

**Naval Hydrography,  
Charismatic Bureaucracy, and the British Military State, 1825-1855  
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This thesis is an investigation into the writing and record keeping practices of those in and around the Hydrographic Office of the Admiralty in the earlier-nineteenth century. It looks at the Hydrographic Office in the context of early-Victorian administrative growth and the print culture of the Royal Navy. In so doing it draws on media-theoretic approaches to paperwork and archives which insist on treating them as topics for investigation, and suggests that these can be used to examine fundamental issues of the establishment and effacement of self, and group, and profession, and public as created through a sophisticated bureaucratic system. Hydrographic surveyors were a group of naval officers whose role stressed record keeping in a peculiarly acute way, but this was underwritten by an intensive concern in this period about both record keeping and life writing. In particular the thesis focuses on bureaucratic practices at the Admiralty in London and on survey ships as they operated in regions of particular colonial, commercial or strategic importance. It goes on to examine how the work of hydrography was defined and promoted in a popular magazine, to explore a particular survey carried out on the St Lawrence River, and to describe the way in which the circulation of instruments was managed within a system that relied on personal relationships between those involved. In finally discussing an episode when the system of correspondence organised by the office was placed under the greatest strain, the thesis explores ideas of institutional memory and absolution.

In examining the relationships between administration, survey and persona, the thesis raises considerations relevant not only for a better understanding of hydrographic surveying but also for the history of earlier nineteenth century sciences more broadly. First, it stresses the importance of state-organised routine scientific activity in the nineteenth century. Particularly, the work emphasises the constant negotiation of role in a context in which scientific activity, alongside shipboard organisation, was strongly routinized, at the same time as gentlemanly improvisation was seen as absolutely necessary. Second, it gives a sense of the way in which scientific identities might be mobilised within, and be mobilised against the constraints of, already established professions. In so doing, it adds to a literature that has insisted on reworking notions of 'professional' in nineteenth-century science, particularly in demonstrating how much work needs to be done to explore the existing and developing routines of naval life. Finally, in insisting on the variety of conceptions of 'public' and 'private', it urges further reflection on contemporaries' deployment of these categories. As such, the work is a contribution to literature on paperwork, professionalism, and the early-Victorian state.