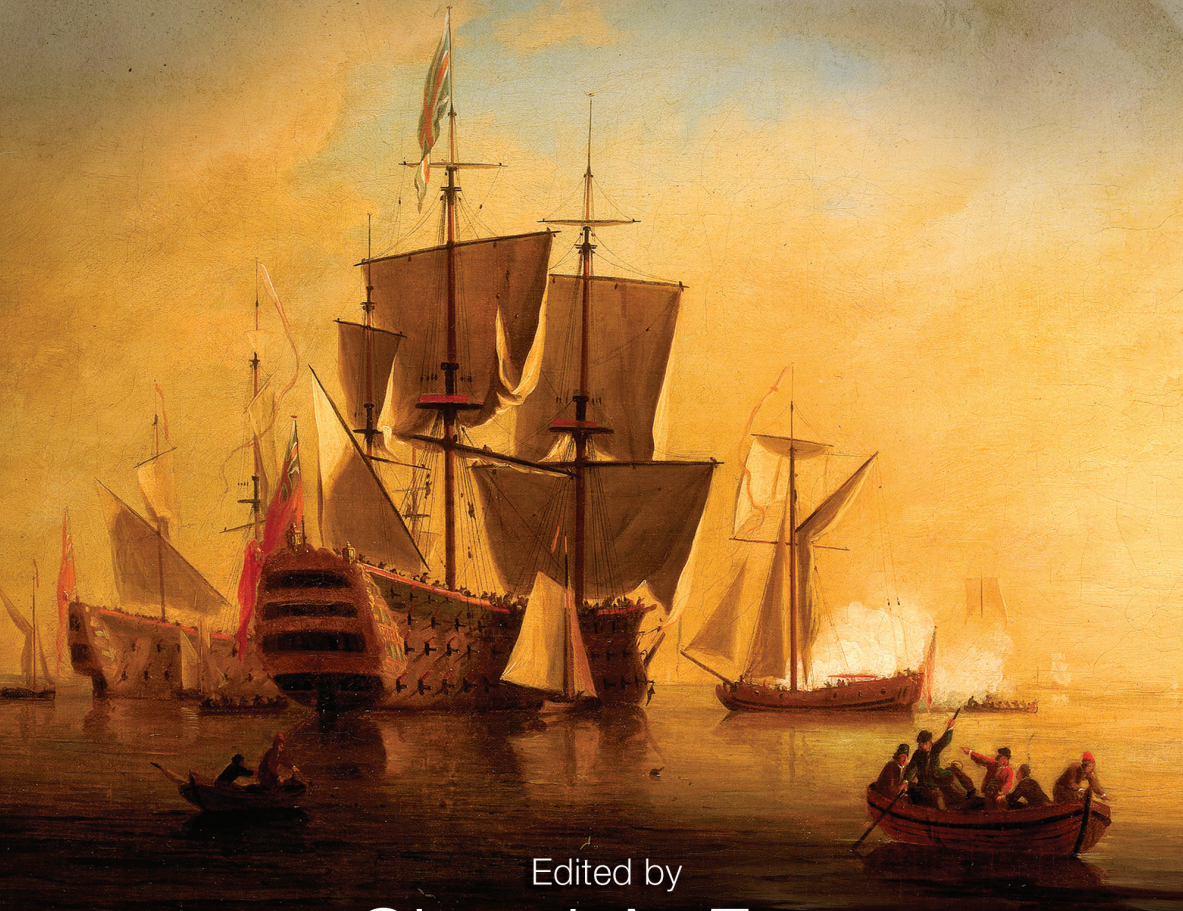# THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF
English Seamen

1650 - 1815

Edited by

Cheryl A. Fury

The Social History of
English Seamen, 1650–1815

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Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters;

They have seen the works of the Lord, And His wonders in the deep …

Psalm 107:23–24

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Contributors

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Jeremy Black is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. A past Council member of the Royal Historical Society, Black is a Senior Fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute. He was appointed to the Order of Membership of the British Empire for services to stamp design. He is or has been on a number of editorial boards including the *Journal of Military History*, the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, *Media History*, the *International History Review*, and *History Today*, and was editor of *Archives*. He is the author of over 100 books, especially on eighteenth-century British politics and international relations. Recent publications include *War and World 1450–2000* (Yale), *The British Seaborne Empire* (Yale), *Maps and History* (Yale), *George III* (Yale) and *European Warfare in a Global Context, 1660–1815* (Routledge).

B. R. Burg is the author of numerous books and articles on maritime topics. His research combines social history and various aspects of anthropology in the study of all-male sexuality within military organisations – pirates, ships' crews, cabin boys and the like. He is the author of several dozen articles, and his books include *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean* (New York: New York University Press, 1983); *An American Seafarer in the Age of Sail: The Erotic Diaries of Philip C. Van Buskirk, 1851–1870*

(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994) and *Gay Warriors: A Documentary History from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2002). His most recent book is *Boys at Sea: Sodomy, Indecency and Courts Martial in Nelson's Navy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). He is currently at work on a book dealing with homoeroticism in the United States Navy.

Bernard Capp is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Warwick, where he has taught since 1968. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and the author of six books: *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (Faber, 1972), *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500–1800* (Faber, 1979); *Cromwell's Navy* (Oxford University Press, 1989), *The World of John Taylor the Water-poet* (Oxford University Press, 1994), *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2003), and *England's Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation and its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649–1660* (Oxford University Press, 2012). His other publications include 'Naval Operations', in John Kenyon and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *The Civil Wars: A Military History of England, Scotland and Ireland 1638–1660* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

Peter Earle is Emeritus Reader in Economic History in the University of London. He took early retirement from the London School of Economics in 1990 and since then has concentrated on researching and writing books, mainly on maritime history. Books written since his retirement include *The Earles of Liverpool: A Georgian Merchant Dynasty* (Liverpool University Press, 2015); *Treasure Hunt: Shipwreck, Diving and the Quest for Treasure in an Age of Heroes* (Methuen, 2007); *The Pirate Wars* (Methuen, 2003); *Sailors: English Merchant Seamen, 1650–1775* (Methuen, 1998); *The Last Fight of the* Revenge (Collins & Brown, 1992).

Cheryl Fury holds degrees from the University of New Brunswick and McMaster University. She is a Professor of European History at the University of New Brunswick (Saint John). She has written a number of articles, reviews and books, including *Tides in the Affairs of Men* (2002), and edited both volumes of *The Social History of English Seamen*. As a Visiting Scholar for the Institute of Historical Research in London, she has been researching and publishing articles on the early voyages of the East India Company.

Margarette Lincoln is Visiting Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London and Curator Emeritus at the National Maritime Museum. Before taking up a museum career she was an academic and has published widely in eighteenth-century studies. Her books include *Representing the Navy: British Sea Power 1750–1815* (2002), *Naval Wives and Mistresses 1745–1815* (2007, 2nd edn 2011), and *British Pirates and Society 1680–1730* (2014). She is currently working on a history of eighteenth-century maritime London.

David McLean has been Professor of History at King's College London since 1999. His recent publications include *Education and Empire: Naval Tradition and England's Elite Schooling* (1999), *Public Health and Politics in the Age of Reform: Cholera, the State and the Royal Navy in Victorian Britain* (2006) and *Surgeons of the Fleet: The Royal Navy and its Medics from Trafalgar to Jutland* (2010).

N. A. M. Rodger, MA, DPhil, FBA, FRHistS, was formerly Professor of Naval History in the University of Exeter, and is now a Senior Research Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. He is working on the last of three volumes of a *Naval History of Britain*, of which *The Safeguard of the Sea* and *The Command of the Ocean* have already been published. Some of his many publications include *A Guide to the Naval Records in the National Archives* (ed. with R. Cock, 2006), *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain*, vol. II, *1649–1815* (2004), *Memoirs of a Seafaring Life: The Narrative of William Spavens* (ed., 2000), *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain*, vol. 1, *660–1649* (1997), *Naval Power in the Twentieth Century* (ed., 1996) and *British Naval Documents, 1204– 1960* (ed. jointly).

David J. Starkey is Professor of Maritime History at the University of Hull, UK. His research interests embrace various maritime themes, notably piracy, privateering and shipowning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and North Atlantic fisheries and maritime communities during the recent past. Among his many publications are *British Privateering Enterprise in the 18th Century* (Exeter UP, 1990), and co-edited works such as *Global Markets: The Internationalization of the Sea Transport Industries since 1850* (IMEHA, 1998), *Shipping Movements in the UK, 1871-1913* (Exeter UP, 1999), *England's Sea Fisheries* (Chatham, 2000), and *A History of the North Atlantic Fisheries* (Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum, 2 volumes, 2009 and 2012.

Abbreviations

ADM   Admiralty
APAC   Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, British Library
BL   British Library, London
BPP   British Parliamentary Papers
CSPC   *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series*
CSPD   *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series*
HCA   High Court of Admiralty
nf.   not foliated
NMM   National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London
OIOC   Oriental and India Office Collections
ON   The Ordinary of Newgate
RC   Royal Commission
TNA   The National Archives, Kew, London

Introduction

Cheryl Fury

A decade ago, I was asked to design an undergraduate course around my own research interests. The biggest challenge was finding a textbook which dealt with the social history of English seamen throughout the early modern period. I never did find anything suitable, opting instead for articles and excerpts from books written by renowned scholars in the field. Clearly, there was a need for a volume which made these writings more accessible and tracked seafarers' experiences over centuries. To fill this historiographical void, I asked some of the leading scholars from both sides of The Pond whose work had heavily influenced my own to summarise their findings. I hoped that, taken together, their contributions would offer a nuanced portrait of seafarers' existence, as well as providing us with some sense of what has been accomplished in the field and what remains to be done. Given the broad swath of time that constitutes the early modern period, we've produced a two-volume set: volume I, covering the Tudor and early Stuart period (1485–1649), was published in 2012. It is now time for its companion for the later era (1650–1815) to join it on bookshelves.

The prospect of editing such a project seemed rather daunting. However, I was pleasantly surprised that so many eminent scholars were willing to volunteer for this project, without any prospect of impressment. I provided them with general guidelines concerning the scope of their chapters and the contributors have chosen the content based on what they deemed most important to share with readers. Each scholar has made their reputation by either exploring the ignored aspects of maritime history, or providing fresh perspectives on oft-explored topics, or both. Throughout their academic careers, some have kept their research within the confines of the maritime world while others have published widely in early modern history. What they have in common is that each has made a major contribution to the social history of early modern seamen. I thank them for graciously giving their time, sharing their expertise, and bearing with this project to the end.

The opening chapter provides an overview of the period, charting the development of sea power and the most significant conflicts which affected the maritime community from the mid-seventeenth century to the early nineteenth. We cannot divorce maritime men from the politics of their day. Such an overview could only be entrusted to a senior scholar with a masterful view of a complex period. Few scholars can compete with Jeremy Black's knowledge and astounding productivity – over 100 publications and counting. Beyond Black's chapter, the volume is grouped into two main sections: chapters pertaining to the Royal Navy and those dealing with non-naval forms of maritime employment such as piracy, privateering and the merchant marine. The former features chapters by N. A. M. Rodger, Bernard Capp, Margarette Lincoln, B. R. Burg, and David McLean. The latter includes chapters by Peter Earle, J. D. Alsop, David Starkey, and John Appleby.

N. A. M. Rodger, Senior Research Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, is a giant in the field of maritime research. He has published many important studies such as his multi-volume *Naval History of Britain*. His examination of the Georgian navy, *The Wooden World* (1986), is undoubtedly one of the most influential works on the British maritime community. This 'classic' continues to serve as the 'go to' book for those interested in exploring the social history of the navy.

Bernard Capp, Professor of History at the University of Warwick, has published on an incredibly diverse array of topics in early modern English history. *Cromwell's Navy* (1989) is of greatest interest to maritime historians. Capp's in-depth analysis of the men of the revolutionary navy in the mid-seventeenth century and the central role of the fleet in that regime has been groundbreaking.

Margarette Lincoln, Curator Emeritus of the National Maritime Museum and Visiting Research Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London, has written and edited a number of works within the field of maritime history, such as *Representing the Navy: British Sea Power 1750–1815* (2002), and *British Pirates and Society 1680–1730* (2014). Her chapter in this volume focuses on the impact of war on naval seamen's wives and women, which she explored in much greater detail in her very valuable study, *Naval Wives and Mistresses, 1745–1815* (2007, 2nd edn 2011).

The works of B. R. Burg, Professor of History at Arizona State University, have been provocative additions to the historiography as homosexuality afloat generally warranted only a few mentions in academic publications – if that – until quite recently. Studies such as *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition* (1983) and *Boys at Sea: Sodomy, Indecency and Courts Martial in Nelson's Navy* (2007) have added much to our purview.

Professor David McLean of King's College London has penned a number of books on various topics relating to the navy and medical care. His *Public Health and Politics in the Age of Reform: Cholera, the State and the Royal Navy in Victorian Britain* (2006) and *Surgeons of the Fleet: The Royal Navy and its Medics from Trafalgar to Jutland* (2010) offer many insights into the challenges and improvements to naval health care.

Peter Earle, Emeritus Reader in Economic History at the University of London, has been spending his retirement authoring several books on maritime history. His contribution to this volume is an examination of the men of the merchant marine. This topic is explored at greater length in his important study, *Sailors: A Social and Economic History of the Lives of English Merchant Sailors in the 17th and 18th Centuries*.

John Appleby, Senior Lecturer in History at Liverpool Hope University, was also a contributor to volume I of *The Social History of English Seamen*. Here, he continues his examination of pirates and privateers, focusing on the so-called Golden Age of Piracy. As he has pointed out, piracy is a heavily gendered crime and he has explored it from different vantage points: *Under the Bloody Flag: Pirates of the Tudor Age* (2009) as well as the roles of females in *Women and English Piracy, 1540–1720: Partners and Victims of Crime* (2013).

J. D. Alsop, Professor Emeritus of McMaster University, also contributed to the previous volume. His prolific works cover a wide range of topics throughout the early modern period. In volume I, he discussed merchant seamen in the Guinea trade, based on his book with the late P. E. H. Hair, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea 1553–1565: The New Evidence of Their Wills*. Alsop's chapter in this volume is unusual in that he has submitted new research rather than a summary of previous findings. He has, however, published extensively on health and medical care at sea and knows well the importance of shipboard victuals. Here, he examines the relationship between food and masculinity. Without question, discussions of masculinity in history are very much in demand currently.

David Starkey, Professor at the University of Hull and Director of the Maritime Historical Studies Centre, is another prolific author and editor in the field of maritime history. Summing up his many published works, he describes his focus as 'research into the character and significance of the interaction of human societies and the marine environment'. His detailed chapter demonstrates his masterful knowledge of the composition of the English maritime community, replete with statistical analysis.

The assembled experts here all have helped shape various aspects of maritime social history and, in many cases, made contributions to several areas. However, these chapters represent only a sampling of their research. I recommend their vast body of work to those interested in the topic. There are also a number of other scholars who have made important contributions who have not been included here. During my recent sabbatical I was fortunate enough to attend conferences in England, Germany and the USA. I met many wonderful scholars at various stages of their careers producing exciting new research. There are some important projects underway which should find their way into print soon. For those who are intrigued by the early modern men and some women of the shipboard world, I can say that we're charting a reliable course in to the previously foggy world of Jack Tar. I'm confident his watery worldview is becoming clearer to us as scholarship continues.

Hopefully these two books will facilitate further study as well as university courses based on the English maritime community. We owe such a debt to the historians featured in these volumes for their scholarship. I know their research has been a springboard for the studies of English seamen currently underway as well as those still taking shape.

1

The Development of Sea Power, 1649–1815

Jeremy Black with Cheryl Fury

The era from 1650 to 1815 was an enormously important period in the development of sea power; maritime matters were intimately connected with Britain's imperial and commercial ambitions. It would be impossible to overstate the import of affairs at sea to the engine of state. Certainly the battles and endeavours at sea during this time are the stuff of legends – whether that was Nelson's victories or those of the most infamous names in pirate lore. Whether English, and later British, seamen were serving Britannia aboard naval ships or in more self-serving undertakings at sea, the growth in British sea power during this long eighteenth century is apparent.

Prior to this period, a number of changes allowed for European and, consequently, British, expansion. If we were to focus on military technology and operational considerations, we would acknowledge that the prime means of, and reason for, change was the rise in Europe in the sixteenth century of the large, specialised, sailing, cannon-armed warship, built and maintained just for war, rather than also acting as a peacetime trader. These ships, able to take part in sustained artillery duels at close range, were expensive to build, administer and maintain. As a consequence of this cost and the related need for political support and organisational sophistication, the number of potential maritime powers was restricted, and, by the late seventeenth century, the powerful naval state was no longer coterminous, as it had earlier been, with the commercial territory or port.

The growth of English naval power in both the sixteenth century and the early and mid-seventeenth had equipped England with an important navy and a tradition of maritime power that subsequently affected political assumptions and views about the necessary identity and desirable policies of Britain (the correct term after the Parliamentary Union of 1707 with Scotland) as a military power. Thus, Britain became the leading naval power in Europe, and thus the world, in the period 1690–1715, a position it was to sustain until the Second World War.

1660–90

While English naval seamen and privateers flexed their muscles in the reign of Elizabeth, the decline under her successor, James I, was obvious. Yet, they came to the fore once more under Oliver Cromwell: the nation showed its naval strength during the republican Interregnum (1649–60), and, more specifically, in the ability to contest naval mastery with the Dutch, the foremost naval power in the world, in the three Anglo-Dutch wars of 1652–4, 1665–7 and 1672–4. Yet, there had been a relative decline in English naval power in the 1660s when, thanks to French and Dutch shipbuilding, the English went from leading to third most important naval power.[1]

During the late 1690s, English naval power increased, not least relative to that of the other two leading naval states, France and the Dutch. There was a significant improvement in logistical support, while English naval capability also increased with a rapid and expensive programme of dockyard construction. The expansion of facilities at Portsmouth and Plymouth supplemented the Restoration concentration of naval facilities on the Medway and the Thames, at Chatham, Deptford and Woolwich.

The impact of improvements in English capability was accentuated by changed priorities affecting the French and Dutch navies. Furthermore, from 1694, the French, then at war with England, the Dutch, Austria and Spain, concentrated on the army, and at sea on privateering. These attacks could be very damaging. English trade was hit hard, which affected the economy and public finances, both helping to cause and exacerbating a major financial crisis in 1696. Privateering[2] did not pose a serious challenge to English naval power, certainly not one as grave as that posed by the French fleet in 1690. To put this in perspective, the German invasion threat in 1940 was weaker than that of France in 1692.

The shift in French priorities interacted with a rise in English naval power and confidence, but also created problems because it ensured that there was not generally a French battle-fleet at sea for the English to engage and defeat, and that in a political culture in which such victories were necessary in order to affirm power and maintain domestic support. As a result, although French weakness enabled the English to prepare for a projection of naval power, it proved difficult to follow up. Amphibious attacks were launched at St Malo and Brest in 1692 and 1694 respectively, but without success. Subsequently, a policy of bombarding French ports such as Calais (1696), St Malo (1693, 1695) and Dunkirk (1695) was found less costly. However, such bombardments had only a limited impact and

[1]   Sari R. Hornstein, *The Restoration Navy and English Foreign Trade, 1674–1688. Study in the Peacetime Use of Seapower* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991); Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations. Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500–1860* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), 192.
[2]   Privateering is the licensed seizure by private individuals of enemy merchantmen, which was not declared illegal until 1856.

did not distract the French from their campaigns in the Spanish Netherlands, the key area of activity on land. This point is a reminder of the peripheral (at worst) and indirect (at best) strategic impact of naval power.

Far more strategic benefit was gained from the dispatch of a large English fleet under Lord Admiral Edward Russell to the Mediterranean in 1694, which was followed by its wintering at Cadiz: Spain was then allied to Britain.[3] The interests of Austria, France and Spain in the western Mediterranean ensured that it was the cockpit of European diplomacy, and, in the half-century from 1694, it was to be a major sphere of British naval power, setting the pattern for public assumptions about this power. English warships had been to the area previously, especially under Blake in the 1650s, and, thereafter, to protect English trade from the Barbary pirates of North Africa, but, from 1694, such naval deployment was more closely linked to strategic confrontations with other European states, principally France but also Austria and Spain.

English naval forces ranged widely in the 1690s. In 1697, a small squadron was sent to the Caribbean, but disease claimed the commander, all the captains and half of the sailors. The effectiveness of English naval operations varied, but there was a common theme of gaining the initiative, mounting attacks, protecting English trade and attacking that of France. The range of English naval activity was maintained after peace was negotiated in 1697. A squadron was sent to Newfoundland to protect English trade. This new-found confidence led in 1700 to the dispatch of a joint Anglo-Dutch fleet to the Sound where it helped to enforce a settlement of Dano-Swedish differences that prevented Charles XII of Sweden from crushing Denmark.

Table 1.1. Size of navies: displacement in 1,000 metric tonnes

	1690	1695	1700	1710	1720	1730	1740	1745	1750	1755	1760
England	124	172	196	201	174	189	195	235	276	277	375
Netherlands	68	106	113	119	79	62	65	65	62	58	62
France	141	208	195	171	48	73	91	98	115	162	156
Spain	30	25	20	10	22	73	91	55	41	113	137

Source: Figures from Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500–1860* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993).

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[3]   Stephen F. Gradish, 'The Establishment of British Seapower in the Mediterranean, 1689–1713', *Canadian Journal of History*, 10:1 (1975), 1–16.

Table 1.2. Relative size of navy as percentage of total size of European navies

		1690	1695	1700	1705	1710	1715	1720
England, later Britain	25.1	25.6	25.8	25.9	26.4	29.2	28.3	
Netherlands		13.7	15.8	14.9	14.2	15.6	14.2	12.9
France		28.5	30.9	25.7	23.9	22.4	15.7	7.8

Source: Figures from Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500–1860* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993).

This period of naval superiority was not without its problems, not least those posed by the expectations raised by allies, Austria and Savoy-Piedmont, problems that were (and are) a frequent aspect of naval power and one under-played by the tendency in some of the literature to focus on battles rather than policy. Relations with allies were highlighted by differing commitments, with the English citing the need to retain naval superiority in the English Channel; and by keeping a fleet in Channel and in Atlantic waters, they were also able to keep an eye on the French in Brest, whose position threatened the Irish Sea and the Channel approaches.

If the 1700s revealed the difficulties of combining naval strategy and opera-tions with the exigencies of alliance politics, war also indicated the problems facing naval forces operating outside that context, but within that of a different but often more difficult alliance, that with the English army, a point that was relevant for the twentieth century.

Anglo-French alliance, 1716–31

Despite the problems it faced in translating output into outcome, Britain remained the strongest naval power, helped by French naval weakness and then by the Anglo-French alliance (1716–31). Furthermore, Spain was the seat of war during the War of the Spanish Succession and, although the Spanish navy was revived under Philip V (r. 1700–46), the crushing British victory over the Spanish fleet off Cape Passaro in 1718 demonstrated that Britain was the strongest naval power in the Mediterranean. In this victory, twenty British ships of the line and two frigates, under Admiral Sir George Byng, destroyed a poorly-deployed fleet of thirteen more lightly gunned of the line and eight frigates, and captured seven ships of the line, leading to euphoria about British naval capabilities.[4] The

[4]   John B. Hattendorf, 'Admiral Sir George Byng and the Cape Passaro Incident, 1718: A Case Study in the Use of the Royal Navy as a Deterrent', in *Journées franco-britanniques de la Marine, Guerres et Paix* (Vincennes: Service Historique de la Marine, 1987), 19–38; John D. Harbron, *Trafalgar and the Spanish Navy* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1988), 31.

Weekly Journal claimed that 'This single action renders the King of Great Britain as much master of the Mediterranean as he has always been acknowledged to be sovereign over the British seas.'

The extent to which Britain was the leading naval power of the period was demonstrated by her most intractable problem, the difficulty of defeating Peter the Great of Russia when his navy refused to fight, prefiguring the Russian naval strategy during the Crimean War of 1854–6. Such problems in the Baltic were a far cry from 1690–2 when France had challenged Britain effectively for control of the Channel. Even so, in the 1720s, the British were mistakenly confident that their navy would prevent the Russians from dominating the Baltic and attacking Britain's allies, Denmark and Sweden, as it was assumed that through the use of naval power Britain could solve her foreign policy difficulties. Twice during the reign of George I, the British ministry chose to intervene in distant quarrels by means of the navy: the dispatch of Byng to the Mediterranean in 1718 and the decision to use the navy as part of the 1719–21 diplomatic offensive to force Russia to return some of her conquests from Sweden as a part of the peace between the two powers. In both cases, the government miscalculated the impact of naval intervention, demonstrating a common flaw in navalist arguments.

In 1718, the government hoped that the threat of British action would persuade Spain not to attack Sicily, but Philip V, who, like Peter the Great, saw naval power as crucial to power projection and geopolitical interests, called Britain's bluff. Although Philip lost his fleet off Cape Passaro, this did not and could not lead to the reconquest of Sicily, a point made then and again, in similar circumstances, when Spain threatened and then successfully invaded Sicily during the War of the Polish Succession (1733–5). The British were able to do little in 1719 to aid the reconquest of Sicily by the Austrians and the war with Spain indeed led to financial and political problems in Britain. There are instructive comparisons with the operational strengths and strategic limitations of British naval power in the Mediterranean in 1941 when under attack from Italy and Germany.

The 1718–20 crisis in the Mediterranean also revealed what was to be underlined in 1733–5 and again in 1740–1, that, without a permanent squadron in that sea, British intervention would tend to be too late. In 1741, the British were unable to stop the dispatch of Spanish forces to Italy across the Mediterranean. Foreign policy commitments, especially treaty obligations, in southern Europe could only be effected by naval force, but the capabilities of naval preparation and warfare did not permit as rapid a mobilisation and deployment of naval forces as politicians envisaged, a problem that, despite a very different technological context, was to be echoed over the last century.

Britain lacked the well-positioned, well-supported naval base in the Mediterranean that its foreign policy required, although this policy also relied upon allied land forces to be effective. In contrast, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British had valuable bases in Malta (from 1800) and Alexandria (from 1882).

Naval action was seen as crucial to the fulfilment of the British diplomatic strategy, but naval opinion was contrary. In truth, the blusterers were the members of the ministry who had negotiated themselves into a false position and failed to devote sufficient attention to what the navy could achieve, a situation with modern parallels. In diplomatic circles, there was still considerable faith in naval power and, looking toward the nineteenth-century use of such power on the world scale, the politics of bombardment were regarded by several diplomats as perfectly possible.

Policing the seas was important to the British understanding of naval power. The large-scale pirate attacks in the Caribbean mounted in the 1670s, 1680s and 1690s, when cities had been attacked, had become far more small-scale by the 1710s, but piracy continued, not least because it was profitable.[5]

Moreover, naval capability remained the most important aspect of British military preparedness and projection. In 1726, when Britain was in a state of cold war with Austria, Russia and Spain, the navy was mobilised in a truly impressive display of strength. A high level of naval activity was maintained over succeeding years. Nevertheless, there was scepticism in Europe about the effectiveness of naval power.

As in the modern world, the very decision not to use the fleet for conflict kept its potential strength a mystery, and therefore enhanced its value as a diplomatic counter. This policy also meant, however, that unrealistic public estimations of naval capacity could be maintained. Had such a policy been attempted and failed, then public attitudes to naval strategy would have had to have been reconsidered. They were not, and this contrast in the domestic situation in Britain, the state with the most developed public politics, between popular attitudes – continued faith in naval power and in the Blue Water strategy of self-sustaining maritime power – and, on the other hand, ministerial scepticism and disinclination to accept the risks and cost of naval warfare, continued into the 1730s. This situation was to be repeated in the late nineteenth century until naval panics about the strength and plans of other states reduced the expectations of the British public.

Conflict with the Bourbons 1739–48

The international naval situation abruptly changed for Britain with the collapse of the Anglo-French alliance in 1731, because naval capability was dependent on political circumstances. The immediate response was war panic at the prospect of a French invasion by the Jacobites in support of the exiled Stuart dynasty.[6] The longer-term consequence was a realisation that naval superiority and strategic

5   I have benefited from discussing piracy with Guy Chet.
6   Jeremy Black and Armin Reese, 'Die Panik von 1731', in *Expansion und Gleichgewicht. Studien zur europäischen Mächtepolitik des ancien régime*, ed. Johannes Kunisch (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1986), 69–95.

security would require war with France, if, as seemed likely, there was no reconciliation. Lacking a substantial army, the British position was very precarious, as it would be necessary to keep the fleet in home waters to prevent invasion.[7] This situation put a premium on the destruction of the French navy, lending military point to the sense of humiliation and dissatisfaction that followed failures to achieve this end. The nature of naval operations in the Age of Sail was not, however, conducive to forcing an unwilling opponent to fight in a position of inferiority.

The continued existence of the French fleet had considerable, potentially crucial, strategic consequences at the time of the Jacobite invasion under Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) in 1745, first of Scotland and then of England. The Duke of Cumberland's pursuit of the retreating Jacobites was to be constrained by the fear of an invasion across the Channel.[8]

Nevertheless, the British were able to take for granted the use of the sea to move their troops up the east coast of Britain and back across the North Sea, thus avoiding many of the problems posed by an invasion when most of the British army was abroad, and also enabling British forces to operate or maintain a presence in two spheres at once. British naval power also blocked French invasion schemes.[9]

No crisis comparable to 1745 was ever to recur. During subsequent French invasion attempts on England in 1759, 1779 and 1805, there was no indigenous pro-French activity and, therefore, the strategic situation was very different.

During the War of the Austrian Succession (1743–8 for Britain), there was an obvious divergence between growing British naval superiority and the dismal progress of the Allied campaigns in the Low Countries. The hope developed that naval success could compensate for continental defeats. This expectation placed a new politico-strategic burden on the navy, for it was now required to obtain and ensure trans-oceanic advantages, an obligation that necessitated a mastery of home and European waters that would permit the trans-oceanic dispatch of major naval and army forces. In part, these ideas were of long standing, reflecting a traditional optimistic public assessment of naval capability, but the political need for them can be traced to 1745. It was then that the hopes of defeating France on the continent that had been so marked in 1742–3, especially after victory in the battle of Dettingen in 1743, were replaced by the realisation that it would be difficult to stop the French triumphing by land. This situation prefigured British policy against France in 1795–1802 and again in

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[7]   Anonymous, *A Letter from a By-Stander to a Member of Parliament: Wherein is Examined What Necessity there is for the Maintenance of a Large Regular Land Force in this Island* (London, 1742).

[8]   Newcastle to Cumberland, 12 Dec. 1745, RA. Cumberland Papers 8/9.

[9]   For differing views, H. W. Richmond, *The Navy in the War of 1739–1748*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), II, 154–89; F. J. McLynn, 'Sea Power and the Jacobite Rising of 1745', *Mariner's Mirror*, 67:2 (1981), 163–72.

1803–12, when the awareness of disasters in Europe was counteracted by hopes of the conquest of French colonies.

In 1745, the French lost Cape Breton Island and its major naval base of Louisbourg. The French also lost 4,000 sailors, a crucial limitation of their maritime strength.[10] British victory at sea transformed the invasion threats of 1744–5 and the danger of the loss of Cape Breton in 1746 into a completely different political, strategic and diplomatic situation. The angry debates over naval policy that had characterised the earlier years of the war ceased. The navy ended the war in a rich glow of success, at the same time as the disadvantages of alliance politics and a continental military commitment were abundantly brought home by the French advance into the United Provinces (Netherlands).

The British enjoyed naval success as well in privateering voyages; British seamen had a special fondness and aptitude for such undertakings. Privateering entailed a fusion of patriotism and profit: indeed, more than 6,600 prizes were taken by the British in 1702–83, nearly half by privateers.[11]

The prospect of privateering profits was important in mobilising support for imperial warfare within the British colonial mercantile community. Spanish colonial trade was hit from 1739. It was also necessary to protect British trade against Bourbon privateers: it was hit in the 1740s, both by the Spaniards and by the French. The agricultural staple trades of the Carolinas, the Chesapeake and, especially, the Caribbean sustained serious losses, and in 1747–8 Bourbon privateers off the Delaware capes brought Philadelphia's trade to a halt.[12] The contrast between the private enterprise that could produce so many privateers, and the state warfare that made such little difference to the disposition of Caribbean territories in the 1740s, was marked, but Britain was more successful than its rivals in using trade for warfare.

War in 1739–48 showed that the British navy was an effective fighting force and administrative body, and this effectiveness was true not only in European, but, also, in trans-oceanic waters. In the West Indies, British failures, as in the large-scale amphibious expedition against Cartagena in 1741, were not primarily due to administrative deficiencies, although victualling was a perennial problem. The difficulties of operating in the West Indies were not new: the main change that the war introduced was in the size of the naval forces deployed in the Caribbean, and thus in the quantity of supplies required. The Admiralty's failure to keep the fleet in the Caribbean adequately manned was a reflection of the degree to which it had not yet solved the problem of manning in general, although this manning situation was exacerbated by the effects of disease. The Sick and Hurt Board supplied all the medicines it was asked to, the Admiralty consented to the

[10]   Ruddock F. Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 69–88.
[11]   David John Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990).
[12]   Carl E. Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739–1748* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

building of a new hospital, and the sick were given the best treatment that the medical knowledge of the day allowed, even though the nature of the diseases was not understood. As a result, morbidity and mortality continued to plague seamen, especially those in foreign climes.

Although convoying was poorly organised, the men on the spot were usually able to make good the administrative deficiencies that were revealed. More generally, the improvement of naval bases in Jamaica and Antigua had provided an infrastructure for large amphibious operations as well as help in policing the seas. The facilities for refitting and repair provided by naval bases were important to sustaining naval strength, which was a difficult task, not least as a consequence of the natural decay of what were organic working parts.[13]

In 1749, as a result of long war service, including damaging operations in the Caribbean, the battle-fleet in good condition had been greatly reduced, and the dockyards could not cope with requirements for repair and replacement. This problem was overcome in the early 1750s, not least through using the private sector to build new ships. In the long term, improved infrastructure and better naval construction lessened the problems of cyclical decay.[14]

Over the long term one problem that continued to plague the navy was that there was no adequate permanent force of naval personnel. Naval efficiency was measured in the ability to create fighting teams for existing ships once mobilisation was ordered. The permanent navy consisted of ships and officers, with relatively few sailors. The formation of a reserve of seamen was proposed without result: the Register Act of 1696, which provided for a voluntary register of seamen, had proved unworkable and was repealed in 1710. Subsequent proposals for legislative action met resistance. Although the enlistment of volunteers was important, and in mid-century landsmen, nearly all of whom were volunteers, composed close to one-third of the navy's wartime strength, the navy continued to be dependent on impressments by the press gang. By law, this method applied only to professional seamen, but it was both abused and arbitrary. More seriously, the system was only partially successful.[15] On many occasions, naval preparations and operations were handicapped by a lack of sailors. Possibly, however, there was no better option, in the absence of any training structure for the navy, and given the difficulty of making recruitment attractive when the length of service was until the end of the war.

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[13] The longevity of most ships of the line was about twelve to seventeen years, longevity defined as the time between launch and the need for at least middling repair, although a complex combination of factors, beginning first with the cutting of the timber, its storage, the mode of construction, weather conditions, the service of the ship, and its care while in reserve, determined the longevity of a ship and the amount of repair that it was likely to need.

[14] Clive Wilkinson, *The British Navy and the State in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004).

[15] Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007).

Naval power and British policy 1749–55

The potential of British naval power after the War of the Austrian Succession was largely a matter of great-power diplomacy. The deterioration in Franco-Spanish relations that led to the Austro-Spanish Treaty of Aranjuez of 1752 was the single most important factor behind British naval success in the subsequent Seven Years' War (1756–63). Spain remained neutral until 1762. Thus, the arithmetic of naval confrontation that had in the previous war limited British flexibility was vitally altered, a change that helps to explain France's subsequent determination to win Spanish assistance in the War of American Independence.

The bulk of British diplomatic attention in 1749–53 was devoted to attempts to improve the so-called Old Alliance with Austria and the United Provinces and, in particular, to secure the Imperial succession for the son of Maria Theresa, the future Joseph II. Naval power was essentially immaterial to this diplomatic strategy. Nevertheless, the British government believed that the strength of the fleet influenced the continental powers, a view that was to be habitually taken by Britain as the leading naval power and is, of course, a continued refrain of navalists.

In practice, the powers of central and eastern Europe (Austria, Prussia and Russia) were less impressed by or interested in British naval power and, indeed, a failure to consider the views of other powers sufficiently has weakened modern discussion of British naval capability.

Naval power was clearly important in the Baltic and this had allowed Britain to play a major role in Baltic diplomacy. The limitations of British naval power as a diplomatic tool in the Baltic, however, had been exposed when Peter the Great had refused to back down in the face of threats of naval attack in 1720, and were to be again in 1791, and it is difficult to believe that Russia decided not to attack Sweden in 1747 because Britain would not supply a few warships. In the case of the Holy Roman Empire (Germany), which became the focus of diplomatic activity and speculation in 1750 after the ending of the Baltic crisis, British naval power was of little value. In its German diplomacy, Britain, indeed, relied not on offers or threats of naval power, but on financial inducements and talk of shared interests.

Although British ministers, nevertheless, remained convinced of the importance of naval power, they were frequently accused of failing to take adequate steps to counter Bourbon colonial and naval moves, and, indeed, both France and Spain greatly increased the size of their fleets after the War of the Austrian Succession, as they were also to do after the Seven Years' War. The Opposition used this changing situation as evidence of an alleged governmental failure to protect national interests, complementing criticism of an excessive concern for continental diplomacy. Whatever Opposition criticisms, the ministry in fact kept a close eye on French naval developments, and they were the prime target of

British espionage.[16] Prefiguring the situation in the 1790s, 1880s and 1930s, there was an awareness that British naval power might not be equal to all the demands that might be placed upon it.

The war at sea

Once at war, Britain needed to destroy her opponents' fleets, as both France and Spain were increasing their naval strength. Together, they launched warships with a total displacement of around 250,000 tonnes in 1746–55, while Britain launched only 90,000, losing its previous superiority over the combined Bourbon powers. Fortunately for Britain, Spain did not join the war until 1762 and, by then, France had been defeated at sea, losing about 50,000 tonnes of warships to British captures. Thanks to captures and shipbuilding, the British navy in 1760 had a displacement tonnage of about 375,000, at that point the largest in the world. Nevertheless, the potential strength of her opponents' united naval power, combined with the danger of invasion, made it necessary for the British to blockade the principal French bases, especially Brest. Fortunately, improvements in revictualling at sea and the development of watering facilities at Torbay made this possible.[17]

In 1758, the ability of the British navy to act both as an offensive operational force and as a restraint on French trade was fully demonstrated. Louisbourg fell to an amphibious expedition, and, by cutting the supplies of the French garrison of Emden, led to their withdrawal, which provided the British with a landing port in continental Europe. French commerce dried up by the end of 1758, while the rise of captures by the British navy was indicative of its superiority in most Western waters.

Individual French warships proved vulnerable to the increasingly insistent British naval pressure in European water, and the cumulative effect weakened the French. The large number of warships captured by Britain and incorporated into her navy played a major role in affecting the balance of naval strength. This incorporation aided the process by which the British changed the nature of their navy, copying the Bourbon large two-deckers. The new ships were better sailers and better fighters, both manoeuvrable and capable of holding their own in the punishing artillery duels of the line of battle engage-

[16] Duke of Bedford, Secretary of State for Southern Department, to Earl of Albemarle, envoy in Paris, 5 April 1750, London, Bedford Estate Office, vol. 23; Jeremy Black, 'British Intelligence and the Mid-Eighteenth Century Crisis', *Intelligence and National Security*, 2:2 (1987), 209–29.

[17] Richard Middleton, 'British Naval Strategy, 1755–1762: The Western Squadron', *Mariner's Mirror*, 75:4 (1989), 349–67; Michael Duffy, 'The Establishment of the Western Squadron as the Linchpin of British Naval Strategy', in *Parameters of British Naval Power 1650–1850*, ed. M. Duffy (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), 60–81.