits that those publicans earned £100 per year, he is most likely approximating their median income.

Categorizing officers' fathers' occupations using Colquhoun's tables reinforces the conclusion presented in Figure 3.1: namely, that officers came from lower down the social scale than previous studies have found. Figure 3.2 shows the results of this analysis:



Nearly half of the fathers for whom occupations are available probably earned less than £200 per year, and only a tiny percentage earned more than £1000.²⁰ It is important not to overstate how low down the spectrum commissioned officers belong: nearly every

²⁰ The income divisions are admittedly rather arbitrary, but they derive from the divisions of Colquhoun's tables.

officer's father belonged in the upper quartile of British society as measured by income.²¹ Sea officers were not usually sons of agricultural labourers or the emerging industrial working class, who made up the bulk of the other three quartiles.²² But they were also not exclusively sons of the wealthy. Rather, the majority of their families belonged to the ill-defined 'middling sort' as measured by income and by occupation, as Lewis' categories showed. Later chapters will attempt to be more precise in defining the social status of naval officers themselves, rather than simply viewing them from the perspective of their fathers. For now, modern readers may find it challenging to contextualize the income levels of the period; a few examples may help provide some context.

Sir Davidge Gould is a member of the lowest category: his father was a parson in Somerset. Colquhoun categorized his father as one of Britain's 10,000 'lesser clergymen' earning approximately £120 per year.²³ This lowest category is also the most varied: other examples include Francis Godolphin Bond, son of a Royal Navy surgeon, and George Morey, whose father was a butcher.²⁴ The broad category of £200 to £699 per year includes Matthew Young's father, who was a doctor of divinity and visitor of Trinity College, Dublin.²⁵ Colquhoun's data places him in one of two categories, either 'Eminent clergymen' earning £500 per year, or 'Persons educating youth in universities and chief schools' earning £600 per year. The landed gentry are the primary occupants of the penultimate category. Colquhoun estimated that they earned about £700 per year and

²¹ L.D. Schwarz, 'Income Distribution and Social Structure in London in the Late Eighteenth Century', *The Economic History Review* 32, no. 2 (1979), p. 258.

²² J. Rule, 'Manufacturing and Commerce', in H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 127–8.

²³ *The Gentleman's Magazine* 28 (1847), pp. 201–3; Lindert and Williamson, 'Revising England's Social Tables', p. 400.

²⁴ 'John /Bond/', *FamilySearch*, accessed 15 Apr. 2013, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.2.1/SGKC-FQT>; TNA, PROB 11/1216/184 (Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers, Will of John Morey, Butcher of Portsea, Hampshire, 1792).

²⁵ 'The Book of Trinity College, Dublin, 1591–1891', *The Internet Archive*, accessed Apr. 2013, at http://www.archive.org/stream/bookoftrinitycol00trin/bookoftrinitycol00trin_djvu.txt.

described them as ‘Gentlemen and ladies living on income’.²⁶ Captain Graham Moore’s journal provides some corroborating evidence for such an income: his goal was to ‘possess £800 a year for myself and the lass I love, with whom I wish to settle in the country within 30 miles of London’.²⁷ Two examples from the database of men whose families had such a lifestyle include William Henry Whorwood, who was mentioned in chapter one and whose father was a major landowner in Headington, near Oxford, and Nathan Jeremiah Ball, whose father owned 500 acres in Burwell, near Cambridge.²⁸ Finally, the wealthiest individuals in the database came from the most prosperous merchant families and the aristocracy. Mayson Wright’s father was an important early industrializer in Yorkshire; Colquhoun estimates that such ‘eminent merchants’ earned about £2600 per year.²⁹ Sir Arthur Kaye Legge’s father was the Earl of Dartmouth, and Colquhoun estimates that such a title would probably be accompanied by an annual income approaching £8000.³⁰

It is important to emphasize, though, that the latter two officers were rare. Viewed through Lewis’ lens, scions of the aristocracy made up a mere four per cent of naval officers; Colquhoun’s top category includes wealthy merchants but, at seven per cent, is similarly small. This evidence helps to contextualize the current historiography of the role of wealthy and high status officers in the Georgian Navy. The accepted narrative, sketched roughly, is that the Navy’s popularity increased steadily from at least the Seven Years’ War through the Napoleonic period, and it began to attract sons of important men to its

²⁶ Lindert and Williamson, ‘Revising England’s Social Tables’, p. 400.

²⁷ T. Wareham, *Frigate Commander* (Barnsley, 2004), p. 136.

²⁸ ‘Lords of the Manor 2: The Whorwoods (1613–1849)’, *Headington.org*, accessed Apr. 2013, at http://www.headington.org.uk/history/famous_people/lordssofmanor2.htm; ‘Nathan Ball[s] and Mary Fitt[z]’, *Lintywhite’s Family History Pages*, accessed 15 Apr. 2013, at <http://lintywhite.com/ball.html>.

²⁹ ‘History and Topography of the City of York, the East Riding of Yorkshire ...’, *The Internet Archive*, accessed 15 Apr. 2013, at http://www.archive.org/stream/historyandtopog00whelgoog/historyandtopog00whelgoog_djvu.txt; Lindert and Williamson, ‘Revising England’s Social Tables’, p. 400.

³⁰ *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 158 (1835), pp. 89–90; Lindert and Williamson, ‘Revising England’s Social Tables’, p. 400.

officer corps. The endearing letter sent by the grandson of a duke to Sir Edward Hawke after Quiberon Bay was quoted in chapter one, but is also useful as evidence here. The Navy's rising popularity was given the royal stamp of approval when George III sent Prince William Henry to sea in 1779; this further encouraged Britain's elite.³¹ The influx of high-status young gentlemen prompted the Navy to demarcate future officers by their social status. Though the 1794 Order in Council that established the three classes of boys was primarily intended to wrest control of the officer entry system from the captains, it also served to separate future officers from their social inferiors from the moment they stepped on board a ship.³² The first class of boys were called volunteers and were 'to consist of young gentlemen intended for the sea service'. The second and third classes of boys were for future able seamen and servants, respectively.³³ The Admiralty's goal was to ensure that a 'volunteer 1st class' was the son of a gentleman, however defined. The result of both the increasing popularity of the Navy among elites and the policy changes aimed at the social backgrounds of future officers was that young gentlemen in the early decades of the nineteenth century came from increasingly prestigious backgrounds.³⁴ Wareham cites the 'enormous rise in the number of young aristocrats' after 1801, and Cavell's database also supports this narrative: 12.6 per cent of her boys came from landed gentry families in 1781, increasing to 34 per cent in 1801.³⁵

³¹ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 388.

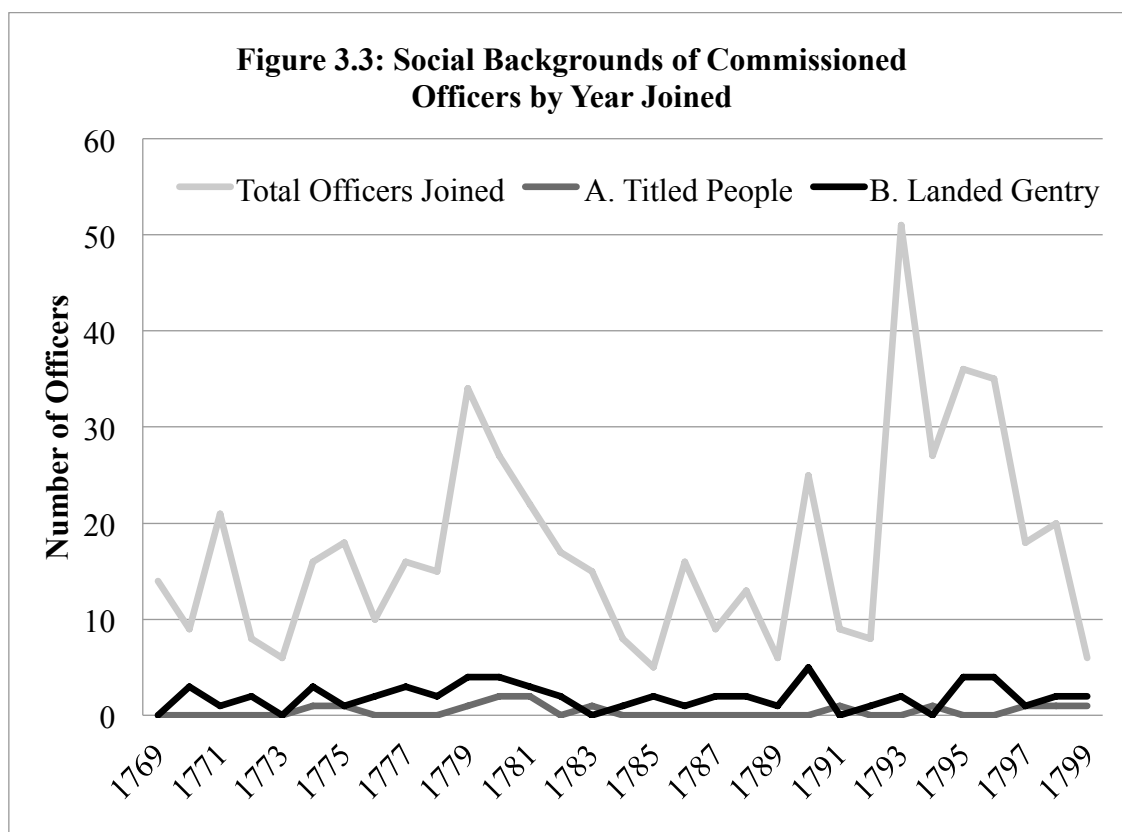
³² S.A. Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the British Navy, 1771–1831* (Woodbridge, 2012), p. 88. The creation of the three classes of boys also had little immediate impact on the ability of individual captains to choose their followers, since it was not difficult to rate a 'young gentleman' as a second-class boy for a while until there was a space open for him as a volunteer 1st class.

³³ *The Keith Papers*, ed. C. Lloyd (NRS, 1955), p. 163.

³⁴ Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys*, pp. 113–58; T. Wareham, *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2001), pp. 54, 94; D. Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy* (London, 1995), p. 22.

³⁵ Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys*, p. 46. Cavell's sample sizes are substantially smaller than the present study. She only sampled every ten years. Her 1781 figure derived from a sample of 103 boys, but her 1801 figure derived from only 47.

As clean as this narrative is, the present database does not provide any conclusive evidence to support it. Figure 3.3 shows when the officers in the database from the two most prestigious categories joined the Navy, with the overall pattern of officer entry included for comparison:



The paucity of socially prestigious officers remains the defining feature of the data. There is no evidence to suggest that they joined the Navy at an increasing rate over the period.

This data does not necessarily invalidate the historiography described above: it was undoubtedly the case that George III's decision to send his son to sea to train as a midshipman was momentous and, as Rodger argues, 'socially radical, even revolutionary'.³⁶ The sample sizes for each individual year are also small—1793, the year with the most entrants, only boasts fifty-one officers. Further evidence to support the existing narrative comes from contemporaries, on whom noble officers also exerted a disproportionate influence. Nelson, St Vincent, and Collingwood all, at various times,

³⁶ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 388.

found reasons to complain about ‘Honourables’ in the Navy. Nelson thought they were disobedient, writing to St Vincent in 1797, ‘Orders are not for [nobles]—at least, I never yet knew one who obeyed.’ Collingwood agreed and added that they tended to be incompetent as well: ‘The truth is, in this great extensive navy, we find a great many indolent, half-qualified people, to whom may be attributed most of the accidents that happen.’³⁷ St Vincent was typically acerbic: ‘This vast overflow of young nobility in the Service makes rapid strides to the decay of seamanship, as well as subordination.’³⁸

As this section has shown, ‘vast overflow’ is a vast overstatement of the percentage of officers from elite backgrounds. It is always dangerous to argue that contemporary observers were incorrect, particularly three observers as prominent in the Navy and in the historical literature as the three quoted above. St Vincent’s writings, in particular, are frequently cited as evidence that the Navy’s officer corps was socially top-heavy. But it is important to keep in mind the context in which these men were writing. Associating aristocrats with idleness and incompetence was a common trope in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The ‘Four-in-Hand Club’ was a lightning rod for such criticism. The club consisted of degenerate but rich members of the aristocracy who squandered their fortunes and went on drunken joy rides while dressed as coachmen. It included friends of the naval officer Lord Falkland, who was mentioned in chapter one because he died in a duel.³⁹ But Falkland was an exception: the Navy was not, in fact, suffering from a massive influx of noble officers. The social backgrounds of the Navy’s officers tended to be more commercial and less socially illustrious than both contemporaries and historians have argued. The data in Figure 3.3 suggest that if the social status of naval officers increased, it

³⁷ Wareham argues that officers from elite backgrounds were disproportionately likely to be given desirable frigate commands. Wareham’s sources, though, were the same as Lewis’s, and it was not possible to revise and check Wareham’s data for the present study. Wareham, *Star Captains*, p. 93.

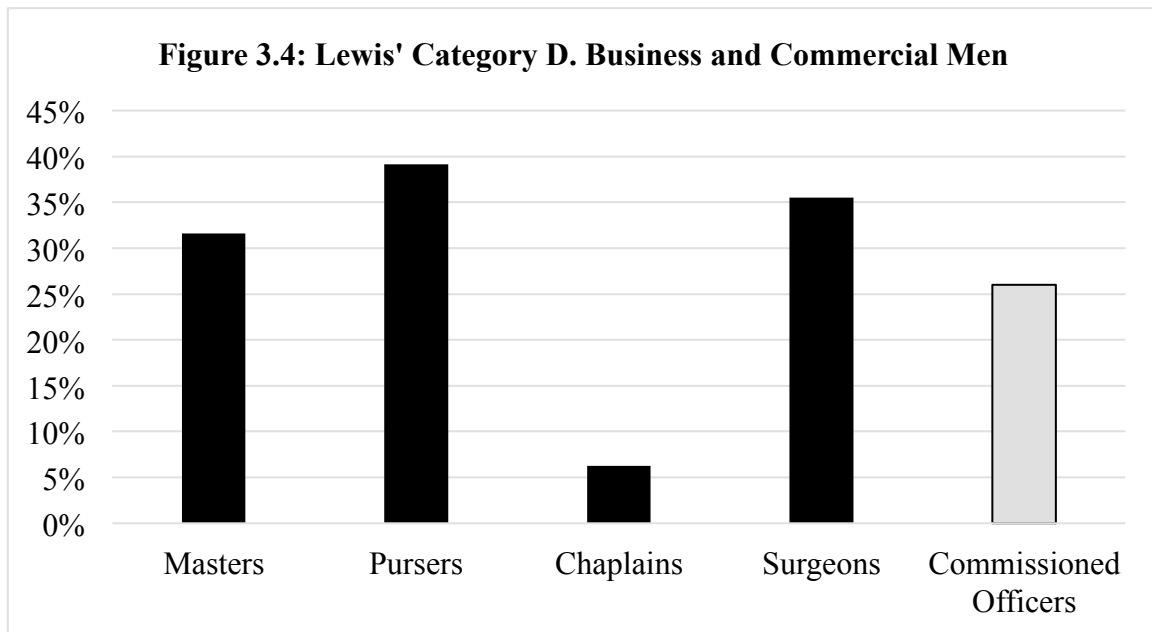
³⁸ Quoted in Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 513–4.

³⁹ B. Wilson, *Decency and Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789–1837* (London, 2007), pp. 164–8, 173.

did so slowly, and in fact it may not have increased at all in the last decades of the eighteenth century. From an institutional perspective, the Navy's popularity and prestige reached its zenith during this period, but it did not attract a significantly higher proportion of socially elite officer recruits until, at the earliest, the last years of the Napoleonic Wars.

Warrant Officers' Social Origins

Though the statistical results of the warrant officers' database are not as robust as those for commissioned officers, they do suggest that the social differences among members of the wardrooms of the late Georgian Navy were surprisingly limited. Warrant officers seem to have come from social backgrounds broadly similar to those of commissioned officers. This result cuts against most of the existing literature on warrant and commissioned officers. Historians have assumed that since a commission was undoubtedly more prestigious than a warrant, commissioned officers would naturally have come from more socially elite backgrounds than warrant officers. Instead, it is more accurate to say that the majority of commissioned and warrant officers shared similar middling professional and commercial backgrounds. Compare, for example, the percentage of officers whose fathers had obvious business interests:



Even though the underlying data for warrant officers is less robust than the data for commissioned officers, the results presented in Figure 3.4 make sense. For example, pursers, whose responsibilities on board were similar to that of a shopkeeper, came from the most commercial backgrounds of the group. Robert Nicholson's father was a shopkeeper in Kent, while Samuel Curry's father was a rope-maker in Devon.⁴⁰ Masters' fathers in this category tended to be merchants with maritime connections: Henry Doughty's father was a merchant in Scarborough on the Yorkshire coast, and William Main's father was a dealer in Liverpool.⁴¹ But the latter appears in the historical record because he declared bankruptcy in 1763: the commercial operations of warrant officers' fathers tended to be small in scale. Surgeon Samuel Gage Britton, for example, was the son of a tailor in Bristol.⁴² There do not seem to have been many warrant officers whose fathers would have had a similar income to that of Captain Christopher Bell's father, who

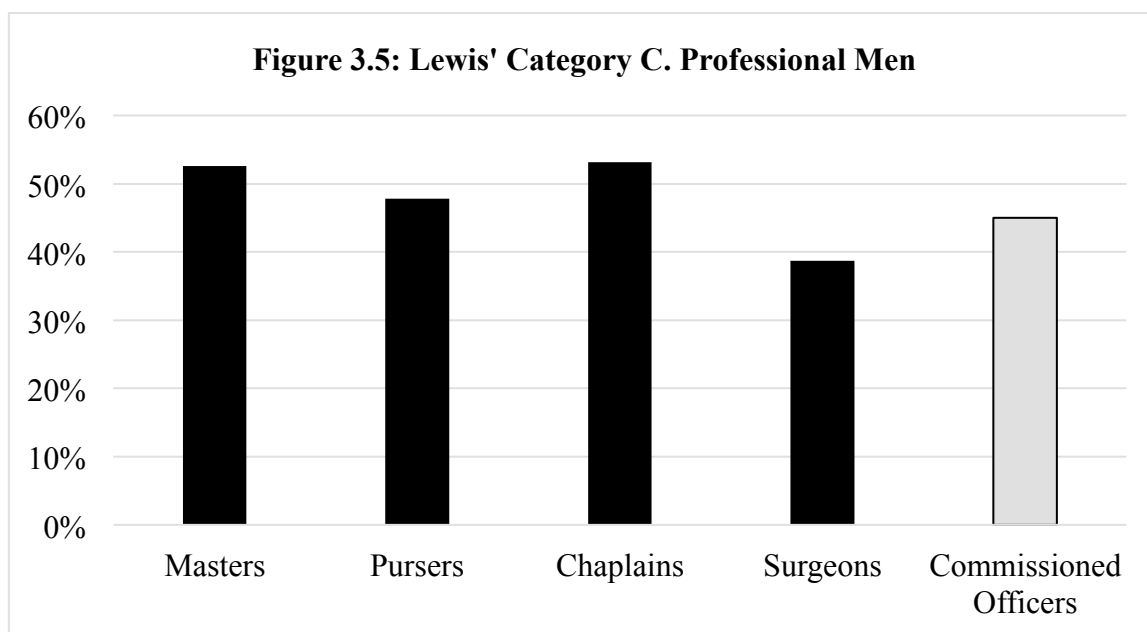
⁴⁰ TNA, IR 26/343/171; 'Sun Fire Record Office MS 11936/377/582007', *Access to Archives*, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=074-sun_2-0-377&cid=-1#-1.

⁴¹ J. Wright, *The American Negotiator: Or, The Various Currencies of the British Colonies in America* (London, 1765), p. xlv; R. Baldwin, *The General Index as to Twenty-Seven Volumes of the London Magazine, viz, from 1732 to 1758 inclusive* (London, 1763), xxxii, p. 338.

⁴² 'Bristol Record Office: 5918/29/e', *Access to Archives*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-5918&cid=-1#-1>.

was a merchant who owned the ‘principal’ house in Great Yarmouth.⁴³ But there were plenty of warrant officers who shared a background similar to that of Lieutenant William Lloyd, whose father James was an innkeeper in Devon.⁴⁴ Seen through Lewis’ lens, the percentage of warrant officers from commercial backgrounds is comparable to that of commissioned officers.

A similar pattern is visible in Lewis’ ‘Professional Men’ category: there is little difference between the percentage of professional fathers for warrant and commissioned officers. Figure 3.5 shows the percentage of professional fathers for each officer category:



The range across the categories is notably small: only fourteen percentage points separate chaplains, whose fathers were most frequently professionals, from surgeons.

Unsurprisingly, chaplains’ fathers were often members of the church, and surgeons’ fathers were often medical professionals. Surgeon James Thynne’s father was an apothecary and surgeon in Paisley, Scotland, while chaplain Edward Brice’s father, George Tito Brice,

⁴³ C.J. Palmer, *The Perilustration of Great Yarmouth, with Gorleston and Southtown* (3 vols., Great Yarmouth, 1875), III, p. 339.

⁴⁴ ‘Re: Eales in Ashburton, Devon’, *Genealogy.com*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://genforum.genealogy.com/eales/messages/67.html>; ‘DEVON-L Archives’, *RootsWeb*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/DEVON/2002-04/1019434254>.

was a clergyman.⁴⁵ There are dozens of other examples in the database. Pursers' fathers, though difficult to uncover, were frequently civil servants, clerks, or pursers. William Cheney Grout's father was a long-serving purser in the Royal Navy.⁴⁶ John Henry Bond crossed two categories: his father was a surgeon in the Navy, and his grandfather was a purser.⁴⁷ Masters came from maritime and naval families more frequently than other warrant officers. It's more notable to find masters who have no obvious maritime connection, such as Thomas Chamberlayne and David Blackburn. Both of their fathers were clergymen.⁴⁸ But James Bowen's background as the son of a merchant ship captain was more common among his fellow masters.

As with the commercial background category, commissioned officers were more likely than warrant officers to be the sons of eminent professionals. Post-captains and admirals in the Navy are good examples: eighteen per cent of all the fathers of commissioned officers in the professional category were of that rank. For warrant officers, the percentage is much lower: only three masters were sons of similarly successful naval officers, and none of the other categories. But it is important not to overstate the social distance between commissioned and warrant officers' fathers within the professional category. Master William Furzer's father was the Surveyor of the Navy; purser George Hopper Toulmin's father was a respected surgeon and author; surgeon Robert Carruthers' father was an eminent physician; and surgeon Francis Spilsbury's father invented a popular

⁴⁵ J. Maxwell, *Paisely Dispensary: A Poem* (1786), dedication; *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1715–1886*, ed. J. Foster (4 vols., Oxford, 1888), s.v. 'Brice, Edward'.

⁴⁶ TNA, PROB 11/1818/445 (Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers, Will of Susanna Gordon, Widow of Saint Pancras, Middlesex, 22 July 1822).

⁴⁷ TNA, ADM 6/353/66 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates: Certificates and other papers submitted by applicants to the Charity, 1814).

⁴⁸ N. Carlisle, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1810); D. Neville, *Blackburn's Isle* (Lavenham, 1975), p. 16.

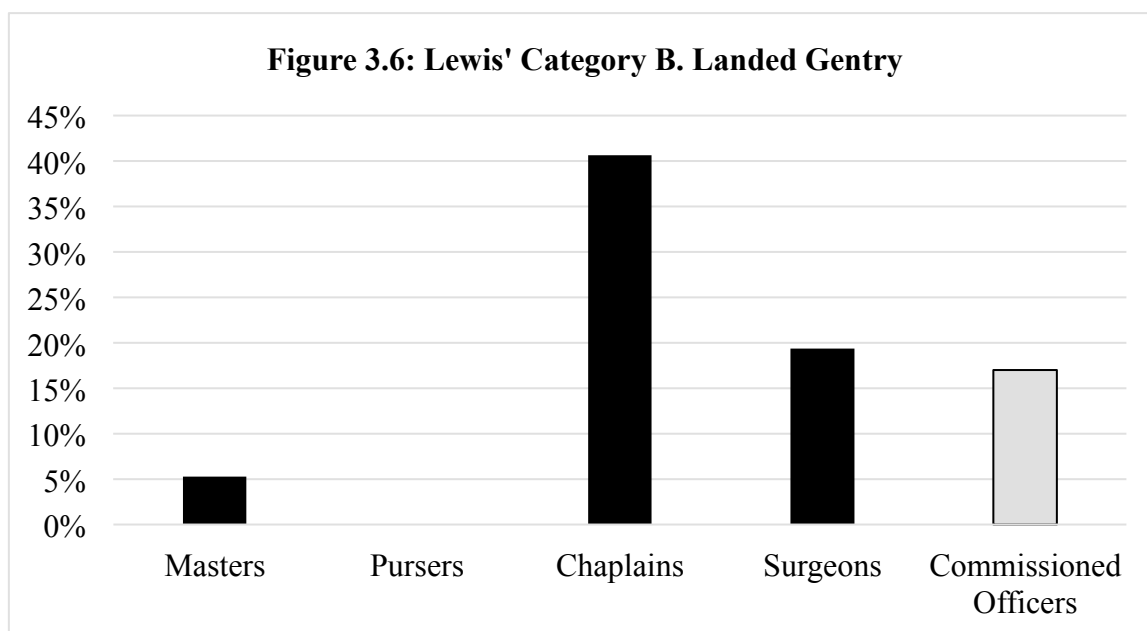
medicine for the relief of rheumatism.⁴⁹ There are also plenty of examples of commissioned officers from less prestigious professional families: Edward Shapcote, mentioned in the context of birth certificates in chapter one, was the son of a gunner, while William Trounsell's father was a carpenter.⁵⁰ In other words, professional backgrounds were common to nearly half of all the occupants of the Navy's wardrooms, and even though commissioned officers were more likely to have prominent fathers, the range of occupations was similar.

Combining Figures 3.4 and 3.5 covers most of the backgrounds of both warrant and commissioned officers. But there are two notable omissions: there are very few chaplains from commercial backgrounds in Figure 3.4, and, as we saw earlier in this chapter, there are a number of commissioned officers from landed backgrounds. Figure 3.6 shows where the remaining chaplains' fathers can be found:

⁴⁹ M. Wand, 'Captain Bennett Investigated', *The Foxearth and District Local History Society*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://www.foxearth.org.uk/CaptainBennett.html>; B. Calvert-Toulmin, 'Descendants of Abraham Toulmin of Chard in Somerset', My Toulmin Family Home Page, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://toulmin-family.co.uk/DescendentsAbrahamChard.htm>; 'The commissariat record of Dunblane. Register of testaments, 1539–1800', *The Internet Archive*, accessed Jan. 2014, via http://archive.org/stream/commissariatreco20dunb/commissariatreco20dunb_djvu.txt; S.

Tucker, et al, *The Encyclopedia of the War of 1812* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2012), p. 672.

⁵⁰ 'John Shapcote', *Shapcott Family*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://stepneyshapcotes.shapcott-family.com/page2.html>; TNA, ADM 6/23/170 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates: Commission and Warrant Book, 1783).



Unsurprisingly, there are very few masters and no pursers from landed backgrounds. Part of the explanation is educational: to be a purser required basic literacy and mathematics skills, but, unlike chaplains, it was not necessary for a purser to have any experience in higher education. There were fewer monetary barriers to becoming a purser compared to the expense an Oxford or Cambridge education. Pursers were akin to accountants or shopkeepers, and neither of those occupations attracted sons of the gentry. Masters, meanwhile, learned seamanship in the same way that commissioned officers did: by spending long periods of time at sea. It was unlikely that a well-to-do landed family would consider sending their son to the Navy to be a master when it would be within their means to put him on the path to a commission. The reverse of the argument about pursers and masters suggests why chaplains and surgeons more frequently came from landed backgrounds. Chaplains were often younger sons who did not stand to inherit their fathers' estate and so sought a career in the church. Surgeons incurred medical training expenses of between £50 and £100, but the potential payoff for such an investment was a steady career as a medical service provider and, with further educational expenses, elevation to the status

of a physician.⁵¹ In a typical wardroom of a ship of the line, it was about as likely that the surgeon came from a traditional landed family as it was that a lieutenant or two did.

The social significance of the large percentage of chaplains and surgeons from landed backgrounds should not be overemphasized, though. The difference between surgeons and commissioned officers in Figure 3.6 is two percentage points, which is well within the margin of error. Also, there are no warrant officers in the database whose fathers were titled. Though only four per cent of commissioned officers had titled fathers, that percentage is infinitely larger than the percentage of warrant officers with titled fathers. In other words, despite the broad similarities highlighted here, there was a small but noticeable social gap between warrant officers and commissioned officers. No titled family would consider encouraging their son to become a purser or, probably, even a surgeon. Clergymen were sometimes the younger sons of titled men, but most of those men had good enough prospects on land to make the Navy an unattractive career choice.

James Bowen's peculiar career provides a useful prism through which the distinction between commissioned and warrant officers' backgrounds can be viewed. As discussed in chapters one and two, Bowen was born into a maritime community in Devon that produced a large percentage of the Navy's manpower, both officers and men. His father was the master of a merchant ship, a background common among both commissioned and warrant officers. Like many lieutenants, he went to sea at a young age and became an expert sailor. He joined the Navy as a master shortly before his thirtieth birthday after a successful decade in command of merchant ships during the American War. He would have retired a master had it not been for his expert handling of Lord Howe's flagship at the Glorious First of June in 1794. The admiral asked him his preferred

⁵¹ Cardwell, 'Royal Navy Surgeons', p. 46.

reward, and he chose a commission as a lieutenant.⁵² He vacated his position near the top of the masters' seniority list and joined the commissioned officers' list at the very bottom: in other words, the historical association of gentlemen with commissions meant Bowen was willing to start over.⁵³ Until that moment, though, his early career and path to the Navy were typical of warrant officers, and masters in particular. As we saw in chapter two, no commissioned officers, when faced with unemployment, chose to give up their commissions to become masters. The distinction between warrants and commissions was real and significant, even if masters came from backgrounds not dissimilar to many commissioned officers. The extent to which commissions were significantly more prestigious than warrants is examined more fully in later chapters. The emphasis in this chapter is on the broad similarities between the social backgrounds of the two groups.

The men who ate and drank, slept and worked, and played and argued around the wardroom mess tables of the Georgian Navy came from middling professional or commercial backgrounds. Sons of doctors, lawyers, military officers, clergymen, civil servants, shopkeepers, tradesmen and merchants made up the Navy's officer corps. In the patriarchal world of the eighteenth century, their fathers' occupations shaped their perceived social status in important ways. Admittedly, only commissioned officers came from Britain's elite, and within each category, it was more likely for a commissioned officer than a warrant officer to be the son of an eminent professional or wealthy merchant. But few officers were obviously gentlemen by birth who stood to inherit a large estate and had family arms.

The Wardroom

⁵² *ODNB*, s.v. 'Bowen, James (1751–1825)'.

⁵³ His brother Richard followed a more traditional path to a commission by joining a ship as a midshipman as a teenager.

The wooden world was cramped. The backbone of the fleet, seventy-four gun ships of the line, were only about 170 feet long and 50 feet wide, but they held crews of more than 600.⁵⁴ The major division on board was between the quarterdeck and the rest of the ship. The former was first and foremost a practical space for commanding the ship. But it also served a ceremonial purpose. Surgeon Peter Cullen called it the ‘grand promenade of all the officers of the first class’ and noted:

If ever a Court be held in a ship it is on the quarter-deck. All the orders, speeches, etc. are delivered from it. All assemblies of the ship’s company, when ordered by the Captain, must appear on it. The troops, or Marines, are paraded also upon it. And it is sometimes converted into a church, or a ball room.⁵⁵

The theatricality of the quarterdeck was deliberately contrived to distinguish officers from men. But the focus of this section is the relationships among officers, and in particular whether gentility by birth played a significant role in shaping officers’ social interactions on board. Therefore, the wardroom is the more appropriate space to analyse. Chaplain Mangin’s description of the wardroom of a seventy-four is worth reproducing at some length:

It is usually in a line-of-battle ship, about 35 feet in length, and 16 or 18 feet wide. Within the walls, which are of painted canvas, are the cabins of six officers; the centre of the room is occupied by the mess-table; and the extremity, under the stern windows, by a projection called the rudder-head. The opposite end is so arranged as to do the office of a side-board; with the door of entrance on one side of it; and a space to sling a quarter-cask of wine, on the other.⁵⁶

Space, and particularly private space, was at a premium.⁵⁷ The gunner, boatswain and carpenter lived in small cabins off the gunroom, and did not have access to the wardroom. The surgeon and the purser did, but they too slept elsewhere, usually in small cabins in the cockpit, near the midshipmen. The remaining members of the wardroom had individual

⁵⁴ Q. Colville, ‘Life Afloat’, in Q. Colville and J. Davey (eds.), *Nelson, Navy & Nation: The Royal Navy and the British People, 1688–1815* (London, 2013), p. 82; *Five Naval Journals, 1789–1817*, ed. H.G. Thursfield (NRS, 1951), p. 15.

⁵⁵ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 57–8.

⁵⁶ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ On the lower deck, the crew slung their hammocks in twenty-eight inch wide spaces.

cabins, but, as Mangin notes, these were small spaces demarcated from the wardroom only by a canvas curtain. There were two latrines, called quarter galleries, for the use of the wardroom, but on a typical seventy-four, one of the quarter galleries opened directly out of the first lieutenant's cabin. Living and sleeping areas increased exponentially with rank, and only the captain had more than one room, guaranteed access to his own latrine, and any kind of privacy.⁵⁸ But he had acquired his privacy after having spent years in cabins off the wardroom and in the cramped cockpit. In other words, every officer, both commissioned and warrant, spent significant periods of his career sharing his living space as a member of the wardroom. Exploring the space that commissioned and warrant officers inhabited and the ways in which they interacted with each other demonstrates the social dynamics at work every day in the Georgian Navy.

Just as ordinary sailors organized themselves socially by mess tables, so too did wardroom officers congregate daily around food. It was the fundamental aspect of their experience on board a ship. As Pepys quipped, 'Englishmen, and more especially seamen, love their bellies above everything else.'⁵⁹ Wardroom officers gathered around the mess table three or four times a day to fill their bellies: first at breakfast around 9am, then again at dinner at 2pm. Tea was served at 6pm on Mangin's ship, and a few hours later the day ended with 'drinking and toasting' until about 10pm. In between, the wardroom was crowded and busy, and not exclusively populated by officers: seamen washed and scrubbed the space at daybreak; stewards often had reasons to be in the space to prepare and clean up after meals; and some servants used it to prepare their officers' uniforms and boots. The wardroom's primary occupants were the officers, though: in between meals, they used it to write letters, study, or play backgammon or music. There was nearly constant foot traffic in and out of the room, and it only became something approaching

⁵⁸ B. Lavery, *The 74-gun Ship Bellona*, revised edn. (London, 2003), pp. 17–18, 50, 80.

⁵⁹ Colville, 'Life Afloat', p. 86.

quiet at the end of the evening.⁶⁰ The busy routine of the wardroom meant that men from a range of backgrounds were forced to interact regularly with each other in a social setting. Every day, they rubbed shoulders—literally—with their fellow officers.

Only in the Navy could a prince of the realm be seated next to the son of a woolcomber. Graham Moore was neither, but his stories about meeting Prince William Henry demonstrate the relaxed atmosphere that characterized even that wardroom. Upon first meeting the Prince on the *Hebe* in 1785, Moore was struck by the Prince's friendliness. Without introducing himself, the Prince greeted Moore 'in an easy stile [*sic*]'. Moore suspected his identity, but, he wrote in his diary, 'I spoke to him and addressed him in the same manner I would any other lieutenant.' Moore also reported on the social dynamics in the wardroom that evening: '[The Prince] was very at ease and familiar with all officers, calling for songs and joining in the chorus.' The Prince was famously fond of drinking, and one night Moore found himself up all night: 'We were very merry, the Prince seems to have a strong taste for what is called blackguarding and enjoyed some smutty jokes and loose songs.' Moore didn't get to bed until 7am.⁶¹

Despite the relaxed tone, the *Hebe*'s wardroom was atypical simply because of the presence of the Prince. As the databases suggest, a typical seventy-four's wardroom included the following members, on average: one lieutenant from a landed or titled background; one lieutenant whose father was a naval officer; and three lieutenants whose fathers were professionals or merchants. The master, who had at least a decade's experience at sea, was from a maritime community and family, while the purser's father was involved in commerce. The surgeon came from a small landholding family in Scotland, while the chaplain was the younger son of a genteel but impoverished English family. The Captain of the Marines and his two lieutenants were unlikely to come from

⁶⁰ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 11–13.

⁶¹ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, pp. 4–6.

landed backgrounds and probably more closely resembled the warrant officers than the sea lieutenants.⁶² This ‘typical’ wardroom is an oversimplification, of course, and each wardroom consisted of a unique mixture of men. But the social distance between the members, and in particular between the commissioned and warrant officers, was relatively small. Mangin provides corroborating evidence when he notes that there was only one ‘independent man’ in his wardroom; the rest, presumably, came from middling backgrounds on the fringes of genteel society.⁶³

Many officers became close friends after serving together, and friendships often crossed social and hierarchical barriers. The close proximity in which officers lived and worked undoubtedly was the major driver of these friendships, as was the success of the mission.⁶⁴ David Blackburn, master of the tender *Supply* en route to Australia, feared that a poor relationship with his commanding officer, a lieutenant, would make the long voyage even more difficult to endure. His letters repeatedly refer to the state of that relationship. On his first day aboard the *Supply*, he wrote to his sister that the lieutenant ‘was very civil and as far as I can judge at present seems to wish to live with me on friendly terms. If so, it will take off a deal of the unpleasantness of so long a voyage.’ A week later: ‘[I] am upon good friendly terms with Captain Ball and it shall not be my fault if we don’t continue so.’ One month into the voyage: ‘You will be glad I know to hear that my Captain and I continue on friendly social terms and I dare say we shall continue so.’ Five months into the voyage, he thought his good relationship with the lieutenant was still worth mentioning to his sister. From the lieutenant’s perspective, Blackburn noted: ‘Indeed tis his interest to be civil to me, as I am the next in rank to himself ... [I]n case of sickness of his side, the

⁶² B. Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines, 1664–1802* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 95–101.

⁶³ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 33.

⁶⁴ A useful parallel can be found in the foundation of the Continental Army in 1775–6. Sarah Knott argues that the Continental Congress deliberately sought to create ‘fraternal cohesion’ among the new army’s officers because it was an ‘essential [prerequisite] for an efficient and effective fighting force’. See S. Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2009), p. 161.

command of the tender must devolve upon me.’⁶⁵ In addition to the torture of living in a cramped space, unable to escape a deteriorating relationship, it would be dangerous for the only two experienced navigators to have a falling out on such a long voyage.

Other friendships seem to have had less to do with the necessities of long voyages and more to do with the lack of alternatives. From a social perspective, Blackburn, the lieutenant, and the surgeon were much more similar to each other than to the crew. As Blackburn points out, ‘[E]xcept the surgeon, who I think is a good man ... [the lieutenant] has no one else to converse with but me.’⁶⁶ All three were likely from the upper quartile of the social spectrum, as demonstrated by the databases underpinning this study. Purser Thomas Peckston’s letters demonstrate that he paid little attention to the distinction between commissions and warrants. He moved his wife into a house previously occupied, first, by the wife of a captain, and second, by the wife of a lieutenant. He told her that he had encouraged all the officers of his previous two ships to call on her there, and emphasized how well-read the chaplain of the *America* was. He continued:

Mr O’Maley is Purser of the same ship, is a family man and very deserving. The Doctor has offered his Services therefore if you should want any medical assistance I would recommend your calling on Dr Bromley who I am sure will gladly give you his attendance. Lieutenants Richardson, Molesworth, Caldwell and Moody and Mr. Glen the Master, also Capt. Rea of the Royal Marines and Lieutenant Garter and Hill of the above I wish also to be treated with attention.⁶⁷

When Peckston joined his next ship, he developed a close friendship with the surgeon and the captain. He exchanged books with the surgeon, and the captain offered him use of his library. Peckston taught both of them to write shorthand, and they played whist together, either in the captain’s cabin or the wardroom.⁶⁸ As a lieutenant on the *Perseus*, Graham Moore went drinking ashore with the Marine lieutenant and the purser.⁶⁹ Like Peckston, he

⁶⁵ Neville, *Blackburn’s Isle*, pp. 118–126.

⁶⁶ Neville, *Blackburn’s Isle*, p. 121.

⁶⁷ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Thomas Peckston to Mary Peckston, 1 and 11 July 1812.

⁶⁸ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Thomas Peckston to Mary Peckston, 3 February 1813.

⁶⁹ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 9.

clearly saw no problem crossing boundaries of service or commission to socialize with the fellow members of his wardroom. Even when the socializing was not up to Moore's high standards, he lumped both warrant and commissioned officers together in failure:

The want of society is one of the most uncomfortable circumstances in my profession. Among six or seven men, which is the most we meet of that class which we can conveniently have much social intercourse with in a frigate, a man is in high good luck if he meets one person from whose character and conversation he can draw much amusement or instruction.⁷⁰

The 'six or seven men' would most likely include the commissioned officers, but Moore deliberately did not exclude warrant officers from that group: most frigates, after all, only had four or at most five commissioned officers. Moore wanted messmates of good character and engaging conversation, not necessarily of high birth or rank.⁷¹ Even conversation was not strictly necessary for Moore to develop amicable feelings towards his messmates. He wrote later in his career, on another ship: 'I have a real regard for some of [the officers] and would really exert myself to serve them, but their conversation is tasteless to me.'⁷² What emerges from Moore's diary and other similar sources is a picture of wardrooms in which gentility by birth is not an issue; rather, gentility of behaviour is the desired characteristic.

Moore's frustration with lacklustre conversations is a good (if relatively tame) example of the tension that often simmered just beneath the surface in some wardrooms. Courts martial records are full of episodes when those frustrations boiled over, revealing cliques, jealousies, and annoyances exacerbated by the pressure of intense daily contact. Few, though, seem to have been driven strictly by concerns about officers' social backgrounds. A suspicious smell in the wardroom of the sloop *Orestes* in the spring of 1809 caused a group of officers to accuse the surgeon of disposing of his chamber pot in

⁷⁰ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 94.

⁷¹ The crew, it need hardly be mentioned, were not worthy of Moore's conversation.

⁷² Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 239.

the wardroom; they also accused him of calling the captain a scoundrel. It seems the surgeon did not have many friends on board and was at the mercy of this clique: the ship's gunner had put on a puppet show that made fun of the surgeon's brogue and intimated that the surgeon had given the purser, his one ally on board, an enema. The Court, probably wisely, simply dismissed the surgeon from the ship in the hopes of solving the clash of personalities. There is no hint in the record that either social status or rank played a role in the dispute.⁷³ In another case, it is likely that the Captain George Mortimer of the Marines of the *Hercule* had spent much of the winter of 1801 sitting uncomfortably at the wardroom mess table, as his fellow officers were heavy drinkers and frequently swore. Rather than confront them about it, he accused the chaplain of drunkenness, ungentelemanly conduct, and failing to do his duty. 'A great deal of indecent and improper language has been made use of at the mess table,' Mortimer told the Court, 'which the prisoner [the chaplain] has never in any one instance attempted to check or repress, which I conceive in a divine, it was his duty to have done.' The case was dismissed and the chaplain cleared of any wrongdoing.⁷⁴ On the quarterdeck of the *Princess Charlotte* in 1805, Marine Lieutenant George Marshall told his ship's purser, Mr. Joseph Knight, that he was a 'kiss my arse fellow'. The Court sided with Marshall, ruling that Knight had provoked him, but they '[bewailed] that His Majesty's quarter deck should have been made the scene of any altercation'.⁷⁵

None of the aforementioned altercations resulted in duels, which will feature in chapter six. Nevertheless, life in the Navy's wardrooms was rougher around the edges than genteel society. It was an entirely masculine world in which the close living conditions and necessity of maintaining good relations on long voyages tended to diminish the

⁷³ *Naval Courts Martial, 1793–1815*, ed. J.D. Byrn (NRS, 2009), pp. 666–76.

⁷⁴ *Naval Courts Martial*, pp. 79–86.

⁷⁵ *Naval Courts Martial*, pp. 106–14.

significance of the land-based social hierarchy.⁷⁶ Occasionally, though, social backgrounds did feature in disputes between officers. Edward Pellew and Thomas Troubridge played out the most famous argument between two naval officers of the period. Unable to stand each other's company, both launched letter-writing campaigns to London to complain about the other. Pellew, son of a packet-boat captain, dismissed Troubridge as a mere son of 'un garçon pâtissier from St Martin's Lane'.⁷⁷ But most officers seem to have treated their wardroom messmates as relatively equal members of their floating home.⁷⁸ They socialized across both the boundary between commissions and warrants and across the boundary between the landed elite and the rest. It was frequently not harmonious, but the unique demands of life at sea meant that the wardroom was a space for relative social equals rather than for rigid hierarchies.



A commission nominally made a man a gentleman; a warrant did not. Thus when Nelson described his Portuguese boatswain as 'a most excellent gentleman', he shocked the Victorian editor of his letters, Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, into including a footnote: 'Professional readers will think this an extraordinary description of a *boatswain*.'⁷⁹ Boatswains were warrant officers, though not of wardroom rank.⁸⁰ But membership of the

⁷⁶ There were women on board some ships some of the time. There were five women in Nelson's squadron at the Nile, for example. See Colville, 'Life Afloat', pp. 88–9. But in general, wardrooms were populated by men.

⁷⁷ S. Taylor, *Commander: The Life and Exploits of Britain's Greatest Frigate Captain* (London, 2012), p. 200.

⁷⁸ Ships lacked some of the essential qualities of a home identified by Davidoff et al. in *The Family Story*, pp. 83–7: namely, a matriarch and a hearth (unless one considers the galley stove to count). Nevertheless, the ship as a home is a useful way of conceptualizing sailors' social interactions and identities.

⁷⁹ Nelson to Philip Stevens, 21 September 1787, *The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson*, ed. Sir N.H. Nicolas (7 vols, London, 1844), I, p. 257. Italics original.

⁸⁰ They did, however, have a servant, which was a privilege they shared with all other officers. Higher ranking officers had much larger servant allocations: admirals would have dozens in their retinue, and the number of servants allocated to a captain was proportional to the size of

wardroom did not guarantee genteel status. Mangin's demeaning description of his messmates underlines the difference between the civilian and naval worlds: '[L]ong accustomed to the Society of the polite, the learned and the effeminate, I was now to dwell with those to whom not any of these epithets could possibly be applied.'⁸¹ Clearly it is important to distinguish between the gentility of an officer's social background and his behaviour. Chapter six will explore the differences between the two in much greater detail. From the perspective of this chapter—gentility of birth—the distinction between the social status of commissioned officers and warrant officers of wardroom rank should not have been so stark. It has not attempted to argue that there were no social differences between them. Only commissioned officers came from titled backgrounds, and within each of Lewis' social categories, commissioned officers' fathers tended to be wealthier and more successful than warrant officers'. But many chaplains and surgeons came from the landed gentry, and masters and pursers came from middling professional backgrounds much more similar to other members of the wardroom than to any member of the lower deck. It is the similarities between warrant and commissioned officers, not the differences, which are most striking.

Using those similarities as a foundation, we need to recalibrate the way we think about the officers of the Georgian Navy. Socially, both in terms of background and in the manner in which they treated each other, warrant and commissioned officers belong in the same broad category. Neither St Vincent's division of the naval hierarchy, which emphasizes the influx of titled officers into the Navy, nor the most common historical division, which ignores the presence of warrant officers, should survive unscathed in the face of the evidence presented here. There were few noble officers, and warrant officers

the crew. Nevertheless, having even one servant distinguished boatswains from petty officers and the rest of the crew.

⁸¹ *Five Naval Journals*, p. 8.

interacted as full members of the wardroom mess with commissioned officers. But to argue that all warrant and commissioned officers were socially identical would also be a mistake. As the next chapter will explore, there were significant gradations within the naval hierarchy of rank, income, and behaviour that shaped officers' social status.

CHAPTER FOUR

If They Personally Deserve It

Prize Money and Promotion Prospects

On 15 June 1780, Edward Pellew was distraught. His commanding officer, Captain Philemon Pownoll, had just been killed by a shot fired from a French privateer. Pellew—future Admiral and Viscount, recipient of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies station, hero of the shipwreck of the East Indiaman *Dutton*, and commander of the Bombardment of Algiers—was convinced that his career was over. Pownoll had been Pellew's patron, and, since Pellew had no relatives or other connections of any note in government or in the Navy, he feared that he would never progress past being first lieutenant of the *Apollo*, a thirty-two gun frigate. He later wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Sandwich:

The ship's company have lost a father. I have lost much more, a father and a friend united; and that friend is my only one on earth. Never, my Lord, was grief more poignant than that we all feel for our adored commander. Mine is inexpressible. The friend who brought me up, and pushed me through the service, is now no more!¹

Two factors prevented Pellew's career from stagnating. First, he took command of the *Apollo* during the height of the action in which Pownoll was killed and brought it to a successful conclusion, driving the French privateer ashore. She was later recovered and bought by the Navy; more importantly for Pellew, he was promoted to commander and immediately given the sloop *Hazard*. Sandwich made the reasons for Pellew's promotion explicit: 'as a reward for his gallant and officer-like conduct'. Second, Pellew was clearly a talented and driven commander, likely to capture valuable prizes and reflect well on any

¹ Quoted in N.A.M. Rodger, "'A little navy of your own making.'" Admiral Boscawen and the Cornish Connection in the Royal Navy', in M. Duffy (ed.), *Parameters of British Naval Power, 1650–1850* (Exeter, 1992), p. 89.

powerful patron. Lord Falmouth, an eminent Tory politician closely connected to Pownoll and Pellew's community in Cornwall, quickly stepped into the patronage void, and Pellew was made post by the end of the American War. His career was no longer in jeopardy.²

As the previous chapter demonstrated, commissioned officers' social backgrounds were both lower on the spectrum and more similar to warrant officers' backgrounds than previous historians have found. Pellew, son of a packet-boat captain, is a good example of an officer of middling origins. But an officer's social background was only one variable in his social status equation. This chapter analyses the significance of two more variables: rank and money. It identifies two groups of naval officers: an elite minority and a large and diffuse majority. Promotion to post-captain was the surest route to joining the elite. Not only was it the highest rank to which an officer could be promoted independent of seniority, but it also vastly increased his potential prize money earnings. Post-captains who survived long enough to become admirals were in even better positions, as Pellew's career demonstrates: he was a successful frigate captain with a good record of prize money earnings, but he made a fortune as the Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Station. Only a tiny minority of naval officers reached the lofty heights of Pellew's career. Most languished in obscurity. This chapter separates the elite from the rest to provide the foundation for discussing naval officers' unique blend of gentlemanly professionalism in chapters five and six.

Commissioned Officers' Promotion Prospects

What factors determined whether an officer would join the elite? Some potential factors were beyond an officer's control, such as the timing of his birth and whether he had

² ODNB, s.v. 'Pellew, Edward, first Viscount Exmouth (1757–1833)'; H. Colburn and R. Bentley, *The United Service Journal and Naval and Military Magazine* (London, 1833), I, p. 394; S. Taylor, *Commander: The Life and Exploits of Britain's Greatest Frigate Captain* (London, 2012), pp. 49–51; Rodger, "A little navy of your own making", p. 86.

opportunities to distinguish himself in action. Others, such as his conduct in battle and abilities as a seaman, navigator, and leader, were within his control. This section explores how each of these factors shaped officers' careers.

Rodger proposes that the timing of an officer's commission played a significant role in determining his prospects. In his article on the subject, he notes that officers commissioned just before the outbreak of the American War gained promotion to commander at a greater rate than those commissioned later in the war.³ In *Command of the Ocean*, he takes the argument a step further, connecting the dots between the usual age of a newly-commissioned lieutenant—about twenty—and the most fortuitous time to be born—about twenty years before the outbreak of a major war. The assumption is that being a young, newly-commissioned lieutenant at the outbreak of a war, when the demand for seaworthy lieutenants and the opportunities for distinction are highest, would tend to lead to promotion.⁴ The database that underpins this study provides mixed results to support his assertion. The data series are messy and not easily presented graphically, so the most straightforward approach is to test Rodger's hypothesis in tabular form across the three major conflicts covered by this study: the American War, the French Revolutionary Wars, and the Napoleonic Wars. The baseline comparison, shown at the bottom of Table 4.1, is the promotion rate across the whole study. The dates tested for each war were chosen by selecting the outbreak of the relevant naval war (1778, 1793, and 1803), subtracting twenty years, and then broadening the analysis to include two years before and after the resulting date. This helps incorporate commissioned officers aged eighteen to twenty-two, all of whom would be considered at the prime age to benefit from a major conflict.

³ N.A.M. Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers in the Royal Navy, 1690–1815', *Journal for Maritime Research* 3, no. 1 (2001), p. 96.

⁴ Idem, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), p. 381.

Table 4.1: Promotion Rates by Birth Date⁵

War	Birth Dates	Number of Officers	Promoted to Commander	Promoted to Post-Captain
American War	1756–1760	62	29%	21%
French Rev. Wars	1771–1775	95	36%	22%
Napoleonic Wars	1781–1785	84	39%	19%
Baseline	1732–1788	554	34%	20%

There does not seem to be a clear benefit to being born twenty years before the outbreak of a major war. Massaging the data to remove officers for whom their birth date is unconfirmed or simply an estimate does not significantly change the results, except for the American War:

Table 4.2: Promotion Rates from Confirmed Birth Dates Only

War	Birth Dates	Number of Officers	Promoted to Commander	Promoted to Post-Captain
American War	1756–1760	28	50%	39%
French Rev. Wars	1771–1775	69	36%	22%
Napoleonic Wars	1781–1785	77	42%	21%
Baseline	1732–1788	395	42%	26%

The rates increase across the board because high-ranking officers are more likely to have confirmed birth dates, often from their entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. The American War promotion rate is significantly higher for two reasons: first, the older the records, the more likely that confirmed birth dates belong to famous officers; second, as Rodger argues, the Navy's unemployment problem was much worse in the Great Wars than in the American War.⁶ Recall Figure 0.1, which showed the relationship between successful exams and commissions from 1775 to 1805: employment prospects tended to worsen over time as the two series track each other closely in the American War but deviate during the Great Wars.

⁵ Note that some of those promoted to commander were subsequently promoted to post-captain: the percentages presented in Tables 4.1–4.4 therefore double-count all officers promoted to post-captain. The tables present the data as two separate measures of an officer's promotion prospects.

⁶ Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 99.

An alternative approach is to choose birth dates that are exactly twenty years before major mobilizations, even though the sample sizes are small:

Table 4.3: Promotion Rates for Officers Born Twenty Years before Mobilizations

Mobilization	Birth Dates	Number of Officers	Promoted to Commander	Promoted to Post-Captain
American War	1758	14	43%	36%
Nootka Sound	1770	13	15%	8%
French Rev. Wars	1773	13	31%	15%
Napoleonic Wars	1783	16	38%	25%
Baseline	1732–1788	554	34%	20%

Again, the American War stands out as the exception to the others. It seems safe to conclude that Rodger’s ‘twenty-year rule’ holds true, at least in part, for the American War, but does not apply to the Great Wars with France. Being born twenty years before the Nootka Sound Crisis even seems to have been unlucky.

Rodger’s first conclusion—that the timing of an officer’s commission was important, rather than his birth—holds up much better. Here are the promotion prospects for the officers in the study who were commissioned as part of the four major mobilizations of the period:

Table 4.4: Promotion Rates by Year of Commission

Mobilization	Year of Commission	Number of Officers	Promoted to Commander	Promoted to Post-Captain
American War	1778	13	54%	23%
Nootka Sound	1790	33	48%	24%
French Rev. Wars	1793	24	50%	24%
Napoleonic Wars	1803	14	57%	36%
Baseline	1774–1813	526	36%	21%

There was a clear benefit to being commissioned at the beginning of a major mobilization, particularly for an officer’s chances of being promoted to commander. The correlation is weaker for promotions to post-captain, but there is nevertheless a consistent pattern. The data reflects the varied nature of officers’ careers: though many officers were commissioned around their twentieth birthday, enough were commissioned at older ages to make the birth data inconclusive. Rodger is undoubtedly correct to argue that being

commissioned at the start of a conflict put an officer in a position to succeed, but his age at the time he was commissioned mattered less. This revision makes intuitive sense: the marginal difference between a newly-commissioned twenty-year-old lieutenant and a newly-commissioned twenty-six-year-old lieutenant is small and unlikely to be a major determining factor in his employment prospects.

That lieutenant's social background could be a determining factor, however. Recall the complaints from St Vincent, Nelson, and Collingwood about the influence and behaviour of high-born officers described in chapter three. Perhaps it is not surprising that St Vincent (son of an Admiralty lawyer), Nelson (son of a country parson) and Collingwood (son of a Newcastle merchant) would be so disdainful of certain noble officers, even if there were few of them. Georgian society was 'obsessed' with social status.⁷ Within the Navy, this obsession manifested itself not only in contemporaries' complaints about the performance of highborn officers, but also in the thorny question of patronage and promotion prospects. St Vincent, once again, helpfully connected social status to promotion prospects in a complaint to the man at the top of the social hierarchy, King George III:

[T]he Navy is so overrun by the younger branches of nobility, and the sons of Members of Parliament, and they so swallow up all the patronage, and so choke the channel to promotion, that the son of an old officer, however meritorious *both* their services may have been, has little or no chance of getting on.⁸

Contrast St Vincent's complaints with the King's own writings on the subject. Following HMS *Lively*'s capture of the French frigate *Tourterelle* in 1795, the King laid out how he thought the Navy should choose candidates for promotion in a letter to Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty:

I am much pleased with the gallant action of the *Lively* with the *Tourterelle* French frigate transmitted to me by Earl Spencer, and with Captain Burlton having been in

⁷ P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), p. 464

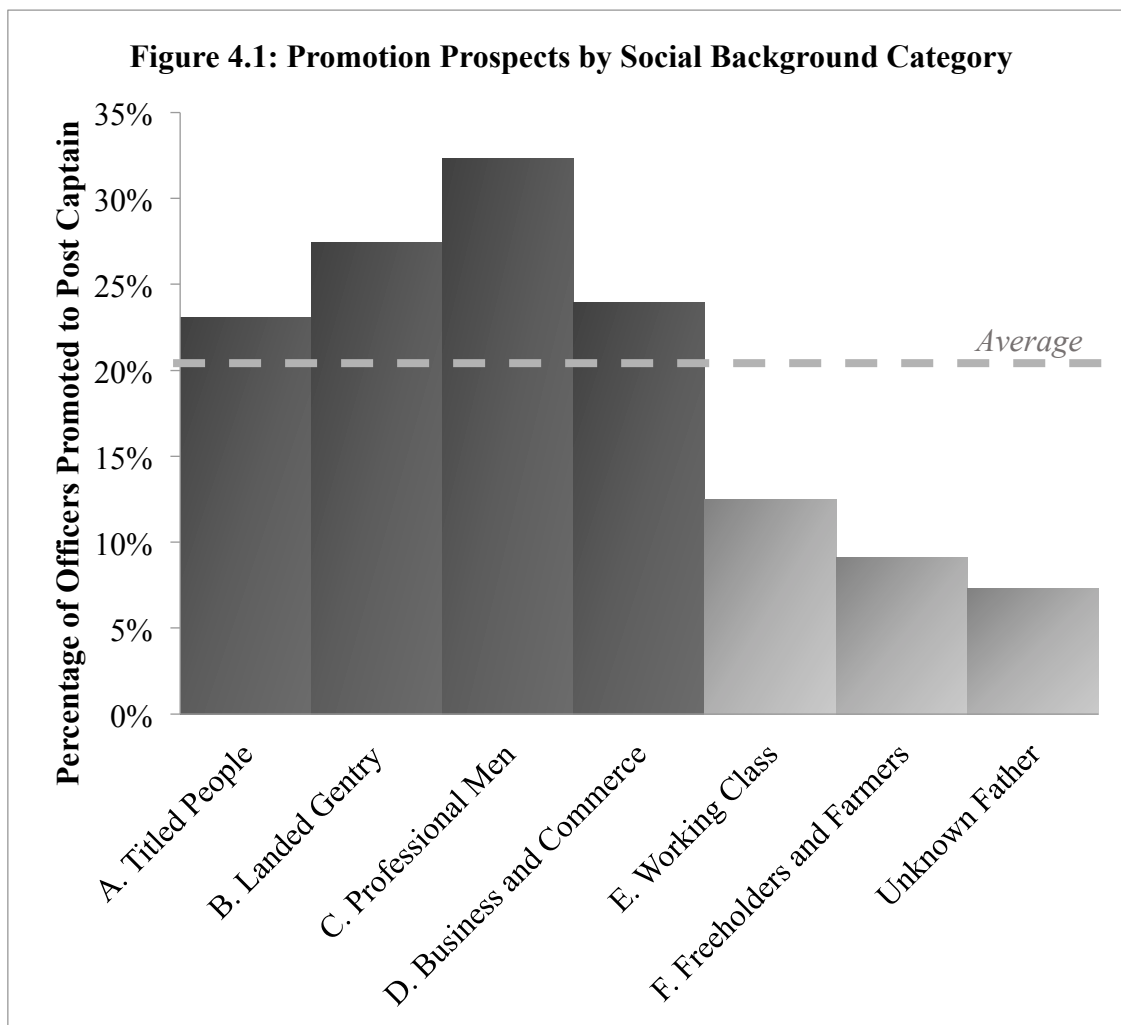
⁸ Quoted in Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 513.

consequence promoted to the rank of post captain, and the first Lieutenant to that of Master and Commander. As the second Lieutenant Mr [John] Maitland conducted himself very well I trust he will soon meet with the same favour; being a man of good family will I hope also be of advantage in the consideration, as it is certainly wise as much as possible to give encouragement, if they personally deserve it, to gentlemen.⁹

There is a lot to unpack in this letter. First, note the significance of a successful action in moving the careers of Burlton and the first lieutenant forward. As noted in chapter one, and as we saw with Pellew, being the first lieutenant of such a ship was the surest route to promotion to commander. Second, note that the King mentions Maitland's conduct before his social background. Maitland's background is certainly a factor, but it only comes into play once he has demonstrated his abilities in action. Compared to St Vincent's letter, the King's letter describes a much more complex, nuanced, and meritorious promotion system, particularly given that we now know that the King's wishes for Maitland were unfulfilled: he was not promoted to commander for another eighteen months.¹⁰ Much as he was wrong to complain about the 'vast overflow of young nobility' in chapter three, St Vincent's complaints about high born officers receiving unmerited awards are misplaced. The results from the database support the King's version of the Navy's promotion system over St Vincent's. Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of officers from each of the social categories used in Lewis' analysis, plus the sixth category of freeholders and farmers, who were promoted to post-captain:

⁹ Quoted in T. Wareham, *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2001), p. 123.

¹⁰ Wareham, *Star Captains*, p. 123.



There are three divisions of this figure worth examining in more detail: categories A through D, categories E and F, and the question of unknown fathers. For all the sections, promotion to post-captain stands alone as a proxy for officers' promotion prospects. In certain respects, this is unfair: promotion to commander was a significant career step in its own right, providing an officer with his first taste of independent command and the right to be styled 'captain'. However, it was also an odd, in-between rank that was sometimes used as a way to reward old lieutenants for years of service—there was no expectation that these men would ever command a ship. As discussed in chapter one, employment prospects for commanders were poor, particularly early in the period. In contrast, it was generally true that promotion to post-captain indicated that an officer had reached the pinnacle of his profession. His rewards were better employment prospects, significantly increased pay,

more opportunities for prize money, and the knowledge that, should he live long enough, he would die an admiral. Across the study, about twenty per cent of all officers reached the promised land of post rank, indicated by the dashed line.

In Figure 4.1, categories A through D demonstrate that the path to post rank was not smoother for officers from the top of the social pyramid. In fact, the category that performed the worst was the category that St Vincent was convinced was '[choking] the channel to promotion' for everyone else: officers whose fathers had titles. Admittedly, the sons of businessmen performed only one percentage point better, which is well within the margin of error. Nevertheless, it is revealing that there is no correlation among these four categories between social status and promotion prospects. Professional men's sons performed the best, and this is the category that contains the hypothetical son of the old officer that St Vincent was convinced was being crowded out by the Navy's preference for noble promotions.

Categories E and F were, however, significantly less likely to produce post-captains than categories A through D. This helps to temper the conclusion that could be drawn from the previous paragraph: namely, that the Navy operated a strict meritocracy. It suggests, rather, that there was a threshold of social status that an officer needed to cross in order to increase his promotion chances. Officers from the bottom of the social hierarchy lacked the connections and the social capital necessary to secure promotion at the same rates as their wealthier peers. The Navy was not, in any absolute sense, a meritocracy. Above the threshold, social status does not seem to have played a significant role; below the threshold, it correlates strongly with less successful careers. Officers from working class and agricultural backgrounds were promoted to post-captain at a rate of only thirteen and nine per cent, respectively, which is well below the average rate of twenty per cent across the population.

Maitland's case provides a useful illustration. The King wanted the Navy to support the careers of gentlemen, but, as this thesis shows, that term lacked a clear definition. Maitland was a member of Lewis' landed gentry category, and his grandfather was an earl—he was well above the threshold identified in Figure 4.1. It would be reasonable to conclude, then, that the King defined a gentleman as a member of the landed gentry. Others, including those more directly responsible for naval promotions than the King, were less particular, as sons of professionals and merchants seem also to have been above the threshold. The existence of the threshold suggests that whether or not an officer was a gentleman did influence his career prospects. But rather than define gentility by birth, as the King did, the Navy seems to have defined gentility by behaviour. What seems to have mattered was whether an officer could behave like a gentleman, rather than whether he could claim to derive a large income from his landed estate.

Officers from below the threshold in Figure 4.1 may not have possessed sufficiently polished social skills to claim gentility by behaviour. In the cramped quarters of a ship's wardroom, or at the captain's table, good manners and good breeding were essential for an officer to secure the connections his career needed. After a dispute with his first lieutenant, Graham Moore attempted to excuse the man's behaviour: 'I attributed his manner to ill breeding.'¹¹ James Anthony Gardner's description of the first lieutenant of the *Edgar* is less obviously prejudicial but nevertheless revealing:

Our first lieutenant (Yetts) was a very droll and strange personage, in dress as well as manners. When he commissioned the *Edgar* he had on a uniform coat made in days of yore ... [and] a hat that had been cocked, but cut round, with a very low crown, so that he was obliged to keep his hand to his head to prevent its blowing off in the lightest breeze. When he came on board in this costume, the warrant officers thought he had made his escape from a madhouse; and Grey, the gunner, swore he was an understrapper [*sic*] from Bedlam.¹²

¹¹ T. Wareham, *Frigate Commander* (Barnsley, 2004), p. 58.

¹² J.A. Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches: The Recollections of James Anthony Gardner*, ed. C. Lloyd (London, 1955), p. 70.

Yetts was the son of a Scottish brewer, and he was never promoted past lieutenant. By the time he joined the *Edgar* in 1787, he had been a lieutenant for nearly twenty years.¹³

Perhaps Yetts' eccentricities gave his potential patrons pause. There are two caveats here: a brewer would technically fall into the 'business and commerce' category rather than the working class; and Gardner admired Yetts' quirks, describing him as 'a good sailor of the old school' and noting that Yetts was comparatively well educated.¹⁴ However, it does not appear that Yetts' father was a particularly prosperous brewer, and Gardner's own lack of ambition suggest that he, in contrast to some of his peers, would not have placed much value on fashionable dress in his messmates. In any case, one of the central themes in Gardner's memoir is the importance of good relations with shipmates. Officers from lower down the social scale may have been at a disadvantage, particularly if they were placed in a midshipmen's berth such as the one described by Gardner on board the *Barfleur*:

No ship in the navy was in such high order. The midshipmen's berths were fitted up in great style (the beginning of luxury which the war soon after put a stop to), with rules and regulations. If a candle was taken off the table a fine of sixpence must be paid; and a shilling, if a hat was hung up in the berth or left on the chairs. This was all very well for the dandy aristocracy, but did not suit some of us that formerly belonged to the old *Edgar*.¹⁵

The barrier between those with the social and financial capital to prosper in such an environment and those without is clear. Comparatively few men managed to cross the barrier and launch highly successful careers.

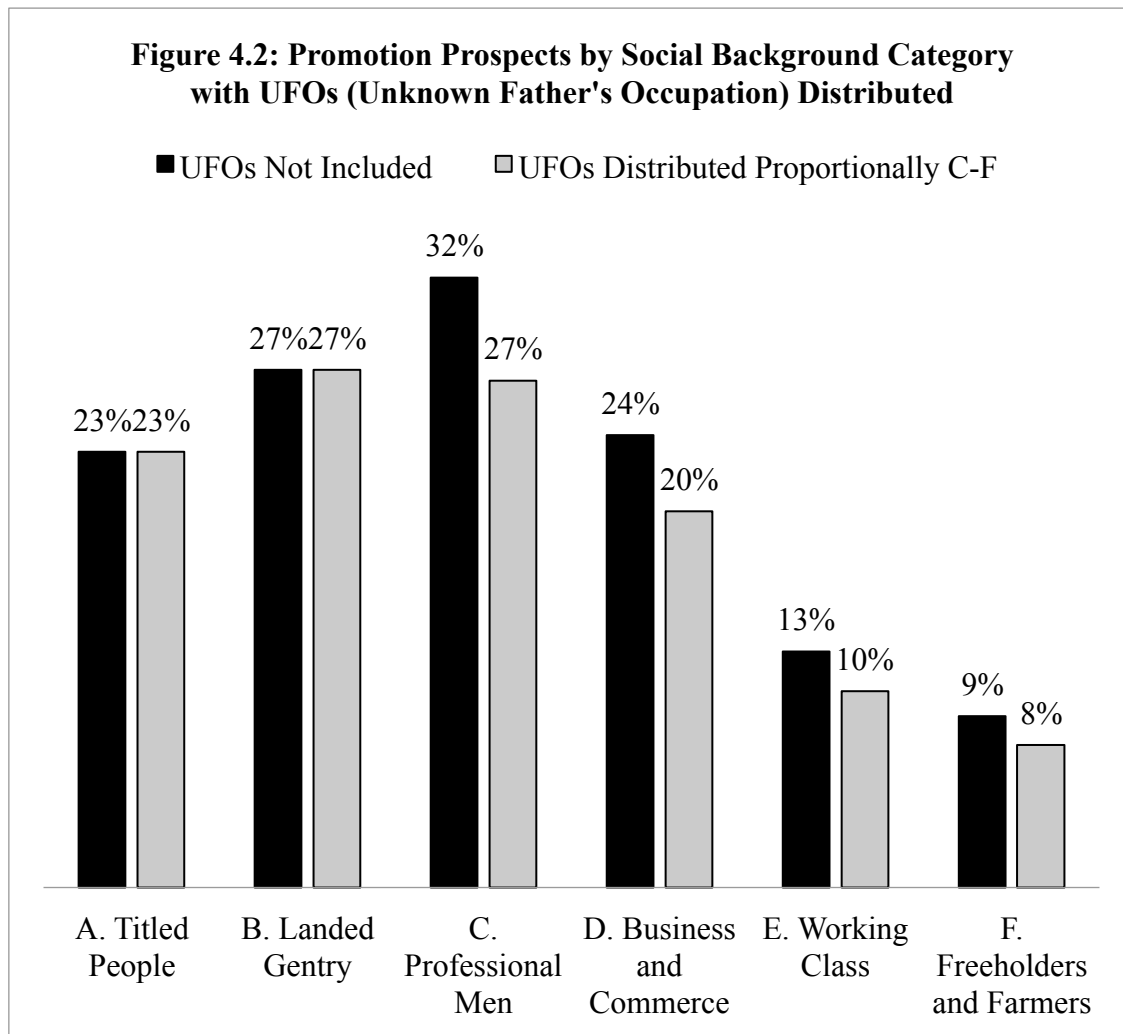
The unknown father category in Figure 4.1 presents a somewhat different problem. Whereas it was possible in chapter three to ignore the officers whose fathers' names or occupations were unknown, it is not possible to do so here, particularly because they had

¹³ 'Scottish Record Society', *The Internet Archive*, accessed 15 Apr. 2013, at http://archive.org/stream/scottishrecordso34scotuoft/scottishrecordso34scotuoft_djvu.txt; TNA, PROB 11/1628/226 (Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers. Name of Register: Kent Quire Numbers: 201–250. Will of John Yetts, Lieutenant of the Royal Navy of Edinburgh Saint Cuthberts, Mid Lothian, 17 Apr 1820).

¹⁴ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, p. 90.

¹⁵ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, p. 108.

the least successful careers of all the categories. There are actually two sub-categories that make up the thirty-four per cent of officers with unknown fathers. For fifteen per cent of all officers, or slightly less than half of the unknown father category, we know the officers' fathers' names but not their occupations. The database categorizes them as 'UFOs'—unknown father's occupation. George Bennett Allen's father Thomas Allen is an example of one such father. Though his trail went cold thanks to his common name, it is still possible to incorporate him into the present analysis. Because the two most prestigious categories have been so thoroughly researched, catalogued, and digitized, it is highly unlikely that Allen was a member of either of those categories. He could certainly have been a professional, a businessman, a labourer, or a farmer, though. Without any other data points, it is reasonable to assume that these men's occupations were distributed in the same proportion to those of the men in categories C, D, E, and F, but that none of them were members of categories A or B. The results of this distribution are shown in Figure 4.2:



This is a crude method, but it goes some way toward solving the problem presented by unknown fathers: now fully eighty-one per cent of the officers in the database are accounted for in Figure 4.2. Importantly, this analysis does not alter the conclusion reached earlier: namely, that while there was a threshold of social capital necessary for a successful career, being a member of the landed gentry or the nobility did not provide a significant benefit to an officer's chances of gaining promotion to post-captain. The addition of the unknown fathers also tempers the suggestion that the best-placed officers were the professionals: their promotion rate now matches that of the landed gentry.

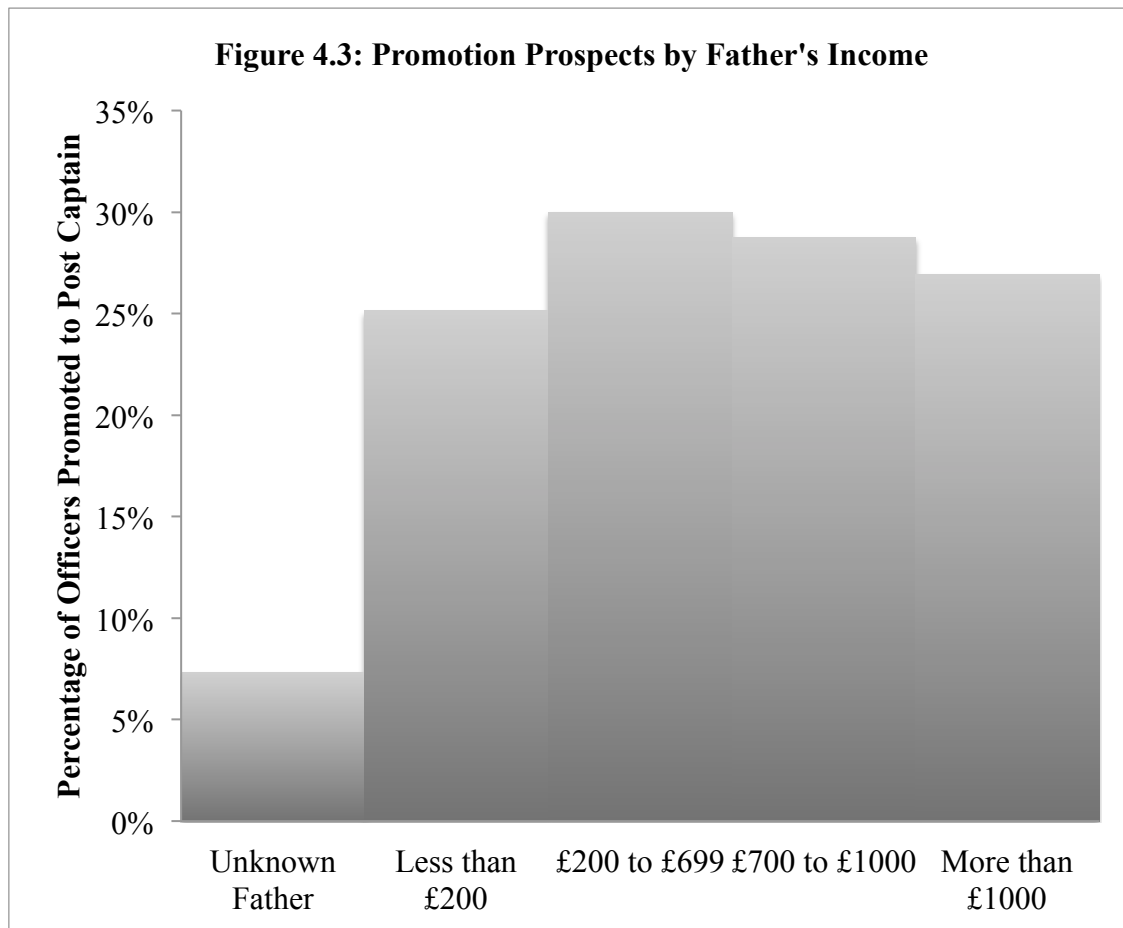
The analysis of fathers whose occupation is unknown does not solve the unknown father problem: it still omits nineteen per cent of the officers in the database who have completely unknown fathers. It is impossible to make reasonable assumptions about their

possible social origins. Again, it is unlikely that they came from titled or even landed backgrounds, since the officers in the database would probably show up in the records of both categories. But there is too much uncertainty surrounding these men to distribute them across the remaining categories with any confidence. Instead, these men can probably be set aside from the analysis because the reason they fail to show up in the historical record is relatively straightforward: the majority of officers with unknown fathers passed for lieutenant before 1789.¹⁶ Before that date, the passing certificates in The National Archives generally do not contain copies of the candidate's birth certificate; after that date, most candidates have birth certificates on file. In other words, there is nothing particularly unique about these men that suggests a reason for their poor promotion prospects: they simply passed for lieutenant earlier in the period. Furthermore, most remained lieutenants for the duration of their careers, which exacerbates the problem of locating them in the historical record. This is, admittedly, a circular argument—unsuccessful officers should be set aside in part because their failures make it difficult to include them—but they make up less than one-fifth of the officers in the database. For the purposes of the present analysis of the relationship between social background and promotion prospects, the uncertainty surrounding these men does not alter the fundamental patterns.

In any case, Colquhoun's tables reinforce the thesis that there was no correlation between social status and promotion prospects. Mapping officers' promotion prospects onto the same divisions of income levels described in chapter three produces Figure 4.3¹⁷:

¹⁶ Database.

¹⁷ Database.



Again, the absence of any correlation between income levels and promotion prospects is striking, as is the poor performance of officers with unknown fathers. Whereas it was possible to distribute some of the officers in the ‘unknown father’ group using Lewis’ categories, it is not possible to do so here. Income levels do not correlate strongly with the availability of source materials: it is plausible that the son of a wealthy merchant lurks in the ‘unknown father’ category. Distributing the ‘unknown fathers’ across all four groups proportionally is similarly dangerous. Though the unknown fathers make up a significant portion of the database, it is safer to focus on what we do know: there is no correlation in the available data between an officer’s father’s income and his chances of securing promotion to post rank. The differences among the four groups of known fathers are small—only five percentage points separate the best-performing group from the worst.

Further evidence for the limited role that an officer's socio-economic background played in his career can be found in the careers of some of the officers mentioned in the context of Lewis' social categories in chapter three. Sir Davidge Gould, son of a parson, distinguished himself in cutting-out expeditions and anti-smuggling operations during the American War. His record ensured that he could benefit from Lord Keppel's rush of promotions when peace was clearly imminent: he was promoted to commander in 1782 at the age of twenty-four. Like most officers, he spent time on half-pay during the subsequent peace, but his strong record meant that he was near the top of the Admiralty's list for promotion to post rank at the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars. He commanded the *Audacious* at the Battle of the Nile and was knighted in 1815.¹⁸ Francis Godolphin Bond, son of a Royal Navy surgeon, also moved rapidly through the ranks. Admittedly, being the nephew of Captain William Bligh helped secure appointments early in his career, but he took advantage of his opportunities: commanding the *Netley* schooner between 1798 and 1800, he captured a number of French privateers and was wounded while raiding along the French coast near Le Havre. This distinguished him sufficiently to earn his promotion to commander, and two years later he was a post-captain. His reputation among his peers and on the lower deck was high: William Richardson described him as 'a gentleman and a sailor' and he had little trouble attracting sailors to join his ships.¹⁹ Both

¹⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine* 28 (1847), pp. 201–3. For the political motivations behind the 1782 promotions, see Rodger, 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', p. 94, and D. Syrett, 'Admiral Rodney, Patronage and the Leeward Islands Squadron, 1780–2', *Mariner's Mirror* 85, no. 4 (1999), p. 415. Nelson did not have a very high opinion of him, writing to Lady Hamilton that Gould 'is not grown much wiser since we left him'. He seems to have been promoted one or two steps beyond his ability. See A. Morrison, *The Collection of Autograph Letters and Historical Documents formed by Alfred Morrison. The Hamilton & Nelson Papers* (2 vols., London, 1893), II, p. 108.

¹⁹ W. Richardson, *A Mariner of England: An Account of the Career of William Richardson... as told by himself*, ed. S. Childers (London, 1908), p. 116; *The Nagle Journal: A Diary of the Life of Jacob Nagle, Sailor, from the Year 1775 to 1841*, ed. J.C. Dann (New York, 1988), p. 237. The key dates of his career come from 'Francis Godolphin Bond, 1765–1839', *Sailing Texas*, accessed Apr. 2013, at <http://sailingtexas.com/England/FrancisBond/franciscgodolphinbond.html>.

officers benefitted from some initial connections, but they also did not squander them. While neither have records as illustrious as Nelson or Collingwood, they were certainly important contributors to the British war effort.

In contrast, two officers from wealthy backgrounds (who were both mentioned in chapter three) were unable to make the key step from commander to post-captain. Their families' wealth does not seem to have been a factor in their successes and failures. Mayson Wright, son of a wealthy merchant, was, according to Marshall, 'almost constantly employed' in command of small vessels from his commissioning in 1794. He captured a privateer in 1803, but he did not manage to earn promotion to commander until 1813, almost two decades after his first commission. He was on active service for the last two years of the war, but promotion to post-captain never came.²⁰ William Henry Whorwood's career indicates that he, too, was probably a solid but unspectacular officer. Born to a landed gentry family, he passed for and was commissioned as a lieutenant in 1798 and spent the next decade on active service. Rather unusually, he remained with the same ship for more than eight years, serving as a lieutenant of the *Active* from 1800 to 1808.²¹ Compared to Gould's rapid transition from lieutenant to commander, Whorwood's career trajectory is noticeably slower. After a decade as a lieutenant, he was promoted to commander in 1808 and served with Duckworth on the Dardanelles campaign; that was, however, his final active service, and he retired as a commander.²²

Both Whorwood and Wright's careers seem a good deal more successful than those of the three remaining examples. George Morey, a butcher's son, Matthew Young, an eminent clergyman's son, and Nathan Jeremiah Ball, a gentleman landowner's son, span an impressive range of social backgrounds; none, however were promoted past the rank of

²⁰ J. Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography* (4 vols., Cambridge, 2010), IV, part I, pp. 118–9.

²¹ As chapter two discusses, turnover from ship to ship was usually frequent. Whorwood may have stayed with one ship for a long time because he feared the uncertainty of unemployment.

²² TNA, ADM 9/4/1014 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services, Commanders' Services, William Henry Whorwood, 1817).

lieutenant on active duty. Morey is the oldest of the three—he was commissioned in the American War—but his career is largely absent from the historical record after that.²³ Young's career was derailed by the seven years he spent in France as a prisoner of war.²⁴ Ball served on five ships in the eight years after he was commissioned in 1806; he also spent eighteen months ashore on half pay. His career, in short, never achieved lift-off.²⁵ Ball's inability to secure a promotion was likely a product of the diminished opportunities in the post-Trafalgar Navy; again, though, none of these career trajectories seem to have been substantially altered by the officer's socio-economic background.

The argument presented in this section has been largely a negative one: there is no strong correlation between an officer's social background and his promotion chances above a certain social threshold. It is possible to add other negative arguments to the mix, some of which were mentioned earlier: there was no strong correlation between an officer's date of birth and his promotion prospects, nor does there seem to have been a correlation between the age of the officer when he joined the Navy or the date he joined the Navy and his promotion prospects. There are some correlations between an officer's place of birth and poor promotion prospects: only fifteen per cent of Irish officers became post-captains, which is five per cent less than the mean. Irish promotion rates are similar to those of officers from Hampshire and East Anglia (fifteen and seventeen per cent, respectively). The poor performance of Irish officers could plausibly derive from geographic prejudice on the part of the Navy, but that explanation certainly does not apply

²³ TNA, PROB 11/1216/184; *The Book of Trinity College, Dublin, 1591–1891* (London, 1892). *The Internet Archive*, accessed Nov. 2014, at http://www.archive.org/stream/bookoftrinitycol00trin/bookoftrinitycol00trin_djvu.txt; E. Fitzball, *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life* (London, 1859). Excerpt published at 'Nathan Ball[s] and Mary Fitt[z]', *Lintywhite.com*, accessed Nov. 2014, at <http://lintywhite.com/ball.html>.

²⁴ P. Marioné, *The Complete Navy List of the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815*, CDROM (Brussels, 2004), s.v. 'Young, Commander (Rtd) Matthew (1786 - 1855)'.

²⁵ TNA, ADM 9/8/2748 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services, Lieutenants' Services, Nathan Jeremiah Ball, 1817).

to Hampshire: forty per cent of the officers from Hampshire were the sons of men directly connected to the Navy's sizeable presence in Portsmouth. Their poor prospects may be simply a random fluctuation in the data. Officers from the poorest-performing regions were not socially unique either. The only pattern that emerges is a slight increase in the number of professional fathers relative to the population mean, and a slight decrease in the number of commercial fathers. It is difficult to see causality in these patterns. There does not seem to have been a strong correlation between an officer's geographic origins and his promotion prospects, with the possible exception of Irish officers.

A fair question, then, is: what did correlate with career success? The absence of any significant correlation between social status and promotion prospects, the inconclusive nature of the other available data on officers' origins and births, and the anecdotal evidence presented above suggest that the only plausible remaining drivers of officers' careers were merit and timing. In fact, it is worth stepping back from the database's statistical insights to allow the officers some agency. The most successful officers were those that demonstrated, again and again, that they could train a ship's company and deploy their ship in battle against the enemy effectively. No amount of statistical analysis can account for an officer's brilliance in challenging situations. John Hindmarsh coolly gave the order that freed HMS *Bellerophon* from the soon-to-explode *L'Orient* at the Battle of the Nile, despite being only thirteen years old. He helped Saumarez rescue victory from defeat at Algeciras in 1801, stormed French forts at Toulon, and fought at Trafalgar. He participated in the ill-fated Walcheren expedition and in the more successful attack on Mauritius. Hindmarsh later claimed to have helped capture or destroy more than forty enemy ships of the line by the time of his promotion to commander in 1814.²⁶ Volant Vashon Ballard circumnavigated the globe in the *Discovery* with George Vancouver as a

²⁶ 'Hindmarsh, Sir John (1785–1860)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 4 Nov. 2012, at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hindmarsh-sir-john-1315/text2809>.

midshipman; he captured seven privateers in a few months as the captain of the frigate *Blonde*, and helped capture Guadaloupe in 1811.²⁷ Sir Robert Mends lost his right arm at Yorktown in 1781, took a splinter to the head off Dominica in 1782, and was severely burned by a powder explosion off Lorient in 1795. He was wounded in the head again by another splinter in a frigate action off the coast of Spain in 1809, but in 1810 he supported the Spanish rebellion by destroying several French coastal batteries. Mends participated in more than seven significant victories over the course of his long and painful career.²⁸

Davidge Gould had few naval connections and still enjoyed a successful career; Francis Godolphin Bond had naval connections but also took advantage of his opportunities for advancement. The evidence is clear: the most successful officers were those that impressed their superiors, not those that had impressive fathers.

Christopher Cole is not in the database, but he is a good example of an officer who managed to impress not just one but three separate patrons. Though his brothers all became very successful, his connections were not apparent early in his naval career: his father was a lawyer in Cornwall. Rear-Admiral Sir Francis Samuel Drake saw potential in young Cole, and helped him become a lieutenant on a ship in the East Indies. But when Cole arrived in India, he learned that his patron was dead and his chances of promotion were therefore slim. In 1799, he was given a choice: either he could continue as a lieutenant, or he could be promoted to commander on half-pay, with little hope of a ship. He chose the former because the opportunity was to sail with Admiral Lord Hugh Seymour to the West Indies, where the mortality rate was high. Sure enough, he impressed Seymour enough to be given a vacant command. But Cole's luck again failed him, as Seymour died in 1801. Cole managed to impress his superiors a third time by, as one biographer puts it, 'his activity in pursuing privateers and by his care for his men's health'. Sir John Duckworth,

²⁷ ODNB, s.v. 'Ballard, Volant Vashon (1774?–1832)'.

²⁸ ODNB, s.v. 'Mends, Sir Robert (1767?–1823)'.

who had replaced Seymour, became Cole's third patron, and made him a post-captain in 1802.²⁹ Cole's career provides a useful example of the many ways in which a talented and hardworking officer could make important connections.

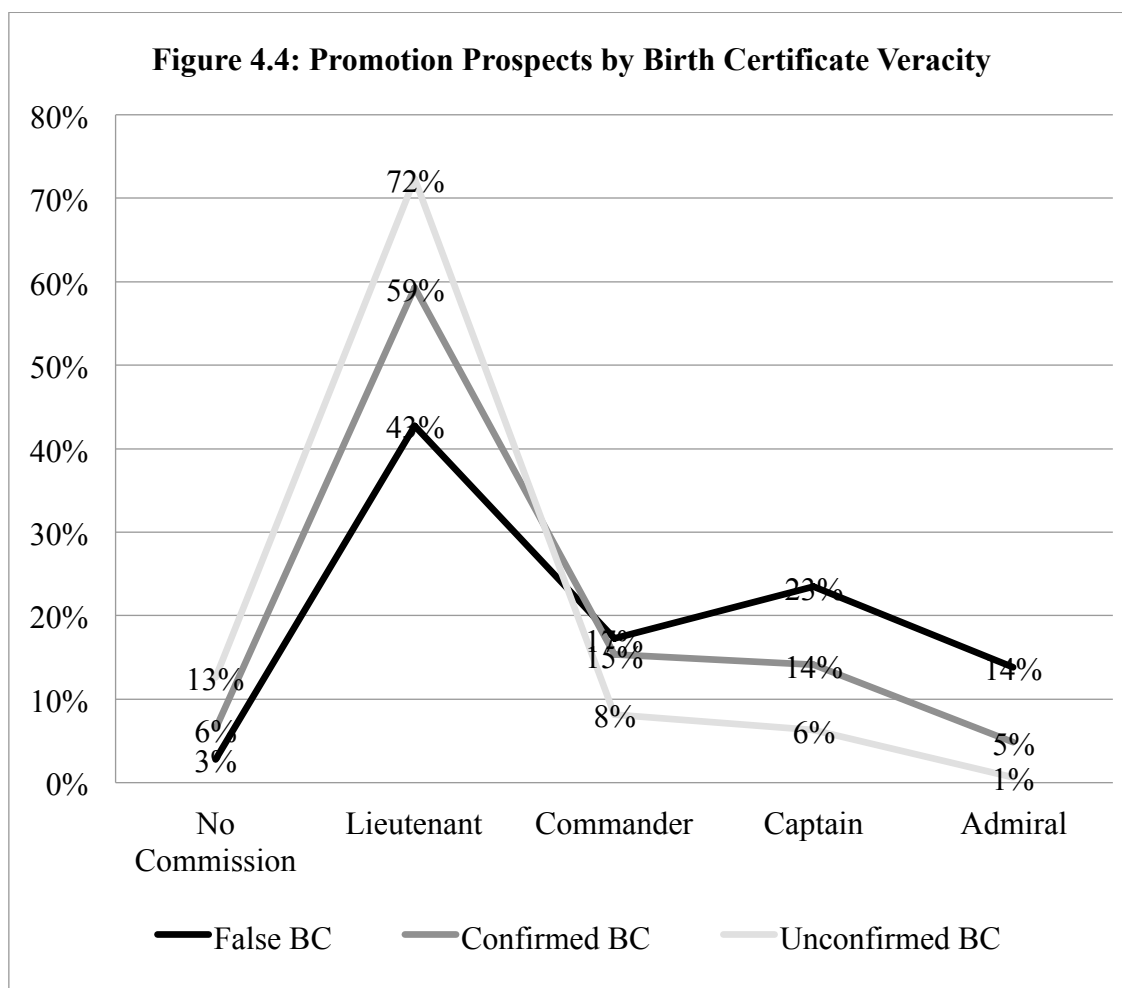
The reverse of this argument is that officers who failed to impress their patrons did not gain promotions. When Graham Moore assumed command of the *Melampus* in 1796, he was generally pleased with her condition and her crew. The first lieutenant, however, was less impressive. He had 'an ignorance of mankind' that caused him to 'make himself odious to [the crew]'. His poor leadership skills were compounded by his poor seamanship. Moore complained in his diary, 'While I was at my dinner the first lieutenant contrived to run the ship on board of a Danish sloop and did her some inconsiderable damage. This was entirely from ignorance in Seamanship of the 1st Lieutenant who is more deficient in this respect than I at first thought him.' Moore's complaints continued: the first lieutenant was 'lazy, non-effective in a time of difficulty' and 'slovenly'. There was no chance that Moore would recommend this man for a promotion, or ask the Admiralty to allow him to follow Moore to his next ship. Unsurprisingly, the man's career never progressed past lieutenant on active service. Incompetence and a poor recommendation were obviously deadly to a career.³⁰

It is also worth returning to chapter one to uncover one of the few positive correlations to support the argument that merit—or at least sufficient skill to stand out when given the chance—trumped social connections. The correlation comes from an

²⁹ Wareham, *Star Captains*, p. 101; *ODNB*, s.v. 'Cole, Sir Christopher (1770–1836)'.

³⁰ The selections from Moore's diary come from Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, pp. 110, 112, 118, and 132. Wareham never mentions the lieutenant's name, and searching the muster books of the *Melampus* reveals little more of use. Both Joseph Hellard and John Price could have been the officer in question; neither progressed past the rank of lieutenant on active service. See 'John Price (d. 1828)' and 'Joseph Hellard', *Three Decks—Warships in the Age of Sail*, accessed Aug 2014 at http://threedecks.org/index.php?display_type=show_crewman&id=11882 and http://threedecks.org/index.php?display_type=show_crewman&id=8332.

unlikely place: birth certificates. Figure 4.4 maps the final active-duty rank of officers sorted by whether or not they falsified their birth certificates:



Officers who falsified their birth certificates tended to have more successful careers. John Toup Nicholas is one of the men who falsified his birth certificate (in fact, as was mentioned in chapter one, he holds the record for most egregious falsification in the database). His career illustrates the plausible causal link between false birth certificates and successful careers. Nicholas' father was a lieutenant in the Navy, and he was born on 22 February 1788. He joined the Navy via his father's connections when he was nine and spent six consecutive years at sea, which meant that he had fulfilled the required sea time shortly after his fifteenth birthday. It is unlikely that young master's mate John Toup Nicholas had even started shaving, much less looked like a twenty-year-old man, when he

appeared in front of the examiners on 4 July 1803. When he presented a birth certificate claiming that he had been born on 22 February 1781—fully seven years before his actual birth—the examiners must have known it was false. Nevertheless, he passed the exam, earned his commission, and launched his career. He rewarded his examiners' faith by destroying 130 enemy vessels on the Italian coast during the four years he commanded the brig *Pilot*; he earned his promotion to post rank after winning a violent single-ship action in 1815.³¹ In other words, the commissioners allowed Nicholas to get away with his preposterous birth certificate because they saw potential in him. Talent trumped the regulations.

The other positive correlation from earlier in this section—officers commissioned at the outbreak of wars had more successful careers—does not undermine this argument. Opportunities for distinction in action tended to be more available at the opening of a major conflict before blockades and convoy systems took effect, and victories early in conflicts tended to be magnified in importance.³² Captain James Saumarez received his knighthood after a successful single-ship victory in October 1793; it is unlikely that such a victory would have received as much attention a few years later, when such actions were not considered news.³³ There was certainly an element of good timing in any successful naval officer's career, but the most important contributing factor was the officer's ability to take advantage of his opportunities. Saumarez's crew suffered one casualty—a broken leg; the French ship lost more than a hundred men. It was a nearly perfect victory that demonstrated Saumarez's outstanding abilities as a seaman and leader.

It is possible to overlay a very different argument onto the previous two paragraphs. Its parameters are as follows: John Toup Nicholas passed for lieutenant at

³¹ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Nicolas, John Toup (1788–1851)'.

³² Prizes were just as available in the middle of wars as they were at the beginning, though, as this chapter will discuss. Chapter six will discuss the phenomenon of officers rewarded for victories at the beginning of wars in more detail.

³³ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Saumarez, James, first Baron de Saumarez (1757–1836)'.

fifteen because his examiners wanted to support the career of a ‘son of the service’.

Furthermore, the only evidence for the argument that the examiners saw potential in him is his subsequent success; this reads the story backwards, since his examiners could not possibly have predicted he would be such an active and lucky officer. Saumarez is also a poor example to cite because he, too, was a nephew of the service.³⁴ This argument has some validity, and there is certainly evidence in the database to support the contention that what really mattered was timing and being related to a naval officer. One third of the sons of naval personnel finished their careers as post-captains or admirals. Nor is it possible to ignore the career arcs of some of the most socially elite members of the officer corps, such as Sir Arthur Kaye Legge. Mentioned in the context of income data in chapter three, he was the fifth son of the Earl of Dartmouth. Legge was not a remarkably successful or lucky officer. He was present at the Glorious First of June; he was also present at the less glorious Walcheren and Dardanelles expeditions. There is no evidence to suggest that he was one of the ‘Honourables’ whose incompetence so bothered St Vincent, Collingwood, and Nelson; neither is there any evidence to refute the logical assumption that he did not have to look far for patrons who were interested in supporting the career of an earl’s son. But on the whole, these arguments are less persuasive. Legge was in no way an embarrassment to the Navy or an example of an officer promoted above his abilities: while on independent command, he captured a number of privateers and at least one very valuable merchant ship; as an admiral in 1811, he helped defend Cadiz and received the thanks of the town.³⁵ Even with his connections, the demands of the Wars and of service at sea meant Legge needed to possess a certain level of competence.

It was, admittedly, difficult for officers in the heat of it all to see that there was anything other than ‘intrigue or connexion’ involved in securing promotions. Moore wrote

³⁴ *ODNB*, s.v. ‘Saumarez, James, first Baron de Saumarez (1757–1836)’.

³⁵ Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography*, I, part II, pp. 441–4.

in his diary, 'The ways of the Admiralty are dark and intricate, puzzled in mazes. I cannot get any information relative to myself.'³⁶ Cavell's data suggests that when the Navy was demobilized, it was even darker and more puzzling because family backgrounds played a much more significant role in determining employment and promotion prospects.³⁷ On the eve of peace in 1814, the Secretary to the Admiralty felt the need to reassure the Government's titled supporters that, 'except in extraordinary instances where officers may have acquired public notice by some distinguished service, promotion is obtained by Interest'.³⁸ The implication is that wartime promotions had not been so kind to Britain's elite, but peace would bring with it a return to the natural order. The database provides plenty of evidence to support the idea that wartime promotions did not privilege the titled; it also provides some anecdotal evidence to suggest that peacetime promotions did. For example, there were four officers in the database who were made post at the major promotion linked to the signing of the Treaty of Amiens in March and April 1802. Three were sons of the service, including a member of the Bowen family and the son of an admiral, and the fourth was the dissolute Charles John Cary, ninth Viscount Falkland.

Wartime promotions, though, were grounded in merit. Nicholas, 'son of the service', and Legge, son of an earl, were exactly the type of men that St Vincent described in his letter to the King. St Vincent claimed that men like Legge tended to crowd out men like Nicholas; in fact, men like Legge and Nicholas tended to crowd out less able candidates. In 1808, one anonymous officer argued:

Promotion is by no means monopolized in the Navy by men of high connexions;—there are very few such, comparatively speaking, and every one deserves the situation he holds, though merit. As the actions of these Noblemen are publicly

³⁶ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, pp. 77, 79.

³⁷ S.A. Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the British Navy, 1771–1831* (Woodbridge, 2012), appendix. Wareham concurs in *Frigate Commander*, p. 19, as does C. Consolvo, 'The Prospects and Promotion of British Naval Officers, 1793–1815', *The Mariner's Mirror* 91, no. 2 (2005), p. 148.

³⁸ Quoted in B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 144.

known, it cannot be thought indelicate bringing them forward in this manner. The fact is, there is scarcely an Officer who has not risen through his own exertions. The mass of the Navy is composed of men, whose parents had little or no interest with those in power ... they recommend themselves to Captains by serving zealously under them, and thus acquire patronage, ever carrying weight with it. The road to promotion is indeed open to all.³⁹

He overstates the case, as this chapter has clearly identified social barriers to promotion.

His argument was also not a reflection of consensus, nor did it apply during peacetime. But when the Navy was fully mobilized, which was the case for most of the period under study, its promotion mechanisms can be summarized as follows. Naval connections were most useful very early in officers' careers when they needed to secure sufficient sea time to pass for lieutenant. The lieutenants' exam was rigorous and would have helped distinguish talented candidates from their incompetent peers; the examiners were likely to ignore obviously false birth certificates from those talented candidates in the interest of getting the young man into a position of authority quickly. The goal of a newly commissioned lieutenant was to attract the attention of a powerful patron; the best way to do this was on active service, often in combat, so the timing of his commission was important. With good timing (such as being commissioned at the beginning of a war), he would have plenty of opportunities to demonstrate his talents; with poor timing (such as being commissioned after Trafalgar), his career might never take off, no matter his connections or his skills. If he came from a working-class background, his social skills might not be particularly polished, and, in the most extreme cases, his superiors could see him as a social embarrassment. But so long as he came from at least a respectable middling background, what really mattered was whether he could do his job well: success at sea depended to a large degree on teamwork, and it was in the interest of high-ranking officers to surround themselves with competent subordinates. For the most talented officers from at

³⁹ Quoted in M. Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750–1815* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 22.

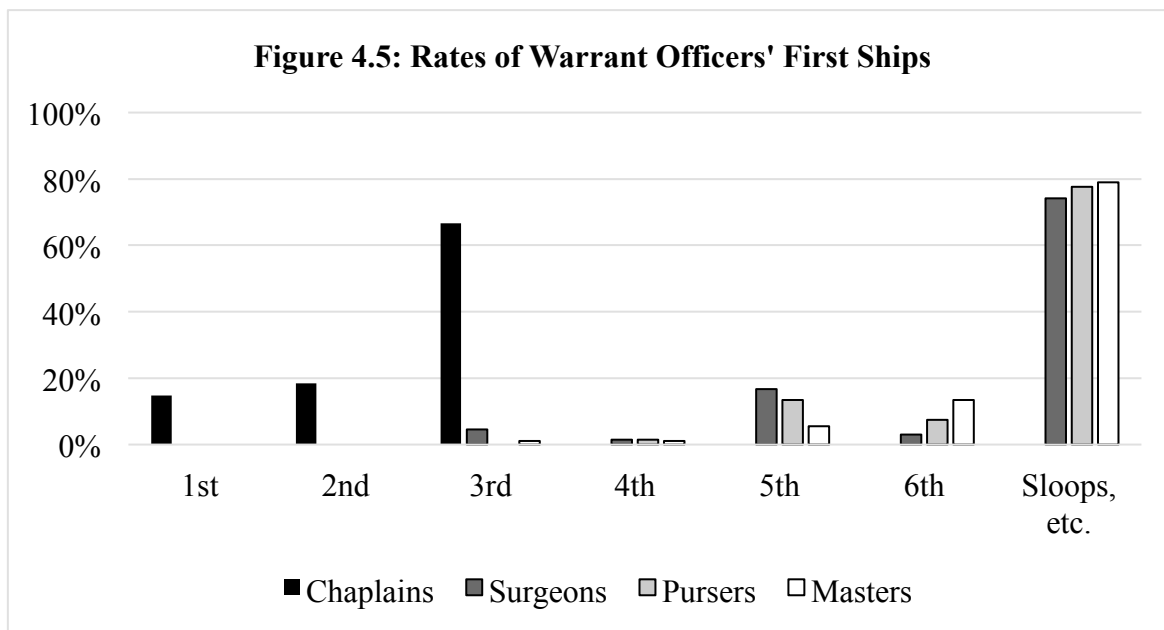
least a middling background, the promotion process could be very rapid: these high-flyers moved quickly from lieutenant to commander to post-captain, which in turn put them in a position to join Georgian society's elite.⁴⁰

Warrant Officers' Promotion Prospects

It was unlikely that warrant officers would have opportunities to join the social elite, but a few did—James Bowen is the most famous example. It is nevertheless important to include warrant officers' promotion prospects in this discussion for two reasons. First, there were significant differences in incomes among warrant officers determined in part by promotion. Second, the mechanisms by which warrant officers were promoted provide a useful comparison to commissioned officers. Warrant officers were not usually promoted from one rank to another. Instead, as mentioned briefly in chapter two, they sought appointments in larger ships. There were no equivalents of the 'high-flyers' among warrant officers, who moved quickly into larger ships: inexperienced masters did not have opportunities to navigate ships of the line. Pursers, surgeons and masters each followed a very similar pattern of beginning their careers in the Navy's smallest ships.⁴¹ Figure 4.5 shows the ships' ratings in which warrant officers began their careers:

⁴⁰ Similar evidence for 'high-flyers' can be found in the cohorts described by Rodger in 'Commissioned Officers' Careers', pp. 118–9: the initial spike in each cohort shows officers promoted rapidly; after that, promotion rates slow dramatically.

⁴¹ In 1782, at the end of his tenure as First Lord of the Admiralty, Sandwich insisted that pursers begin their careers in sloops. See J. Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (London, 2006), p. 92.



Chaplains stand out as a clear exception to the general pattern: they nearly always joined ships of the line. The *Phoebe*, the frigate highlighted at the beginning of chapter two, was well within the Navy's norms in not having a chaplain. Masters, pursers, and surgeons, though, tended to begin their careers in the Navy's sloops, cutters, gun-brigs, and fire-ships. Ships of the line tended to be run by senior warrant officers, while the opposite was true for sloops. From a strategic perspective, this pattern was probably beneficial to the Navy's operations as it put the largest and most powerful ships in the hands of its most experienced men.

The general pattern of masters', pursers', and surgeons' careers is therefore clear: they began in small ships and sought appointments in progressively larger ships. Though only masters had to pass for each larger rating, all warrant officers considered moving to a larger ship to be a promotion, and they used that term to describe the practice. In 1803, Nelson's squadron needed to be quickly resupplied off the northern coast of Sardinia, and purser Richard Bromley's quick thinking and 'disinterested' services (the essence of good pursery) brought him to the attention of the Admiral. Nelson wrote to the Admiralty, 'I therefore take the liberty of mentioning [Bromley] as very deserving of promotion, and

hope their Lordships will bear him in recollection as a candidate for a First or Second Rate.’⁴² Similarly, in 1834 purser Nathaniel Haydon described his career as a series of promotions: ‘I served 10½ years in the East Indies and was first promoted for beating off the *Marengo* & 2 frigates in 1804 and was again Promoted from the *San Fiorenzo* to the *Powerful* in 1808 for capturing the *Piedmontaise* after 3 days action.’⁴³ Masters could look to be promoted even beyond first rates, particularly at the end of their careers. In 1804, after more than thirty years of service, James Murray wrote his patron Admiral Montagu, ‘[I] feel great gratitude for your very kind attention to my Interest, but as there appears very little hope of my ever getting a Dockyard ... I should be glad to return to my former Employment at Plymouth.’⁴⁴ That former employment was as the Superintending Master, which meant he was responsible for ships in the harbour. He hoped to be promoted to Master Attendant at a dockyard, a more comfortable and lucrative posting for an old master who wished to live ashore. Chaplains, who usually began their naval careers already in ships of the line, may have seen a return to a shore-based living as a kind of promotion. Pursers sought appointments as admiral’s secretaries, victualing agents, or prize agents.⁴⁵ Warrant officers were in terminal positions, but moving to a larger ship or ashore to a dockyard or hospital was one way they could advance their careers.

How warrant officers distinguished themselves from their peers was less of a pressing issue for them than it was for commissioned officers. For masters and surgeons in particular, the demand for their services in wartime was high enough that most did not have to worry about extensive periods of unemployment or career stagnation.

⁴² Nelson to Sir Evan Nepean, 10 Dec 1803, *The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson*, ed. Sir N.H. Nicolas (7 vols, London, 1844), v, p. 303.

⁴³ TNA, ADM 6/194 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Survey of age and services of Pursers, 151–300, 1834).

⁴⁴ TNA, ADM 6/135–68 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Masters' Passing Certificates, statements of service, 1800–50); see ADM 6/155 for James Murray's file.

⁴⁵ Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, p. 95.

Nevertheless, some officers clearly gained promotions more quickly than others. The key question at the heart of the previous section—to what extent an officer's social background influenced his career trajectory—cannot be directly applied to warrant officers because data on their social background is not extensive enough and their careers had different structures. It is possible, however, to survey surviving recommendation letters in the archives. They suggest that two factors above all others determined warrant officers' chances of securing promotions and preferred appointments: talent and experience. For example, James Crawford became master of the *Veteran* in 1800 even though he had not yet qualified for a third-rate; his patron was George Collier, who wrote to the Admiralty of his 'conviction' in Crawford's ability, 'together with the high Character he brought from his last ship'.⁴⁶ Frederick Ruckert's application, quoted in chapter two, included 'very strong certificates of his merit'.⁴⁷ Richard Burstall's recommendation is more analogous to Nathaniel Haydon's promotions, described in the previous paragraph. Burstall led six other men in a small boat in a desperate attempt to board an enemy ship 'with ten soldiers on deck with charged bayonets'. The attack failed, but his captain spoke of his 'very resolute and gallant conduct' and said he deserved 'the highest praise'.⁴⁸ Burstall was never unemployed for more than one month in his two-decade career, which he finished as the Superintending Master at Sheerness Dockyard. As with commissioned officers, the fastest way to secure a promotion was to demonstrate talent to a senior officer.

It is difficult to reconcile such examples of merit-driven patronage in action with the argument presented by Vale and Edwards in their biography of Thomas Trotter. They explain that because Trotter did not receive a desired appointment from his former patron, Admiral Roddam, 'the selection of warrant officers tended to be immune from the

⁴⁶ TNA, ADM 6/141.

⁴⁷ TNA, ADM 6/161.

⁴⁸ TNA, ADM 6/139.

patronage system'.⁴⁹ Little in the world of eighteenth century professionals was immune from patronage, which was the lubricant for most men's careers. Other historians have noted the importance of patronage for army medical officers.⁵⁰ It is fair, however, to note that some warrant officers secured employment and promotion thanks to their extensive experience rather than their connection to a powerful patron. Thomas Fotheringham and Francis Minto undoubtedly impressed senior officers with their skills during their long careers, but neither ever served with the same captain twice. In other words, they do not seem to have become followers of any particular commissioned officer, as we saw with masters Murray and Crawford earlier. The Admiralty distinguished officers based on seniority, so unsurprisingly both commissioned and warrant officers defended their dates of seniority robustly. James Hunter wrote a long letter to the Admiralty explaining how his brief flirtation with a lieutenancy should not count against his seniority as a master. He presented a series of excuses and citations of other masters with similar cases in his defence. His application succeeded, which moved him up the master's seniority list a full eight years. His restored seniority probably helped him secure the post of Superintending Master at Portsmouth in 1797.⁵¹

Most of the examples cited so far of warrant officers impressing patrons with their skills match the argument presented in earlier about commissioned officers' promotion prospects. The skills warrant officers demonstrated, though, varied widely. Contrast the narratives of Burstall and Haydon with those of Crawford and Bromley. The former's skills were martial and would have fit any ambitious commissioned officer: Burstall, in particular, was brave in boarding an enemy ship of superior force. The manner in which

⁴⁹ B. Vale and G. Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet: The Life and Times of Thomas Trotter, 1760–1832* (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 77.

⁵⁰ C. Kelly, *War and the Militarization of British Army Medicine, 1793–1830* (London, 2011), p. 155.

⁵¹ TNA, ADM 106/2925 (Navy Board: Records. REGISTERS. Masters' Qualifications, 1749–1811); TNA, ADM 6/132 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Seniority List of Masters, with previous services, 1809).

Haydon described his naval service suggests that he was an active participant, much like fellow purser Augustus William Le Neve, who volunteered to attack a Danish smuggling vessel in a small boat action in 1808.⁵² Warrant officers behaving like commissioned officers by strapping on a sword and leading men in combat was a common practice, though by no means universal. On the other hand, Crawford and Bromley's skills were more closely related to their daily, non-combat responsibilities: Crawford's patron praised his ability and character, while Bromley used quick thinking and hard work to resupply a squadron in a crisis. Warrant officers had multiple ways to impress patrons. They made essential contributions both in combat and to everyday operations. Some enjoyed long, successful and lucrative careers, while others used their naval training to launch civilian careers.

Even the most extraordinary warrant officers could not expect to attain the heights of glory available to commissioned officers, though. David Blackburn was the master of one of the ships of Australia's First Fleet. Blackburn Island is named after him, but the honour is diminished by the shadow cast over his 'small green island' by its much larger neighbour, Lord Howe Island.⁵³ Lord Howe himself is responsible for one of the highest honours bestowed upon a warrant officer in the database, the aforementioned granting of a commission to the master of his flagship, James Bowen. Three other masters in the database followed Bowen's path and became commissioned officers. As we have seen with Ruckert, Forbes, and others, masters' early careers often mimicked commissioned officers'. Ruckert was listed as a midshipman on the *Captain*, and Forbes, Hunter, and Alexander Briarly all served as acting lieutenants.⁵⁴ Some masters had opportunities to

⁵² W. James, *Naval History of Great Britain 1793–1827* (6 vols., London, 1826–37), v, p. 28.

⁵³ D. Neville, *Blackburn's Isle* (Lavenham, 1975), p. 10; 'Royal Navy Settlers', *RootsWeb*, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ausnavy/descend_b.htm.

⁵⁴ TNA, ADM 6/161; TNA, ADM 36/16549 (Admiralty: Royal Navy Ships' Musters (Series I). Ship: *Swiftsure*, 1 May 1805–31 Oct 1805) and ADM 29/1/60 (Admiralty: Royal Navy,

earn a commission by passing the lieutenants' exam on their own volition: a battlefield commission was not usually required. Moving in the other direction, some of the men from the commissioned officers' database who passed their exam but never received their commissions probably became masters instead.⁵⁵ Masters were the only warrant officers with any hope of earning a commission. They were also the only warrant officers who routinely wielded independent authority similar to that of a commissioned officer because they were qualified to command non-combatant ships. In William Price's long career, for example, he spent time in command of two store ships. Ultimately, though, even the most senior masters were still warrant officers: they remained firmly below commissioned officers in the naval hierarchy and were not members of the elite, either in the Navy or in British society.

Warrant and Commissioned Officers' Pay

The primary reason warrant officers sought promotions to larger ships was the corresponding increase in pay. Captain William Rutherford of the fifth-rate *Decade* wrote to the Admiralty in 1804 on behalf of his master, Thomas Mann, who had requested a new appointment: 'I shall be truly sorry at losing so valuable a Master, but he wishes to get into a higher rate for the Benefit of his family.'⁵⁶ From 1700 until 1802, annual warrant officer pay, rounded to the nearest pound, was as follows:

Royal Marines, Coastguard and related services: Officers' and Ratings' Service Records (Series II). Navy Pay office: Entry Books of Certificates of Service, 1802–14); TNA, ADM 106/2925; TNA, ADM 6/132; NMM, ADM 354/231/74 (Navy Board: Bound Out-letters, 16 Apr 1808).

⁵⁵ Thomas Cropley is the only likely example, but passed master's mates are difficult to track.

⁵⁶ TNA, ADM 6/154.

Table 4.5: Warrant Officers' Approximate Annual Income by Rate, 1700–1802⁵⁷

Warrant Officer	1st Rate 880 men	2nd Rate 750 men	3rd Rate 650 men	4th Rate 425 men	5th Rate 240 men	6th, sloops 125 men
Master	£119	£109	£82	£73	£67	£52
Purser	£52	£46	£39	£33	£29	£26
Surgeon ⁵⁸	£161	£147	£136	£111	£91	£79
Chaplain	£99	£88	£77	£56	£39	£26

Pay increased dramatically with the size of the ship. Pursers and surgeons doubled their pay by moving from sloops to first rates, and masters and chaplains' pay increased even more. The increase in pay provided strong incentives for officers to seek promotion into a larger ship.

Table 4.5 does not tell the whole story, however. Leaving aside prize money for now, all warrant officers except chaplains had opportunities to increase the income listed in the table. Masters, for example, could supplement their income with pilotage charges by using their expert knowledge of tricky inshore waters. Thomas Fotheringham called the Admiralty's attention to the situation in the North Sea in 1806, explaining that there were two ships stationed there that were forced to employ two pilots each because their masters were not qualified to navigate the shifting sands off Yarmouth. The expense of employing four pilots, Fotheringham claimed, 'must be a loss to Government of about three Hundred Pounds (or near), besides a handsom [*sic*] emolument which would be coming to Qualified Masters'. Fotheringham, of course, proposed that giving that emolument to him would be a more economical solution, and he included his own chart of Yarmouth as a *curriculum vitae*.⁵⁹ Not all masters were qualified pilots, as this example shows, but those that were could expect a slightly higher income than that listed in Table 4.5.

⁵⁷ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 623–4.

⁵⁸ Chaplains and surgeons received pay at a flat rate plus a payment for each man on board.

Estimates of typical ships' company sizes have been included to estimate their annual income and are similar to those used in M. Crumplin, 'Surgery in the Royal Navy during the Republican and Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815)' in D.B. Haycock and S. Archer (eds.), *Health and Medicine at Sea, 1700–1900* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 72.

⁵⁹ TNA, ADM 6/145.

Pursers' low incomes stand out in the table, but they also need some adjustment. In most ships, even though they were essential members of the ship's administrative team, they earned half or less than their wardroom companions. Reforms in 1802 and 1807 increased the incomes of all warrant officers except chaplains, but the reforms actually made pursers' situations relatively worse. The most junior surgeon of a sloop received a huge raise, more than double his old income, and masters received, on average across all rates, a thirty-seven per cent raise. Pursers, on the other hand, received only a twenty-five per cent average raise.⁶⁰ As an illustration, the purser of a third rate now earned only £50 per year, but a master earned £137. The chaplain of that third rate still earned more than the purser, even though he had received no raise. In second and fourth rates, the masters now earned three times as much as the purser. One way to understand how such inequality could arise is to think of a purser's pay as compensating him for his official duties; it was up to him to supplement his income via his unofficial duties. Some hint of this practice comes from the widow of John Martin Leake, whose solicitation of the Compassionate Fund was recorded as follows:

Mr Martin Leake had been in the Service 15 years, but only three years in a line of Battle Ship, so that the profits of his profession were only beginning. His widow represented that by the unfortunate loss of the *Hero*, when her Husband perished, a years' accounts were lost, so that the profits which might have been expected, can never now be realized.⁶¹

Not only did larger ships pay better, but they also provided a purser better opportunities to realize 'the profits of his profession'. There were a number of ways he could do so. First, he could hope to make a legitimate profit by victualing his ship. Victuals were issued by the Victualing Board and charged to his account at a debit price, which was cancelled when they were issued (and fully accounted for), but not quite matched by the credit given

⁶⁰ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 626–7.

⁶¹ TNA, ADM 6/323–6 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Register of officers' widows & orphans applying to the Compassionate Fund, 1809–27).

for victuals returned into store. He also spent his own money—or, often, used a line of credit from his friends or business colleagues—to purchase consumable goods such as bedding, firewood, and candles that were necessary for the ship but not included in the Victualing Board's outlay.⁶² After keeping very careful account of how much was consumed, he hoped that the reimbursement exceeded his initial outlay, and that he could still afford to cover the interest on his loan. He only made a profit, then, if his accounts were faultless and he was not caught short by some sudden change in the markets.⁶³ Economies of scale meant that larger ships, such as the *Hero*, were potentially more profitable. They also provided more opportunities, given their larger crews, to make money as the ship's banker. Advancing pay at interest to officers was a common way to turn a profit, though pursers had to be careful, given the cramped conditions, not to swindle their shipmates. None of the legitimate profit-making endeavours were likely to make a purser's fortune, however, and so some turned to illegitimate endeavours. Selling clothes to dead men and pocketing the reimbursement was one relatively simple way to defraud the Navy Board. The purser also usually held a monopoly on tobacco sales, which he provided from his private stores, and it is likely that price gouging was common practice. More serious fraud was difficult to execute, but the minor frauds helped give pursers a bad reputation on board many ships.⁶⁴

It is important to delineate this description of pursers' incomes from their colleagues in the army. It was not possible for a purser either to commit fraud or make legal profits on the scale of army paymasters. Though both pursers and paymasters were personally liable for money they held on behalf of the crown, they were not analogous to

⁶² A sloop required a surety of £400, increasing to £1200 for a first rate. Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, p. 92.

⁶³ At no point did a purser hold public money in cash, which was the usual method by which paymasters in the Army could make profits.

⁶⁴ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis, 1986), pp. 87–98.

Deputy Paymasters in the army. The latter received large sums from the Paymaster General to use to pay the soldiers on an expedition. While in possession of the money, the Deputy Paymaster had opportunities to invest it, to exchange it with local currency at a favourable rate, or to withhold the money to extort kick-backs from the officers and men. It was possible to make a fortune this way.⁶⁵ Ships' pursers rarely came off so well, since they held far less money for payments and were not allowed to invest it. Regimental paymasters provide a better comparison for pursers, but they were commissioned officers voted to the position by the other officers of the regiment rather than warrant officers at the mercy of the Navy Board. Regimental paymasters usually employed a non-commissioned officer as their deputy or paymaster-sergeant, which again, is not quite the same position as a naval warrant officer. Neither the regimental paymaster nor his sergeant had many opportunities to engage in seriously corrupt and profitable activities, so in that way they were similar to pursers.⁶⁶ All told, the tight control exerted by naval administrators meant that pursers had only limited opportunities to supplement their income, either legally or otherwise. The best hope for a purser was to become the follower of an admiral and be appointed his secretary. Famously, Philip Stevens progressed from purser to Anson's secretary to Secretary of the Admiralty to baronet.⁶⁷ In the database, Samuel Curry, Joseph Grimes, and John Payton Lamey all became admirals' secretaries, though none managed to match Stevens' illustrious career.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Military Miscellany I: Manuscripts from the Seven Years War, the First and Second Sikh Wars and the First World War*, eds. A.J. Guy et al. (Army Records Society, 1996), p. 8.

⁶⁶ A.J. Guy, *Oeconomy and Discipline: Officership and Administration in the British Army 1714–63* (Manchester, 1985), p. 62.

⁶⁷ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, p. 97.

⁶⁸ *The Naval Chronicle*, ed. J.S. Clarke and J. McArthur (London, 1799–1818), XIII, p. 81; *Ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 350; TNA, PROB 11/1835/258 (Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers. Name of Register: Teignmouth Quire Numbers: 451–500. Will of John Payton Lamey, Secretary to Rear Admiral Frederick Warren and Purser in the Royal Navy, 29 Aug 1834).

At the other end of the spectrum of warrant officer pay were surgeons, whose large incomes stand out in Table 4.5. After the 1807 reforms, surgeons' incomes increased further. No longer did the size of the crew dictate their pay: instead, pay increased with seniority. The most junior surgeons earned about £200 per year, the most senior £328. Again, though, the headline numbers need revision. As described in chapter two, surgeons required training. Neither apprenticeships nor coursework at a Scottish university were significant expenses, but both were more expensive than masters and pursers' training. Until the reforms at the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars, surgeons also had to pay for their own supplies. On the other hand, surgeons also received two additional payments that, in most cases, covered the cost of surgical supplies. First, Queen Anne's bounty added about £30 or £40 per year to naval surgeons' incomes, depending on whether their service was in peacetime or wartime. Second, surgeons received fifteen shillings from each patient suffering from venereal disease.⁶⁹ A simple way to defraud the Navy Board was to claim that dead men suffered from such afflictions.⁷⁰ Even after all the necessary adjustments are included, Table 4.5 demonstrates clearly that naval surgeons were highly paid in the context of naval warrant officers. This was most obvious at the top of the naval medical profession: Dr Leonard Gillespie, Physician to the Fleet in 1805, told his sister that he could 'live in a princely style, free from any expense' because his salary was £465 per year.⁷¹ Lower down the seniority list, Peter Cullen was also pleased with the increased pay for surgeons: 'The medical profession in the Navy was never duly estimated, nor remunerated properly' until Melville's 1807 reforms.⁷² As chapter two's analysis of the labour market showed, their compensation was still not high enough to attract sufficient

⁶⁹ Vale and Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet*, p. 79.

⁷⁰ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, p. 95.

⁷¹ Dr Leonard Gillespie to Mrs Hall of Armagh, 7 Jan 1805, *Nelson's Physician on the Victory*, accessed Sept 2014, at <http://www.ctv.es/USERS/j.deacon/nelson.htm>.

⁷² *Five Naval Journals, 1789–1817*, ed. H.G. Thursfield (NRS, 1951), p. 54.

numbers to the Navy, nor was it enough to keep most surgeons in the Navy for longer than half a dozen years.

Not every warrant officer calculated their earning potential in the Navy, compared it to civilian options, and coolly chose the greater, but pay certainly played a role in shaping whether warrant officers remained in the Navy for their whole careers. Chaplains had plenty of reasons to seek more comfortable arrangements ashore. In addition to the uncertainty surrounding their purpose on board, Colquhoun estimated that even ‘lesser clergymen’ earned about £120 annually.⁷³ Such a living would produce an income twenty per cent greater than that of a chaplain of a first rate. Colquhoun surprisingly did not estimate incomes for doctors or even apothecaries, but Vale and Edwards note that at the extreme, a London physician could earn up to £10,000 per year. Most earned far less, of course, but pay was not generally a reason for a surgeon to remain in naval service. Surgeons were the best-paid warrant officers, but they were still paid less and of lower status than their colleagues in the army and the East India Company. Members of the army’s medical branch were commissioned officers, while East India Company surgeons could trade privately to augment their incomes.⁷⁴ The Sick and Hurt Board cited the relative unattractiveness of a naval career for surgeons as a direct cause of the reforms that led to pay by seniority (as well as the introduction of a uniform, covered later).⁷⁵ Unsurprisingly, as we saw in Table 2.2, surgeons’ naval careers were on average the shortest in the wardroom. Pursers could probably make more money as a shopkeeper—Colquhoun estimated an annual income of £150 for them—but leaving the Navy would have required contacts ashore to help set up the shop, not to mention a loan.⁷⁶ Their careers were slightly longer than surgeons’ in part for these reasons. Firm estimates are difficult to

⁷³ P.H. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, ‘Revising England’s Social Tables 1688–1812’, *Explorations in Economic History* 19 (1982), p. 400.

⁷⁴ Vale and Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet*, pp. 16–18.

⁷⁵ Crumplin, ‘Surgery in the Royal Navy’, pp. 72–3.

⁷⁶ Lindert and Williamson, ‘Revising England’s Social Tables’, p. 400.

make for alternative incomes for masters as well. Taking command of a coastal merchant ship was the easiest non-naval alternative, but the master of a ship of the line almost certainly made more money. East Indiamen captains earned more, but such positions were usually taken by former commissioned officers and rarely became available. Most masters seem to have sought long-term employment in the Navy.

Commissioned officers only sought civilian employment as a stopgap during peacetime, but their pay was also tied to the size of the ship on which they served. Table 4.6 lays out the 1700 pay scale, rounded to the nearest pound:

**Table 4.6: Commissioned Officers' Approximate Annual Income by Rate
1700 Establishment⁷⁷**

Rank	1st Rates	2nd Rates	3rd Rates	4th Rates	5th Rates	6th Rates	Sloops, etc.
Captain	£365	£291	£246	£182	£146	£109	-
Commander	-	-	-	-	-	-	£109
Lieutenant	£91	£91	£73	£73	£73	£73	£73
Master's Mate	£43	£39	£37	£31	£27	£27	£27
Midshipman	£29	£26	£24	£22	£20	£20	£20

Captains' pay increased as dramatically as warrant officers': the captain of a first rate made more than three times as much per year as the captain of a sixth rate. But the scale was flatter for lieutenants, which reflected the absence of any correlation between a lieutenant's seniority and the size of the ship on which he served. Admirals' pay was impressive, at least on paper. A rear-admiral could expect to earn more than £600 per year from his pay alone, while a full admiral earned twice as much. With great pay came great expectations of fine dining, though: admirals spent a large percentage of their incomes maintaining their tables on their flagships to entertain officers and guests. Admirals' expenses were significantly greater than wardroom fees, but relative to their pay, wardroom officers also spent heavily on food and drink. Edward Mangin had to pay £15

⁷⁷ This pay scale was in effect until 1797 for lieutenants and below and 1807 for all higher ranks. Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 622–7.

towards the wardroom's wine upon joining his ship, and he estimated that he spent £60 per year on food and other expenses on board.⁷⁸

In 1797, lieutenants' pay was modified to eliminate any difference across rates and raised to £91 per year, meaning that all were now paid as if they were serving on first or second rates. The raise was cited by the mutineers at Spithead and the Nore as one of their chief complaints, and the result was an increase of ratings' and petty officers' pay.

Master's mates and midshipmen also received small raises. For example, a master's mate on a first-rate now earned £47 per year rather than £43; a midshipman in a sloop also gained about £4 per year. A much more significant revision to the pay scale coincided with the reforms of 1807 cited in the discussion of warrant officers' pay earlier. The new pay scale is displayed in Table 4.7:

**Table 4.7: Commissioned Officers' Approximate Annual Income by Rate
1807 Establishment⁷⁹**

Rank	1 st Rates	2 nd Rates	3 rd Rates	4 th Rates	5 th Rates	6 th Rates	Sloops, etc.
Captain	£420	£347	£308	£237	£201	£219	-
Commander	-	-	-	-	-	-	£219
Lieutenant	£110	£110	£110	£110	£110	£110	£110
Master's Mate	£50	£46	£43	£38	£34	£34	£34
Midshipman	£36	£33	£31	£29	£26	£26	£26

These tables serve as a necessary background for the discussion of prize money in the next section. They also emphasize the significance of post rank for officers' earning potential.

Lieutenants' pay was not very high. The master of a third rate after 1807 earned almost thirty pounds per year more than the first lieutenant, and the surgeon was likely paid even more. But the captain earned more than all but the most senior surgeon, and nearly three times as much as his lieutenants. The division between the large group of lieutenants and warrant officers and the small group of elite post-captains is again significant.

⁷⁸ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 7, 13, 14.

⁷⁹ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 622–7.

Chapter six will spend more time discussing the implications of officers' pay for their social status, but for now, it is worth putting the pay data in the context of other eighteenth century incomes. Table 4.8 shows a selection of incomes comparable to that of naval officers, drawn from Colquhoun's data:

Table 4.8: Selections from Colquhoun's Estimates of Annual Incomes in 1803⁸⁰

Category	Income
Persons in higher civil offices	£800
Gentlemen and ladies living on income	£700
Eminent clergymen	£500
Ship-owners, letting ships for freight only	£500
Freeholders of the better sort	£200
Persons employing professional skill and capital as engineers, surveyors, and master builders, etc.	£200
Shopkeepers and tradesmen dealing in goods	£150
Persons ... in the Education of the Youth of both sexes, etc.	£150
Persons employing capital as tailors, mantua-makers, milliners, etc.	£150
Lesser Clergymen	£120
Farmers	£120
Innkeepers and publicans, licensed	£100
Lesser freeholders	£90

At the top of the table, admirals' incomes compare favourably to the landed gentry. But the captain of a ship of the line earned less than an eminent clergyman or a merchant.

Lieutenants' incomes put them surprisingly far down the income table, with publicans and freehold farmers. Pursers and chaplains earned even less. Masters' incomes are roughly similar to shopkeepers and educators, with surgeons a step above. Overall, those occupations with incomes comparable to naval officers are best described as middling. Farmers, teachers, shopkeepers, and tailors did not move in the same socio-economic circles as wealthy landowners. Only admirals' incomes matched those of their civilian peers.⁸¹ It must be emphasized again that admirals were rare: roughly speaking, only one officer in twenty reached that rank on active service, and, of the other nineteen, thirteen never progressed past lieutenant.

⁸⁰ Lindert and Williamson, 'Revising England's Social Tables', pp. 400–401.

⁸¹ P.J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700–1850* (London, 2000), p. 234; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 624.

Both commissioned and warrant officers complained periodically about their low pay. In 1745, a group of lieutenants petitioned the Admiralty unsuccessfully for higher pay.⁸² An anonymous officer published a pamphlet with a similar theme in 1773, and a group of surgeons petitioned Lord Sandwich in 1780, demanding higher pay and that the Admiralty cover the cost of their instruments and medicines.⁸³ Graham Moore attended a meeting of lieutenants in 1787 that was considering a similar petition.⁸⁴ The timing of that meeting was not a coincidence: most of the officers at that meeting would have been living on their half-pay while the Navy was demobilized. A lieutenant on half-pay at that meeting would have earned only about £40 per year, which was meagre at best. Warrant officers only received half-pay when they were sufficiently senior. The same year that Moore attended the meeting of lieutenants, David Blackburn wrote to his sister to complain that he was number 226 on the seniority list of masters, and therefore ineligible for half-pay. It was one of the reasons why Blackburn was willing to accept service on a brig in the First Fleet, even though he had qualified for a third rate.⁸⁵ Employment provided a much more attractive financial situation than life ashore, whether or not an officer was eligible for half-pay.

Prize Money

Missing from the analysis of officers' incomes is prize money, the Navy's great equalizer: no other employer could tempt potential employees with such wealth. Prize money offered all sailors the possibility of making a fortune, or at least securing a comfortable retirement. An officer's monthly wages were merely the foundation of his income; prize money earnings had the potential to increase his income dramatically. This section relies heavily

⁸² *British Naval Documents, 1204–1960*, eds. J.B. Hattendorf et al. (NRS, 1993), no. 306, p. 523.

⁸³ Captain of a Man of War, *A Letter from a Captain of a Man of War, to a Member of Parliament* (London, 1773); *British Naval Documents*, no. 318, pp. 537–8.

⁸⁴ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 16.

⁸⁵ Neville, *Blackburn's Isle*, p. 114–6.

on the work of Dan Benjamin, whose unpublished paper on prize money earnings remains the only statistically rigorous analysis of the subject.⁸⁶ Much as previous sections have identified a small elite of highly successful officers, this section argues that prize money was distributed unevenly across the population of warrant and commissioned officers.

Benjamin's research suggests that prize money was abundant throughout the Great Wars. He estimates that the Royal Navy captured £30.8 million worth of prizes from 1793 to 1815, resulting in a net value of £26.6 million.⁸⁷ The men responsible for the disappearance of the £4.2 million were the widely despised prize agents, whose fees—usually about five per cent—caused naval officers a good deal of frustration. They were, however, necessary because they took control of the prize once she reached port and helped ensure that the men present at her capture received their shares. Agents shepherded prizes through the prize court system when there was some question about neutrality. The process was notoriously slow. Since agents could earn interest on the value of a prize while the case wound its way through court proceedings, they had perverse incentives to impede its progress. Hill's data shows that only one prize in seven was distributed after seven months, and one in five prizes took longer than four years to process. In addition to likely delays, any captain who captured a neutral vessel took a serious risk because he was liable for the value of the prize if she was determined to be neutral. St Vincent was typically hyperbolic, writing to Grenville in 1806: '[W]here one captain makes a fortune by the capture of neutrals, ten are ruined.' Hill's more sober assessment nevertheless emphasizes the risks: 'To some extent their position was comparable with that of a policeman on the beat: they needed a grasp of the principles, a lot of experience and a good nose to smell a rat.' Some officers, particularly those on foreign stations, avoided the corruption and

⁸⁶ D.K. Benjamin, 'Golden Harvest: The British Naval Prize System, 1793–1815' (Unpublished paper, 2009).

⁸⁷ Benjamin, 'Golden Harvest', p. 3.

inefficiency of the prize courts entirely by ransoming prizes. Even if the ransom was less than the value of the vessel, a captain could be certain that he would receive the money, and he would not have to spare men to sail the prize back to port.⁸⁸

Despite the problems with the prize court system, the narrative of prize money during the Wars must emphasize just how much money there was to distribute. Benjamin finds an average of £1.2 million available every year. Furthermore, he finds that fewer than thirty per cent of prizes were captured during the French Revolutionary Wars. The majority of prizes were captured not at the outset of the Wars, as historians have assumed, but during the second decade of operations.⁸⁹ The Treasurer of the Navy, George Rose, provided corroborating evidence during a Parliamentary hearing: by his accounting, £1,300,000 worth of prize money had been distributed in 1810.⁹⁰ Not all prizes were created equal: most prizes were small coasting vessels; less than five per cent were worth more than £20,000. The rare fat prizes skewed the mean net value of a prize up to £3,400; the median net value was only £725.⁹¹ The net value of a legitimate prize was distributed among the officers and men by dividing it into eighths. From 1708 to 1808, there were five classes of recipients on a ship. The captain stood alone in the first class, and he received three eighths of the value of the prize. If he was acting under the orders of a flag officer, he forfeited one third of his share to that officer. The second class consisted of the master, the captain of the marines, and the lieutenants. They shared one eighth of the value, as did the third class: the other warrant officers, the master's mates, and the lieutenants of marines. Petty officers and midshipmen shared another eighth, and the final class consisted of the men, who shared one quarter of the prize. The captain's share therefore was usually equal to or greater than that of the entire wardroom plus the gunner, boatswain, and carpenter,

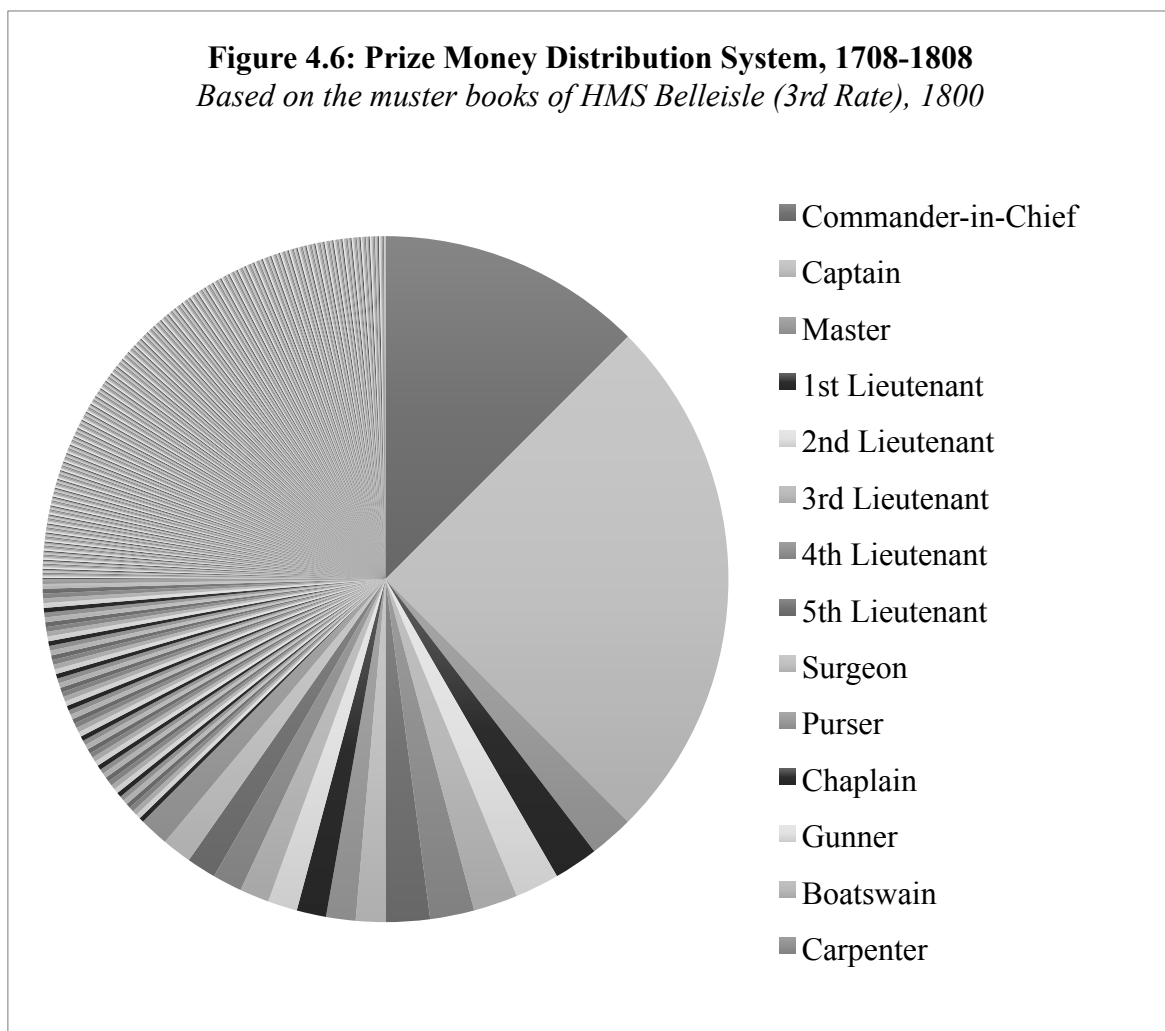
⁸⁸ J.R. Hill, *The Prizes of War: The Naval Prize System in the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815* (Stroud, 1998), pp. 21, 32, 98–100, 139–42, 148–52, 212–3.

⁸⁹ Benjamin, 'Golden Harvest', p. 3.

⁹⁰ Hill, *Prizes of War*, p. 147.

⁹¹ Benjamin, 'Golden Harvest', p. 3.

which put captains in by far the best position to make a fortune from prizes.⁹² Figure 4.6 provides a visual representation of the unequal distribution of prizes by showing each man's share of a hypothetical prize on a typical third rate⁹³:



The largest single portion is the Captain's; warrant officers and lieutenants' slices are significantly smaller, though still much larger than the crew's, whose slices appear in the upper-left quadrant.

Benjamin's data also confirms what contemporaries suspected, namely that frigates were in the best position to capture prizes. Some frigates were remarkably lucky: purser Thomas Peckston reported to his wife that two frigates cruising near Port Mahon had

⁹² Benjamin, 'Golden Harvest', pp. 16–17.

⁹³ TNA, ADM 36/15317 (Admiralty: Royal Navy Ships' Musters (Series I), Ship: *Belleisle*, 1 October 1800 – 31 July 1801).

brought in twenty-seven prizes ‘within a few months’ in 1812.⁹⁴ Since frigates had smaller crews and fewer officers than ships of the line, each man’s share of a prize was also larger. It was not unknown for officers to try to structure their careers to maximize their chances. Shortly after he was married, Peckston was back at sea. Explaining his absence to his new wife, he said he was only willing to leave her if he could get ‘a good frigate’; otherwise he wanted to be appointed to a stationary ship so he could live with her.⁹⁵ In the end, he did serve on a frigate, which netted him over £400 in a little more than two years. The largest prize was a French ship purchased by the Navy, and Peckston’s share was a healthy £85.⁹⁶ Master Thomas Griffiths found himself £250 in debt to his agent in 1807, so he applied to his patron, the Deputy Comptroller of the Navy Board: ‘[I]f you will be pleased to let me be appointed to a Frigate [I] shall feel myself much obliged as it is the most likely way to recover what I have lost.’⁹⁷ Griffiths could not expect to pay back the debt in one year, but Benjamin’s data demonstrates that the average earnings from prize money for members of the second class were relatively high. He estimates that Griffiths could expect to earn £150 per year in prize money if he served on a fifth rate. Lieutenants and warrant officers serving on frigates and sloops could expect to double their annual wages from prize money. In contrast, service on a ship of the line was less lucrative: officers could expect a fifty per cent increase on their annual wages.⁹⁸ There were exceptions: captains of the ships involved at Trafalgar received £973 in prize money plus £2,389 ‘specially awarded by the government’.⁹⁹ But major fleet actions aside, frigates had better prize prospects than ships of the line.

⁹⁴ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Thomas Peckston to Mary Peckston, 30 June 1812.

⁹⁵ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Thomas Peckston to Mary Peckston, 5 and 13 Feb 1813.

⁹⁶ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Copies of Testimonials as to the Character and Abilities of Thomas Snowden Peckston, RN; Hill, *Prizes of War*, p. 230.

⁹⁷ TNA, ADM 6/147.

⁹⁸ Benjamin, ‘Golden Harvest’, p. 18.

⁹⁹ Hill, *Prizes of War*, p. 71.

The implications of Benjamin's data for officers' social status are significant. No longer do the incomes of the members of the Navy's wardrooms match that of publicans and lesser clergymen. Colquhoun estimated an income of £149 per year for a naval officer. As discussed in chapter three, once the unemployment rate (and therefore half-pay) is taken into account, his estimate is sufficient enough as a mean. Many officers had no opportunities to help capture prizes: one sample of 164 lieutenants found that only 50 of them had been involved in actions that led to prizes.¹⁰⁰ But for those lucky men, £250 or £300 would be a better estimate of their annual incomes than £149. The company kept by such men in Table 4.8 changes: 'Freeholders of the better sort' and master builders are better peer groups, at least by income. Not that sailors knew what to do with prize windfalls. Mangin tells an anecdote about an officer who won £140 in prize money and was wounded. The officer told Mangin, 'I never had any money before; I may never have any again; I have never yet lived luxuriously; I may never more have an opportunity of doing so; I'll do so now.' Mangin says he 'expended his wealth like a Lord—and in three weeks went back to his ship—penniless!'¹⁰¹ James Guthrie, surgeon of Lord Cochrane's famous *Speedy*, was more sober and responsible with his winnings. After capturing the Spanish frigate *El Gamo*, Cochrane's crew split £1,394 in head money; it was one of a number of lucrative prizes that Guthrie enjoyed as he followed Cochrane from ship to ship. In 1806, Guthrie had made enough money to get married and build his own house in Scotland, where he retired.¹⁰²

But the real winners of the prize market were those at the top of the command structure. The prize distribution system meant that Guthrie's share was dwarfed by his captain's. Benjamin describes prize money for warrant officers and lieutenants as a

¹⁰⁰ Consolvo, 'Prospects and Promotion', p. 153.

¹⁰¹ *Five Naval Journals*, pp. 24–5.

¹⁰² 'Dr James Guthrie, 1780–1862', *War of 1812: Privateers*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://www.1812privateers.org/Great%20Britain/Guthrie2.htm>.

‘handsome supplement’ to their incomes. For captains, he argues, prize money was the ‘*sine qua non* of compensation, for it exceeded (sometimes by vast amounts) anything they could hope to earn in monthly wages’. Earning three to four times their monthly wages was relatively common. For the captain of a frigate, this could mean an annual income of more than £1000; a ship of the line might earn her captain £800. Reforms in 1808 dented these figures by reducing the captain and flag officer’s share of prizes to two-eighths and distributing the extra eighth among the petty officers. Compared to warrant officers and lieutenants, though, captains’ incomes still remained high. Benjamin estimates that the captain of a fifth rate serving from 1809 to 1815 could expect an annual income from prizes alone of £745, while his lieutenants took home only £140. Post rank remained the crucial dividing line separating middle-income wardroom members from potentially wealthy elites.¹⁰³

Admirals’ incomes were greater still. Benjamin estimates that £112,000 worth of prizes went to flag officers, on average, every year, and Hill argues that the men best placed to make a fortune were those who became admirals early in the Wars.¹⁰⁴ It is possible to count the number of admirals who flew their flags each year during the Wars using Steel’s *Navy List*. Though some years saw more than forty admirals on active service, the average was closer to thirty-five.¹⁰⁵ Dividing Benjamin’s estimate by the annual average number of flag officers produces an estimated £3200 in prize earnings per admiral per year. This estimate does not take into account the gradations of admirals nor the unequal opportunities for prizes. It merely serves as a rough guide, indicating that the ratio of prize earnings to pay for admirals is more similar to that of post-captains than to that of lieutenants. In extreme cases, admirals could earn immense fortunes. The most

¹⁰³ Benjamin, ‘Golden Harvest’, pp. 16–22.

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin, ‘Golden Harvest’, pp. 19–21; Hill, *Prizes of War*, p. 226.

¹⁰⁵ D. Cripps, *Steel’s List of the Royal Navy, 1793–1815: Ships, Commanders & Stations* (Madison, WI, 2004).

famous example was the man whose story began this chapter, Edward Pellew. With total prize money earnings of about £300,000, mainly gained while Commander-in-Chief of the lucrative East Indies Station, Pellew placed himself in a completely different socio-economic category from the lieutenants, warrant officers, and even post-captains discussed so far.¹⁰⁶

The disparity between the earning potential of post captains and admirals and that of wardroom members is stark, and it reinforces the theme of this chapter. There were two kinds of naval officers: a select group of wealthy and powerful post-captains and admirals, and a large mass of officers who earned far less. The greater inequality was between officers and men, of course: the captain of a ship of the line earned twenty times the monthly wage of a seaman, but his share of prize money was 550 times greater. Nevertheless, from the perspective of this thesis, the distance between a post-captain earning £150 in wages and £750 in prizes and a lieutenant earning £100 in wages and £100 in prizes is significant. An active-duty lieutenant had an impressive income by contemporary standards, which helps explain the attractiveness of a naval career. As Benjamin notes, though, the prize money system created enormous incentives for lieutenants to secure, first, employment, and second, promotion.¹⁰⁷



During the Great Wars with France, there were roughly the same number of commissioned officers as warrant officers of wardroom rank. The distinction between those with commissions and those with warrants was significant, but, from the perspective of officers' social status, it was less significant than that between the officers who reached post rank and those who did not or could not. Only about twenty per cent of commissioned officers

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin, 'Golden Harvest', pp. 19–21.

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin, 'Golden Harvest', pp. 17, 26.

were promoted to post-captain. Therefore, looking at the whole population of both commissioned and warrant officers, it is possible to speak of two kinds: an elite ten per cent of post-captains and admirals, and the rest, the members of the Navy's wardrooms and those languishing ashore, unemployed.

How did officers join the elite ten per cent? Gaining promotion to post-captain was the surest route. As Graham Moore wrote in his diary, 'After a man has got a Post Ship, the great stumbling blocks are removed however and he has some opportunities of shewing himself in spite of neglect, and even of making his fortune.'¹⁰⁸ The timing of an officer's commission could play a role in determining his chances: those officers whose commissions coincided with the beginnings of major wars were often better placed to gain employment, and employment meant opportunities to convince superiors of their abilities. Naval operations depended on teamwork, and senior officers wanted subordinates who could help them succeed. So long as the officer came from at least a middling background and was not a social embarrassment, he would be judged primarily on his talent and work ethic. The Navy's promotion system blended meritocratic elements into the framework of the contemporary patronage system. A useful summary comes from a history of eighteenth-century army surgeons: it was an age 'where patronage and meritocracy rubbed shoulders without apparent mutual discomfort'.¹⁰⁹ The result was that, despite an ever-increasing population of eligible officers in what Kennedy calls Britain's 'galaxy of naval talent', more often than not the Navy managed to select the brightest stars.¹¹⁰

Those bright stars had opportunities to transform their socio-economic status. This chapter has shown that there were enormous sums to be earned, but those who were best placed were the men in command. The Navy's prize money distribution system favoured,

¹⁰⁸ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁹ M. Ackroyd et al., *Advancing with the Army: Medicine, the Professions, and Social Mobility in the British Isles, 1790–1850* (Oxford, 2006), p. 19.

¹¹⁰ P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London, 1976), p. 127.

particularly before 1808, the members of the elite. It was possible for warrant officers, lieutenants, and commanders to make enough money to retire to the countryside, as James Guthrie did. But it was the elite group that benefitted most from the wartime windfall.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Common Blue Frock

Domestic and International Comparisons

The first four chapters of this thesis have described the characteristics, careers, and prospects of naval officers in the Great Wars with France at some length. The final two chapters build on that description and can be seen as a pair. This chapter will place naval officers in a broader context of eighteenth-century professionals by examining the changing nature of the professions. Questions of gentility—its definition and implications for professionals—will lurk beneath the surface of this chapter, but they will not receive full consideration until chapter six. Instead, this chapter asks to what extent naval officers were similar to the ‘traditional professions’ and to other military occupations both in Britain and elsewhere. These comparisons will provide a platform for understanding the ways in which the Navy was ‘socially unique’.¹

Though chapters three and four argued that the social distinction between commissions and warrants was not as great as that between elite officers and the rest, the division should not be set aside completely. Given that the training and responsibilities of warrant and commissioned officers differed—not to mention the wide variations in those categories among warrant officers—comparing them to other professionals requires treating them separately. The first section of this chapter examines professions comparable to commissioned naval officers; the second section examines warrant officers. As we saw in chapter two, warrant officers often used the Navy as a platform for launching civilian careers. Some, however, failed to reintegrate into civilian society and endured unemployment and, in some cases, poverty. Discovering the kinds of jobs available to

¹ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), p. 392.

warrant officers when they left the Navy sheds light on their place in British society.

Finally, exploring how naval officers in other countries fit into their navies and societies demonstrates the extent to which British naval officers were part of a larger maritime community.

Domestic Comparisons for Commissioned Officers

Edward Coote's *The English School-Master*, published in 1720, was a reading and writing manual in which he set forth 'some of the chief Commodities of his Profession'.² *New Improvements in the Art of Midwifery* from 1724 included a section exploring the how to tell when a woman is 'qualified for this profession'.³ In 1748, an anonymous pamphleteer published *The Apothecary Display'd*, which promised to explore 'his profession and important character'.⁴ All three authors use profession as a synonym for occupation; in the early eighteenth century, any way of making a living was considered a profession. Though the definition became more complex and restrictive, as will be discussed shortly, naval officers in the period of this study continued to use this old definition. Nelson bemoaned the death of an acquaintance in a letter to his wife: 'No *age*, no *profession* is exempt from death'.⁵ Collingwood, frustrated to be on shore in 1799 and not at sea, wrote: 'But I cannot in the present state of things suppress an impatience to be in the exercise of my profession'.⁶ These usages are neither problematic nor surprising: being a naval officer was an occupation, and both naval officers and their contemporaries referred to their occupations as their professions.

² E. Coote, *The English School-Master* (London, 1720), title page.

³ H. Deventer, *New Improvements in the Art of Midwifery* (London, 1724), title page.

⁴ [Anonymous], *The Apothecary Display'd* (London, 1748), title page.

⁵ *Nelson's Letters to His Wife and Other Documents, 1785–1831*, ed. G.P.B. Naish (NRS, 1958), p. 220; italics original.

⁶ *The Private Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, ed. E. Hughes (NRS, 1957), p. 97.

But the definition of a profession, and in particular of a professional, did not remain fixed through the eighteenth century. Holmes, writing about the turn of the century, defines a profession as simply a ‘calling or vocation’ and includes apothecaries and surgeons as professionals.⁷ Prest, citing Dr Johnson much later in the century, describes the professions as ‘high-status occupations’ because of their ties to universities.⁸ In other words, no longer would apothecaries qualify as professionals; the ‘traditional professions’ of the law, medicine, and the church separated themselves from other occupations. Corfield’s definition reflects this shift. She defines an eighteenth-century profession as a skilled occupation that provided formal, specialist knowledge that had both a theoretical and practical dimension; in addition, members underwent a formal training process, and there were significant barriers to entry.⁹ Robert Davison, writing about naval officers at the end of the nineteenth century, largely concurs, adding only an element of autonomy to the professional body.¹⁰ Lawyers, doctors, and clergymen fit both Corfield and Davison’s definitions nicely, and, importantly, so do commissioned naval officers. The prerequisites for sitting the lieutenants’ exam, as well as the rigors of the exam itself, are evidence enough. Professionals in this more restrictive sense were socially separated from other occupations. Their training and knowledge provided them with power and prestige.

Therefore it is unsurprising to find instances of commissioned officers referring to themselves and to their profession in such a way that it reflects this elevated and restrictive understanding of their occupation. Often officers used ‘professional’ as a positive adjective to describe the abilities or actions of an officer that were the product of his training and his practical skills and knowledge. Collingwood, writing shortly after the Glorious First of

⁷ G. Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State, and Society 1680–1730* (London, 1982), pp. 3–10.

⁸ W. Prest, ‘Introduction: The Professions and Society in Early Modern England’, in W. Prest (ed.), *The Professions in Early Modern England* (London, 1987), pp. 12–13.

⁹ P.J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700–1850* (London, 1995), p. 25.

¹⁰ R.L. Davison, *The Challenges of Command: The Royal Navy’s Executive Branch Officers, 1880–1919* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 17–18.

June, emphasized that naval officers understood and appreciated what Lord Howe had done in ways that civilians could not: ‘We who were seamen were well acquainted with the great professional abilities of Lord Howe’, he wrote, ‘but he has outdone all opinion that could be formed.’¹¹ Maintaining the high opinion of one’s fellow professionals was essential. Sir William Dillon took command of the *Aigle* in 1809, but was dismayed to find her ‘in a most dirty, slovenly state’, not fit for service at sea. ‘I saw at a glance that extraordinary exertions would be required to get the ship ready for sea,’ he wrote. ‘In short, my professional character was at stake.’¹²

Given the parallels between commissioned officers and the traditional professions, it is tempting to lump them together. They could fit onto the social spectrum beneath the landed classes and above the middling sorts, respected for their specialized knowledge but without the tradition and power associated with land ownership in Britain. Unfortunately this comparison is overly simplistic and misleading. There were important differences between naval officers and civilian professionals that complicate the picture, as the following paragraphs will explore.

Davidoff and Hall highlight one difference when they emphasize that professionals sold services, ‘particularly those involving the manipulation of words, visual forms, and abstract ideas’.¹³ Therefore, the hands-on nature of seaborne training was the first problem. As described in chapter one, commissioned officers’ training included manual labour, climbing the rigging, mastering knots and the finer points of seamanship, and aiming and firing canons. No other traditional profession trained their members in a similar manner. Physical activity was associated with lower social status occupations. Physicians performed their diagnoses without touching their patients; surgeons, who did get their

¹¹ *Correspondence of Lord Collingwood*, p. 46.

¹² Sir W.H. Dillon, *A Narrative of My Professional Adventures (1790–1839)*, ed. M. Lewis (2 vols, NRS, 1953–6), II, p. 123.

¹³ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*, revised edn. (London, 2002), p. 260.

hands dirty, were necessarily socially inferior. Lawyers and clergymen had no reason to master a manual skill; commissioned officers' survival depended directly on their seamanship.

The second problem was a product of the first: commissioned officers' educations varied widely. Learning seamanship took precedence over learning Latin. In contrast, physicians, lawyers, and clergymen were necessarily classically educated. One of the recurring themes in James Anthony Gardner's memoir is the way he distinguishes his fellow officers by their education. On the one hand, it is impressive how many officers had a smattering of classical education; on the other hand, that Gardner feels the need to highlight which officers were classically educated is also an indication that such a background was unusual. Billy Culmer is one of Gardner's most colourful shipmates, but he would not have been at home in the company of a respectable London physician. Gardner writes, 'Speaking about the Roman history respecting the battle of Actium between Augustus and Antony, he said he was in the battle and remembered all about it. The fact was he mistook the name and thought it was some place where he had been in the American war.'¹⁴ Gardner is an example of an officer who spent time ashore in school as an adolescent and could quote Cicero with confidence; Collingwood is an example of a captain who insisted his young gentlemen receive a rudimentary classical education.¹⁵ Neither officer is particularly unique, but nor are they indicative of the wide range of educational outcomes in the Navy: Culmer must be included as well. George III was reportedly shocked to learn that Collingwood had written the Trafalgar Dispatch because he had never heard of a naval officer writing so well.¹⁶ Billy Culmer understood spherical

¹⁴ J.A. Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches: The Recollections of James Anthony Gardner*, ed. C. Lloyd (London, 1955), p. 106.

¹⁵ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 387.

¹⁶ N. A. M. Rodger, 'Honour and Duty at Sea, 1660–1815', *Historical Research* 75, no. 190 (2002), p. 434.

trigonometry, but he was hardly a typical example of a classically educated eighteenth-century gentleman.

The third reason that naval officers do not compare easily to the traditional professions is money. Naval officers were paid wages, and there was no opportunity for them to request that the money be given as an honorarium, as was the case with prestigious physicians.¹⁷ As chapter four discussed, commissioned officers on active service could expect to earn an income comparable to that of prestigious professionals, but greedily lusting after prizes was the antithesis of receiving an honorarium. Officers' high unemployment rates also temper the comparison: a lieutenant shuffling off to receive his measly half-pay does not project the image of a successful professional, even when compared to a country parson in a modest living.

Whereas the first three reasons that commissioned officers sit awkwardly next to the traditional professions highlight the ways in which they were lower in status, the final reason does the opposite. All commissioned military officers benefitted from 'time-honoured beliefs that leadership in war was the peculiar preserve of the English aristocracy'. As we will see shortly, the increasingly technical nature of military leadership threatened to undermine some of these beliefs; nevertheless, throughout the eighteenth century, 'the field of arms was especially a celebration of aristocratic values'.¹⁸ None of the traditional professions boasted an ancient association with nobility. Recall that in Hogarth's portrait of Lord George Graham from 1744, Graham is the aristocratic officer, while the chaplain is a member of his retinue.¹⁹

For all these reasons, naval officers need to be analysed separately from the traditional professions. As Collingwood wrote, 'the exercise of [his] profession' required

¹⁷ Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, p. 149.

¹⁸ I. Roy, 'The Profession of Arms', in Prest (ed.), *The Professions*, p. 184.

¹⁹ W. Hogarth, 'Captain Lord George Graham, 1715–47, in his Cabin', oil on canvas, 1742–4, NMM, Object ID BHC2720.

him to demonstrate his active, practical involvement in physical activities; it did not require him to be fluent in the classical world, and therefore many of his peers were not; and it paid him a wage comparable to the lowest stratum of clergymen until his promotion to post-captain. In short, commissioned officers complicate Corfield's definition of an eighteenth-century professional, despite fitting her parameters rather neatly. Nor are officers alone in their awkward social perch: an obvious point of comparison for naval officers, and one that they made readily, is to their colleagues in the army. Many of the problematic points of comparison with civilian professionals also apply to army officers: they were involved in a dangerous, physical activity; a classical education was not required, nor did the army provide much assistance for officers who wished to gain one; and Colquhoun places army officers at nearly the same average income level as naval officers.²⁰ These superficial similarities have allowed historians to speak of the social status of military officers without distinguishing between the two branches.²¹ Once again, though, there were fundamental differences between army and Navy officers that reveal the complexities of the eighteenth-century social hierarchy and its significance for contemporaries.

The key to understanding the difference between the two services is to trace the professionalization of army and Navy officers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rodger provides a useful birds-eye view of the narrative: 'It is a matter of observation that army officers have traditionally been noblemen or gentlemen, while navies have tended to be run by middle-class professionals on whom the aristocratic concept of honour sat somewhat awkwardly.'²² Ironically, beginning with the naval side of the narrative

²⁰ H. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, 'Revising England's Social Tables 1688–1812', *Explorations in Economic History*, 19 (1982), p. 401.

²¹ Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, p. 189; L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, revised edn. (London, 2009), pp. 183–4.

²² N.A.M. Rodger, 'The military revolution at sea', *Essays in Naval History, From Medieval to Modern* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 65–6.

immediately presents prominent exceptions to Rodger's observation. Prince Rupert, Charles I's German nephew, commanded the Royalist fleet in the Civil War, and the future James II commanded the fleet against the Dutch in 1665. Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter one, the Admiralty effectively ended the involvement of amateur nobles by introducing the lieutenants' exam in 1677.²³ This was a crucial development for the career trajectories and qualifications of naval officers, and there was no equivalent in the army.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that suddenly in 1677 naval officers were professionals while army officers remained amateurs. But there are signs of nascent naval professionalism dating from this period: the first officers' club formed in 1674, and officers competed with each other to secure regular employment at sea, rather than flitting between the army, Navy, and merchant services as before. The division in the officer corps, between 'gentlemen' and 'tarpaulin' officers, was real, but Macaulay's famous quip that 'the seamen were not gentlemen; and the gentlemen were not seamen' oversimplifies unhelpfully.²⁴ Gentlemen officers represented the tradition of wealthy landowners doing their duty by commanding ships at sea as amateurs; tarpaulins represented the 'middle-class professionals' of Rodger's observation, who tended to earn their livings at sea, whether as merchant captains or naval officers. Of course, 'represented' is the key verb in the previous sentence: the distinctions were never that clear, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, they had largely disappeared. It was no longer possible for noble or royal amateurs to command his majesty's ships: naval officers' careers were clearly defined and regulated. This was true even for the best connected. When George III sent Prince William Henry to sea, he instructed, '[He] goes as a sailor and as such ... no marks of distinction are to be shown unto him.'²⁵ In practice, of course, many marks of distinction

²³ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 3–5, 66–8, 121.

²⁴ J.D. Davies, *Gentlemen and Tarpaulins: The Officers and Men of the Restoration Navy* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 6, 230.

²⁵ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 121–2, 388.

were shown unto him, but he still had to master all the skills of a professional sailor before commanding his own ship. The Navy's emphasis on practical seamanship was not intended as some radical social levelling process but was instead the product of the dangers inherent in life afloat.

The professionalization of the naval officer corps was more rapid than the professionalization of the army officer corps. The traditional British fear of a standing army provides a ready excuse to dismiss army officers as part-time dilettantes. Such a characterization is unfair, however. It was certainly the case that in the seventeenth century, the army was to a significant degree staffed by gentlemen or noble amateurs who were expected, by virtue of their birth, to know how to lead men into battle when the time came. There were few or no professional standards for army officers, which was in part the product of that long European tradition, noted earlier, of the nobility serving as the defenders of the realm.²⁶ But by the time George II became the last British monarch to be present at a battle, at Dettingen in 1743, army officers were beginning to demonstrate signs of a professional ethos. A good example is the army's standard drill manual of that period, Humphrey Bland's *A treatise of military discipline*.²⁷ Published in 1727, it contained thousands of manoeuvres and formations, which tends to undermine Brewer's argument that land warfare was not particularly complicated.²⁸

Nevertheless, the fundamental technical skills required of all commissioned naval officers—even princes—had no parallel in army regiments. Bland's manoeuvres were difficult to memorize, but they were qualitatively different from the necessary seamanship skills that kept ships afloat, regardless of whether the enemy was present. Even by the middle of the eighteenth century, there were no formal educational requirements for army

²⁶ Rodger, 'Honour and Duty at Sea', pp. 426–7.

²⁷ H. Bland, *A treatise of military discipline* (London, 1727), passim.

²⁸ J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War and the English State, 1688–1783* (London, 1989), p. 57.

officers, and most of what officers needed to know was easy to learn on the job: how to operate a musket, a basic understanding of regimental drills and tactics, and some rudimentary accounting. Not until the end of the French Revolutionary Wars was there a formal academy for army officers.²⁹ Bland's manual also generated plenty of fodder for contemporary satirists. One advised majors, 'Whenever you are to exercise the regiment, get the adjutant or sergeant-major to write out on a small card the words of command in proper order; and if you cannot retain the manoeuvres in your head, you may at least keep them in your hat.'³⁰ None of these perspectives should be exaggerated, though. Regimental manoeuvres could certainly be complicated, but memorizing them all was not necessary to be an effective commander. Thus the narrative of army professionalization is considerably less straightforward than that of the Navy. As Guy summarizes, 'Most importantly, as long as officers could be assumed to be gentlemen, there was no need to study leadership in the abstract. British officers learned their profession "by going on as other people did"'.³¹

Generally, army officers could be assumed to be gentlemen because of the second major difference between the armed professions: the army's purchase system. As discussed in chapter one, entry into the commissioned officer corps in the Navy was controlled at a local level by captains and was therefore unregulated: theoretically it was possible for anyone with the right connections to a friendly captain to become a 'young gentleman' and be on the track to a lieutenant's commission. This was true in army regiments as well, but the barrier to entry was much higher because commissions were expensive. An ensign's commission in an unfashionable regiment of foot cost at least £400 in 1800, and prices

²⁹ H. Thomas, *The Story of Sandhurst* (London, 1961), pp. 15–21.

³⁰ Quoted in C. Barnett, *Britain and Her Army: A Military, Political and Social History of the British Army, 1509–1970* (London, 2000), p. 226.

³¹ A.J. Guy, 'The Army of the Georges 1714–1783', in D. Chandler (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Army*, new edn. (Oxford, 1994), pp. 100–101.

increased dramatically with rank.³² Take Colquhoun's estimated income for a lesser clergymen of £120 per year: purchasing a commission as an ensign for his son would tie up more than three years' income, without even taking into consideration the money his son would need to spend to feed and equip himself appropriately.³³ In contrast, supporting his son in the Navy meant providing only £30 to £60 per year for provisions; there were no major expenses comparable to a commission in a regiment.³⁴ The threshold of social and economic capital required for army officers was, compared to the Navy, both quantifiable and significantly higher.

Admittedly, this description of the purchase system is slightly misleading. Purchasing a commission as a major cost approximately £2,600, but the first £1,500 or so of that usually came from selling a captain's commission. This still left him well short of the required amount, but vacant commissions were filled first by seniority. The hypothetical captain described above would be near the top of the seniority list by the time he had the opportunity to purchase the major's commission; he was therefore more likely to have had a chance to accumulate sufficient funds to close the gap. Furthermore, in 1720, George I began regulating the market for commissions, which provided less wealthy officers fair opportunities to purchase promotions.³⁵ One historian estimates that only twenty per cent of all commissions were purchased by officers not next in line by seniority.³⁶ Battlefield commissions were a second 'safety valve' that helped provide promotion opportunities outside the steep prices of the purchase system. As many as a third of all eighteenth-century commissions were the result of casualties. These

³² C. James, *The Regimental Companion; containing the Relative Duties of Every Officer in the British Army* (2 vols, London, 1800), I, pp. 37–8.

³³ Lindert and Williamson, 'Revising England's Social Tables', p. 401.

³⁴ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 388.

³⁵ Guy, 'The Army of the Georges', pp. 104–5.

³⁶ J.A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715–1795* (Oxford, 1981), p. 100.

commissions were bestowed by seniority with the approval of the theatre commander.³⁷

Finally, the purchase system had the added benefit of providing retiring officers with a one-time pension payment when they sold their commission. Compared to meagre naval half-pay, this was a more comfortable arrangement.

Ultimately, though, the culture of the army was fundamentally different from the Navy. The purchase system, despite all the possible workarounds, remained a stark and explicit barrier to entry that benefitted wealthy officers at the expense of poor officers. Commission prices in fashionable regiments, plus the high standard of living expected for officers in those regiments, restricted membership to only the wealthiest families who could afford, for example, £1,600 to make their son a cornet of the Horse Guards.³⁸ The result was, as Guy summarizes, that ‘the prevailing *culture* of the officer corps was predominantly aristocratic in tone, based as it was upon a pre-Enlightenment honour code with quasi-medieval trimmings’. Naval officers certainly abided by a code of honour, as will be discussed in chapter six, but it is difficult to imagine the naval equivalent of the medieval tournament staged by army officers in Philadelphia in 1778.³⁹ The constant dangers of wind and weather left little room for such frivolous activities. Furthermore, even as the Navy’s prestige rose towards the end of the eighteenth century, it would be incorrect to characterize its officer corps as displaying an aristocratic culture. As demonstrated in the database, the aristocratic footprint in the Navy was small and the range of backgrounds large; Nelson, Collingwood, and St Vincent complained about aristocratic officers because they felt they were high-profile examples of what they saw as declining professional standards in the Navy, not because the officer corps was suddenly full of duke’s sons.

³⁷ Guy, ‘The Army of the Georges’, pp. 104–5.

³⁸ James, *The Regimental Companion*, p. 37.

³⁹ Guy, ‘The Army of the Georges’, pp. 105, 108, *italics original*.

Marine officers provide another possible point of comparison for naval officers. The Marines were deliberately established without a purchase system to avoid the pitfalls of inexperienced but wealthy officers in positions of authority. Their backgrounds were broadly similar to sea officers, though only a handful came from the aristocracy.⁴⁰ The logical comparison for Marine officers would be then to warrant officers, but since both were members of the wardroom, the comparison does not provide too many insights. The only professionals who shared most of the characteristics of commissioned naval officers were the Royal Artillery and Engineers, whose training and promotion systems more closely mirrored the Navy's. Both required technical skills comparable to seamanship and navigation, and, just as the Admiralty attempted to address naval officer education by founding the Royal Naval Academy in 1733, Artillery and Engineer officers could learn their profession at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich from 1741.⁴¹ There was also no purchase system. Indeed, in the early decades of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, officer entry was as informal as in the Navy; unlike the Navy, though, once its Academy was established, it produced most of the Regiment's officers. Officers-in-training at the Academy were members of the redundantly named Cadet Company of Gentleman Cadets, which closely parallels the Navy's informal designation of 'young gentleman'.⁴²

As convenient as these similarities appear today, they would not have held in eighteenth-century Britain. Commissioned officers considered themselves the social peers of regimental officers, not engineers or artillerymen. Uniforms were a particular point of

⁴⁰ B. Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines, 1664–1802* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 95–101; Idem, “‘The Marine Officer is a Raw Lad, and therefore Troublesome’: Royal Naval Officers and the Officers of the Marines, 1755–1797”, in H. Doe and R. Harding (eds.), *Naval Leadership and Management, 1650–1850* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 77–92.

⁴¹ C.A.L. Graham, *The Story of the Royal Regiment of Artillery*, 6th edn. (Woolwich, 1962), p. 7.

⁴² Graham, *Royal Regiment of Artillery*, pp. 6–8; A. Shepperd, *Sandhurst: The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and its Predecessors* (London, 1980), pp. 10–20; J. Smyth, *Sandhurst: The History of the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst 1741–1961* (London, 1961), pp. 27, 39.

contention. The Engineers and the Artillery were both under the control of the Master-General of the Ordnance until 1855, and the uniforms issued by the Board of Ordnance for officers were blue coats trimmed with gold lace and, by the end of the eighteenth century, white breeches.⁴³ At a glance, therefore, it was difficult to distinguish a blue-coated naval officer from a blue-coated engineer, whereas regimental officers in red coats were instantly recognizable. Naval officers tended to bristle at their superficial similarity to the less fashionable corps. One lieutenant complained that his undress uniform 'is only a common blue frock (such as almost every person wears) without anything military to distinguish it, and of consequence, creates not the least respect, either at home or abroad.'⁴⁴ The dress version was impractical and often improperly worn, particularly on foreign stations.⁴⁵ As naval officers saw it, engineers and artillerymen lacked the tradition and importance of the Navy. The Corps of Royal Engineers did not even have military ranks until 1757, and they had to wait until 1787 for the warrant granting them the 'Royal' title.⁴⁶ Regimental officers remained the key peer group for commissioned naval officers throughout the period.

Public perceptions of the two major military branches shaped how officers in each branch understood their status and significance, and over the course of the eighteenth century, those perceptions were not fixed. Brewer summarizes the standard view, which was that the army was always mistrusted and the Navy enjoyed 'unanimous and widespread support'. In this reading, even if army officers tended to be from higher on the social spectrum than naval officers, their perch was made unstable by fears of a standing army. Naval officers were more likely to be hailed as heroes: witness the celebrations of

⁴³ P. Kendall, *The Royal Engineers at Chatham 1750–2012* (Swindon, 2012), p. 12; Graham, *Royal Regiment of Artillery*, pp. 6, 13; M.D. Cooper, *A Short History of the Corps of Royal Engineers* (Chatham, 2006), p. 14.

⁴⁴ Quoted in N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis, MD, 1986), p. 65.

⁴⁵ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, p. 65; Idem, *The Command of the Ocean*, p. 324.

⁴⁶ The Institution of Royal Engineers, *A Short History*, p. 14.

Vernon or Hawke.⁴⁷ Only at the end of the Napoleonic Wars did the army transition from being hated and feared to being loved and hailed in showy spectacles.⁴⁸ Kinkel takes a different approach, arguing that politics is missing from that narrative. First in heated debates over the 1749 Navy Bill, and then following the execution of Admiral Byng in 1757, critics of the Navy vehemently questioned whether a professional officer corps was in the nation's best interests, and whether it was sufficient for national defence.⁴⁹ Newcastle's Establishment Whigs, for example, favoured a foreign policy focused on Hanover and the continent; for them, the Navy was unreliable and of limited use in central Europe. Their opponents, the Tories, championed the 'blue-water' foreign policy of colonial expansion and isolation from European diplomatic entanglements.⁵⁰ In other words, support for the Navy was politically contested and periodically uncertain.

Kinkel's argument is important; however, it is clear that on average and certainly in the last decades of the century, the Navy enjoyed a broader base of support than the army. Until the 1808 Spanish rebellion—so, for the first fifteen years of the Great Wars, the focus of this thesis—the British army did not make a significant impact in the campaigns against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Repeated failed attempts to invade the Low Countries characterized the army's effort. In contrast, the Navy won major fleet battles on all four corners of the expanding French empire, from Egypt to Spain, the North Atlantic to the North Sea. Naval officers during the Great Wars benefitted socially and professionally from widespread public support and affection, while the most prominent army officer before Wellington, the Duke of York, resigned amid political scandal.

⁴⁷ Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, pp. 55–60.

⁴⁸ B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 35.

⁴⁹ S. Kinkel, 'Disorder, Discipline, and Naval Reform in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain', *The English Historical Review* 78, no. 535 (2013), pp. 1451–82; Idem, 'Saving Admiral Byng: Imperial Debates, Military Governance and Popular Politics at the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War', *Journal for Maritime Research* 13, no. 1 (2011), pp. 3–19.

⁵⁰ B. Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (New York, 2007), pp. 307–500.

Domestic Comparisons for Warrant Officers

Warrant officers sit even more awkwardly alongside the traditional professions. As chapter two discussed, chaplains and surgeons were members of the traditional professions, but both were low-status positions. Naval service for some of them served as a platform on which a more successful and higher-status career could be launched. For others, they remained mired below their civilian colleagues in terms of income and prestige.

Meanwhile, no historian of the professions has examined or discussed masters and pursers. This section discusses how well masters and pursers fit Corfield's definition of professionals before using warrant officers' post-naval careers as a window into their social status.

Masters share a number of similarities with commissioned officers. They had few opportunities or reasons to seek a classical education, as seamanship and navigation took priority. Their incomes were comparable with mid-level professionals, but it came in the form of wages, prize money, and pilotage fees rather than honorariums. They lacked the association with noble leadership on the field of battle that helped prop up the social status of commissioned officers. In other words, few masters could have claimed to be members of a profession on par, socially, with lawyers and physicians. The same could be said of pursers, but for different reasons. If they were educated at a mathematical school and trained as a clerk, they would have had to seek a classical education on their own initiative. Their incomes were the lowest in the wardroom, and they supplemented them by charging their messmates and shipmates as much as possible for tobacco or other items for which they had a monopoly. They were associated with shopkeepers, clerks, and small-scale merchants, none of which claimed to be as socially prestigious as members of the traditional professions.

On the other hand, masters and pursers were both members of professions with strict barriers to entry and a corpus of standard practices. Masters' exams were at least, if not more challenging than the lieutenants' exam, and they sat exams far more frequently than their commissioned colleagues. Pursers were among the most heavily regulated professionals of the eighteenth century because of the essential role that victualing played in the Navy's ability to project British power around the globe. There are also plenty of examples of educated pursers: Thomas Peckston's knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew was mentioned in chapter two. Among the wardroom officers, masters and pursers were admittedly the least similar to the traditional professions. Nevertheless, among military men, they would not have been socially or professionally out of place alongside Artillery and Engineer officers. They could not claim the same aristocratic associations as commissioned officers, or boast colleagues among the traditional professions as chaplains and surgeons could. But they should not be forgotten or set aside in the historiography of the professions either.

A useful way to test where warrant officers fit on the spectrum of eighteenth-century professionals is to follow their careers out of the Navy. The nature of their careers and the kinds of people they associated with can provide a sense of their social standing. Peckston, for example, became an important early member of the Gas Light Company and had a long and successful career in that industry. He also maintained many of his naval contacts: in 1817, a commander, a captain, and Lord Prudhoe, later Duke of Northumberland and First Lord of the Admiralty, all wrote him strong letters of recommendation. Prudhoe, who had been his messmate on the *Pelorus*, referred to Peckston as a gentleman.⁵¹ Patronage certainly played a role in securing posts for many former Navy men. Joseph Charles Thomas may have met his powerful patron, Edmund

⁵¹ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Copies of Testimonials as to the Character and Abilities of Thomas Snowden Peckston, RN.

Boyle, eighth earl of Cork and Orrery, while serving as chaplain of the *Vanguard*; Thomas left the Navy, married an heiress, and became a patron of William Blake.⁵² Purser John Brenton used his naval experience and connections—he was probably related to the famous commissioned officers Jahleel and Edward Pelham Brenton—to become a director of the Royal Naval School, while fellow purser Richard Feltham Guy managed to establish a successful stationary and publishing supply business in Cork.⁵³ John Payton Lamey may have used naval connections, or at least his experience with overseas trade, in his post-Navy career. He operated a wine importing business which he started while still serving on active duty.⁵⁴ In all of these cases, former chaplains and pursers demonstrate that they could move easily among the upper quartile of British society thanks in part to their connections in the Navy.

In contrast, Lincoln argues that surgeons' skills were 'lightly regarded' ashore, which made it difficult to set up a civilian practice after they left the Navy.⁵⁵ Vale and Edwards agree with Lincoln's summary, writing that to do so 'would for most [surgeons] have been difficult if not impossible'. Unlike Lincoln, they cite a naval surgeon's poor half-pay and probable lack of connections ashore as the primary hurdles, rather than the popular perception of his skills. They later undermine both their own argument and Lincoln's when they narrate how the subject of their book, Thomas Trotter, used his connections to a retired Navy vice-admiral to set himself up as a surgeon-apothecary in

⁵² 'Biographical Note: Rev. Joseph Thomas (1765–1811): Connoisseur, Emblem Writer and Patron of William Blake', *Erfurt Electronic Studies in English*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://webdoc.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic22/hoeltgen/thomas.html>.

⁵³ *The Nautical Magazine: A Journal of Papers on Subjects Connected with Maritime Affairs* (London, 1832), I, p. 270; 'Richard Feltham Guy & Anne Bacon', *KiwiCelts*, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://family.kiwicelts.com/15_Guy/FT_Guy_04.html.

⁵⁴ *The London Gazette* (Issue number 18998, 27 Nov. 1832), p. 2634.

⁵⁵ M. Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750–1815* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 161–2.

1784.⁵⁶ Furthermore, they approvingly quote from Robert Campbell's famous occupational dictionary, *The London Tradesman*: 'An ingenious surgeon, let him be cast on any corner of the earth, with but a case of instruments in his pocket, he may live where most other professions starve.'⁵⁷ Evidence from the database supports Campbell's description, and places Trotter's decision in a more appropriate context. David Henderson, for example, served as the surgeon of three ships between 1802 and 1805, but he soon left the Navy to establish a practice in Bristol. Peter Henry lasted a little longer in the Navy, from 1801 to 1807, but eventually he, too, was practicing ashore in his hometown in Derry.⁵⁸ Robert Crowe compiled a chemistry textbook and established a practice in Versailles.⁵⁹

Many warrant officers, it should be noted, were far less successful. Whatever contemporary perceptions about the relative social status of warrant and commissioned officers were, it is difficult to distinguish between the outcomes of half-pay lieutenants and unemployed warrant officers. After the Navy demobilized in 1815, master George Wingham and pursers John Martin Leake and Thomas Alldridge endured bankruptcy.⁶⁰ Master Thomas Fotheringham and purser John Howard, both experienced veterans of fleet actions during the war, applied desperately to the Admiralty for employment in the 1830s.⁶¹ Only senior warrant officers received half-pay, which for many, including

⁵⁶ B. Vale and G. Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet: The Life and Times of Thomas Trotter, 1760–1832* (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 74.

⁵⁷ Vale and Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet*, pp. 54, 71–2.

⁵⁸ TNA, ADM 11/40 (Admiralty: Officers' Service Records (Series I). Analysis of surgeons' services for superannuation, 1808); TNA, ADM 104/12 (Admiralty: Service Registers and Registers of Deaths and Injuries, 1774–1807).

⁵⁹ *The British Review, and London Critical Journal* (London, 1816), VII, p. 297.

⁶⁰ *The London Gazette* (Issue number 18521, 7 Nov. 1828), p. 2047, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/18521/pages/2047/page.pdf>; *The London Gazette* (Issue number 15382, 4 July 1801), p. 763; 'Biographical Notes', *The Family Name of Wordingham*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://www.wording.freemove.co.uk/Biographics.htm>.

⁶¹ TNA, ADM 11/2 (Admiralty: Officers' Service Records (Series I). Survey of Masters' Services, Nos.3–249, 1833–5); TNA, ADM 6/193–5 (Admiralty: Service Records, Registers, Returns and Certificates. Survey of age and services of Pursers, Nos.1–450, 1834).

experienced purser Nathaniel Haydon, was their only source of income.⁶² It was rarely sufficient, and, just as half-pay lieutenants desperately sought post-war employment, some warrant officers went to extreme lengths to demonstrate their readiness to the Admiralty. Purser Henry Best, who had emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1816 and become a farmer, dropped everything in 1834 and caught the first ship headed east to prove to their Lordships that he was worthy of one of the rare peacetime opportunities. In his letter to the Admiralty, he described himself as ‘able and willing’, underlined twice for emphasis.⁶³ It is not possible to provide any kind of reasonable statistical comparison between the fates of half-pay lieutenants and warrant officers, but none of the stories recounted in this paragraph were unique to warrant officers.

The emphasis should remain on the range of outcomes, though: while hundreds suffered on half pay, hundreds more set up successful careers. Unlike the positive examples cited earlier, it is not always clear whether these men relied on contacts made during their naval service to launch their careers. Chaplain Francis Bedford secured the living of Belchford in Lincolnshire, while Charles Inglis, a refugee from the American War, became Bishop of Nova Scotia.⁶⁴ Masters William Price, Murdo Downie and William James all published nautical charts, while purser John Copland became a prize agent and helped publish Charles Haultain’s *The New Navy List* in the 1840s.⁶⁵ Master George Forbes and purser James Pottinger both became minor officials in their respective

⁶² TNA, ADM 6/194.

⁶³ TNA, ADM 6/193.

⁶⁴ ACAD, s.v. ‘Bedford, Francis’; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, s.v. ‘Inglis, Charles’, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio.php?id_nbr=2473.

⁶⁵ *The Critical Review, Or, Annals of Literature* (London, 1801), xxxiii, p. 567; Chandler, *The New Seaman’s Guide*, title page; V. Jankovic, *Reading the Skies: A Cultural History of English Weather, 1650–1820* (Manchester, 2000), p. 156; W. James and J.H. Moore, ‘A Chart of the English Trading Part of the Bay of Honduras’ (London, 1791); C. Haultain, *The New Navy List* (London, 1842), ‘Notice’, p. 280.

towns.⁶⁶ Pursers John Speed and William Hamlyn managed to find employment as an innkeeper and customs official, respectively.⁶⁷ Chaplain William Eales and surgeon George Hewetson both joined the East India Company after their naval service, and surgeon John Irvine followed them to the other side of the world by serving as the surgeon superintendent of the *Canton* convict ship.⁶⁸ Fellow surgeon Thomas Downey published a book of original poems.⁶⁹ Most impressive are Henry George Windsor, former purser, and James Lawson Drummond, former surgeon. Windsor was one of the founding members of the Barbados Chamber of Commerce. Unlike fellow purser Henry Best, he did not drop everything when the Navy asked him whether he was fit for sea in 1834: he was fit, he said, but not interested. Drummond, meanwhile, was one of the founding members of the Belfast Natural History Society.⁷⁰ The variety of warrant officers' skills meant that they were often in a good position to survive the Navy's rapid post-war demobilization unscathed.

Warrant officers' skill sets differed from commissioned officers, but both had mixed success in operating in a civilian peacetime environment after their careers or active service ended. Masters tended to remain in maritime employment, unsurprisingly, and it is likely that they had the lowest ceiling in terms of social mobility across the members of the

⁶⁶ 'FORBES-L Archives', *RootsWeb*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/FORBES/2002-08/1028662770>; 'Descendants of James Pottinger, Purser, Royal Navy', *Genealogy Online*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://genealogy.site50.net/pottinger.html>.

⁶⁷ 'John Speed, Purser RN, 1777–1859', NMM, Object ID OBJ0520; TNA, ADM 6/194.

⁶⁸ *Alumni Oxonienses*, s.v. 'Eales, William'; 'Memorial of George Hewetson', *Indian Cemeteries*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://www.indian-cemeteries.org/viewimage.asp?ID=1355>; TNA, ADM 101/15/9 (Admiralty and predecessors: Office of the Director General of the Medical Department of the Navy and predecessors: Medical Journals. Convict Ships etc., 1839–40).

⁶⁹ T. Downey, *Naval Poems: Pleasures of the Naval Life, and the Battle of Trafalgar* (London, 1813).

⁷⁰ 'Our History', *Barbados Chamber of Commerce & Industry*, accessed Jan. 2014, at <http://www.barbadoschamberofcommerce.com/content/history>; 'Notes and Papers Relating to Belfast Natural History Society', *London's Magazine of Natural History* (London, 1828). Wikisource, accessed Jan. 2014, at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_and_papers_relating_to_Belfast_Natural_History_Society.

wardroom mess. In contrast, chaplains and surgeons had opportunities to move up within their respective professions and widely across the British Isles. The database includes eminent bishops and physicians in both maritime and inland communities; it also includes the unemployed and the bankrupt. While pursers could not aspire to a position as prestigious as a bishopric, they were well-placed to set themselves up as merchants. Not only did they have years of training in the necessary accounting practices, but they also made contacts around the world. The skills and patronage networks that officers developed in the Navy provided them with opportunities to flourish as professionals in a variety of fields and, particularly for chaplains and surgeons, ‘on any corner of the earth’.⁷¹

Wardroom Officers Ashore

Officers’ interactions with civilians were not limited to their post-naval careers. Examining how active-duty officers were treated when they went ashore provides another angle for comparing officers to their civilian contemporaries. It suggests that officers were, on the whole, well-respected and occasionally prominent members of civilian society. At the same time, they were members of a maritime subculture that set them slightly apart.

Officers of ships assigned to coastal patrols around the British Isles could often count themselves lucky compared to officers on blockade duty or on more distant expeditions. While the officers of the *Phoebe* risked their lives in the surf off the coast of modern-day Ecuador to purchase supplies for their ships, officers on assignments nearer to British bases could count on a steady stream of invitations to balls and society events. Previous studies have noted that naval officers were desirable guests at social events: they wore handsome gold-laced uniforms and provided tangible patriotic credentials for the host

⁷¹ R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, 3rd edn. (London, 1757), p. 57.

or hostess.⁷² What has not been noted before, however, is that it was not only post-captains or even only commissioned officers who received invitations. While serving on the *Pelorus*, Thomas Peckston attended a party thrown by the English Consul in Oran, on the Algerian coast. The delegation from the *Pelorus* consisted only of Peckston, the captain, and a lieutenant. After the party, they paid their respects to the Bey.⁷³ Pursers often needed to visit the consulate to get assistance in purchasing supplies, which may explain Peckston's presence at the party.⁷⁴ But Peckston did not mention carrying out any official business, and seemed wholly comfortable in his pseudo-diplomatic capacity.

Gardner had a commission, but he remained firmly in the middle of the naval hierarchy. Nevertheless, he secured plenty of invitations to parties ashore. He relishes recounting the visit of a local official in Waterford to the *Blonde*, in which he was serving on the Irish station. The official had come to invite the wardroom members to his house for a party, but he ended up getting so drunk on board the *Blonde* with the second lieutenant that both of them fell off the gangway into the harbour. On a less rambunctious occasion, Gardner and some fellow midshipmen from the *Berwick* toured Pisa, attending the theatre and visiting the cathedral. When they returned to Leghorn, they were invited to a dinner at 'one of the best houses in the city'. Of course, the dinner got out of hand with drunken escapades—nearly all of Gardner's stories end in the same way.⁷⁵ Graham Moore seems to have been a far more restrained dinner guest, and his diary is full of references to social events. He attended a ball as a young commander, where he met the two young daughters of a rich London merchant. Moore and a friend visited the merchant's country estate and flirted shamelessly with the young ladies; nothing came of the encounter, but Moore's

⁷² Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, p. 119.

⁷³ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Thomas Snowden Peckston to his wife Mary, 13 Feb. 1813.

⁷⁴ J. Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (London, 2006), p. 63.

⁷⁵ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, pp. 141–2, 221.

description of their game of hide-and-seek reads as if lifted from Jane Austen. While serving as a lieutenant, he met ‘a very capital merchant’ named William Boates at an Assembly in Liverpool. Boates invited him back to his house to meet his three daughters. Moore fell ‘half in love’ with the second daughter, but she rejected his advances in favour of a ‘gentleman of fortune’.⁷⁶ Invitations to society events demonstrate that naval officers were welcome in genteel social circles, but that did not guarantee them success in the marriage market. Moore would have to wait until he was a post-captain and a member of the Navy’s elite.

Besides parties, dinners, and balls, another common way in which officers interacted with civilian society was through their service in the Sea Fencibles. There have been a few references in this thesis to the Fencibles, but the service has received very little scholarly attention. Created in response to the invasion threat in 1803, the Fencibles were part of the larger Volunteer movement. Boasting about 9,000 members in 1803 and as many as 30,000 in 1805, they were charged with organizing local defence of potential invasion beaches and manning small coastal vessels to help protect merchant shipping. Naval officers served as commanders of groups of men, who often had separate employment and family responsibilities, but whose local knowledge would help counter an invasion. Initially, senior officers such as St Vincent and Keith were optimistic about the Fencibles. They mobilized quickly and there was widespread popular support; as a bonus, the Fencibles proved to be effective at preventing smuggling. Officers associated with the Fencibles benefitted from this initial burst of public goodwill. Whether or not they were an effective fighting force, the Fencibles provided tangible and immediate reassurances to civilians terrified of Bonaparte. As a propaganda tool, they demonstrated the apparent willingness of Britons to defend themselves. The instructions for officers commanding the

⁷⁶ T. Wareham, *Frigate Commander* (Barnsley, 2004), pp. 3, 8, 34–5.

Fencibles explicitly stated that they were to use their ‘utmost endeavours to rouse the spirit of the people’. Thus in the early days of the Fencibles, it is likely that officers commanding them were seen as pillars of the community.⁷⁷

As the invasion threat receded, so too did the military significance and prominence of the Fencibles and their officers. There were still invasion threats after Trafalgar, and indeed the Fencibles lasted a year longer than the Volunteers—until 1810—for this reason. But without an actual invasion to repel, the initial momentum and promise dissipated. Davey argues that the quality of the officers assigned to the Fencibles declined, and increasingly sailors joined the Fencibles to avoid impressment. In its last few years, newspaper commentators accused the Fencibles of being merely a sinecure for incompetent, disabled, or otherwise unemployable naval officers.⁷⁸ Examples from the database support this trajectory. Thomas Swinnerton Dyer commanded Fencible units for two years, in 1803 and 1804, but by 1805 he was back at sea and in 1810 he was promoted to commander.⁷⁹ John Marsh, on the other hand, made commander at the relatively advanced age of thirty-seven; both his late promotion and his subsequent service in the Fencibles indicate that his seaborne career was over.⁸⁰ For Dyer, the Sea Fencibles were a temporary assignment at a time of national crisis; his career proceeded as if he had been afloat for those two years. For Marsh, commanding Fencibles was much closer to a sinecure.

Perhaps with men like Dyer in mind, Consolvo argues that employment in the Sea Fencibles was not as deadly to a career at sea as other shore-based employment such as the

⁷⁷ J. Davey, ‘The Sea Fencibles’ (Unpublished chapter, 2014). I am grateful to Dr Davey for allowing me to cite material he compiled while researching his forthcoming book, *In Nelson’s Wake: The Royal Navy and the Napoleonic Wars, 1803–1815* (New Haven and London, 2015).

⁷⁸ Davey, ‘The Sea Fencibles’, *passim*.

⁷⁹ TNA, ADM 9/4/1049 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers’ Services, Commanders’ Services, Thomas Swinnerton Dyer, 1817).

⁸⁰ ‘England, Births and Christenings, 1538–1975: John Marsh, 1757’, *FamilySearch*, accessed 29 Nov. 2012, at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/N599-RT1>; TNA, ADM 9/4/885.

Impress Service or commanding signal stations.⁸¹ Time constraints prevented a rigorous statistical analysis of the database, but even a cursory glance reveals that most officers failed to move from either the Impress Service or signal stations back to ships at sea. Lieutenants Silas Hiscutt Paddon, James Smith, and Nathaniel Beldon all ended their careers in charge of signal stations.⁸² Lieutenants James Walker and John Anderson did the same in the Impress Service.⁸³ Neither shore-based appointment was likely to carry with it the same potential social prominence as the Sea Fencibles, at least before 1806. Signal stations were almost as likely to remove officers from civilian society as service at sea. When Gardner saw his first signal station, he was not impressed:

When I got to the summit of Fairlight Down, about 600 feet above the level of the sea, the first object that struck me was a hut, built of turf, in a ruinous state ... [T]aking a turn round the premises I thought I would look at the interior. I did so, but backed out again in a hurry, from filth and wretchedness.⁸⁴

Gardner's editor omitted the detailed description of the filth. As it turned out, Gardner had reached the wrong station, but his description gives some indication of the conditions. A signal station's responsibilities were challenging, as it needed to keep a constant lookout for invasion flotillas and monitor shipping along its remote stretch of coastline. Gardner wrote that it was the most stressful posting of his career. He served for eight years as the commander of a station three miles from Hastings, the nearest town; other stations were in even more remote locations.⁸⁵ Some officers were lucky enough to be able to live with their family; for others, it was a hard and lonely existence.

In contrast, the Impress Service placed officers in the nation's busiest ports. The implications for its officers' interactions with civilian society are challenging to uncover

⁸¹ C. Consolvo, 'The Prospects and Promotion of British Naval Officers, 1793–1815', *The Mariner's Mirror* 91, no. 2 (2005), p. 155.

⁸² TNA, ADM 9/8/2466 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services, Lieutenants' Services, Silas Hiscutt Paddon, 1817); TNA, ADM 9/8/2509; TNA, ADM 9/7/2280 (Admiralty: Survey Returns of Officers' Services, Lieutenants' Services, Nathaniel Belden, 1817).

⁸³ TNA, ADM 9/7/2382; TNA, ADM 9/7/2339.

⁸⁴ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, pp. 251–2.

⁸⁵ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, pp. 252–3.

because impressment has been thoroughly misunderstood. It was not, as some historians have characterized it, the pointy end of the stick of oppression.⁸⁶ Rather, recent research has emphasized that the primary role of the Impress Service was to encourage able seamen to volunteer for the Navy. It was very successful, at least during the French Revolutionary Wars, as nearly three-quarters of the lower deck consisted of volunteers. Impress officers would have spent most of their time organizing patriotic bands, festooning their rendezvous (the recruitment headquarters) with flags and bunting, and posting flyers promising glory and prize money. They also processed large amounts of paperwork, as the Navy kept close tabs on the progress of its recruitment. Nevertheless, pressing unwilling sailors was a key part of the job, particularly because most volunteers were not skilled seamen. To make up the difference, officers of the Impress Service targeted experienced men. Only eighteen percent of pressed men were rated landsmen upon joining their ship, while the rest were rated ordinary or able. Impressment was essential for maintaining the Navy's large pool of experienced sailors on whose backs the success of naval operations depended. It was a 'necessary evil'.⁸⁷ As a result, the Impress Service's officers would not have been held in particularly high esteem by the local population.

Naval officers on active duty interacted with civilians in a variety of ways, only some of which have been described here. Taken together, though, these examples demonstrate that naval officers of any rank or warrant were considered to be sufficiently genteel to merit invitations to at least provincial society balls and events. They attended parties and wooed daughters of the landed gentry; a few could even casually mention that

⁸⁶ Some prominent examples include: M. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987); N. Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and Its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London, 2007); I. Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750–1850* (New York, 2009); K. McCranie, 'The Recruitment of Seamen for the British Navy, 1793–1815', in D. Stoker et al. (eds.), *Conscription in the Napoleonic Era: A Revolution in Military Affairs?* (Abingdon, 2009), pp. 84–101.

⁸⁷ J. Dancy, 'British Naval Manpower during the French Revolutionary Wars, 1793–1802' (University of Oxford D.Phil thesis, 2012), pp. 91–234.

they had paid their respects to the Bey of Oran. Those who commanded Sea Fencibles served on the front lines of the Navy's propaganda campaign, reassuring the public that the Navy was ready to meet the invasion threat. Impress Service officers and signal station commanders were less prominent, but as the former has been misunderstood and the latter can be seen as similar in some ways to the Sea Fencibles, they should not be dismissed.

All naval officers, though, were separate from civilian society in one important way: they were members of a maritime subculture with its own customs and values. Some of the markers of this culture were relatively superficial, such as the seaman's rolling gait; others were more significant, as Chaplain Edward Mangin noted after a few months at sea:

The gloss of novelty was worn off: I was now familiar with the *combings*, and *shot-lockers*; the *splinter-netting*; the *throwing-out* and *answering* of *signals*; the *calling of the after-guard*; *up-hammocks*, and *down hammocks*; *Parbowlings!* And *starbowlings!* With the cry of *Heave-round, men, heave round! Jump up, jolly boat's crew; lower handsomely; Thyse, thyse; steady; steady-e-ee! 'Main-top!'—'ay, ay; Sir'*—I had almost enough of *swabbing* and *holystoning* the deck; I was acquainted with the *mizzen*, *main* and *fore trucks*; the *Bits*, *Tops*, and *Cross-trees*; the *Futtock* (or Foot-hook) *shrouds*; the *mizzen-peak*; the *Dolphin-striker*, etc.⁸⁸

He continues in a similar manner for two more pages. The complexity of the maritime vocabulary tended to make seamen dismissive of landsmen, as Thomas Trotter famously noted in his description of the character of a seaman.⁸⁹ It was certainly possible for officers to code-switch successfully, as we saw with Graham Moore's busy social calendar. But even the refined Moore recounted staying up all night drinking with Prince William. The maritime subculture for both officers and men was characterized by heavy drinking, frequent swearing, and an outwardly casual attitude towards life and death. Travelling thousands of miles from home also provided officers with an alternative perspective on Georgian culture. Gardner recounted one of his drunken escapades in Italy and contrasted it with his joyless experiences ashore in England, 'where every hole and corner has a board

⁸⁸ *Five Naval Journals, 1789–1817*, ed. H.G. Thursfield (NRS, 1951), p. 31.

⁸⁹ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, p. 174.

threatening prosecution, and if you pass two or three stopping in the street, their conversation will be about law, hanging, or trade'.⁹⁰ As we have seen, membership in the maritime culture did not preclude officers from becoming prominent and respected while ashore, but it did set them somewhat apart.

International Comparisons

In some ways, British naval officers had more in common with Portuguese, Danish, or Genoese sailors than they did with British civilians. The maritime culture described in the previous section was international in nature. In recent decades, maritime historians have produced reams of scholarship exploring the ways in which the sea was a shared community for those who travelled it.⁹¹ With that scholarship in mind, it is worth comparing how British officers fit into British society with how other officers from other navies fit into theirs.

France dominated the world-view of the Britons who feature in this thesis. The so-called 'Second Hundred Years' War' with France from 1689 to 1815 meant that Britons constantly had reasons to compare and contrast themselves with the French. At the beginning of the period, the similarities are striking: Louis XIV's Navy had its own version of the British Navy's gentlemen versus tarpaulin tension in its officer corps. The French version was the 'blues', or auxiliary officers who wore blue breeches and who tended to be from maritime backgrounds, versus an increasing number of aristocratic officers.⁹² A key question for both navies was whether the social tensions could be resolved without jeopardizing the development of a well-trained and effective officer corps. We have

⁹⁰ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, p. 142.

⁹¹ See, for example, *The International Journal of Maritime History* and the conferences organized by the International Maritime Economic History Association.

⁹² J. Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line: The British & French Navies, 1650–1815* (Lincoln, NE, 2009), pp. 123, 128–30.

already seen how the British Navy successfully resolved the question; tracing how the French grappled with it will provide a useful comparison with the British experience.

There was no clear victor in the gentlemen versus tarpaulin debate in the Royal Navy: the lieutenants' exam meant that officers had to possess the skills of the tarpaulin, but they were still expected to comport themselves as gentlemen. There was a clear victor in the French Navy: the nobility. By the middle of the eighteenth century, most French naval officers were nobles.⁹³ The French nobility was not the same as the British, however, because it was much larger. There were only two hundred peers in Britain in 1780, compared to hundreds of thousands in France.⁹⁴ Unsurprisingly, it incorporated a much wider socio-economic range: one historian has estimated that only forty per cent of the French nobility in the eighteenth century would have qualified as members of the landed gentry in Britain, and a significant portion were impoverished.⁹⁵ The important distinctions for French naval officers were contained within the varied ranks of the nobility. The many gradations and divisions of French nobility need not concern us here, except for two: first, whether officers' families were members of the *noblesse d'épée* or the *noblesse de robe*, and second, whether an officer was a *gentilhomme*.

The first distinction concerned the nature of the officer's ancestor's service to the crown. Military service meant the officer was a member of the *noblesse d'épée*, which was more prestigious than the *noblesse de robe*. Its wealthiest members lived at Court and performed the ceremonial functions of the royal household. But of the poorest nobles in France, most were members of the *noblesse d'épée*: despite its nominal prestige, it included a wide range of wealth and status. The *noblesse de robe* were descended from

⁹³ Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line*, p. 129.

⁹⁴ R.G. Wilson, 'The Landed Elite' in H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006), p. 159.

⁹⁵ M.W. McCahill, 'Open Elites: Recruitment to the French *Noblesse* and the English Aristocracy in the Eighteenth Century', *Albion* 30, no. 4 (1999), p. 603; L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 134.

judiciary servants of the crown, often of recent ennoblement. Its members tended to be wealthier on average than the *noblesse d'épée*, and as a result, many contemporary commentators sneered at the *noblesse de robe* as 'vile bourgeoisie'.⁹⁶ This hints at the second relevant point of conflict among the nobility: the emergence of newly ennobled families and their fraught relationship with France's traditional nobility. *Gentilhomme* literally translates to the mysterious British rank of gentleman, but it actually signified something different and considerably easier to define. A *gentilhomme* was a noble who could prove at least four generations of noble ancestry.⁹⁷ It separated the ancient noble families of the realm from the wealthy, upstart (and often, but not necessarily, *noblesse de robe*) families. The military was one of the key battlegrounds for these issues because of its traditional connection to the *noblesse d'épée*. The challenge for both the Army and the Navy was to find a way to get competent officers into positions of authority without disturbing these underlying social dynamics.

The British Navy undoubtedly succeeded in meeting that challenge; the French Navy did not. One cause of the French Navy's failure was its fundamentally different approach to officer training. Whereas most aspiring lieutenants in the British Navy spent six years at sea preparing for their exam, French officers were educated ashore in naval academies. The first French naval academies, founded in the 1680s, predate the first British naval academy by almost fifty years. French academies were open only to nobles under the age of sixteen who joined companies of *cadets-gentilhommes* in the three major naval ports of Toulon, Brest, and Rochefort.⁹⁸ The curriculum was primarily theoretical—writing, drawing, mathematics, fortifications, hydrography, geometry—but the students also

⁹⁶ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, pp. 136, 140.

⁹⁷ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p. 135.

⁹⁸ É. Taillemite, 'Le recrutement des officiers de vaisseau au XVIII^e siècle: une politique incohérent', *Neptunia*, no. 161 (1986), p. 38.

worked on the practical elements of seamanship, navigation, and naval warfare.⁹⁹

Compared to well-travelled British midshipmen, though, French cadets were sheltered and less likely to be experienced in maritime crisis management by the time they became officers.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, as with the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth, the archives are full of complaints about the quality of the education provided.¹⁰¹ Most officers, one historian claims, had only a rudimentary knowledge of the scientific foundation of their profession.¹⁰² The Royal Naval Academy, founded in 1752, helped to address the poor quality of the scientific instruction in the provincial academies, but it did little to provide a better practical education for cadets.¹⁰³

The emphasis on a theoretical education for naval officers meant that the tension between an officer's professional skills and his status as a gentleman existed in a slightly different form in France. British officer training was immersive and stressed the application of professional skills to a ship at sea; French officer training was theoretical and aimed to disassociate officers from the application of their skills. For example, though French officers learned pure mathematics at the academy, they left applied mathematics such as navigation to the *maître pilotes*, or ship's masters. Graham Moore cited French officers' unwillingness to learn practical seamanship as the fundamental difference between the two services:

[V]ery few of the French Navy officers of the old regime knew anything at all about [seamanship]. They affected indeed to despise it, which men often wish to do when they find those whom they deem their inferiors more perfect in an art than themselves. The superior skill, however, in practical seamanship is one of the causes of the unrivalled eminence which the British Navy has attained, and I should

⁹⁹ R. Hahn, 'L'Enseignement Scientifique des Gardes de la Marine au XVIII^e siècle' in R. Taton (ed.), *Enseignement et diffusion des sciences au XVIII^e siècle* (7 vols, Paris, 1986), IV and V, pp. 547–9.

¹⁰⁰ P. Contamine et al., *Histoire Militaire de la France* (4 vols, Paris, 1992), II, pp. 154–5.

¹⁰¹ Hahn, 'L'Enseignement Scientifique', pp. 547–9.

¹⁰² Contamine et al., *Histoire Militaire*, II, p. 154.

¹⁰³ Hahn, 'L'Enseignement Scientifique', p. 551.

be very sorry to see any more relaxation in the strictness of our young Midshipmen's time of probation.¹⁰⁴

Calculating lunar distances, piloting through tricky waters such as the English Channel, and creating accurate charts all required more practice and application than many French officers were willing to do.¹⁰⁵ While both masters and commissioned officers learned such skills in Britain, only masters learned them in France. A good comparison that highlights the social ambiguities of seamanship skills is the French East India Company. From 1720, East India Company officers did receive a practical education, going to sea as seventeen-year-old officers-in-training. Seventy-two French East India Company officers received the cross of St Louis, and five more were raised to the nobility—this out of a total population of only 1,500 officers for the entire eighteenth century.¹⁰⁶ But the Navy did not copy the 1720 regulation that provided the Company's training places—the two services had a difficult relationship—and naval officer training remained primarily theoretical and gentlemanly: dancing and fencing were integral parts of the curriculum.¹⁰⁷

A naval career shaped a young noble's social status: France's orientation was always less maritime than Britain's, and an army career was more prestigious than a naval one. But the latter was still a potentially useful social tool, particularly for newly ennobled families. Some 'bourgeois' noble families sent their sons to the Navy in the hopes that a successful career would help them assimilate with the older *noblesse d'épée*. Michel Vergé-Franceschi's monumental seven-volume study of *ancien régime* naval officers contains a number of officers whose fathers had been ennobled, but who falsified the

¹⁰⁴ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 214.

¹⁰⁵ N.A.M. Rodger, 'Navies and the Enlightenment', in P. van der Merwe (ed.), *Science and the French and British Navies, 1700–1850* (Greenwich, 2003), pp. 6–7.

¹⁰⁶ P. Haudrière, 'Les officiers des vaisseaux de la compagnie des Indes: Un corps d'élite dans la Marine française du XVIII^e siècle', *Histoire, économie et société*, 16^e année, n°1 (1997) La Marine XVII^e–XX^e siècle. pp. 117–24.

¹⁰⁷ Rodger, 'Navies and the Enlightenment', pp. 6–7.

extent of their noble lineage to boost their careers and social standing.¹⁰⁸ This obsession with social status manifested itself in a petition in 1782 by noble French naval officers protesting the presence of ‘blue’ auxiliary officers on board their ships.¹⁰⁹ The distinction between commissioned and auxiliary officers—comparable to warrant officers¹¹⁰—in the French Navy was much more significant than in the British. Another way to look at the petition is as the reverse of St Vincent’s complaints about noble officers in the British Navy. Though the roles are reversed, the mechanisms by which their respective social hierarchies placed stresses on the social status of French and British naval officers are similar.

Complicating matters for French officers was the ever-changing nature of those social and professional stresses. Following France’s catastrophic defeat in the Seven Years’ War, reformers began to bend the trajectory of French officer training and promotion towards a more open and meritocratic path. Until 1763, it is fair to characterize the French navy as a gerontocracy. The purpose of promotion by seniority was actually to prevent high-ranking noble officers from usurping the positions of less-prestigious noble officers; in other words, the gerontocracy was seen as more likely to produce qualified officers than the alternative.¹¹¹ The result was an old and conservative officer corps; too often, officers were on the verge of retirement when their desired promotion came.¹¹² Reform came in two forms. First, ministers transferred men with impressive scientific achievements directly to the top of the naval hierarchy. Bougainville, a Colonel of Infantry,

¹⁰⁸ M. Vergé-Franceschi, *Les Officiers Généraux de la Marine Royale, 1715–1774* (7 vols, Paris, 1990), I, pp. 349–83. He suggests that perhaps as many as forty per cent of officers falsified at least part of their noble claims.

¹⁰⁹ Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line*, p. 129.

¹¹⁰ Auxiliary officers were socially comparable to British warrant officers, but the duties of warrant officers were carried out in the French Navy by *officiers marinières*, who were superior petty officers.

¹¹¹ Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line*, p. 129.

¹¹² É. Taillemite, ‘Le Haut-Commandement de la Marine Française de Colbert à la Révolution’ in M. Acerra et al. (eds.), *Les Marines de Guerre Européennes, XVII–XVIII^e siècles*, (Paris, 1985), p. 267.

was by training a mathematician, while Duhamel du Monceau was a botanist. Both were among those who entered the Navy in the years after the Seven Years' War in the hopes that their scientific training—not, importantly, their combat records—would improve the Navy's performance.¹¹³ The second attempt at reform, from 1764, aimed to restructure the academies: it reorganized the students into three classes based not on their seniority, but on the progress of their studies.¹¹⁴ It failed because it was quickly reversed, but its intentions and the controversy surrounding it are roughly similar to a much-misunderstood development in the Army: the Ségur reform of 1781 required students at the École Militaire to demonstrate that they were *gentilhommes*. This was a disastrous public-relations move, but in fact it was an attempt to privilege old but impoverished noble families over the wealthy *noblesse de robe*.¹¹⁵ Though the reforms were slightly different, the pattern is clear: the catastrophe of the Seven Years' War spurred French reformers to provide more opportunities for students to demonstrate their scientific abilities with less emphasis on their birth or, in the case of the Ségur reform, wealth. Louis XVI belatedly bolstered the reformers' efforts in the aftermath of the American War, proclaiming in 1783 that promoting successful officers quickly was in the royal interest.¹¹⁶ But none of the reforms addressed the officer corps' deficiencies in competent seamen and combat veterans.¹¹⁷

The Revolution, of course, changed everything. Many officers emigrated, and those that remained faced a frightening and difficult situation on the outbreak of hostilities in

¹¹³ Rodger, 'Navies and the Enlightenment', p. 8.

¹¹⁴ Hahn, 'L'Enseignement Scientifique', p. 551.

¹¹⁵ D. Bien, 'Caste, class and profession in Old Regime France: The French army and the Ségur reform of 1781', *St. Andrews Studies in French History and Culture* (2010), p. 43; R. Blaufarb, 'Noble Privilege and Absolutist State Building: French Military Administration after the Seven Years' War', *French Historical Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001), p. 237; M.S. Anderson, *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime, 1618–1789* (London, 1988), pp. 196–204.

¹¹⁶ Taillemite, 'Le Haut-Commandement de la Marine Française', p. 264.

¹¹⁷ Rodger, 'Navies and the Enlightenment', p. 8.

1792: would their men obey their orders? A survey that year of existing officers suggested that most of the Navy's high-ranking officers would refuse to serve or had emigrated, though junior officers responded more positively.¹¹⁸ In 1792, only 4 out of 18 admirals, 42 out of 170 captains, and 390 out of 750 lieutenants from the *ancien regime* Navy were still in their posts.¹¹⁹ The result was that in the early years of the Wars, the Revolutionary French Navy was commanded by an odd assortment of inexperienced noble officers, merchant captains, and privateers. The traditional historical narrative is that the Revolution suddenly opened up opportunities for men of talent in France (see Bonaparte, Napoleon), while the conservative reaction to the French Revolution in Britain tended, after an initial scare, to entrench landed interests.¹²⁰ But as we saw in chapter three, the database provides no strong evidence for the latter in the British Navy. The French case is similarly complicated. Graham Moore thought that the initial banishment of noble officers strengthened the French Navy because command devolved to the 'blue' auxiliary officers. These men, Moore assumed, were the real seamen. But the benefits were short-lived: '[T]hey certainly do not defend their ships so well now as they did at the first'.¹²¹ Moore spent the first few years of the war within sight of the French coast and the Channel Islands, so his assessment derived from personal experience.

Moore's narrative of initial success followed by disappointment is useful, though incomplete. One of the Revolutionaries' first reforms was to create an open entrance exam for the military academies, with results published for all to see.¹²² But the exam did not

¹¹⁸ Contamine et al., *Histoire Militaire*, II, pp. 373–6; Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line*, p. 129.

¹¹⁹ A. Nicolson, *Men of Honour: Trafalgar and the Making of the English Hero* (London, 2005), p. 31.

¹²⁰ Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line*, pp. 128–9; S. Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 190–204; J. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 164–5; Colley, *Britons*, p. 151.

¹²¹ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 111.

¹²² J.M. Smith, *The Culture of Merit: Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France, 1600–1789* (Ann Arbor, 1996), p. 272.

remove nobles from positions of authority in the Navy: both Admiral de Brueys, in command at the Nile, and Admiral Villeneuve, in command at Trafalgar, were from aristocratic families. They both survived the Terror and benefitted from the emigration of many of their seniors by being promoted to captain in 1792 and 1793, respectively.¹²³ Nor did the supposed Revolutionary meritocracy instantly produce effective commanders: while Villeneuve and de Brueys were experienced sailors from the *ancien régime* Navy, many were not. In the spring of 1794, aware that his under-trained and poorly disciplined officers were incapable of executing elaborate tactical manoeuvres, Admiral Villaret de Joyeuse could only hope that ‘la bonne volonté’ of the Revolutionary spirit would compensate. Howe’s victory at the Glorious First of June proved him wrong.¹²⁴ A combination of factors—decades of mismanagement under the Bourbons, the chaos of the Revolution, and Napoleon’s decision to reverse the reforms of the 1790s to put former Royal officers back in command—meant that no matter how many opportunities there were for talented French naval officers, they could not overcome the French Navy’s structural deficiencies to combat British naval power effectively.¹²⁵

Despite the enormous difference in the outcomes achieved by the two services, French naval officers nevertheless provide a useful comparison for British naval officers. French officers’ difficulties in navigating the turbulent world of noble privileges and prejudices in some respects mirror the British officers’ difficulties with concepts of gentility. This suggests that the nature of command at sea placed naval officers in an awkward position in eighteenth-century societies, though not always for the same reasons. A brief survey of some other eighteenth-century navies demonstrates the influence of both

¹²³ W. Stewart, *Admirals of the World: A Biographical Dictionary, 1500 to the present* (Jefferson, NC, 2009), p. 86; *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*, s.v. ‘Pierre-Charles-Jean-Baptiste-Silvestre de Villeneuve’.

¹²⁴ Contamine et al., *Histoire Militaire*, II, p. 377.

¹²⁵ Taillemite, ‘Le Haut-Commandement de la Marine Française’, p. 264.

the French and British models as well as the ways in which maritime employment tended to clash with behavioural expectations for ruling classes.

Given their shared history, it is unsurprising to find that American officers grappled with the same tension between gentility and professional responsibilities as British officers. American officers tended to come from middling backgrounds, and few received formal educations. The American definition of a gentleman also mirrored aspects of the British: a man who avoided manual labour for profit and lived by a code of honour.¹²⁶ Chapter six will explore this topic in greater detail for the British. Despite the obvious tension between the demands of seamanship and the expectations of gentility, American naval planners in the 1790s did not attempt to overhaul the basic outline provided by the British Navy. They were not averse to making improvements where they could: American naval officer entry was centrally controlled and midshipmen received half-pay. Both were attempts to avoid the problems of a bloated and unmanageable officer corps.¹²⁷ But the challenge of ensuring that the men who populated the officer corps were of sufficient social and professional quality remained.

While the American Navy tended to follow the British, the Russian Navy attempted to blend aspects of the French, British and Dutch. The Moscow School of Mathematics and Navigation was founded in 1701, and its curriculum mimicked that of the Royal Mathematical School of Christ's Hospital, founded by Charles II in 1673, as well as Louis XIV's naval schools in Toulon, Brest, and Rochefort. In 1715, the Naval Academy in St Petersburg separated from the Mathematics school in Moscow to provide specialized instruction for naval officers. English was a cornerstone of its curriculum, though Dutch became the second language of command. For the remainder of the eighteenth century, the

¹²⁶ C. McKee, *A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession: The Creation of the U.S. Naval Officer Corps, 1794–1815* (Annapolis, MD, 1991), p. 34.

¹²⁷ T. Wareham, *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2001), pp. 14–17.

Russian Navy tended to look towards the British and Dutch model rather than the French.¹²⁸ Russian-born officers came from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from the gentry and nobility to the sons of soldiers and clerics. The same tension between the ‘polite arts’ expected of gentlemen officers and the necessity of learning seamanship at sea was present in Russia: the Academy curriculum included fencing and dancing but officers were expected to be competent seamen.¹²⁹ Another link between the Russian and British services was the presence of former British officers such as Sir Robert Crown, mentioned in chapter one, in Russian service.¹³⁰

A useful comparison for warrant officers can be found in the Danish Navy. There was no equivalent to warrant officers in Denmark; rather, the equivalent positions were senior petty officers who could occasionally be invited to dine in the wardroom. Masters, however, were slightly different: they were salaried civil servants, often with civilian sailing experience, and a few even owned shares in private shipping companies while serving in the Navy. Danish commissioned officers were educated ashore in a manner more similar to the French than the British, so masters usually had the most practical navigational experience on board. The similarities between masters in Denmark and in Britain are more striking than the differences. Masters were paid almost as much as junior lieutenants, and their pay increased with the size of the ship. As in Britain, each ship had one master and one or two master’s mates. They were responsible for purchasing their own navigational instruments, and both they and the commissioned officers kept navigational logs. Masters tended to come from relatively low on the social spectrum compared to commissioned officers, but their origins were heavily maritime. Their position and status in the Navy, though, was in general decline across the eighteenth century. Much as the British

¹²⁸ N. Hans, ‘The Moscow School of Mathematics and Navigation (1701)’, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 29, no. 73 (1951), pp. 532–6.

¹²⁹ M.J. Okenfuss, ‘Russian Students in Europe in the Age of Peter the Great’, in J.G. Garrard (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century in Russia* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 137–42.

¹³⁰ *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* (London, 1841), pp. 611–16.

Navy squeezed masters' positions as competent navigators by introducing the lieutenants' exam in 1677, the Danish Navy slowly did the same: its commissioned officers' navigation skills also improved over the course of the century. Before 1762, a few masters were promoted to commissioned officers, usually to fill shortages on the eve of potential mobilizations; after protests from commissioned officers, though, the king decreed that only those who attended the Academy could earn commissions. Upon Denmark's entry into the Wars in 1807, masters' positions in the Danish Navy were significantly less important than they had been at the beginning of the century. Professionally competent commissioned officers emerged in a number of eighteenth-century navies.¹³¹



There is clearly more to say about the similarities and differences between the British Royal Navy and other eighteenth-century navies. Unfortunately, there was not sufficient time to conduct more research or sufficient space to explore such comparisons in more detail. It is a promising area for future research. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some conclusions from both the domestic and international comparisons presented here.

British naval officers described their occupation in terms similar to those used by members of the traditional professions, but their training and responsibilities were fundamentally different. Even compared to other military officers, naval officers were unique: they needed more practical skills than army officers, and they could not purchase their way up the chain of command. Engineering and Artillery officers offer good comparisons, but naval officers would have rejected them. Commissioned officers wore the uniforms of gentlemen and claimed an ancient association with the aristocracy, while at

¹³¹ M. Rheinheimer and J. Seerup, 'Die "holsteinischen" Steuermänner: Ein maritimes Netzwerk in der dänischen Kriegsflotte des 18. Jahrhunderts', in M. Rheinheimer (ed.), *Mensch und Meer in der Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins und Süddänemarks* (Neumünster, 2010), pp. 133–45.

the same time, they challenged many of the contemporary conceptions of how professionals should behave. Some warrant officers, meanwhile, were members of the traditional professions, but they ranked near the bottom. When warrant officers left the Navy, many flourished, rising either within the traditional professions or launching successful careers in business, the arts, or local politics. Both commissioned and warrant officers, whether or not they were still on active duty, could move freely within genteel society. They attended parties and balls, made friends with members of the landed gentry, and wooed the daughters of rich merchants. They remained members of a maritime subculture, though, that gave them a unique profile in polite society.

That subculture was common across the European and Atlantic worlds, and naval officers placed traditional understandings of education, training, and comportment under stress. Every navy struggled to determine how best to create an officer corps that was both qualified to survive the dangers of the sea and composed of men from the appropriate social tradition. In some navies, that meant providing members of the nobility with theoretical training and subordinates familiar with maritime life; in others, that meant encouraging men from a range of backgrounds to assume the responsibilities of both seamanship and gentility.

CHAPTER SIX

No Longer Nobody

Sea Officers' Social Status

Frederick Wentworth would have made a fine addition to the commissioned officers' database described in chapter one. One of countless officers to have been promoted from lieutenant to commander after a major battle—in his case Duckworth's action off San Domingo in 1806—he spent some time ashore, unemployed. Unlike many of his peers, though, he managed to return to active service. He took full advantage of this opportunity: not only did he distinguish himself enough as a commander to be made post, but he also made £25,000—a fortune—in prize money. He returned to England in 1814 with the expectation that he would be unemployed for the foreseeable future. He also married a woman he had first fallen in love with during his time ashore in 1806.

That woman was, of course, Anne Elliot, the protagonist of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. Written shortly before and published shortly after her death in 1817, the plot hinges on the social acceptability of Wentworth to Elliot's family. This chapter will explore the social status of naval officers in late-Georgian Britain. In fiction, Austen can be explicit about the relative social status of then-Commander Wentworth and the Elliots in 1806: 'Captain Wentworth had no fortune', she writes, so Anne's father, the vain baronet Sir Walter, 'thought it a very degrading alliance', and Anne's friend Lady Russell 'received it as a most unfortunate one'. When Wentworth returns, their opinions change: 'Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was no longer nobody.' Sir Walter and Lady Russell eventually give Wentworth their seal of approval not just because of his fortune: the Crofts, another naval family, help shape their feelings about the social value of naval

officers.¹ All of the naval officers in *Persuasion*, whether elite post-captains or not, behave as gentlemen, as defined by Austen: they are polite, honourable, and independent. This chapter's challenge is to uncover the mechanisms that determined the relative social status of actual British men and women in the late Georgian period.

Social status is notoriously difficult to define. Some historians have treated it as an equation to be solved. Samuel Clark, for example, produced 'The Four Variables of Status' as a general formula for understanding social status in a time and place. The variables are: how different social status is from other kinds of power; what characteristics are valued; whether status is hereditary; and whether status is institutionalized and regulated.² Four variables make for complicated equations, even if the categories Clark identified are useful. Langford's definition of eighteenth-century status acknowledges the challenge: 'Status was increasingly seen as a complicated mixture of wealth, education, occupation, and manners, not readily defined with precision.'³ This chapter will not, and cannot, provide a precise solution to naval officers' social status equation, but it will explore the extent to which they were gentlemen. This exploration is essential: for eighteenth-century Britons, social status mattered. More specifically, for eighteenth-century British men, their primary concern was whether they could convincingly call themselves gentlemen. As Langford has argued, 'Gentility was the most prized possession of all in a society obsessed with the pursuit of property and wealth.'⁴

¹ J. Austen, *Persuasion*, Penguin Classics edn. (London, 2003), pp. 26–7, 232. Austen's characters, though fictional, are still viable sources: not only do her novels often hinge on social status issues, but Austen's own place as the member of the minor landed gentry served up frequent reminders of the importance of birth and fortune. She is also something of an expert on the particular social status of naval officers: two of her brothers, Charles and Francis, were successful naval officers. Charles was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath and Francis was knighted; Francis managed to live long enough to become Admiral of the Fleet. See *ODNB*, s.v. 'Austen, Sir Francis William (1774–1865)'.

² S. Clark, *State and Status: The Rise of the State and Aristocratic Power in Western Europe* (Montreal and Kingston, 1995), p. 17.

³ P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 652–3.

⁴ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, p. 464.

An officer's perceived place on the social ladder played a significant role in shaping his identity. Social status was not the only influence on an officer's identity, nor was it akin to a 'class consciousness' that shaped all of his actions.⁵ As discussed in the introduction, such arguments have been comprehensively dismantled in the last few decades. Rather, this chapter posits that an officer's social status was an important—if not essential—element of his identity, but his ability to control that aspect of his identity was constrained by Georgian society's 'obsession' with social status. At the same time, naval officers were important actors in that society who challenged its traditional definitions of gentility. It is therefore important to begin by defining our terms. To return to 'The Four Variables of Status', this chapter argues that social status was tied closely to other kinds of power in eighteenth-century Britain, though economic power was not a guarantee of social status. Gentility was the most highly valued characteristic, and it was not exclusively hereditary: it could be purchased, up to a point, but it also depended on behaviour and occupation.

Naval officers had unique inputs for all four variables. The previous five chapters have described many of them. For example, few officers were born gentlemen; some made fortunes; and education was distributed unevenly across the population. An additional wrinkle is that not all naval officers were alike. The most significant internal division, highlighted most clearly in chapter four, set post-captains and admirals apart from the members of the Navy's wardrooms—the lieutenants, pursers, surgeons, masters, and chaplains. Sharing similar backgrounds, from lower down on the social spectrum than other studies have found, wardroom officers were members of a profession that defined itself first and foremost as consisting of gentlemen. Their own status as gentlemen was

⁵ As Dror Wahrman points out, eighteenth-century Britons used class as a synonym for rank or order, so 'it had none of the loaded meanings and implications that came to be associated with it later'. See D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780–1840* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 14–16.

contested and uncertain, though, and even the definition of a gentleman was changing around them. After discussing the myriad ways that historians have attempted to pin down the slippery term ‘gentleman’, this chapter tests some of the characteristics of gentlemen on the population of naval officers described by this thesis. It concludes by comparing the social challenges that confronted wardroom officers with those that confronted elite officers.

Defining Gentlemen

To generate a convincing description of gentlemen in the context of eighteenth-century Britain, historians have been forced to divide society into sections, one of which contains gentleman. Cannadine argues that there are three ways that historians and commentators have traditionally done so, though Lewis’ approach, described in chapter three, does not fit neatly into any of the three.⁶ Nevertheless, Cannadine’s categories provide a useful framework for the historiography. The first way of dividing British society is the simplest: into two parts, roughly the patricians and the plebeians.⁷ J.M. Rosenheim, for example, uses this approach to argue that the division between those who owned land and those who did not was the most important division in eighteenth-century Britain. Therefore, when Rosenheim defines gentlemen, he restricts his definition to those who were able to live idly off the rents from their land—in other words, the landed gentry.⁸ In Britain, most historians agree, the minimum requirement for a member of the landed gentry was to own at least 1,000 acres and have an annual income from that estate of at least £500 and probably

⁶ D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London, 2000), pp. 19–20, 26–9.

⁷ E.P. Thompson, ‘Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture’, *Journal of Social History* 7 (1974), pp. 382–405.

⁸ J.M. Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order* (London, 1998), pp. 5–6. See also P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689–1798* (Oxford, 1991), p. 475.

closer to £800.⁹ On the continent, such a definition would often include members of the lesser nobility, and, on both sides of the Channel, such families would probably boast coats of arms. This is the oldest and most traditional definition of a gentleman—a gentleman by birth. Adam Nicolson notes that the word “gentry” is related to “gene” and means essentially “people of good breeding”.¹⁰ Useful as this approach is, it omits large swathes of the middle of eighteenth-century society, naval officers included, who may have had good reasons to consider themselves worthy of genteel status, either by birth or behaviour.

Cannadine’s second method goes some way toward addressing this omission by taking a tripartite approach: British society is, for these historians, divided into three estates, consisting of the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the commoners. Gregory King, writing at the turn of the eighteenth century, treated British society in this way, as did David Ricardo in 1817.¹¹ But if we are to explore Georgian Britain’s ‘obsession’ with gentle status, this approach does not necessarily further our understanding. The key issue is that, using a traditional definition of a gentleman similar to that of Rosenheim, there is no straightforward way to categorize the landed gentry. In terms of income, as Colquhoun’s data showed, members of the landed gentry might fit most easily with the bourgeoisie; but in terms of lifestyle—living idly off the rents from large estates—the landed gentry should be placed with the nobility. A further problem is the historical baggage that accompanies both the concept of three estates and the term bourgeoisie. Thus, while there is value in the simplicity of the bipartite and tripartite approaches to British social history, they ultimately do not reflect the reality of the mass of people in the middle.

⁹ Rosenheim, *Emergence of a Ruling Order*, pp. 5–6; F.M.L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780–1980* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 46–7; R.G. Wilson, ‘The Landed Elite’, in H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 164–5; R.J. Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England, 1780–1870: A Social and Economic History of Family Strategies amongst the Leeds Middle Classes* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 30.

¹⁰ A. Nicolson, *The Gentry: Stories of the English* (London, 2011), p. xiv.

¹¹ Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, pp. 28–9; E. Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History, 1750–1997*, 2nd edn. (London, 1997), p. 104.

Cannadine's third approach is undoubtedly, then, the solution. Unfortunately, while it can be used to grapple with the complexity of the social hierarchy, it does not provide simple answers. This approach places every individual in Britain along a continuum, from the monarch at the top to the lowliest beggar at the bottom. An alternative version describes the social hierarchy as a pyramid.¹² Historians who have adopted this approach tend to have a much broader definition of a gentleman, since one rank on the scale tends to blend into the next. They are also open to the suggestion that it was sufficient to behave like a gentleman. Richard Wilson, for example, defines a gentleman as a man who acted like one: he would need to enjoy hunting and shooting, be moderate in politics and religion, be hospitable and polite, engage in local politics, and educate his children properly. The second, related, requirement was that his peers accept him as a gentleman.¹³ Amanda Vickery agrees, but views gentility through a geographic and gendered lens: a gentleman was mobile, ranging widely to pursue his 'worldly interests'; his wife's management of the domestic space made his independence possible.¹⁴ Lincoln argues a gentleman had the ability, 'based on natural goodwill, to seem at ease in varied social situations, and converse affably and with propriety on a range of topics'. She does not elaborate on how one acquired the 'natural goodwill' such a definition requires.¹⁵ Langford's is most relaxed of these broad definitions, and is therefore the most inclusive: a gentleman needed to have the means to dress well and wear a sword.¹⁶

These definitions of gentility by behaviour relate to the eighteenth century, but, as Nicolson points out, it would be incorrect to argue that the dual nature of gentility only emerged then. Membership (usually by birth) in the landed gentry required ownership of

¹² Royle, *Modern Britain*, p. 101.

¹³ Wilson, 'The Landed Elite', p. 170; for a similar definition, see F. Heal and C. Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (London, 1994), pp. 1–19.

¹⁴ A. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (London, 2009), pp. 10–12.

¹⁵ M. Lincoln, 'Naval Personnel in Popular Culture', in Q. Colville and J. Davey (eds.), *Nelson, Navy & Nation: The Royal Navy and the British People, 1688–1815*, (London, 2013), p. 115.

¹⁶ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 65–6.

considerable estates, but assuming the title of gentleman did not and had not for centuries. Knighthoods bestowed on rich but landless City merchants date back to the fourteenth century, and such men would have been able to call themselves gentlemen. Nicholas Upton wrote in 1434 that ‘in thys days openly we se how many poor men by theyr grace, favour, labour or deserving’ became gentlemen. An observer in 1555 distinguished between ‘Gentle Ungentles’, who were born gentlemen but behaved improperly, and ‘Ungentle Gentles’, who were not born gentlemen but behaved as gentlemen.¹⁷ But it was undoubtedly the case that gentility by birth was of more significance and was more common than gentility of behaviour in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What changed in the eighteenth century was the balance between the two. Gentility of birth was eclipsed by gentility of behaviour, as the myriad definitions offered by Lincoln, Langford, Vickery, and others suggest.

The generally accepted historiography of social status changing over time is summarized by Langford, who notes that instances of aspiring gentlemen using the titles ‘Mr’ and ‘Esquire’ increased steadily throughout the eighteenth century. He argues that the ‘rank’ of gentleman was slowly eroded as middling families with little or no land began to claim it for their own.¹⁸ It is not enough to say simply that the definition of a gentleman was broadened, though, because it was not always a linear process. The definition of a gentlemen was constantly in flux. A specific chronology of these changes is not possible because of these inherent uncertainties, but it is possible to set down some markers for key transitional periods.

Daniel Defoe’s writings often serve as the anchor for the first transitional period, from the Glorious Revolution through roughly 1730. Defoe’s fictional gentlemen often had

¹⁷ Nicolson, *The Gentry*, pp. xiv–xix. It was also possible to be born a gentleman but not considered one by behaviour, as was the case with Henry VIII and Charles I. See P.J. Corfield, ‘The Rivals: Landed and Other Gentlemen’, in N. Harte and R. Quinault (eds.), *Land and Society in Britain, 1700–1914: Essays in Honour of F.M.L. Thompson* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 1–2.

¹⁸ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 65–6

urban, mercantile backgrounds, perhaps in part because of Defoe's own background as a trader. He defended the dignity of trade, and his writings have been described as celebrating the emergence of a new commercial middle class. He was also helpfully explicit about the two sources of gentility, and he did not hide his opinions about the merits of the two:

I say there are gentlemen by birth and gentlemen by education, and I insist that the last is the better of the two; for he is the best and truest original of a gentleman, and has been so, of all the families of gentlemen in England; or else they have no originals at all.¹⁹

Education formed the cornerstone of Defoe's gentility of behaviour. Some historians have taken Defoe's writings as an indication that the 'middling sort of people' were commonly claiming gentility by behaviour as early as the late seventeenth century.²⁰ But Defoe clearly had an agenda, and his writings should not be taken entirely as a reflection of reality.²¹ Gentility by birth was still firmly entrenched in this period.

The second transitional period in the definition of a gentleman covers the middle decades of the century through the end of the American War. It has often been characterized as the era of politeness, though the term itself is misleading. Ben Wilson notes that 'by Victorian standards their manners were loose, their talk licentious and their amusements vulgar' particularly when compared with the courtly French. The British claimed to value sincerity highly, in contrast with the stylized hypocrisy of the French court. Gentlemen who demonstrated sensibility—meaning a willingness to express their emotions—were praised because they were sincere.²² Tastes changed as well: furniture was daintier, fashionable dress was frilly, and people addressed each other with 'rococo

¹⁹ M. Shinagel, *Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), pp. vii–viii, 48–9, 213.

²⁰ J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (London, 1994), pp. 81, 147–8.

²¹ Shinagel, *Daniel Defoe*, p. 134–6.

²² B. Wilson, *Decency and Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789–1837* (London, 2007), pp. xii–xxxiii.

politeness'.²³ Langford's volume of the history of England covers precisely this period, and it is not surprising that his definition of a gentlemen pivots on dress and comportment. In the polite era, a man who could afford to purchase the correct fashionable clothes and could act properly had attained the majority of the status markers necessary to be considered a gentleman.

The American Revolution shattered the foundations of polite society. The 1780s were a time of national self-doubt. Fears of decline, in all senses but particularly moral, economic, and political, inaugurated a newly contentious era.²⁴ Calls for national renewal helped redefine the ideal gentleman. The polite and refined gentleman who had overseen the disaster in the colonies was accused of effeminacy. '[T]he dainty Hands of our present pretty Men', one writer complained, were unfit for 'the Barbarous, rude, rough Work' of war. The polite gentleman's replacement enjoyed hunting and drinking and conceived of gentility as founded on a code of honour. This alternative strand of gentility was linked with military service. The chivalric code served to reinstall martial virtues and love into contemporary notions of masculinity.²⁵ Though the narrative of the replacement of the polite with the chivalric is too linear and simplistic, it highlights the significance of the American War in reshaping gentility of behaviour. It also serves as a useful reminder that gentlemen were by definition men, and notions of masculinity were inextricably linked to gentility of behaviour.

²³ A. Nicolson, *Men of Honour: Trafalgar and the Making of the English Hero* (London, 2005), pp. 166–8.

²⁴ J. Innes, 'Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in Later Eighteenth-Century England' in E. Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 57–118; B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 30–31.

²⁵ K. Harvey, 'The History of Masculinity, circa 1650–1800', and M. Cohen, '"Manners" Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750–1830', *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (April 2005), pp. 296–330. Contrasting polite gentlemen with martial gentlemen had a long history. In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Beatrice complains, 'O that I were a man for his sake! or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake! But manhood is melted into courtesies, valour into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue' (IV.i.1965–8).

Fears of revolution and invasion during the 1790s and 1800s reinforced the necessity of incorporating martial values into Britain's ruling classes and into British masculinity. Aristocrats, widely condemned as effeminate, degenerate, or both, sought to reclaim their ancient association with military service. Colley argues that the landed elite elevated military heroes to peerages to bolster the popular perception of the aristocracy.²⁶ This topic will be covered in greater detail at the end of this chapter, but for now it serves to highlight the distance travelled the turn of the eighteenth century. No longer were gentlemen by birth the default: gentlemen by behaviour had closed the gap between the two such that gentlemen by birth—the landed elite—were now actively seeking to associate themselves with gentlemen by behaviour. Rodger places naval officers at the centre of this shift. He argues that 'in effect Nelson and the navy were proposing a new gentility of behaviour rather than property or family'.²⁷ As the previous few paragraphs have demonstrated, the distinction between gentility of behaviour and birth was not new in Nelson's era. But two decades of conflict and existential threats to the British Isles provided ample opportunities for naval officers to demonstrate their fitness for the 'rough Work' of war.

What, then, did it mean to be a gentleman during the crisis of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars? It was still possible to be born a gentleman, but following the era of politeness, it was increasingly common for men to claim the rank of gentleman based on other characteristics. Defining those characteristics remained frustrating and unsatisfactory. Money helped, but a gentleman did not have to be rich. Fashionable clothes could define a gentleman, but by the first decade of the nineteenth century, clothes were simpler and fewer men wore wigs and powder.²⁸ Both wearing a

²⁶ L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, revised edn. (London, 2009), pp. 177–92.

²⁷ N.A.M. Rodger, 'Introduction', in Colville and Davey (eds.), *Nelson Navy Nation*, p. 16.

²⁸ Wilson, *Decency and Disorder*, pp. 180–81. Simple clothes could be expensive and time consuming, as exemplified by the famous George 'Beau' Brummell and other 'dandies'.

sword and boasting a classical education were sufficient for gentlemen, but neither was necessary. Good manners were important—etiquette had replaced politeness.²⁹ An occupation that required little or no physical labour was an indication of gentility, though traders and merchants were not associated with the ideal gentleman.³⁰ Every category has hesitations and caveats, indicating that gentility was both poorly defined and contested.

Sea Officers as Gentlemen

Even as the parameters of gentility became increasingly blurry during the Great Wars, naval officers tested and stretched more components of gentility than almost any other group of men in Georgian Britain. As we saw in the last chapter, it is fair to characterize naval officers as members of the professional classes, but it is important to emphasize the ways in which they differed from other professionals. Naval officers boasted entry requirements similar to the civilian professions, though without the classical education associated with them; they aspired to the gentlemen-amateur ideal of the army officer, but more closely resembled the workmanlike engineer or artilleryman. P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, in their important study of British ‘gentlemanly capitalism’, argue that gentlemen could not be seen to work directly for money. A gentleman ‘interposed an appropriately wide distance between the mundane world ... and the higher calling of directing others’. Their argument applies most directly to the last decades of the nineteenth century rather than the eighteenth, but they also argue that ‘the main qualities of gentility remained fixed points of reference from Chaucer to Waugh’. Thus, the traditional professions of the eighteenth century solved ‘the problem of living in the world while also rising above its

Brummell’s somewhat ironic motto was that ‘the severest mortification a gentleman could incur, was, to attract observation in the street by outward appearance’.

²⁹ Harvey, ‘The History of Masculinity’, and Cohen, “‘Manners’ Make the Man’, pp. 296–330.

³⁰ This was particularly true after the 1780s and the decline of ‘sensibility’. See Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, p. 567.

sordid realities' by avoiding manual labour.³¹ Nelson summarized the tensions at the heart of his profession—and at the heart of this analysis—in a letter to an aspiring officer:

'Recollect that you must be a Seaman to be an Officer, and also, that you cannot be a good Officer without being a Gentleman.'³² The direct link between the technical and manual skill of seamanship and the behavioural graces of a gentleman is unique to naval officers.

Naval officers were well aware of their tenuous claim to gentility and ready to defend it. Along similar lines, Alannah Tomkins' study of the middle-class Ginders family during this period highlights the 'pitfalls awaiting those who were not constantly poised to act against their position being undermined'.³³ To maintain their social position, naval officers monitored their finances and their appearance closely. Graham Moore was explicit: 'Money—altho' nothing to a philosopher—is something to me.'³⁴ Prize money, as we saw in chapter four, was a crucial variable for officers because there was a chance they could win enough of it to purchase their way up the social ladder. Those officers who had not made a fortune in prize money needed to guard against profligacy. Purser Thomas Peckston was concerned that his wife's new friends would cause her to spend all their money:

I do not know whether I am pleased with your new acquaintances, Mr. and Mrs. Ricketts, it is true they may be very deserving and all that, but you know my dear girl they enjoy an income which gives them the ability of living much more extravagantly than we can afford to do, and by associating with any class of People we are apt to assimilate their manners.³⁵

The gradations of gentility were both fine and significant. Unless Peckston were lucky in prizes, he and his wife knew that they could not afford to move in more elevated circles.

³¹ P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (London, 1993), pp. 22–3.

³² Nelson to Mr Charles Connor, December 1803, *The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson*, ed. Sir N.H. Nicolas (7 vols, London, 1844), v, pp. 310–11. Connor was related to Emma Hamilton and was therefore from a low-status background.

³³ A. Tomkins, 'Fragility and Resilience in a Middle Class Family: Jeremiah Ginders (1777–1845) and His Kin', *Staffordshire Studies* 13 (2001), p. 81.

³⁴ T. Wareham, *Frigate Commander* (Barnsley, 2004), p. 236.

³⁵ NMRN, Museum Papers No. 1997/65, Thomas Peckston to Mary Peckston, 4 August 1812.

Moore would have applauded Peckston's restraint: he had no patience for officers who attempted to move up the social ladder not only by spending money, but also by putting on airs:

For instance, a pretension to fashion, a smattering of knowledge of the Poets sufficient for pedantic quotation. With these pitiful attainments, they have the impertinence to assume an air of superiority over the plain, assiduous and intelligent sea officer, whose attention has been turned to what is substantial and useful.³⁶

Moore emphasized that pretentious officers were rare, and that his colleagues were, on the whole, 'a most meritorious body of men'. His idealized version of a sea officer lacked a classical education and was employed usefully, and yet he was still a gentleman.³⁷

A good, if fictional, example of Moore's gentleman sailor can be found in Mrs Parson's 1807 novel, *The Convict, or Navy Lieutenant*. The hero, Thompson, is the third son of a country parson. Sent to sea when he is eleven, Thompson has no education, but he works hard to learn his profession. He also has few vices: his father tells him not to drink or swear and, shockingly, the young man obeys. In keeping with the popular perception of sailors as rude and lacking social graces, Thompson is ridiculed for his clean living. The officers Moore disdained were overcompensating for this prejudice by faking education and social graces. The prejudice is also visible in Dr Fletcher's novel *The Naval Guardian*, from 1805, in which a mother expresses concerns about sending her son to sea because he would be bound to grow up without learning proper manners. In contrast, as noted earlier, naval officers in *Persuasion* are uniformly praiseworthy and honourable. But in *Mansfield Park*, Austen grapples with a wider range of officers. Fanny Price's father is a disabled lieutenant who drinks heavily, swears, threatens his niece, and reads only the Navy List and the newspaper. In the same novel, Admiral Crawford wastes no time in moving his

³⁶ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 38.

³⁷ Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, p. 38.

mistress into his house after his wife dies.³⁸ We can now see the full spectrum of naval officers in both fact and fiction: from the foppish officers condemned by Moore, to the gentleman Wentworth, to the ignorant Price and the slovenly midshipmen in *The Convict*. Naval officers were a socially diverse group.

The most restrictive definitions of gentility do not hold up well when applied to naval officers. When Rosenheim and Thompson tie gentle status to membership in the landed gentry, they draw a distinction that contemporaries did not draw, certainly by the turn of the century. As the databases have demonstrated, few naval officers fulfilled the property and income requirements for the landed gentry, yet naval officers considered themselves to be gentlemen.³⁹ Richard Wilson's more inclusive definition seems more appropriate, but it does not fully capture the particular challenges of service at sea. He provides a behavioural code for a gentleman, but followers of the code would more closely resemble Cain and Hopkins' capitalists than Nelson's technically skilled seamen.⁴⁰ Similarly, Cain and Hopkins have little room for hard-working naval officers in their definition of gentlemen as men 'with sufficient leisure to practice the gentlemanly arts' who 'required income, and preferably sizeable wealth, but [who] could not be sullied by the acquisitive process'.⁴¹ Nelson and St Vincent, neither of whom were beneficiaries of sizeable family wealth, were engaged in the acquisitive process to such an extent that they took each other to court over prize money.⁴²

More promisingly, Langford's simple definition of anyone who had the means to dress well and wear a sword certainly includes naval officers under its broad umbrella, and

³⁸ M. Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750–1815* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 149–56.

³⁹ Rosenheim, *Emergence of a Ruling Order*, pp. 5–6. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture*, pp. 46–7.

⁴⁰ Wilson, 'The Landed Elite', pp. 164–5.

⁴¹ Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, p. 23.

⁴² A. Lambert, *Nelson: Britannia's God of War* (London, 2004), pp. 236, 239.

the sword provides a martial element lacking from other definitions.⁴³ Under the umbrella, though, the picture is more complex. Commissioned officers' uniforms demonstrate the conflicting pressures they experienced. Their undress uniforms followed civilian fashions by becoming darker in colour and less frilly, reflecting the increasingly sober and refined version of gentility during the Napoleonic Wars. Their dress uniforms, however, maintained sufficient gold lace to associate officers with courtly dress, reflecting their important service to the monarchy and the state.⁴⁴ The analysis of promotion prospects suggests that there does seem to have been a threshold of social capital necessary for advancement in the Navy. Arguing that only those commissioned officers above the threshold were considered gentlemen would be going too far: after all, Thomas Fife's father was a woolcomber and probably not able to call himself a gentleman, but as a post-captain, Fife undoubtedly did. Langford errs on the side of inclusiveness for this very reason, and his definition seems to be the line of best fit. But the existence of the threshold does suggest that not all gentlemen were created equal. A lieutenant on half-pay from a working-class background may have called himself a gentleman—he wore a handsome uniform and a sword—but his peers may not have accepted him as one, particularly if his social skills were unrefined.

Warrant officers' claims to gentility were similarly tangled. Edward Barker's letter to his uncle from 1800, frequently cited in the existing historiography, has provided a significant stumbling block for historians' conceptions of warrant officers' social status. Barker was desperate for help from a patron to secure a naval commission, which he said was equivalent to 'an independency and the rank of gentleman in every society and in every country'.⁴⁵ Barker says nothing about warrants, but it does not take a great leap of

⁴³ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 65–6.

⁴⁴ A. Miller, *Dressed to Kill: British Naval Uniform, Masculinity and Contemporary Fashions 1748–1857* (London, 2007), pp. 44–5.

⁴⁵ *British Naval Documents, 1204–1960*, eds. J.B. Hattendorf et al. (NRS, 1993), p. 546.

imagination to use his statement to suggest that naval men without commissions could not claim the rank of gentlemen. As chapters three and four demonstrated, the distinctions between warrant and commission officers were much less significant socially than the distinction between post-captains and the rest. Warrant officers socialized with commissioned officers, they came from similar family backgrounds, and they aspired to the same social status. Gardner makes no distinction between commissions and warrants in his memoir, describing pursers he served with as well as lieutenants—both were his messmates.⁴⁶ It should not be surprising, then, that warrant officers demanded status symbols commensurate with their perception of their importance. Chapter four described their success in securing higher pay. They also earned uniforms, first in 1787, and then a revision to the original pattern in 1805. A group of physicians led the campaign, writing to the Sick and Hurt Board and citing the rank they held ‘in the Service and Society’. Their request was denied, but the uniforms were revised and made to look more similar to that of a commissioned officer.⁴⁷ Warrant officers conceived of themselves as gentlemen in much the same way that lieutenants did: neither were members of the elite, but both had sufficient income, dress, and, in most cases, understanding of etiquette to claim to be gentlemen. The example of naval officers reinforces the conclusion that the rank of gentleman was not a fixed identity, nor were all gentlemen of equal rank. Anyone with the means to dress well and wear a sword could claim to be a gentleman, but within that framework, family background, behaviour, rank, and income set some gentlemen above others.

Honour and Duty

⁴⁶ Gardner, *Above and Under Hatches*, passim.

⁴⁷ Quoted in D. Jarrett, *British Naval Dress* (London, 1960), pp. 63–4.

Whatever the gradations of gentility and disputes about its definition, contemporaries were in agreement about one essential quality of a gentleman: honour. Anthony Appiah defines honour as ‘being entitled to respect’; gentlemen acknowledged other gentlemen based on their mutual possession of honour. It was a binary concept: either a gentleman had it, or he was not a gentleman and had no honour.⁴⁸ St Vincent famously summarized: ‘The Honour of an officer may be compared to the chastity of a woman, and when once wounded may never be recovered.’⁴⁹ Maintaining one’s honour meant abiding by the honour code. As with so many other concepts in the eighteenth century, the origins of the honour code could be found in the classical period. It was associated with a love of glory that compelled men to commit acts of ‘noble self-sacrifice and military valour’. In practice, the eighteenth-century honour code had shifted its foundations from the ancient code, as we will see.⁵⁰ But naval officers were well-placed to claim honour for themselves because of its association with bravery and military heroics. When Nelson was accused of behaving dishonourably, he responded vehemently, citing his combat record:

[I have been] in more than one hundred and forty skirmishes and battles, at sea and on shore; have lost an eye and otherwise blood, in fighting the Enemies of my King and Country; and God knows, instead of riches, my little fortune has been diminished in the Service ... and when instead of all my fancied approbation, to receive an accusation of a most traitorous nature—it has been almost too much for me to bear.⁵¹

Physical courage was a crucial component of honour, as Nelson explained, and gentlemen defended themselves aggressively against such accusations.

In the most extreme cases, questions about a gentleman’s honour led to a duel.

English duelling dated from the sixteenth century, when it was introduced as part of an

⁴⁸ A. Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York and London, 2010), pp. 13–16.

⁴⁹ Nicolson, *Men of Honour*, pp. 116–17

⁵⁰ D.T. Andrew, ‘The Code of Honour and Its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700–1850’, *Social History* 5, no. 3 (1980), p. 417.

⁵¹ Nicolson, *Men of Honour*, pp. 116–17.

Italianate culture of gentlemen courtiers.⁵² The historiography of duelling in Britain has focused almost exclusively on criticism of the practice and its decline; both topics will be covered shortly. But that historiography obscures the salient fact that for nearly three hundred years, gentlemen in the British Isles fought duels to defend their honour.

Gentlemen military officers were the most frequent practitioners: one study found that forty-four per cent of all eighteenth-century duels involved officers. That Nelson, accused of cheating, would respond by listing his combat achievements should not be surprising: for military officers, their courage had to be beyond question. Duels served precisely that purpose.⁵³ Brewer describes outbursts like Nelson's as commonplace: 'Officers flaunted their bellicosity: they were known for their keen sense of honour and their willingness to fight duels.'⁵⁴ Competence was not a requirement for duellists: all that mattered was that they had risked their lives for the sake of their honour.⁵⁵

Examples of naval officers duelling are readily available. From the database, we know that Lieutenant William Gibson went ashore to fight a duel in 1800.⁵⁶ Peter Cullen describes a duel between the first lieutenant of the *Hannibal* and the second lieutenant of *Marines* which resulted in the death of the former.⁵⁷ Thomas Fremantle was challenged to a duel by his former first lieutenant, Henry Rice.⁵⁸ In 1799, the *Naval Chronicle* reported three duels in two weeks in Devonport, and in 1808, *The Times* reported two duels involving naval officers on the same day.⁵⁹ Duelling was prevalent, even if the only officer

⁵² M. Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness, and Honour* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 14–16.

⁵³ R.B. Shoemaker, 'The Taming of the Duel: Masculinity, Honour, and Ritual Violence in London, 1660–1800', *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (2002), pp. 540.

⁵⁴ J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (London, 1989), p. 59.

⁵⁵ U. Frevert, *Men of Honour: A Social and Cultural History of the Duel* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 3.

⁵⁶ P. Marioné, *The Complete Navy List of the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815*, CDROM (Brussels, 2004) s.v. 'Gibson, Lieutenant William'.

⁵⁷ *Five Naval Journals, 1789–1817*, ed. H.G. Thursfield (NRS, 1951), pp. 71–2.

⁵⁸ Nicolson, *Men of Honour*, pp. 106–7.

⁵⁹ M. Barton, 'Duelling in the Royal Navy', *The Mariner's Mirror* 100, no. 3 (2014), pp. 286–8.

in the database to die in a duel, mentioned in chapter one, was Lord Falkland. The usual causes were disputes involving women, arguments deriving from living in cramped conditions, and questions of precedence or seniority.⁶⁰ Contemporary critics argued that few duels derived from questions about a gentleman's military valour, as the ancient conception of honour would suggest; rather, most were petty disputes transformed into life-threatening duels by alcohol or hot tempers.⁶¹

Note that Nelson did not fight a duel over the accusation that he had behaved dishonourably. Senior officers did not often fight duels, even though challenges were occasionally issued, or at least threatened. Admiral Sir John Orde challenged St Vincent in 1799, but the King forbade St Vincent from responding. St Vincent also cited his poor health and, significantly, that he could not be held personally responsible for decisions made as a public servant.⁶² The famous dispute between two other admirals, Troubridge and Pellew, nearly led to a duel. Troubridge wrote that '[Pellew's] conduct to me has been infamous ... he may be assured at a proper time I shall not forget'. Troubridge died before he could get his satisfaction. But the most important reason why Troubridge did not explicitly challenge Pellew—and why Orde was arrested for challenging St Vincent—was that duelling was not allowed in the Navy. All of the officers mentioned in the previous paragraph—Gibson, the Marine lieutenant on the *Hannibal*, and Henry Rice—were dismissed the service for duelling. The narrative of honour and duelling presented so far therefore confronts an uncomfortable contradiction: honour was an essential component of gentility; gentlemen defended their honour by duelling; naval officers were particularly sensitive to the honour code; many fought duels; but the Navy banned duelling.

⁶⁰ Barton, 'Duelling in the Royal Navy', pp. 284–8.

⁶¹ Andrew, 'The Code of Honour and Its Critics', p. 417.

⁶² Barton, 'Duelling in the Royal Navy', p. 288.

The death of the duel is one of the most commonly told stories of the eighteenth century, though there is no clear scholarly consensus about its cause. The narrative outline can be sketched as follows. As early as the 1590s, critics attacked the duel because it was foreign. James I condemned it because he thought it was barbaric and anti-Christian.⁶³ But the campaign against duelling did not start to make much progress until the eighteenth century. Members of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge proposed a bill to ban duelling in 1712. Queen Anne commended it, but it failed to pass.⁶⁴ By mid-century, critics were making sufficient headway that most historians agree duelling was in decline. The cause of the decline is the subject of considerable debate. One version of the story ascribes the decline to the rise of state power, another to the popular press.⁶⁵ A third version is that as the fashion for wearing swords receded, so too did the instances of duelling.⁶⁶ Some historians have credited the critics of the 1770s with providing the *coup de grâce*. They promoted ‘reasonableness, Christianity and commerce’ in contrast to the ‘incongruous and foolish’ duel.⁶⁷ Evangelicals are the heroes of this narrative, expounding ‘a new vision of society’ that undermined the code of honour and its feudal counterpart, the duel.⁶⁸

The problem with this argument is that the duel did not die in the 1770s, or even in the 1780s. Sword-wearing came back into fashion at the end of the century, and so did duelling.⁶⁹ Again, the crisis of the 1780s and the subsequent two decades of war are to blame. Military officers, socially more prominent and numerous in times of crisis, were

⁶³ Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England*, pp. 14–16.

⁶⁴ J. Innes, ‘Parliament and the Shaping of Eighteenth-Century English Social Policy’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 40 (1990), pp. 79–80.

⁶⁵ Appiah, *The Honor Code*, pp. 44–6.

⁶⁶ Shoemaker, ‘Taming of the Duel’, pp. 530–32.

⁶⁷ Andrew, ‘The Code of Honour and Its Critics’, p. 411.

⁶⁸ Shoemaker, ‘Taming of the Duel’, p. 539.

⁶⁹ Shoemaker, ‘Taming of the Duel’, pp. 530–32.

steeped in the culture of honour, and duelling survived in their ranks, as we have seen.⁷⁰ It even survived past 1815 because, according to one historian, it offered ‘an alternative excitement’.⁷¹ Pistols also helped to extend the life of the duel because they made combat less dangerous and more easily formalized.⁷² Not until the 1840s could it be said that the duel was truly dead.

Since criticism of duelling has almost as long a history as duelling itself, it is clear that the cause of the death of the duel must be more fundamental. One common argument in the existing historiography is that the rise of ‘middle-class values’—or variations on that theme—killed the duel. A number of historians see the critics of the 1770s as the leading edge of this movement.⁷³ They contrasted King George III and his wife, exemplars of these ‘middle-class values’, with other members of the royal family, who were prone to scandals.⁷⁴ Another historian sees the ‘stirring of middle-class awareness’ in the 1784 election.⁷⁵ In response, according to one account, the British aristocracy ‘modified its ethos in response to new manifestations of middle-class culture’.⁷⁶ Eliminating the duel was one way to modify that ethos. The ruling classes were not necessarily proactive in this process, though. Richard Cobden’s version of the death of the duel, from 1859, illustrates the encroachment of middle-class values:

Well, I remember that some linendrapers’ assistants took it into their heads to go down one Sunday morning ... and they began fighting duels; and that as soon as the linendrapers’ assistants took to duelling, it became very infamous in the eyes of the upper classes ... Now nothing would be so ridiculous as any nobleman or

⁷⁰ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 588–90.

⁷¹ V.G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1988), p. 102.

⁷² Shoemaker, ‘Taming of the Duel’, p. 542. Not only were most pistols inaccurate, but combatants could choose whether to fire into the air or at their opponent, depending on the nature of the dispute.

⁷³ Andrew, ‘The Code of Honour and Its Critics’, pp. 427–9; Shoemaker, ‘Taming of the Duel’, p. 539.

⁷⁴ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, p. 581.

⁷⁵ Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, p. 45.

⁷⁶ M.W. McCahill, ‘Open Elites: Recruitment to the French *Noblesse* and the English Aristocracy in the Eighteenth Century’, *Albion* 30, no. 4 (1999), p. 627.

gentleman thinking of resenting an insult by going out and fighting a duel about it.⁷⁷

As the middle classes appropriated activities and values formerly reserved for aristocrats, aristocrats distanced themselves from those values. According to these accounts, the death of the duel should be situated within the larger narrative of the slow decline of the aristocracy and the rise of the merchant capitalist class in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸

What, then, of gentlemen naval officers? Though they were complicit in extending the life of the duel through the Great Wars, there are also a number of examples of officers who chose not to fight to defend their honour. Nelson's rant about his combat record is one example; St Vincent's declaration that his actions towards Orde as a commanding officer could not be construed as a personal attack on his honour is another. Naval officers declined duels both because it violated the Nineteenth Article of War and because they no longer felt that honour was worth a duel. Nelson's vehemence is evidence that honour was still important in shaping his identity as a gentleman, but other values had emerged to challenge honour as the most important. Rodger suggests that one such value was duty, which he describes as a 'middle-class virtue' to contrast it with the aristocratic virtue of honour. Naval officers were perfectly placed to benefit from this confluence because of the nature of their profession.⁷⁹ Success at sea, as has been repeated throughout this thesis, required teamwork, dedication, and technical expertise. An officer's duty operated on at least three levels: tasks necessary for the smooth sailing and efficient fighting of the ship; deference to his superiors; and a sense that his life and career were intended to be given in the service of the public or the state.⁸⁰ To refine the working definition of a gentleman during the period 1793 to 1815, then, one of the most significant shifts was the relative

⁷⁷ Quoted in Appiah, *The Honor Code*, p. 47.

⁷⁸ Appiah, *The Honor Code*, pp. 44–6.

⁷⁹ N. A. M. Rodger, 'Honour and Duty at Sea, 1660–1815', *Historical Research* 75, no. 190 (2002), pp. 425–47.

⁸⁰ *OED*, s.v. 'duty'.

decline of honour and the rise of duty as the energizing element in a gentleman's conception of himself.

It is important not to set honour aside completely, however. As mentioned in chapter one, combat at sea during the age of sail forced naval officers to demonstrate physical courage in the face of overwhelming danger. When two ships exchanged fire from a distance, officers' roles were primarily to display themselves to their men. Rank dictated the absurdity of the display: midshipmen and junior officers could busy themselves conducting their division in the accurate and efficient firing of the ship's guns, but the commanding officer was expected to expose himself to enemy fire on the quarterdeck. He gave orders to con the ship and fire the guns, but otherwise remained standing still as if waiting for his opponent to fire in a duel. Only when he attempted to board his enemy could he participate in the fighting. Nelson's death at Trafalgar was a product of this exposure, though the idea that he wore his finest medals ostentatiously and made himself an easy target is a myth.⁸¹ One young officer's account of Trafalgar provides some insight into the behaviour expected of an officer:

My eyes were horror struck at the bloody corpses around me, and my ears rang with the shrieks of the wounded and the moans of the dying. At this moment seeing that almost everyone was lying down, I was half disposed to follow the example, and several times stooped for the purpose, but ... a certain monitor seemed to whisper, 'Stand up and do not shrink from your duty'. Turning round, my much esteemed and gallant senior [Captain Hargood] fixed my attention; the serenity of his countenance and the composure with which he paced the deck, drove more than half my terrors away; and joining him I became somewhat infused with his spirit, which cheered me on to act the part it became me.⁸²

Note that before he sees his captain demonstrating honourable behaviour, his conscience tells him to do his duty. Honour was what caused naval officers to conceive of their duty as displaying their physical courage. The two concepts cannot be neatly separated.

⁸¹ 'Undress Coat (1795–1812 Pattern) and Waistcoat Worn by Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805', in Colville and Davey (eds.), *Nelson, Navy & Nation*, pp. 14–15.

⁸² Quoted in R. Pietsch, 'The Experiences and Weapons of War', in Colville and Davey (eds.), *Nelson Navy Nation*, p. 176.

Elite Officers' Social Status

Were naval officers the cause of the confluence of honour and duty? Or did they merely get swept along on the current as broader social forces redefined gentility for their benefit? The distinction between elite and wardroom officers is essential, as is the geographical distribution of officers. There were, roughly speaking, eight to ten thousand wardroom officers during the Napoleonic Wars: a small group when compared to the ten million inhabitants of the United Kingdom, but nevertheless a significant and easily recognizable group of professionals. But wardroom officers were not distributed evenly across the British Isles. When they were employed, they were stationed abroad or on the coastal fringe, which suggests that their capacity to influence social norms in communities not connected to the Navy was limited. On the other hand, when they were unemployed or when they had left the Navy, some wardroom officers moved freely around inland Britain. These men could have been visible examples of naval officers' unique brand of gentility for Britons who did not live near hubs of naval activity. Surgeons and chaplains are the most likely candidates to have interacted with inland communities because their skill sets were easily transferrable to any civilian environment. Chapter five provided some examples: chaplain Francis Bedford's living was in a small village in Lincolnshire, while surgeon James Lawson Drummond moved to Belfast—a port, yes, but not one of the major naval centres such as Plymouth, Portsmouth, or Chatham.

But most wardroom officers did not move so freely. The database suggests that masters, pursers, and commissioned officers tended to maintain ties to the maritime communities on the south coast. Purser William Hamlyn became a customs official, and other pursers set up overseas importing businesses headquartered in ports. A number of masters published nautical charts after the Wars, indicating their continued connection to

the sea. Because the data for commissioned officers is better, it is possible to track where more than sixty per cent of them died. The similarities between their counties of birth and death are striking. The five most common counties in which commissioned officers were buried are, in descending order, Kent, Middlesex, Hampshire, Devon, and Gloucestershire. The latter is the only county different from the top five counties of birth described in chapter one, and it is simply a product of the number of officers who died in Bath. Cornwall, the fifth most common county of birth, is the sixth most common county of death. Combined, the top six counties—all, except Gloucestershire, on the south coast—account for two-thirds of all officers who died in England and for whom burial information was available.

Naval officers were commonplace on the south coast, but the midlands and north would not have been as exposed to their unique brand of gentility. Nevertheless, when fourteen-year-old Mary Gill of Dudley, near Birmingham, chose a subject for her stitching sampler in 1808, she chose to commemorate Nelson's death at Trafalgar. Young Mary had probably never seen the sea, but she had never known a world without the Great Wars.⁸³ As described above, the database indicates that she was unlikely to have met many naval officers in her short life, but she had certainly heard of Lord Nelson. Unlike wardroom officers, then, elite officers did have opportunities to reshape contemporary definitions of gentility, honour, and duty because of their authority, prominence, and in some cases, celebrity. This section argues that even though wardroom officers' influence was constrained by geographic patterns, elite naval officers transcended geography and were at the leading edge of changing social categories. In a time of national crisis, when the boundaries of those categories were under serious duress, they provided highly visible examples of a new kind of ruling class.

⁸³ M. Gill, 'Sampler', 1808, NMM, Object ID TXT0031.

One aspect of elite officers' gentility that was not new was their insistence that they were not interested in prize money. Vernon provided the blueprint for future naval heroes, condemning his colleagues for their profiteering when it came at the expense of maintaining Britain's naval supremacy.⁸⁴ The leading lights of the Navy a half-century later frequently made similar proclamations while simultaneously lusting after every prize within reach. Duckworth wrote to St Vincent: 'I am sure you who know me will do me the justice to say I have never been grasping for Prize Money and that *Gold is not my God*.' Nelson claimed, '[I]t was the destruction of the Enemy, not riches for myself, that I was seeking.' When he was denied an opportunity to gain some riches for himself, he naturally complained: '[T]his Admiralty takes away all my golden harvest ... [Orde] is to wallow in wealth, while I am left a beggar.' Pellew was the most egregious offender, stating baldly: 'I never cared much about Riches.' He made more than £200,000 in his career.⁸⁵ Merchants balanced similar concerns, as Cain and Hopkins argue. It was important for a gentleman to distance himself from the means of production of his wealth, which for naval officers meant prizes. At the same time, officers' wages were too low to allow elite officers to maintain a lifestyle comparable to members of the landed gentry. They saw prize money as a necessary if vulgar supplement to their incomes.

Collingwood would have eagerly accepted a prize money windfall, but since one never came his way, it is easier to take his protestations seriously. He wrote to his wife after Trafalgar, 'To possess riches is not my ambition, but I am in hope to get another medal: of that indeed I am ambitious, for I am the only officer in the Service with three.'⁸⁶ Whereas officers desired prize money privately and dismissed it publicly, they actively and openly sought non-pecuniary rewards. Honours were inextricably linked with military

⁸⁴ G. Jordan and N. Rogers, 'Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England', *Journal of British Studies* 28, no. 3 (1989), p. 207.

⁸⁵ J.R. Hill, *The Prizes of War: The Naval Prize System in the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815* (Stroud, 1998), pp. 222–4.

⁸⁶ I. de la Bere, *The Queen's Orders of Chivalry* (London, 1964), p. 113.

service. One observer explained that honours motivated young men to join the army or Navy: '[T]he young Cadet who lists himself in the Fleet or Army ... seems to have nothing at heart but Glory and Drabbing ..., a Regiment and a Truncheon, if not a Star and Garter, are the ultimate Objects he has in view, which sweetens every Labour and Danger.'⁸⁷ Post-captains and admirals could not be promoted, so medals, knighthoods, baronetcies, and, in a few cases, peerages provided them with opportunities to join Britain's social elite. They were honoured for their merit, not their political or social connections. Some officers did sit in the House of Commons, and about eighty per cent of them owed their seats to family interest. But naval MPs were not known for their participation or even their attendance: most supported the government to avoid damaging their career prospects.⁸⁸ The vast majority of rewards bestowed upon naval officers were for leading British forces to famous victories.⁸⁹ The honours system created a new service elite, in which glory replaced land ownership as the crucial qualification.

Meritorious service had long been at the heart of the early modern honours system, but the growth of the service elite in the period after 1790 was unprecedented. It was, as one historian argues, the beginning of a 'major transition' in the British nobility. What was once the preserve of grandees became open to distinguished public servants, including naval officers.⁹⁰ Three factors best explain this shift. The first is the gradual change in the definition of merit. Confusingly, the early modern definition of merit included birth and lineage when applied to the nobility. In other words, an important aspect of a noble's service to the crown was that his ancestors had also served the crown. His merit did not

⁸⁷ Quoted in A. Matikkala, *The Orders of Knighthood and the Formation of the British Honours System, 1660–1760* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 128.

⁸⁸ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, p. 43.

⁸⁹ M.W. McCahill, *The House of Lords in the Age of George III (1760–1811)* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 408–9.

⁹⁰ M.W. McCahill, 'Peerage Creations and the Changing Character of the British Nobility, 1750–1830', *The English Historical Review* 96, no. 379 (1981), p. 283.

have to be his own.⁹¹ The efforts to reform the French Army and Navy in the 1780s came into conflict with this issue, as we saw in the last chapter. But the relationship between merit and lineage eroded over time, and in Britain it seems to have disintegrated earlier than in France. Elias Ashmole argued that men sought honour by acting meritoriously, and lineage did not feature in his definition of the latter term. Nor did it feature in James Coats' *New Dictionary of Heraldry* from 1725, which stated that 'the truest Honour depends on Merit'.⁹² By the middle of the eighteenth century in Britain, merit referred primarily to actions and abilities rather than lineage. The second explanation for the growth of a merit-based service elite is that the fiscal-military state 'remilitarized' the English aristocracy. The service elite embodied a renewed 'martial ethos', which was an essential component of the administration of a state in which the majority of the budget was spent on the military.⁹³ The third factor, related to the second, is the nature of warfare against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. The differences between the Great Wars and previous eighteenth-century wars can be overstated, but the existential threat to Britain cannot. Invasion, mutiny, and rebellion were constant threats for two decades; rewarding those who risked their lives to prevent them was essential. Elite sea officers who survived and excelled in this environment benefitted from being on the front lines of Britain's war effort.

To return to Collingwood, he had performed meritorious service at Trafalgar, and he hoped for a medal as a reward. Unlike prize money, he did not feel the need to hide his desire, but, as we will see, he did have reasons to worry about whether he would receive one. A gold medal was a far cry from a peerage, but officers still valued them highly. They were the lowest rung on the ladder that led into the service elite. Large Naval Gold Medals

⁹¹ J.M. Smith, *The Culture of Merit: Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France, 1600–1789* (Ann Arbor, 1996), pp. 1–10; D. Bien, 'The Army in the French Enlightenment: Reform, Reaction, and Revolution', *Past and Present* 85 (1979), pp. 68–98.

⁹² Matikkala, *Orders of Knighthood*, pp. 28, 35–6.

⁹³ R.B. Manning, *Swordsmen: The Martial Ethos in the Three Kingdoms* (Oxford, 2003), p. 4.

were struck after the six largest fleet actions of the Wars: the Glorious First of June, St Vincent, Camperdown, the Nile, Trafalgar, and San Domingo. Smaller medals were struck following a further twelve actions, often just for the ship's captain. Edward Hamilton received a medal for cutting out the mutinous *Hermione* in 1799, as did Philip Broke for leading the *Shannon* to victory over the *Chesapeake* in 1813. Admirals often received other rewards in addition to the medal: Howe received a gold and enamel badge, a £3,000 sword, and a thanksgiving service at St Paul's after the Glorious First of June.⁹⁴

Collingwood was present at the Glorious First of June, but he failed to receive a medal despite playing a crucial role in Howe's victory. His ship had taken one of the seven prizes, and he had assumed command of a division when his admiral had been wounded. These actions should have secured him a prominent place in Howe's dispatch to the Admiralty. Instead, Howe merely praised the whole fleet and provided few specifics. When the public and the First Lord demanded to know who had distinguished themselves in the action, Howe asked his flag captain and the conveyor of the dispatches, Sir Roger Curtis, to draft a second letter. Howe was careful to write to the First Lord beforehand to warn him of the potential for 'disagreeable consequences'.⁹⁵ It proved to be a prescient warning, as Curtis' letter mentioned all the admirals and captains of the fleet except for three: Admiral Caldwell, whose command had barely been engaged; Captain Molloy, who was court-martialled and dismissed from the service for gross incompetence; and Collingwood. Two of Collingwood's fellow officers protested the injustice of the oversight, to no avail. When the king arrived at Spithead to visit the fleet, he awarded the newly-struck gold medal only to the captains mentioned in Curtis' dispatch.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ A.N. Pamm, *Honours and Rewards in the British Empire and Commonwealth* (2 vols., Aldershot, 1995), I, pp. 115–7.

⁹⁵ *British Naval Documents*, no. 306, p. 543.

⁹⁶ O. Warner, *The life and letters of Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood* (London, 1968), p. 51; M. Adams, *Admiral Collingwood: Nelson's Own Hero* (London, 2005), pp. 132–4.

Collingwood was understandably disconsolate in letters to his friends after the battle, writing that Curtis' letter had nearly broken his heart. He was also palpably angry:

[Curtis] ever has been an artful, sneaking [*sic*] creature, whose fawning insinuating manners creeps into the confidence of whoever he attacks, and whose rapacity wou'd grasp all honours and profits that come within his view. The letter was an attempt upon the credulity of the world to make them believe the *Queen Charlotte* [Howe's flagship], with very little help, defeated the French fleet.⁹⁷

Collingwood did not blame Lord Howe for Curtis's misconduct, but, despite confronting Curtis about the matter, he won no recompense. Curtis's response to Collingwood's accusations was, in Collingwood's words, 'an ill told story, a story which has given me more pain than even my poor Admiral suffered from his misfortune'.⁹⁸ His admiral had received a serious wound to his leg during the battle, and it was later amputated. Hyperbole aside, medals mattered to post-captains.⁹⁹ With no chance of promotion, they provided one of the few opportunities for distinction as well as tangible proof of their national importance. Thus when Collingwood wrote to his wife after Trafalgar expressing his desire to receive a medal, his experience after the Glorious First of June must have been at the forefront of his mind.

Medals also provided handsome supplements to elite officers' uniforms and post-action portraits, which many officers commissioned as demonstrations of their elevated status. The most common form of naval portraiture featured the sitter looking directly at the viewer, occasionally with a dangerous maritime scene behind him. As Lincoln notes, such portraits made the officer appear to have 'mastered the element'.¹⁰⁰ A bold portrait was a flamboyant status symbol, as demonstrated by the examples on the next page.

Duncan and Pellew are depicted in dangerous maritime situations. The background of

⁹⁷ Collingwood to Sir Edward Blackett, 30 June 1794, in E.A. Hughes (ed.), *The Private Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood* (NRS, 1957), pp. 48–51.

⁹⁸ Collingwood to Dr Alexander Carlyle, 9 July 1794, in Hughes (ed.), *Correspondence of Lord Collingwood*, pp. 51–3.

⁹⁹ E. Wilson, 'The Careers of James, Lord de Saumarez and Cuthbert, Lord Collingwood, 1748–1836' (University of Cambridge M.Phil thesis, 2008), pp. 55–9.

¹⁰⁰ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, pp. 33–6.



Figure 6.1: 'John Jervis, Earl of St Vincent', studio of Lemuel Francis Abbott, oil on canvas, circa 1795. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 6.2: 'Cuthbert Collingwood, Baron Collingwood', by Henry Howard, after a painting by Giuseppe Politi, oil on canvas, 1828 (1807). © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 6.3: 'Adam Duncan, 1st Viscount Duncan', by Henry Pierre Danloux, oil on canvas, 1792. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 6.4: 'Edward Pellew, 1st Viscount Exmouth', by James Northcote, oil on canvas, 1804. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Pellew's portrait commemorates his role in rescuing drowning passengers and crew from the wreck of the *Dutton* East Indiaman. Pellew stands tall and confident despite the chaos and death behind and around him. Similarly, the deck slopes steeply under Duncan in his all-action portrait. He braces himself against the movement of the ship as his hair is whipped by the wind. Elite sea officers were members of a maritime subculture and portraits demonstrated their prominence within it. Even the sun breaking through the dark clouds behind Jervis hints at the danger and drama of life at sea, while Collingwood is framed by the taffrail and ensign of his flagship. To a civilian audience, these maritime backgrounds would have been unfamiliar. But viewers would have immediately understood the confidence, authority, and honour each sitter displayed.

Collingwood ensured that his portrait included all three of his medals: for St Vincent, Trafalgar, and the Glorious First of June. Not only was the oversight at the latter battle eventually corrected, but he need not have feared whether he would receive a medal following Trafalgar. Jervis has no medals—the portrait predates his famous victory at St Vincent—but he wears instead a more socially prestigious honour. His bright red sash is a symbol of the Order of the Bath, into which he was inducted in 1782 following his capture of a French ship of the line.¹⁰¹ Founded in 1725 specifically to reward military service in European wars, it was highly valued. Members of the Order had an 'aura of victory' about them.¹⁰² Nelson became a Knight Companion (KB) following the battle of St Vincent, and he immediately had the star of the Order embroidered on all of his uniform coats. Before 1815, membership was restricted to thirty-five Companions. St Vincent was predictably unhappy when the end of the Wars prompted a dramatic enlargement to several hundred members, broken into three classes. He refused to wear his sash and star any more except

¹⁰¹ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Jervis, John, earl of St Vincent (1735–1823)'.

¹⁰² Matikkala, *Orders of Knighthood*, p. 129.

in the presence of the sovereign.¹⁰³ Snobbery was present at all levels of Georgian society, but it could be acute at the top.

Baronetcies were another common reward for victorious naval officers. There were seventy-seven new baronets—not all of them naval—in the 1790s, which was more than had been created in the forty years beginning in 1720.¹⁰⁴ After Captain Michael Seymour's *Amethyst* had captured the French frigate *Niemen* in 1809, he had a choice to make. His friends encouraged him to go to London to put pressure on the Admiralty to shower him with honours. Seymour calculated that he did not need to do so, and was proved correct when he was made a baronet. He wrote to a friend:

So I am, you see, right in not going to town to beg—pressed as I have been by many to do so. ... I have written my best thanks, and shall be off on leave to give personal thanks to my gracious Sovereign, and pay my fees (£400) I hear, by return of post on my leave coming down.¹⁰⁵

The reference to the fees is revealing. Seymour wrote later to complain about the expenses associated with his new title and how difficult it would be to maintain an appropriate lifestyle. He predicted that he would be 'a poor miserable rascal of a Baronet'. In reality, he had made a good income from prizes, but his story is nevertheless indicative of elite officers' fervent desire for such rewards and their persistent concerns about status and income.¹⁰⁶

Joining the aristocracy was the ultimate reward. A nineteenth-century observer summarized: '[H]ereditary permanent rank is what most Englishmen prize above all earthly honours. It is the permanency, especially, that they value.'¹⁰⁷ As the number of new baronets exploded during the Wars, so too did the number of new peers. One historian described the late-eighteenth century as a period of 'peerage mania'. Creating one peer

¹⁰³ De la Bere, *Queen's Orders of Chivalry*, pp. 111–20.

¹⁰⁴ Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in T. Wareham, *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2001), p. 191.

¹⁰⁶ Wareham, *Star Captains*, p. 192.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in J.V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660–1914* (Oxford, 1989), p. 92.

produced rival claims from dozens of others, and the result was peerage inflation.¹⁰⁸ Part of the explanation was political, as George III used his prerogative to strengthen the government of the younger Pitt in the 1780s by stuffing the House of Lords with supporters.¹⁰⁹ But peerages were handed out to members of the new service elite as well. Naval officers were as eager as any other group to take advantage of these opportunities. A successful action generated a difficult decision for ministers: was that action more or less worthy than a previous action?¹¹⁰ Timing helped: as mentioned earlier, James Saumarez received a knighthood for his nearly flawless victory over a French frigate in 1793. Had the action occurred later in the Wars, it is less likely that he would have been so celebrated. Saumarez discovered this himself when, after rescuing victory from defeat at Algeciras in 1801, he was made a KB and given valuable plates, a sword, and a pension of £1,200. He did not, however, receive the peerage he felt he deserved in part because Nelson's victory at the Nile, the most recent major fleet action, had been larger in scale than Algeciras. Ministers felt the Nile warranted a barony, while Algeciras did not. Saumarez's second claim to a peerage came after his most important contribution to the war effort, his four years in command of the Baltic fleet. No major actions highlighted his tenure, though, which meant ministers had no dramatic and public victory to reward. Saumarez retired to Guernsey without the peerage he desired. Not until 1831, nearly two decades after his last service afloat, did he become Baron de Saumarez.¹¹¹

Recipients of the highest awards needed incomes commensurate with their rank. Few officers had family fortunes on which to draw, and some that did, such as Rodney, gambled them away. Duncan and St Vincent received annuities of £2,000, as did Nelson at

¹⁰⁸ M.W. McCahill, *Order and Equipoise: The Peerage and the House of Lords, 1783–1806* (London, 1978), pp. 148–9.

¹⁰⁹ W.C. Lowe, 'George III, Peerage Creations and Politics, 1760–1784', *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (1992), p. 587.

¹¹⁰ McCahill, 'Peerage Creations and the Changing Character of the British Nobility', pp. 272–3.

¹¹¹ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Saumarez, James, first Baron de Saumarez (1757–1836)'; Wilson, 'Careers of James, Lord de Saumarez, and Cuthbert, Lord Collingwood', pp. 49–91.

his elevation. Nelson's heirs received much more. His brother's pension was worth £5,000 per year, and the trustees of Nelson's estate were granted £90,000 to purchase a suitable house. Wellington's pension was £2,000 at his creation and £4,000 on his promotion to an earl. He received £100,000 when he became a marquis, £400,000 when he became a duke, and £200,000 following the victory at Waterloo. But Wellington and Nelson received significantly more than most, and some military peers struggled to maintain appropriately lavish lifestyles. The families of Exmouth and Hood, for example, owned fewer than 3,000 acres at the end of the nineteenth century, which paled in comparison to many other peers' landholdings.¹¹²

Medals, baronetcies, and peerages were high-profile, major rewards that made naval officers public figures. As we saw in chapters three and four, the social backgrounds of elite naval officers were not different from the thousands of officers who languished unemployed or toiled as lieutenants commanding gunboats in the Channel. With little to recommend them to the peerage or the Bath other than their heroic deeds, elite officers were hyperaware of the social capital to be gained from the favour of the monarch. Officers' vulnerability made them easy targets for satirists. Oliver Goldsmith poked fun at the ribbon of the Order of the Garter:

The princes of Europe have found out a manner of rewarding their subjects who have behaved well, by presenting them with about two yards of blue ribbon, which is worn about the shoulder. ... This is a very frugal method of recompensing the most important services; and it is very fortunate for kings that their subjects are satisfied with such trifling rewards. Should a nobleman happen to lose a leg in battle, the king presents him with two yards of ribbon, and he is paid for the loss of his limb. ... In short, while a European king has a yard or blue or green ribbon left, he need be under no apprehension of wanting statesmen, generals and soldiers.¹¹³

¹¹² M.W. McCahill and E.A. Wasson, 'The New Peerage: Recruitment to the House of Lords, 1704–1847', *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 1 (2003), pp. 14–16. See also H.M. Scott (ed.), *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (2 vols., London, 1995), I, pp. 78–9.

¹¹³ O. Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World from a Chinese philosopher residing in London to his friends in the east* (2 vols., London, 1792), II, p. 6. Quoted in M. De-la-Noy, *The Honours System*, 2nd edn. (London, 1992).

Strange as it sounded to Goldsmith, elite officers happily traded a leg for two yards of ribbon. The opportunities for social mobility in the army and Navy were unlike any other profession. Military service made it possible for the son of a country parson or a lawyer to become a peer of the realm, so long as he was willing to risk bodily harm.

It is important, though, not to get carried away describing the growth of the service elite. One useful way of putting naval officers' place in the elite in perspective is to see the period of 'peerage mania' as the exception to the broader narrative of elite political authority and aristocratic power in Britain.¹¹⁴ Throughout its history, the British aristocracy was notably small by European standards, closed to new wealth, and effective at maintaining its influence. Only during the crisis following the French Revolution, when perceptions of the aristocracy were at their lowest ebb and the threats to it the highest, did the elite become accessible to significant numbers of new men.¹¹⁵ At the lowest levels of the elite, there is ample evidence for this narrative.¹¹⁶ There were more than six hundred baronetcies granted before 1821, and more than eighty per cent of them went to men whose primary qualification was their wealth. Naval and army officers received the rest.¹¹⁷ But vanishingly few new men joined the very highest level, the peerage. The House of Lords nearly doubled in size from 1784 to 1830, but, as a number of historians have noted, roughly three-quarters of these new peers were already at least members of the landed gentry if not related to other aristocrats.¹¹⁸ The long-running debate about the extent to

¹¹⁴ P. Harling, *The Waning of 'Old Corruption': The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779–1846* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 1–2.

¹¹⁵ D. Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy* (London, 1995), pp. 9–10; Pamm, *Honours and Rewards*, I, p. 36.

¹¹⁶ D. Spring and E. Spring, 'Social Mobility and the English Landed Elite', *Canadian Journal of History* 21, no. 3 (1986), pp. 350–51.

¹¹⁷ Beckett, *Aristocracy in England*, p. 117.

¹¹⁸ McCahill and Wasson, 'New Peerage', p. 6; Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 29; J. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 21–3; Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, pp. 118–19; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, p. 597.

which the British elite was ‘open’ is more complicated than the summary provided here.¹¹⁹

It is not necessary to do more, though, because from the perspective of naval officers, the elite was open, but only to the most prominent naval heroes.

Those heroes were also the exception to the rule that new peers were related to old peers. Since there were so few of them, it is possible to list each officer from the period who earned his peerage at sea, his father’s occupation, and any connections to other aristocrats:

Table 6.1: Naval Officers Raised to the Peerage and Their Connections¹²⁰

Officer	Father’s Occupation	Aristocratic Connection?
Samuel Hood, first Viscount Hood	Vicar	No
Alexander Hood, first Viscount Bridport	Vicar	No
Charles Middleton, first Baron Barham	Customs collector	No
John Jervis, first earl of St Vincent	Lawyer	No
Horatio Nelson, first Viscount Nelson	Rector	Mother was cousin of second Lord Walpole
Cuthbert Collingwood, first Baron Collingwood	Merchant	No
George Keith Elphinstone, first Viscount Keith	Disgraced Scottish peer	To other Scottish peers
Alan Gardner, first Baron Gardner	Army officer	No
James Gambier, first Baron Gambier	Lt Governor of Bahamas	No
Edward Pellew, first Viscount Exmouth	Packet-boat captain	No
James Saumarez, first Baron de Saumarez	Physician	No
Adam Duncan, first Viscount Duncan	Scottish gentry	No

¹¹⁹ Some useful summaries can be found here: T.C.W. Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648–1815* (London, 2007), p. 265; Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, pp. 9–10; F.M.L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780–1980* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 17–19.

¹²⁰ Table compiled from Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 513 and the ODNB.

None of the naval officers who earned peerages had any significant relationships to existing peers. Members of Clan Elphinstone had been prominent Jacobites; his elevation to first an Irish peerage and then to the peerage of the United Kingdom came in spite of his family's background rather than because of it. For Nelson, a much more significant connection for his career was to the naval officer Maurice Suckling, his mother's brother, rather than all the way to the Walpoles. The spectacular nature of the victory at the Nile was responsible for his elevation to the peerage, not his family connections. Richard Wilson therefore misses the mark when he lumps naval officers in with other members of the service peerage: 'A few generals, admirals, and very successful lawyers were ennobled', he notes, 'but their family and social connections were almost invariably with the peerage and large landowners.'¹²¹ Army officers were more likely to be connected with the upper reaches of society, as mentioned in chapter three: forty per cent of officers came from either the aristocracy or the landed gentry.¹²² The naval officers elevated to the peerage are notable for their middling backgrounds. They provided new blood for the British elite in ways that the other beneficiaries of the expansion of the peerage did not. Just as naval officers were unique in the ways in which they tested the definition of a gentlemen, elite naval officers were unique in the ways in which they tested the definition of an aristocrat.

Nelson's prominence in the literature means that, much as we paused to put his career in context in chapter one, it is worth pausing again here to discuss his interaction with the honours system and what that reveals about his understanding of his social status. The Battle of Cape St Vincent thrust Nelson into the public eye. He led an important manoeuvre at a crucial moment to bring the enemy into range, and then proceeded to board

¹²¹ Wilson, 'The Landed Elite', p. 159.

¹²² A.B. Wood, 'The Limits of Social Mobility: Social Origins and Career Patterns of British Generals, 1688–1815' (London School of Economics and Political Science Ph.D. thesis, 2011), pp. 36–43.

and capture an enemy ship. When she became entangled with another enemy ship, he boarded and captured her as well. Prints of the feat hailed ‘Nelson’s Patent Bridge for Boarding First-Rates’—the bridge being another enemy first-rate—and Nelson received the Order of the Bath plus a pension of £1,000.¹²³ He seems to have felt that these rewards were fair and in keeping with both his contribution to the battle and his place in the command hierarchy.¹²⁴ He was less pleased with his rewards following his victory at the Nile. Part of the problem was that he was created the Duke of Bronte by the King of Naples and given property there worth £3,000 per year. In comparison, the Barony granted him by the English king was moderately insulting. Given that St Vincent had won an earldom the previous year, Nelson felt entitled to more. He responded with wilful disobedience of direct orders, becoming embroiled both in the marriage of Sir William and Lady Emma Hamilton and in the affairs of the Neapolitan Court. He also began signing his name ‘Nelson and Bronte’, and wearing his foreign orders and awards, including a magnificent diamond chelengk from the Sultan of Turkey.¹²⁵ Compared to Collingwood’s anger following the Glorious First of June, Saumarez’s disappointment at not receiving a peerage after Algeciras, or St Vincent’s refusal to wear the insignia of the Order of the Bath following its expansion in 1815, Nelson’s jealousy and sensitivity are only different by degree, not substance. Naval officers, Nelson very much included, invested enormous amounts of emotional energy in their relationship with the honours system because they could not afford to rely on their family lineage to support their social status.

Nelson, however, was a celebrity in ways that his colleagues were not. Gillray’s caricatures and satires of Nelson are useful indications of his prominence. ‘The Hero of the Nile’ depicts a small, wounded, and lonely Nelson, draped in and nearly swallowed by a

¹²³ R.J.B. Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory: The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson* (London, 2005), p. 229; *ODNB*, s.v. ‘Nelson, Horatio, Viscount Nelson (1758–1805)’.

¹²⁴ De la Bere, *Queen’s Orders of Chivalry*, pp. 112–13.

¹²⁵ Jordan and Rogers, ‘Admirals as Heroes’, p. 219.

baffling array of honours.¹²⁶ Nelson's relationship with the Hamiltons was a favourite subject, as Gillray could draw on his full range of double entendres when depicting the self-styled *tria juncta in uno*.¹²⁷ Kathleen Wilson argues that Gillray's prints ironically endeared Nelson to 'the people' because he was the butt of elite jokes.¹²⁸ His celebrity grew rapidly, and he learned how to shape and manipulate it to help create his own legend. His actions were frequently reckless, demonstrating little regard for his own safety. Nicolson describes him as a hero in the Achilles mould, 'who burns and destroys without thought to his own welfare'.¹²⁹ Nelson's funeral therefore saw the confluence of a number of conflicting currents. The 'people's hero' was dead, and the greatest heroes are dead heroes.¹³⁰ Would his popularity, subversive behaviour, and middling background pose a threat to monarchy and aristocracy when put on display at the largest funeral in British history? Or had the aristocracy successfully appropriated his celebrity? In fact the funeral became a celebration of all three as ordinary sailors hailed their hero's sacrifice for the nation alongside the elite.¹³¹ Despite his occasionally erratic behaviour and middling pedigree, the aristocracy successfully appropriated Nelson's celebrity and used it as a patriotic symbol during the most difficult period of the Wars.

Nelson as the people's hero and Nelson as the bulwark of British independence neatly demonstrate the two ways to interpret how service peers interacted with the traditional aristocracy. In 1812, Sir Egerton Brydges claimed that the nobility was 'more blended with the people. ... [T]he power and the distance of a stately and reserved

¹²⁶ J. Gillray, 'The Hero of the Nile (caricature)', 1798, NMM, Object ID PAF3888.

¹²⁷ ODNB, s.v. 'Hamilton [*née* Lyon], Emma, Lady Hamilton (bap. 1765, d. 1815)'.

¹²⁸ K. Wilson, 'Nelson and the People: Manliness, Patriotism and Politics', in D. Cannadine (ed.), *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 60.

¹²⁹ Nicolson, *Men of Honour*, pp. xx, 7.

¹³⁰ Manning, *Swordsmen*, pp. 63–4.

¹³¹ G. Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 82–6.

aristocracy are lost.¹³² Colley takes the opposite approach, arguing that military officers not brought up as members of the aristocracy would have felt alienated from the narrow world of the highest elite.¹³³ The large annuities granted to officers upon their ennoblement tend to support Colley's argument: few naval officers were capable of supporting their titles from their own incomes. In 1808, one Member of Parliament complained that such men would inevitably become 'pensioners of the crown, or burdens on the people'. Lord George Cavendish agreed, complaining that 'the peerage was very improperly given to military men'.¹³⁴ Colley combines Cavendish's complaints with Brydges' sentiment to claim that the aristocracy sought to bring a smattering of exceptionally meritorious men into its ranks, but not too many. She gives the aristocracy a great deal of agency in reshaping their public image, citing a parade of military heroes in 1818 as evidence that 'the British elite was a service elite'. Such a claim would have been preposterous during the aforementioned crisis of the 1780s, when aristocrats were widely condemned as incompetent drains on the state. But by appropriating the patriotic heroes of the Wars, Colley argues that British elite managed to rebound and set the stage for a final period of supremacy in the nineteenth century.¹³⁵

The experience of naval officers can provide some modest revisions to Colley's influential—and largely persuasive—arguments. Ennoblement for distinguished service at sea was not invented in 1793: Anson, Hawke, and Rodney all won peerages connected to naval service in the eighteenth century. Thus when Howe won the first great fleet victory of the Wars, he was celebrated much as previous naval heroes had been. Though Howe had already been created an earl before the battle, what mattered was that he had beaten a French fleet at sea. He was made a Knight of the Order of the Garter as a result, which was

¹³² Quoted in Scott, *European Nobilities*, pp. 78–9.

¹³³ Colley, *Britons*, pp. 167–72.

¹³⁴ McCahill and Wasson, 'The New Peerage', p. 22.

¹³⁵ Colley, *Britons*, pp. 177–92.

seen as greater in precedence even than an earldom.¹³⁶ Similarly, when Sir John Jervis won a more impressive victory in 1797, his promotion to an earldom followed the pattern of rewards for naval officers, though a little more lavishly than usual.¹³⁷ As the Wars dragged on, surpassing in length and scale any previous wars of the eighteenth century, more and more naval officers had good claims to rewards similar to those of Howe and St Vincent. No previous conflict had so many major fleet battles, not to mention smaller actions such as Algeciras or Sir Richard Strachan's action after Trafalgar. The majority of service peerages did come during the Wars,¹³⁸ but Colley's insistence that the aristocracy was deliberately sprinkling talent among its ranks overstates the aristocracy's agency in the emergence of the service elite. Many of the rewards for officers were in keeping with long-established practice. Nelson's death at Trafalgar, for instance, left his second-in-command Collingwood as the natural recipient of a peerage; failure to give him one would have been seen as an outrage.¹³⁹

Service peers were rarely given titles ranked higher than Baron or Viscount. The earldom granted to St Vincent was the highest title granted to a naval officer during the Wars. Collingwood's full title, Baron Collingwood of Caldburne and Hethpoole, referred to two small properties that Collingwood's wife had inherited. 'I thought all the world knew I was no Land-Lord', he wrote. He was a peer, but he was no rival to the traditional landed aristocracy.¹⁴⁰ Above all, the honours system was in place to provide motivation for meritorious services, not to reshape the constitution of the elite. Colley is correct to argue that its constitution was nevertheless reshaped, but the cause was primarily the nature and

¹³⁶ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Howe, Richard, Earl Howe (1726–1799)'; Matikkala, *Orders of Knighthood*, p. 110.

¹³⁷ St Vincent had already been recommended for a peerage before the battle, which helps explain why he was elevated above a viscount. See *ODNB*, s.v. 'Jervis, John, earl of St Vincent (1735–1823)'.

¹³⁸ McCahill and Wasson, 'The New Peerage', p. 21.

¹³⁹ In many ways, Collingwood's barony can be seen as an extension of the practice of rewarding first lieutenants after single-ship actions.

¹⁴⁰ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Collingwood, Cuthbert, Baron Collingwood (1748–1810)'.

duration of the Wars. Most service peers were relatively low-ranking and impoverished compared to families long-established in the nobility. Those families were still forced to adapt, not only to the influx of new peers, but also to the growth of the fiscal-military state and the threats of the Wars.¹⁴¹ Many aristocrats undoubtedly grasped the opportunity to associate themselves with the patriotic heroism exuded by the new service elite. But the honours system, as applied to military heroes, was not fundamentally different at the end of the century than it was at the beginning. It was different politically, as demonstrated by George III's stuffing of the House of Lords with supporters of Pitt in the 1780s. But John Locke's statement regarding military service still applied: '[T]he Laurels and Honours always justly due to the Valour of those who venture their Lives for the Country [are undeniable].'¹⁴²



This chapter has argued that both commissioned and warrant officers claimed to be gentlemen. In doing so, they tested and stretched the boundaries of gentility. The demands of their profession, their social backgrounds, and their frequently poor educational experiences provided a weak foundation for their claims. At the same time, their association with ancient conceptions of honour, military valour, and service to the state gave them opportunities to rise higher on the social spectrum than any other group of non-landed men. Those that did joined the emerging service elite and provided highly visible examples of genteel values and behaviours. The shaky foundations of their status meant that they were prone to jealousies and squabbles that, to modern eyes, seem petty. When placed in the context of their contested status, though, their behaviour is easier to explain.

¹⁴¹ P.J. Jupp, 'The Landed Elite and Political Authority in Britain, ca. 1760–1850', *Journal of British Studies* 29 (1990), pp. 53–79; P. Harling and P. Mandler, 'From "Fiscal-Military" State to Laissez-faire State, 1760–1850', *Journal of British Studies* 32 (1993), pp. 44–70.

¹⁴² Matikkala, *Orders of Knighthood*, p. 54.

To return to *Persuasion*, Sir Walter complains that the Navy can bring ‘persons of obscure birth into undue distinction’.¹⁴³ Wentworth would undoubtedly have argued that by spending years learning highly technical skills far away from his family and loved ones, and risking his life to defend his country, he deserved not only his rank and his fortune but also the approval and gratitude of Sir Walter.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, p. 156.

CONCLUSION

Naval officers led hard lives. Commissioned officers left their families as boys in the hopes of finding adventure, only to be confronted with the reality of the midshipmen's berth. Warrant officers' cabins were less dank, but a far cry from the comforts of a vicarage. The sea and the wind were a daily threat, and they had to learn the rhythms of shipboard life quickly. Newly-commissioned lieutenants strapped swords around their waists and blue coats over their shoulders. They were now gentlemen. Whether they wore this rank easily depended on both family background and behaviour. A few lieutenants were sons of aristocrats; some were sons of the landed gentry. But the majority, nearly three in four, were sons of the middling sort. Warrant officers shared similar backgrounds. Seated around the mess table, with servants behind them, wardroom officers were undoubtedly gentlemen officers whose authority stemmed from their professional expertise as well as their social superiority relative to the crew. Ashore, away from the naval world, their social status was less clear. Relatively poorly educated and possessing a range of seamanship and navigation skills unknown to civilian landmen, wardroom officers tested Georgian Britain's social boundaries.

Above the wardroom, the Captain in his Great Cabin had fewer questions about his social standing. His family background was not noticeably different from his subordinates', but his compensation and authority were substantially greater. He had reached his position through a combination of patronage, merit, and good timing. If his luck continued, he could earn enough from prizes to purchase a country house. If he were also talented and hard-working, he might earn a medal, a knighthood, or even a peerage. He was still an outsider to the world of the traditional landed elite. The stereotypical officer had a weather-beaten face, spoke directly, and lacked the refinement of a classical education. There are certainly examples of officers who undermined this stereotype, but most elite naval officers came into conflict with at least a few of the social and economic norms of the top of the social pyramid.

The two kinds of naval officers identified by this thesis both challenged contemporary notions of gentility. But historians of the professions and of social status need to understand that they did so in very different ways.

In revising and expanding on the work of Michael Lewis, this thesis has provided a better picture of the members of the Navy's wardrooms during the Great Wars with France. It has also aimed to make three central contributions to the fields of British social and naval history. First, it has emphasized the continuing significance and evolution of social status boundaries in Georgian Britain. Historians of the professions and of social status have hitherto misconstrued the chronology of the changing nature of gentility and misunderstood the relationship of naval officers to issues of gentility and professionalism. Second, the thesis has recalibrated our understanding of the nature and mechanisms of patronage networks. The systematic random sample of officers demonstrates the relative insignificance of social backgrounds in shaping officers' careers; in contrast with the existing assumptions in the literature, patrons used a much wider range of criteria when selecting clients. Finally, the thesis has questioned the traditional separation of naval history from social and cultural history. The Navy and naval officers were central to British life at the end of the eighteenth century and cannot be effectively analysed separately. The Navy was both socially unique and uniquely important to Britain during the crisis of the Wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.



There is more work to be done. In each chapter, there are areas that would benefit from either more research or alternative methodologies. The strength of the databases is the enormous quantity of source material drawn from electronic sources. As more and more records are digitized, it will be possible to fill in the gaps in nearly every officer's biography. Birth records will benefit most, and future research should be able to eliminate most doubts about

officers' ages and the extent to which they falsified their birth certificates. Better birth records have the added benefit of increasing our knowledge of officers' family relationships, which will strengthen the analysis presented in chapters three and four. The existence of commissioned officers' birth certificates—even when they were false—meant officers' career outlines could be easily determined. Warrant officers, lacking birth certificates, needed to be traced from ship to ship. Undertaking the same exercise with commissioned officers would be enormously time-consuming, but it would answer a number of outstanding questions about officers' employment prospects and patterns. Another topic that would benefit from more data is prize money. Even though there are enormous quantities of archival records relating to prize money during the Great Wars, naval historians have not been willing to put in the time and energy necessary to process it. Chapter four relied heavily on the two exceptions to that observation, but neither work has done more than scratch the surface. Finally, the domestic comparisons in chapter five traced warrant officers after they left the Navy, but it was difficult to find information about many of them. As more nineteenth-century records are digitized, it may become possible to gather more information about officers who left the Navy.

The thesis has also identified at least three viable future projects related to its arguments that do not require a brute-force approach to data collection and analysis. First, the international comparisons in chapter five should be expanded. Studying European naval officers provides the easiest and most direct path forward, but there are also opportunities to expand the comparisons to explore the social standing and backgrounds of other maritime professionals.¹ A second, smaller project is to catalogue and analyse the series of Admiralty reforms during the Napoleonic Wars that granted warrant officers uniforms and raised their pay. Roger Knight has identified these reforms as fertile ground for future study in his recent book,² and the analysis presented in this thesis suggests that there is much more to learn about

¹ See, for example, J.R. Bruijn, *Commanders of Dutch East India Ships in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2011).

² R.J.B. Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organisation of Victory, 1793–1815* (London, 2013).

how naval administrators understood the evolving roles, status, and significance of warrant and petty officers. Finally, a third project—furthering our understanding of patronage networks—requires alternative sources and methodologies. A randomized but in-depth analysis of how a range of officers of varying ranks interacted with their patrons would be a good start. It was nearly impossible, given the source material used for this project, to uncover, much less take a data-driven approach, to low-level networks. High-profile individuals have well-known and thoroughly studied patrons: Sir Peter Parker's relationship with Nelson and Collingwood is a good example. But what of the sixty-three per cent of officers who never made it past the rank of lieutenant? Did they lack patrons? Or were their patrons themselves unsuccessful or lacking influence? Unfortunately, the challenges posed by these questions mean that officers' patrons lurk in the background of this study, presumably highly influential but largely unknown.

The officers in the foreground of the study deserve further study, both because of their value to social historians and because of their prominence in the great conflict of the early modern period. Defending Britain from invasion and projecting British force abroad were the first two tasks in the eventual defeat of Napoleonic France. These men helped the Navy complete those tasks. But of course they did more than that. By 1815, 'Rule Britannia' was no longer an imperative, but rather a statement of reality.

APPENDIX

I randomized the pages of Bruno Pappalardo's index to lieutenants' passing certificate to select the commissioned officers. I used the random function in Microsoft Excel, namely '=randbetween(1,564)'. This function generated random pages; I turned to each page in the order generated by the function and selected officers on the page who passed for lieutenant between 1775 and 1805, inclusive. See footnote 49 in the introduction for a list of the pages. I stopped sampling when I reached 556 officers, which, as described in the introduction, is roughly ten per cent of the total officers who served during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. It is not possible to provide a margin of error or confidence level for questions in which the sample is not normally distributed, but for those that are, I can claim a margin of error of four per cent at ninety-five per cent confidence. Those calculations indicate that for results that are not normally distributed, my claims can still be treated with confidence.

For the warrant officers' database, I repeated the randomizing and sampling process described above; however, since there is no index to warrant officers, I used seniority lists instead. The time parameters of the commissioned officers' database were clear; the warrant officers' seniority lists were less easily demarcated. To be consistent, I chose seniority lists of officers whose careers substantially included the Great Wars. For masters, I randomized the line numbers of officers who appeared in ADM 118/190. To increase the size, reliability, and coverage of my sample, I then took a second sample of ADM 6/132. For surgeons, I used ADM 104/172, and for pursers, I used ADM 118/192. For chaplains, I used the list of chaplains provided by Taylor in *The Sea Chaplains*. The warrant officer databases are, as noted in chapter two, smaller than the commissioned officers' database (their sizes can be found in chapter two), and their results should be treated with more caution. A list of all the officers in the databases follows on the next page.

Surname	First Names	Type
Allen	George Bennet	Commissioned
Allen	Henry Robert	Commissioned
Allen	James	Commissioned
Allen	John	Commissioned
Allen	Robert William	Commissioned
Amsinck	William	Commissioned
Anderson	Charles	Commissioned
Anderson	David	Commissioned
Anderson	Henry	Commissioned
Anderson	Hugh	Commissioned
Anderson	James	Commissioned
Anderson	John	Commissioned
Anderson	John	Commissioned
Anderson	John	Commissioned
Ashington	John	Commissioned
Ashley	Benjamin	Commissioned
Baikie	Hugh	Commissioned
Bail(e)y	Edward Seymour	Commissioned
Bailey	John	Commissioned
Bailey	John William	Commissioned
Bain	Henderson	Commissioned
Bainbridge	William	Commissioned
Baird	James	Commissioned
Baley	Robert	Commissioned
Baley	Robert Ashley	Commissioned
Balfour	Robert	Commissioned
Balfour	William	Commissioned
Ball	Henry	Commissioned
Ball	Nathan Jeremiah	Commissioned
Ballantyne	John	Commissioned
Ballard	Volant Vashon	Commissioned
Beal(e)	Jeremiah	Commissioned
Belchier	Nathaniel	Commissioned
Belden or Beldon	Nathaniel	Commissioned
Bell	Christopher	Commissioned
Bell	George	Commissioned
Bell	George	Commissioned
Bell	John	Commissioned
Bell	Joseph	Commissioned
Bell	Michael	Commissioned
Bell	Nicholas	Commissioned
Bell	Richard	Commissioned
Bell	Robert Benn	Commissioned
Bell	William Augustus	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Blake	William	Commissioned
Boileau	Lestock Francis	Commissioned
Bolton	Sir William	Commissioned
Bolton	William	Commissioned
Bond	Dyer	Commissioned
Bond	Francis Godolphin	Commissioned
Bond	Thomas	Commissioned
Boulton	John	Commissioned
Bover	Peter Turner	Commissioned
Bowden	Richard Booth	Commissioned
Bowden	William	Commissioned
Bowdick	James Brown	Commissioned
Bowen	Abraham	Commissioned
Bowen	Charles	Commissioned
Bowen	George	Commissioned
Bowen	James	Commissioned
Bowen	James	Commissioned
Bowen	John	Commissioned
Bowen	Richard	Commissioned
Bowen	Thomas	Commissioned
Bowen	William Hawkwell	Commissioned
Bremer	James	Commissioned
Brisbane	John Douglas	Commissioned
Bullock	James	Commissioned
Burgess	Samuel	Commissioned
Burgess	William	Commissioned
Burgess	William	Commissioned
Burgh	William	Commissioned
Burke	Henry	Commissioned
Burke	Stephen	Commissioned
Burke	Walter	Commissioned
Burley	John	Commissioned
Burlton	Charles	Commissioned
Burlton	Sir George	Commissioned
Burman	Charles	Commissioned
Burn	David	Commissioned
Burn	John	Commissioned
Burn	John	Commissioned
Burn	John	Commissioned
Burn	John	Commissioned
Burn	Miles Braithwaite Parry	Commissioned
Bury	Richard Incledon	Commissioned
Bush	George	Commissioned
Carr	William	Commissioned
Cary	Charles John	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Clarke	George	Commissioned
Clements	John	Commissioned
Cole	Francis	Commissioned
Collins	John Bardon	Commissioned
Conn	John	Commissioned
Connell	Thomas	Commissioned
Crooke	James	Commissioned
Cropley	Thomas	Commissioned
Crosbe	Edward Hawke	Commissioned
Crosbe	George Vandeput	Commissioned
Crosbe	Robert Boyle	Commissioned
Crosbie	Robert	Commissioned
Cross	Lewis	Commissioned
Crosse	Edward	Commissioned
Crossman	Richard	Commissioned
Crouch	Edward Thomas	Commissioned
Crouch	Joseph	Commissioned
Crow	William	Commissioned
Crowe	William	Commissioned
Crown	Sir Robert	Commissioned
Croxall	Scott	Commissioned
Crymes	George	Commissioned
Cudd	William	Commissioned
Dacres	James Richard	Commissioned
Dacres	Richard	Commissioned
Dalby	Jacques	Commissioned
Dalby	Thomas	Commissioned
Dalby	William	Commissioned
Dale	John Law/urence	Commissioned
Dale	Leonard	Commissioned
Dalgleish	James	Commissioned
Dalling	George	Commissioned
Dalyell (Dabyell?)	Thomas	Commissioned
Elsmere	Hans Sloane	Commissioned
England	Thomas	Commissioned
Fairweather	John	Commissioned
Falcon	Gordon	Commissioned
Falconer	George	Commissioned
Falconer	Hugh	Commissioned
Falconer	John Richard	Commissioned
Falkland	Richard	Commissioned
Falkner	Samuel	Commissioned
Fane	Francis William	Commissioned
Fanshawe	Henry	Commissioned
Fanshawe	Robert	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Featherstone	William Damerel	Commissioned
Field	George	Commissioned
Field	John Connor	Commissioned
Field	William	Commissioned
Fielding	Charles	Commissioned
Fielding	Victor	Commissioned
Fife	John	Commissioned
Fife	Thomas	Commissioned
Figg	William	Commissioned
Finch	John	Commissioned
Finch	William	Commissioned
Ford	William	Commissioned
Garrett	William	Commissioned
Garrety	James Henry	Commissioned
Garrick	William	Commissioned
Garstin	Edward	Commissioned
Gart(h)shore (Stirling after 1806)	Alexander	Commissioned
Garth	Thomas	Commissioned
Gascoyne	John	Commissioned
Gatehouse	William	Commissioned
Gawen	Jeffery	Commissioned
Gibson	William	Commissioned
Giddy	Charles	Commissioned
Gideon	Henry	Commissioned
Giffard	John	Commissioned
Gifford	Harry Lippingcott	Commissioned
Gifford	James	Commissioned
Gilbert	George	Commissioned
Gilbert	Henry Garnett	Commissioned
Gilbert	Richard	Commissioned
Gilbert	Thomas	Commissioned
Gilchrist	Archibald	Commissioned
Gosselin	Corbet	Commissioned
Gosselin	Thomas Lemarch or Le Marchant	Commissioned
Gossett	Abraham	Commissioned
Gostling	Thomas	Commissioned
Gott	Thomas	Commissioned
Gould	Robert	Commissioned
Gould	Sir Davidge	Commissioned
Gourly	John	Commissioned
Gower	Augustus Leveson	Commissioned
Gower	Edward Leveson	Commissioned
Greensill	George	Commissioned
Griffith	John	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Griffiths	Anselm John	Commissioned
Griffiths	Joseph	Commissioned
Groat	Archibald	Commissioned
Guion	Daniel Oliver	Commissioned
Guion	Gardiner Henry	Commissioned
Guisse	Martin George	Commissioned
Gullett	Christopher	Commissioned
Gumm	Richard	Commissioned
Gummoe	John	Commissioned
Gunter	Robert	Commissioned
Gunthorp	Matthew	Commissioned
Guthrie	James	Commissioned
Guthrie	William	Commissioned
Harding	James	Commissioned
Harrison	Thomas	Commissioned
Harvey	Sir Eliab	Commissioned
Hawkins	Abel	Commissioned
Henderson	George	Commissioned
Henderson	James	Commissioned
Henderson	James	Commissioned
Henderson	James Scott	Commissioned
Henderson	Robert	Commissioned
Henderson	William	Commissioned
Hendrie	John	Commissioned
Hervey	William	Commissioned
Heslop (Hislop)	John	Commissioned
Hessey	George	Commissioned
Heywood	Edmund	Commissioned
Heywood	Peter	Commissioned
Hiatt	John	Commissioned
Hibbs	Robert	Commissioned
Hibbs	Robert John	Commissioned
Hibbs	William	Commissioned
Hichens	Thomas Cuthbert	Commissioned
Hickey	Frederick	Commissioned
Hickman	John Col(l/e)man	Commissioned
Hickman	Stephen William	Commissioned
Hicks	Thomas Bickerton Ashton	Commissioned
Hicks	William	Commissioned
Hicks	William	Commissioned
Hill	Thomas	Commissioned
Hill	William	Commissioned
Hill	William	Commissioned
Hillard	William	Commissioned
Hillier	Curry William	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Hillier	George Renner	Commissioned
Hillier	Robert Curry	Commissioned
Hills	Alexander	Commissioned
Hills	Archibald Beer	Commissioned
Hills	George	Commissioned
Hills	John	Commissioned
Hills	Thomas	Commissioned
Hills	William	Commissioned
Hillyar	James	Commissioned
Hillyar	William	Commissioned
Hilton	George	Commissioned
Hilton	Stephen	Commissioned
Hinde	Venables	Commissioned
Hindmarsh	John	Commissioned
Hinton	John	Commissioned
Hinton	Martin	Commissioned
Hinton	Thomas Eyre(s)	Commissioned
Hird	William	Commissioned
Hire	George	Commissioned
Hire	George Augustus	Commissioned
Hiscutt	Silas	Commissioned
Hitchcock	Thomas	Commissioned
Hitchins	Joseph Benjamin	Commissioned
Hoad	George	Commissioned
Hoar	Balch Nun	Commissioned
Hoar (Bertie)	Thomas	Commissioned
Houlton	Robert	Commissioned
Houston	John	Commissioned
How	Henry	Commissioned
Howard	Richard	Commissioned
Howard	Thomas	Commissioned
Howard	Thomas	Commissioned
Howcroft	Adam	Commissioned
Howden	John	Commissioned
Howdon (Howden)	Robert	Commissioned
Hughes	Provo Featherstone	Commissioned
Hughes	Richard	Commissioned
Hughes	Robert	Commissioned
Hughes	Robert	Commissioned
Hughes	Robert	Commissioned
Hughes	Thomas	Commissioned
Hughes	Ulysses	Commissioned
Hughes	William	Commissioned
Hughes	William	Commissioned
Hughes	William Caesar	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Hughes	William James	Commissioned
Huish	George	Commissioned
Hulke	Benjamin	Commissioned
Hull	Isaac	Commissioned
Hullah	Thomas	Commissioned
Ilbert	William Roope	Commissioned
Impey	John	Commissioned
Imrie	John	Commissioned
Incedon	Robert	Commissioned
Infield	Caleb	Commissioned
Ingham	George	Commissioned
Inglefield	Samuel Hood	Commissioned
Inglis	Charles	Commissioned
Inglis	John	Commissioned
Inglis or Ingles	Charles	Commissioned
Ingram	Alexander	Commissioned
Leach	James	Commissioned
Leaver	Charles Tovey	Commissioned
Legge	Sir Arthur Kaye	Commissioned
Lessly	John	Commissioned
Lewis	Godfrey	Commissioned
Lewis	James Edward	Commissioned
Lewis	John	Commissioned
Lloyd	Robert	Commissioned
Lloyd	Thomas Henry	Commissioned
Lloyd	William	Commissioned
Lloyd	William	Commissioned
Lloyd	William	Commissioned
Loane	William	Commissioned
Lobb	William Grenfell (or Grenville or Granville)	Commissioned
Loch	Francis Erskine	Commissioned
Lochtie	Robert	Commissioned
Lochty	John	Commissioned
Lock	Charles	Commissioned
Lock	Charles	Commissioned
Maitland	Benjamin	Commissioned
Maitland	Henry Topham Harley	Commissioned
Maitland	Sir Frederick Lewis	Commissioned
Major	William	Commissioned
Malbon	Samuel	Commissioned
Malone	William	Commissioned
Manley	John Lampen	Commissioned
Mann	Elias	Commissioned
Mann	Samuel	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Manners	Charles	Commissioned
Manning	John	Commissioned
Mansel	Robert	Commissioned
Mansel (Philipps?)	Richard	Commissioned
Mansell	Edward Wogan	Commissioned
Mansell	William	Commissioned
Marsh	Henry	Commissioned
Marsh	John	Commissioned
Marsh	Josiah	Commissioned
Marsh	Stephen	Commissioned
Marshall	David	Commissioned
Marshall	Francis	Commissioned
Marshall	George	Commissioned
Marshall	Henry Masterman	Commissioned
Marshall	James	Commissioned
Marshall	John	Commissioned
Marshall	John	Commissioned
Marshall	John Houlton	Commissioned
Marshall	John Willoughby	Commissioned
Martin	Thomas	Commissioned
Maundrell	Richard	Commissioned
Meeke	William Ingram	Commissioned
Meik	James Lind	Commissioned
Meik	John Lind	Commissioned
Mein	James	Commissioned
Mekam	John	Commissioned
Melburn or Milburn	Thomas	Commissioned
Melhuish	John	Commissioned
Mends	Sir Robert	Commissioned
Mends	William Bowen	Commissioned
Menzies	Alexander	Commissioned
Menzies	Duncan	Commissioned
Menzies	James	Commissioned
Mercer	William	Commissioned
Miles	Thomas	Commissioned
Morey	George	Commissioned
Newton	John	Commissioned
Newton	Joseph	Commissioned
Newton	Thomas	Commissioned
Newton	Vincent	Commissioned
Nichol(l)s	Sir Henry	Commissioned
Nicholas	John	Commissioned
Nicholas	John	Commissioned
Nicholas	John Harris	Commissioned
Nicholas	John Toup	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Nicholas	Robert	Commissioned
Nicholson	William	Commissioned
Nicol	David	Commissioned
Nicolson or Nicholson	James	Commissioned
Nightingale	Henry	Commissioned
Ninis	George	Commissioned
Nisbett	Samuel	Commissioned
O'Callaghan	Edward	Commissioned
Orchard	Joel	Commissioned
Orde	Thomas	Commissioned
Orfeur	Abdiel	Commissioned
Orkney	John	Commissioned
Ormsby	Charles Cutts	Commissioned
Palmer	George	Commissioned
Ponsonby	Anthony	Commissioned
Ponsonby	John	Commissioned
Ponsonby	William or Milham?	Commissioned
Pook	Henry	Commissioned
Poole	Charles	Commissioned
Pope	Daniel	Commissioned
Pope	John	Commissioned
Ratsey	Robert	Commissioned
Ratsey	Robert	Commissioned
Ratsey	Thomas	Commissioned
Raven	William Thomas	Commissioned
Ravenscra/oft	George	Commissioned
Ravenshaw	George	Commissioned
Rawlance	Roger Randall	Commissioned
Rees	James	Commissioned
Reid	Charles Hope	Commissioned
Ryall	Maltis Lucullus	Commissioned
Schomberg	Alexander Wilmot	Commissioned
Schomberg	Isaac	Commissioned
Schomberg	Sir Charles Marsh	Commissioned
Schultz	George Augustus	Commissioned
Scobell	Edward	Commissioned
Scobell	George Treweeke	Commissioned
Scott	Alexander	Commissioned
Scott	David	Commissioned
Scott	Edward Forlow	Commissioned
Scott	Edward Hinton	Commissioned
Scott	Thomas	Commissioned
Scott	Walter	Commissioned
Scott	William	Commissioned
Scott	William	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Scott	William Isaac	Commissioned
Scriven	Timothy	Commissioned
Scroder	Christopher	Commissioned
Seager	John	Commissioned
Seymour	Richard	Commissioned
Seymour	Sir George Francis	Commissioned
Seymour	Sir Michael	Commissioned
Shackleton	Charles	Commissioned
Shairp	John	Commissioned
Shapcote	Edward	Commissioned
Sharp	Thomas	Commissioned
Sharp	William	Commissioned
Shaw	Charles	Commissioned
Shaw	George	Commissioned
Shaw	Harding	Commissioned
Shaw	James	Commissioned
Shaw	John	Commissioned
Shaw	William John	Commissioned
Shed	Robert	Commissioned
Smith	James	Commissioned
Smith	James	Commissioned
Smith	James	Commissioned
Smith	James	Commissioned
Smith	James	Commissioned
Smith	James	Commissioned
Smith	James Edward	Commissioned
Smith	James George	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith	John	Commissioned
Smith (Bradshaw)	William	Commissioned
Smith, Skene from 1830	John	Commissioned
Smithson	James	Commissioned
Spencer	Samuel	Commissioned
Taunton	John Joseph	Commissioned
Thompson	William	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Thruston or Thurston	Charles Thomas	Commissioned
Thwaites	Richard	Commissioned
Tickell	Richard Brinsley	Commissioned
Tidy	Thomas Holmes	Commissioned
Tildesley	Thomas or John?	Commissioned
Tillard	James	Commissioned
Tiller	William	Commissioned
Tillstone	Bartlett	Commissioned
Tilly	Charles	Commissioned
Tilson	George	Commissioned
Timins	Charles Sheldon	Commissioned
Todd	Andrew	Commissioned
Trac(e)y	Francis McMahon	Commissioned
Tracey	John	Commissioned
Travers	John	Commissioned
Travers	Sir Eaton Stannard	Commissioned
Treacy	Joshua	Commissioned
Treacy	William	Commissioned
Tredwin	Hugh	Commissioned
Trounsell	William	Commissioned
Truppo	Peter	Commissioned
Truscott	Francis	Commissioned
Truscott	George	Commissioned
Truscott	William	Commissioned
Truss	William	Commissioned
Tucker	John	Commissioned
Tucker	Nicholas	Commissioned
Tucker	Robert	Commissioned
Tucker	Sir Edward	Commissioned
Tucker	Thomas Tudor	Commissioned
Tucker	William	Commissioned
Turner	John	Commissioned
Turner	John	Commissioned
Turner	Joseph	Commissioned
Turner	Robert	Commissioned
Turner	William	Commissioned
Turnivall	William	Commissioned
Turno(u)r	John	Commissioned
Turnour	Hon. Arthur	Commissioned
Turnour	Hon. Henry	Commissioned
Turquand	William James	Commissioned
Tuson	Augustine	Commissioned
Tuting	Frederick	Commissioned
Twisden	John	Commissioned
Upton	Clotworthy	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Vassall	Nathaniel	Commissioned
Vaughan	Charles	Commissioned
Vaughan	George	Commissioned
Vaughan	Henry	Commissioned
Vaughan	James	Commissioned
Vautier	Daniel (or David)	Commissioned
Veitch	James	Commissioned
Venour	William	Commissioned
Vernon	Francis Venables	Commissioned
Walker	Charles	Commissioned
Walker	Charles Montagu	Commissioned
Walker	George	Commissioned
Walker	Harry	Commissioned
Walker	James	Commissioned
Walker	James	Commissioned
Walker	James Luke	Commissioned
Walker	John	Commissioned
Walker	John	Commissioned
Walker	John	Commissioned
Walker	Thomas	Commissioned
Walker	William	Commissioned
Warde	Sir Charles	Commissioned
Warden	William	Commissioned
Warden	William	Commissioned
Wardrobe	Robert	Commissioned
Ware	Samuel	Commissioned
Warffe	George	Commissioned
Waring	Henry	Commissioned
Warner	Patrick	Commissioned
Warner	Samuel George	Commissioned
Warner	William	Commissioned
Warrand	Thomas	Commissioned
Welsh	James	Commissioned
Whitlock	William	Commissioned
Whiteway	Samuel Stewart	Commissioned
Whitewood	Thomas	Commissioned
Whitter	Hender (Header?)	Commissioned
Whorwood	William Henry	Commissioned
Whyte	Adam	Commissioned
Whyte	Edward	Commissioned
Wilkes	Thomas	Commissioned
Wright	John Wesley	Commissioned
Wright	Joseph	Commissioned
Wright	Mayson	Commissioned
Wright	Peter Watson	Commissioned

Surname	First Names	Type
Wright	Philip	Commissioned
Wright	Robert	Commissioned
Wright	Thomas	Commissioned
Wright	Thomas	Commissioned
Wright	William	Commissioned
Wright	William	Commissioned
Wright	William	Commissioned
Wright	William	Commissioned
Young	Edward Le Gay	Commissioned
Young	George	Commissioned
Young	George Forbes Freeman	Commissioned
Young	James	Commissioned
Young	James	Commissioned
Young	James	Commissioned
Young	John James	Commissioned
Young	John Spicer	Commissioned
Young	John Thomas or Taylor	Commissioned
Young	Mathew	Commissioned
Young	Richard	Commissioned
Allen	William	Chaplain
Asbridge	Jonathan	Chaplain
Bale	Joseph Challoner	Chaplain
Batwell	Daniel	Chaplain
Bedford	Francis	Chaplain
Bowen	John	Chaplain
Brice	Edward	Chaplain
Bruch	Cudworth	Chaplain
Buckham	William	Chaplain
Carter	John	Chaplain
Davies	Joseph	Chaplain
Davis	John	Chaplain
Dealtry	Francis W.	Chaplain
Duckworth	Henry	Chaplain
Eales	William	Chaplain
Edyvean	Robert	Chaplain
Ellis	William	Chaplain
Eyre	Anthony William	Chaplain
Forge	William	Chaplain
Forster	George J.	Chaplain
Gill	Joseph	Chaplain
Goodwin	Francis	Chaplain
Haggitt	D'Arcy	Chaplain
Hake	Abraham David	Chaplain
Hamilton	Andrew	Chaplain
Hancorne	Thomas	Chaplain

Surname	First Names	Type
Hatherill	Joseph	Chaplain
Hodson	William	Chaplain
Holmes	John	Chaplain
Hopes	James	Chaplain
Howe	James	Chaplain
Inglis	Charles	Chaplain
Jenney	Richard	Chaplain
Jones	John	Chaplain
Keate	William Burland	Chaplain
Keen	John Wroe	Chaplain
Kendall	Nicholas	Chaplain
Lawrence	Andrew	Chaplain
Lendrum	Joseph	Chaplain
Linton	Henry	Chaplain
Lovell	Trefusis	Chaplain
Mangles	George	Chaplain
Mason	Richard	Chaplain
Massingberd	Samuel	Chaplain
Montgomery	George	Chaplain
Myers	Timothy	Chaplain
Newnham	William	Chaplain
Pilkington	Joseph	Chaplain
Powell	Howell	Chaplain
Rosenhagin	Philip	Chaplain
Spranger	Robert	Chaplain
Thomas	Joseph Charles	Chaplain
Thomas	William	Chaplain
Warwick	Thomas	Chaplain
Williams	Eliezer	Chaplain
Wills	William	Chaplain
Woolfe	Benjamin	Chaplain
Wools	John	Chaplain
Adeane	William	Master
Arnott	William	Master
Atley	John	Master
Audley	Thomas	Master
Balfour	Thomas	Master
Bell	Henry	Master
Bell	Thomas	Master
Benyon	David	Master
Black	Alexander	Master
Blackburn	David	Master
Blyth	Samuel	Master
Briant	Lewis	Master
Briarly	Alexander	Master

Surname	First Names	Type
Brown	George	Master
Bryant	Stephen Atk?	Master
Burstall	Richard	Master
Buyers	John	Master
Carr	Alexander	Master
Carrow	Anthony	Master
Chamberlayne	Thomas R.	Master
Clarke	Samuel	Master
Cochrane	William	Master
Coppinger	William	Master
Cotterell	Charles	Master
Cumming	William	Master
Damon	John	Master
Davis	William Joseph	Master
Dessiou	Peter	Master
Devonshire	Samuel	Master
Doughty	Henry	Master
Downie	Murdo	Master
Evans	Alexander	Master
Fair	Robert	Master
Fenwick	John	Master
Forbes	George	Master
Furzer	William	Master
George	Peter	Master
Gill	Thomas	Master
Gray	James	Master
Griffiths	Thomas	Master
Hair	John	Master
Harrison	William	Master
Hawkes	William	Master
Hills	John	Master
Hunter	James	Master
Hutchins	Benjamin	Master
Jackson	John	Master
James	William	Master
Jenking	Hercules	Master
Jinking	Michael	Master
Killingbeck	Samuel	Master
Langdon	Michael Rose	Master
Leffingwell	Christopher	Master
Louthean	Robert	Master
Macleod	Hector	Master
Magee	James	Master
Main	William	Master
McKenzie	Alexander	Master

Surname	First Names	Type
McNiven	Donald or David	Master
McQuein or McQueen	William	Master
Milne	William	Master
Moore	Archibald	Master
Moore	Henry	Master
Moore	William	Master
Murphy	Duncan	Master
Nevin	James	Master
Nicholls	William	Master
Noble	John	Master
Ogle	George	Master
Oswald	John	Master
Parrot	John	Master
Pascoe	Edward Richard or Randall	Master
Pearcey	John	Master
Pearth	George	Master
Pike	John	Master
Popplewell	Thomas	Master
Potts	Thomas	Master
Priest	William	Master
Prior	Francis	Master
Purches	James	Master
Ramsay	John	Master
Richardson	James	Master
Ritchie	John	Master
Sissmore	Thomas Richard or Royal	Master
Smith	James	Master
Stead	Stephen	Master
Stevenson	William Bernard	Master
Stone	Patrick	Master
Swan	David	Master
Talbot	William	Master
Tapper	John	Master
Taylor	Thomas	Master
Thomas	Philip	Master
Thong	Henry	Master
Town	Hills	Master
Webb	Thomas	Master
Williamson	Nielson	Master
Wingham	George	Master
Alldridge	Thomas	Purser
Andrews	Charles Edward	Purser
Arthur	William	Purser
Askew	William	Purser
Atrill	William Jeremiah	Purser

Surname	First Names	Type
Baker	James	Purser
Bell	Edward	Purser
Best	Henry	Purser
Black	William Snell	Purser
Bond	John Henry	Purser
Booth	Richard	Purser
Brenton	John	Purser
Bromley	Richard	Purser
Brown	Alexander	Purser
Butt	Nathaniel Gear	Purser
Collins	John	Purser
Copland	John	Purser
Curry	Samuel	Purser
Dall	George	Purser
Douglas	Francis	Purser
Eales	Samuel	Purser
Edwards	George	Purser
Gibbon	John	Purser
Gibson	John	Purser
Grimes	Joseph	Purser
Grout	William Cheney	Purser
Guy	Richard Feltham	Purser
Hamlyn	William	Purser
Harries	George	Purser
Harris	William	Purser
Haycock	David	Purser
Haydon	Nathaniel	Purser
Henshelwood	William	Purser
Hicks	Edward	Purser
Higden	Josiah	Purser
Howard	John	Purser
Hughes	Peter	Purser
Hulbert	George Redmond	Purser
Humphreys	Joseph	Purser
Hutton	James	Purser
Jelly	Charles	Purser
Jenkins	George	Purser
Jennings	Thomas	Purser
Johns	James	Purser
Johnston	George	Purser
Lamey	John Payton	Purser
Larby	John	Purser
Le Neve	Augustus William Henry	Purser
Leake	John Martin	Purser
Lockhart	Alexander	Purser

Surname	First Names	Type
Luckombe	John	Purser
Major	Thomas	Purser
Mashiter	Richard	Purser
Maxwell	Charles	Purser
McHugo	Jonathan Burke	Purser
McLean	Lachlan	Purser
Mitchell	John	Purser
Mitchell	Thomas	Purser
Munro	Henry	Purser
Nicholson	Robert	Purser
Organ	Samuel	Purser
Owen	John	Purser
Padden	William Adam Hodgson	Purser
Pearson	Henry	Purser
Peers	Daniel Letsome	Purser
Postlethwaite	Roger	Purser
Pottinger	James	Purser
Ross	William Eales	Purser
Shea	John	Purser
Skeen	James	Purser
Smith	John	Purser
Speed	John	Purser
Stowe	William	Purser
Street	James	Purser
Sullivan	John	Purser
Surflen	John	Purser
Taylor	John	Purser
Thompson	William	Purser
Tireman	William	Purser
Toulmin	George Hopper	Purser
Walker	William	Purser
Watkins	Richard	Purser
Whichelo	Richard M. (or Lemon?)	Purser
White	Edward	Purser
Wild	William	Purser
Wilkinson	Joseph	Purser
Windsor	Henry George	Purser
Wright	John Clayton	Purser
Wright	William	Purser
Agnew	John	Surgeon
Alexander	Thomas	Surgeon
Bell	John	Surgeon
Britton	Simon Gage	Surgeon
Brown	George	Surgeon
Bunting	Charles	Surgeon

Surname	First Names	Type
Burnside	Robert	Surgeon
Carruthers	Robert	Surgeon
Coates	Edward	Surgeon
Cochrane	John	Surgeon
Cockburn	Mark	Surgeon
Connell	John	Surgeon
Crowe	Robert	Surgeon
Davidson	Simon	Surgeon
Davies	Daniel	Surgeon
Dickson	John	Surgeon
Dickson	Walter	Surgeon
Domville	James	Surgeon
Donnelly	Patrick	Surgeon
Douglas	Andrew	Surgeon
Downey	Thomas	Surgeon
Drew	John	Surgeon
Drummond	James Lawson	Surgeon
Eden	Stevenson	Surgeon
Edman	Charles	Surgeon
Feely	Charles Law	Surgeon
Finucane	Morgan	Surgeon
Frankland	John William	Surgeon
Gibbs	Richard	Surgeon
Girvan	Alexander	Surgeon
Greer	Robert	Surgeon
Guthrie	James	Surgeon
Hallett	John	Surgeon
Hanna	Thomas	Surgeon
Hasted	John Septimus	Surgeon
Henderson	David	Surgeon
Henderson	George	Surgeon
Henry	Peter	Surgeon
Hewetson	George	Surgeon
Hoffmann	Matthias	Surgeon
Hogg	James	Surgeon
Irvine	John	Surgeon
James	Edmund	Surgeon
Jeffcott	John	Surgeon
Jenkins	Richard	Surgeon
Johnston	Francis	Surgeon
Johnston	Robert	Surgeon
Kennedy	John	Surgeon
Kennedy	Joseph	Surgeon
Kerr	John	Surgeon
Keys	Thomas	Surgeon

Surname	First Names	Type
Knox	John	Surgeon
Lauder	John	Surgeon
Lewis	David	Surgeon
Lewis	Richard	Surgeon
Lowry	Philip	Surgeon
McHugh	John	Surgeon
Michod	John Peter Lewis	Surgeon
Milne	Garden	Surgeon
Mustard	William	Surgeon
O'Brien	Michael	Surgeon
Odell	Gregory	Surgeon
Parker	Thomas	Surgeon
Pitt	Samuel	Surgeon
Power	Pearce or Pierce	Surgeon
Prothero	John Edwards	Surgeon
Rutherford	James	Surgeon
Sibbald	George	Surgeon
Spilsbury	J.B. or Francis Brockell?	Surgeon
Sprowle or Sproule	Frederick Fitzwilliam	Surgeon
Swann	Robert Cawley	Surgeon
Tainsh	Robert	Surgeon
Taylor	James Nehemiah	Surgeon
Thomas	Thomas	Surgeon
Thynne	James	Surgeon
Tobin	Richard	Surgeon
Tunstall	James	Surgeon
Vance	George	Surgeon
Walker	Ebenezer	Surgeon
Wall	Arthur	Surgeon
Warden	William	Surgeon
Watson	Peter	Surgeon
Welsh	Robert	Surgeon
Williams	Thomas	Surgeon
Williamson	William	Surgeon

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