

BCMh New Researchers in Maritime History Conference 2018

Hosted by
ss Great Britain
Great Western Dockyard
Bristol
6-7 April

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Friday 6th April

Imogen Dickens, International Project Officer , ss Great Britain

Global Stories, The People of the ss Great Britain. A Public Engagement Project

The steamship Great Britain, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, is now a museum in Bristol. The ship was launched in 1843 and was the first iron-hulled propeller driven steamship to cross the Atlantic. During her working life she carried over 30,000 passengers to five different continents. Global Stories, The People of the SS Great Britain is a research database comprising of information about the passengers and crew who travelled on this ship. The newly transcribed passenger and crew lists are the backbone of the project. Each person who travelled has their own profile which can be updated with new research. Objects in archives from around the globe can be tagged to the appropriate person to enrich their profile. Each separate voyage from 1843-1970 have been mapped using co-ordinate points recorded in diaries and logs which were written on board. You can follow an individual person on their journey or look collectively at themes such as births and deaths at sea. The data is available for academic research as a complete dataset, but it is also disseminated to a wider group of people on site in an interactive creative way. This paper is an example of taking a wealth of information and through public engagement opening it up to a diverse audience.

18:30 Keynote lecture

Steam Strategy and Screw Propellers

Professor Andrew Lambert , Laughton Professor of Naval History in the Department of War Studies, King's College London

Professor Lambert's books include *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia 1853-1856*, *The Foundations of Naval History*, *Nelson, Britannia's God of War* and *Crusoe's Island*. His extensive list of published articles and book chapters include several on Isambard Kingdom Brunel and his influence on the Royal Navy's use of the screw propeller.

Saturday 7th March

Session One

Mark Barton (King's College London)

The Patriotic Fund at Lloyds 1803 to 1809 - Rewarding zeal or influencing the Navy?

This Fund, which still exists, was set up in 1803 to reward Naval and military officers for zeal in action and give pensions for those wounded or bereaved in the war. The Fund raised over £500,000 with over £100,000 of that being within the first three weeks. To set this in context, the private contribution to enable you to be a committee member was the same as the contribution to become a subscriber at Lloyds, both being £100. This can be compared with earlier battles that Funds had been created for whereby the fund to reward those who had participated in the battle of the Nile was £38,436. The gallantry awards they gave were swords or silver to a set value. Swords being up to £100 and the biggest award of silver was to Earl Nelson for Trafalgar and was to the value of £500.

This paper will look at the work undertaken by the Fund, how it started and why it undertook what was at the time a novel approach of awarding swords rather than just silver and was so careful to reward all levels of personnel involved rather than merely senior officers as previous commemorations had tended to.

Alison Baxter (Oxford Brookes University) –

A most useful class of men' - the life of a ship's engineer in 19th C

In 1873 a young man named Ernest Dupen embarked as 4th Engineer on the steamship 'Japan', newly built for the Suez Canal trade. Over the next three years Ernest kept a daily log of his voyages on the 'Japan', carrying cargoes of tea, rice, and human beings - Chinese workers on their way to the Australian gold fields and Muslim pilgrims travelling to Mecca. At the same time Ernest's older brother John was serving on the China station as an engineer on board the 'Ringdove', a naval gun vessel. Both men had received their training at home in Hayle on the north Cornish coast, a town that was for a time the site of the two biggest foundries in the world. An apprenticeship at one of the foundries was much sought after because once a boy understood the workings of a steam engine, he could take a job anywhere. Like the computer programmers of today, engineers were essential to manufacturing, transport, utilities, and more. In both the Royal Navy and the merchant marine their status was an awkward one; they were not ordinary seamen but neither were they of the officer class. It was accepted that their work was of vital importance, but they had to learn their skills elsewhere. This paper uses the lives of the two brothers to shed light on where the first ship's engineers came from, what kind of men they were, and the career path that was open to them.

Melanie Holihead (University of Oxford)

Enlightened self-interest, unintended consequence: strategic development and street-level impact of the Royal Navy allotment

Natural successor to early eighteenth-century remittances, the allotment system remained a feature of naval family life until 1982. Its introduction was an act of enlightened self-interest, for while creating the means for seagoing lower-deck men to support their dependants at

home, thereby reducing financial distress, the Royal Navy's prime motive was less altruistic: to stem the loss of mature, experienced seamen who were abandoning the service to pursue employment on shore. Nineteenth-century legislation reveals the caution with which the system was developed, for this was an innovation through which public money (sailors' wages) was placed by government offices into private hands (men's wives, mothers, and nominated others) - a development avoided for many decades more by that other armed service of the period, the British army. Regulation may have been politically and fiscally prudent from the Navy's point of view, but amid the benefits of the allotment system there were drawbacks for the women on the receiving-end, as mid-nineteenth century internal reports and Royal Commission witnesses confirmed. This paper, based upon recent doctoral research findings, explores the operation and impact of the allotment in the years before implementation of Continuous Service. It sets out how the system worked, the scale of its operation, and inherent limitations. Using individual cases as illustration, it also reveals how sailors (mis)used the rules to benefit unlikely recipients, how some enterprising women (mis)used the system to their own advantage, and how such exploits distorted public perception of the 'half-pay', and of sailors' women in general.

Session Two

Joe Davey (University of Portsmouth)

The Maritime/Urban Interface in a Port City Bristol 1850-1914

There is a widely held stereotypical impression that when sailors were let loose into port towns, they behaved in uncivilised and debauched ways, and were incapably drunk, licentious, ignorant and violent. This is a perception reinforced through early scholarship, the folklore of sailortown communities and through media representation of sailors.

This paper seeks to challenge this stereotypical image of the sailor. It seeks to contribute to the growing body of research that has progressively moved beyond the study of sailors at sea and towards the reality of their lives on shore. It will argue that in the case of Bristol in the post slavery and post sail era, the reality is different and that seafarers were not deserving of this negative perception. It will be argued that contrary to the common perception, largely resultant of historians artificially separating sailors from other working class communities ashore, seafarers, when contextualised in the wider working class of the city of Bristol, can be seen to be little different to other working people in their involvement in anti-social and illegal behaviours, their family and kinship relationships, their need of philanthropic and civic assistance and their leisure pursuits. In short it will be argued that Bristol's seamen can be seen not as a breed apart but an integrated presence in urban working class culture.

Leanna Brinkley (University of Southampton)

Elizabeth's Hidden Merchants: Coastal trading in Bristol, Hull and Southampton

The Elizabethan period has become synonymous with imagery of large and treacherous overseas voyages. The advent of widespread privateering and exploration during the latter sixteenth century has made names like Drake and Hawkins famous. Yet behind every large overseas voyage existed an army of smaller-scale mariners and merchants. While coastal trading attracted less risk and smaller rewards than overseas voyages, its role within the wider landscape was significant.

Without the tireless work of English coastal traders, domestic distribution of commodities would have been impossible. At a time when road travel was high-risk, coastal trading enabled the kingdom to function. A lack of insight into the lives and careers of this overlooked section of society has led to a skewed perspective of England's maritime economy and of the broader socio-economic make-up of Elizabethan society.

This paper will attempt to address this imbalance by investigating the means through which traders at home in England forged relationships with their peers, developed networks and continued their trade in spite of political and economic disruption.

Making use of the National Archives' extensive collection of national customs accounts and lay subsidy records, as well as local Parish records and wills, this paper will investigate the ways in which English coastal trading functioned during this period.

By combining traditional historical methodologies with new digital technologies and investigating the lives of people frequently overlooked in the long-established historiography, this paper offers a new perspective on English maritime history.

Nicholas Guoth (Australian National University)

Distance tamed: Negotiating information uncertainty in international maritime transactions during the mid to late nineteenth century.

International trade and communication up to and including the nineteenth century was carried out primarily through maritime means. Merchants involved in this trade relied on the methods available to transmit their information and requests. Those methods took time. That created uncertainty for the merchants in their decision making, an uncertainty that had to be overcome to allow for optimum sales and profit. Various processes were devised to compensate for the information delays. When deep sea telegraph lines were laid in the 1860s and 1870s, a significant portion of this uncertainty was removed. However, owing to the extreme cost of sending messages through telegraph, this advantage was not fully recognised in the early years of its use.

This paper advances the case of trade between Australia and China in the decades of the 1860s and 1870s. Numerous goods were exchanged directly between the two countries, yet mail and other packet information was being delivered via Galle, Ceylon. The delay in the receipt of that information created uncertainty in decision making. Those merchants involved in the trade of such commodities as tea, coal, sandalwood, sugar and other goods devised mechanisms to overcome these difficulties. This paper analyses how merchants in China and Australia prevailed during this period so as to attain the optimum result in their transactions.

Session Three:

Anna McKay (University of Leicester)

Food, Inglorious Food: The Diet and Discontent of Prisoners of War on board HMPS Brave, 1808-1815

Between 1775-1815, conflict played out across multiple territories as various nations were caught up in the American, French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. During this time, negotiations for exchanges, or cartels, broke down and tens of thousands of prisoners of war were held captive at depots, barracks and prison ships across the world. Across Britain and France, officers could live quite comfortably, stationed on parole in private houses. By contrast, men of lower rank endured harsher realities of overcrowding, insufficient rations and disease. With capacity reaching breaking point, the British government used captured warships as temporary holding spaces for prisoners. Damaged at sea, these vessels could hold up to five hundred men at any one time. One such warship was HMPS Brave. Captured at Trafalgar in 1805, the Brave was converted to a prison ship in 1808 and placed under the command of Captain Edward Hawkins at Plymouth. HMPS Brave and its neighbouring prison ships housed a melting pot of nationalities; men were French, Danish, Prussian, American, Spanish. Faced with mouldy bread and rotten beef supplied by corrupt contractors, prisoners came together to vent their frustration. They wrote letters, petitioned agents and formed committees that argued for better rations. With reference to National Maritime Museum collections, Admiralty reports and previously unseen material relating to HMPS Brave, this paper will investigate the everyday experiences and routines of the ordinary soldiers, sailors and conscripts held on board prison ships and the central role that food played in giving prisoners of war a voice.

Kelsey Power (King's College London)

Honour and Prisoners of War; Framing Narratives of Masculinity in Napoleonic Wars

Prisoners of War during the Napoleonic Wars were outside of the normal sphere of command and defined duty. Naval officers captured and held in France lived in a precarious social space that was neither wholly civilian, nor wholly military. As such, prisoners relied heavily on the social expectations placed on them by "honour". However, most military historians have failed to account for the complexity of honour off the field of battle, particularly in the case of the Navy, whose honour ethos was designed around life at sea, not extended incarceration on land. The presentation examines this contested space, showing how honour influenced the actions, values, and decisions of individuals during the crucial period of the escape attempt. Considerations of honour, career, and social prospects forced escaping prisoners to mold their means of escape to an acceptable narrative. The paper attempts to place the complexities of social class, gender, and military service during the Napoleonic Wars in context, and provide clues to how ideas of honour and transgression affected claims to legitimate leadership.

Sonia Grant (Independent)

African and Arab Merchant Seamen Interned in Germany during the Great War

Classified as British subjects, nearly 300 Arabs and men of African origin in Germany at the outbreak of war were rounded up from hulks impounded in Hamburg and transported to a makeshift internment camp, Ruhleben, a former racecourse outside Berlin.

Although a small number, this demographic has remained conspicuously absent in discourse on the Great War. In rectifying an omission the paper presents an overview of the ‘men of colour’, among whom the largest single contingent were merchant seamen, and focuses on how they persevered in a 5,000-strong enclave—“Little Britain”—a virtual outpost of Empire.

Primarily from Sierra Leone and Yemen, the seafarers were housed in segregated barracks and lacked opportunity—language or illiteracy barriers and discrimination or racism notwithstanding—to become fully integrated. There were, of course, exceptions.

Ironically, their departure aroused suspicion and resentment because they were among some of the first to be repatriated. Unbeknown to naysayers shipping companies such as Elder Dempster pressured the government for their early release, as manpower was urgently required; however, some unfortunates subsequently found themselves onboard vessels which were torpedoed.

Once the war was over, they were largely abandoned to destitution by their shipping companies; rendered stateless by the government; betrayed by the National Union of Seamen; and caught up in racially-motivated riots.

Obscured for a century, their collective stories, nonetheless, represent triumph over tragedy and the overall narrative rescues a marginalised group otherwise lost to history.

Session Four:

John Bolt (University of Portsmouth)

The Cinderella Service: the changing Navy and the Royal Marine experience, 1856 – 1924

This paper is a social and cultural examination of the precarious status of the Royal Marines within the Royal Navy during this period, and why as a military body the Marines were unable to properly influence the discourse about their own future functionality, and only narrowly avoided extinction. The objective of this paper is to show that despite a contemporary claim of over 350 years of service lineage, the Corps of Royal Marines have only recently become accepted as the nation’s experts and stewards of knowledge on amphibious warfare. This paper will show that amphibious warfare development in Britain was not a serious preoccupation of military thinkers and government ministers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As so-called “Soldiers of the Sea”, the role of the marine has been fraught with ambiguities. The historiography of the Royal Marines is largely informed by histories compiled by early Corps historians, focusing on campaign histories, with its social and cultural aspects largely overlooked by naval historians. This paper will argue that a crisis of identity and function intensified during the mid-nineteenth century,

increasing with a threatened redundancy of the Marines due to changes in technology and naval reforms. Finally, it will demonstrate that despite attributions of loyal service, the Royal Marines were still marginalised amongst their sister services of the Army and the Navy despite popularity in public opinion.

Matthew Heaslip (University of Exeter)

International naval cooperation in interwar East Asia

The interwar period has long been characterised by historians as a time of friction between the Royal, US, and Imperial Japanese navies, as naval supremacy slowly shifted from the long-term incumbent to its challengers. Stephen Roskill set the tone with the very subtitle of his 1968 account 'The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism'. Recent accounts have tempered discussion of rivalry between Britain and America, with Bell arguing that the jostling between the two represented power-play between friendly states, rather than any real or potential hostility. Much of that debate, however, has centred on interactions between the Admiralty and Department of the Navy. Likewise, discussion Japan's dealings with other navies in the period has been framed by later imperial expansionism. Research into how mainstream officers and service personnel dealt with each-other is much thinner. Braisted mentions cooperation between British and American warships off the Chinese coast, for example, as part of his examination of the Asiatic Fleet's interwar activities. This paper intends to bridge the water separating those two themes, of local and global interactions. To do so it will examine Britain's China Station, America's Asiatic Fleet, and the Imperial Japanese Navy, during their operations in East Asia. While the problems faced by the three powers were often identical, government policy frequently dictated different responses, providing fascinating case studies of how the navies dealt with contrasting priorities. Rather than discussing when and why the powers pursued similar or divergent top-level approaches, questions discussed by other historians, this paper will focus on how the navies actually related to each-other in practice.

Samantha Sudbury (University of Portsmouth)

The professionalisation of the Royal Navy between 1660 and 1688

James, Duke of York, the future King James II of England is famous for being deposed in the Glorious revolution in 1688. However, his administrative capabilities are often overshadowed by his Catholic beliefs and the turbulent political climate in England. This research brings into focus his tenure as Lord High Admiral and the administrative reforms he enacted to 'professionalise' the Royal Navy. He built upon the work of the Duke of Northumberland and created and distributed firm procedures and policies for all of the principal and lower officers. This attempted to reduce the negligence and abuses that had been rife in the navy up to this point. To achieve this he implemented control mechanisms, the reduction of sinecures and perquisites, stock control, audits and many other accounting procedures. Lesser forms of these 'policies' had been attempted to be implemented in the past, however, the distribution and dissemination of this is debatable. This research focuses upon the earlier sources including the quantity of extant versions and references to these sources and compares them to the multitude of copies available of the Duke of York's instructions. With these comparisons, we are able to demonstrate how far the Duke of York managed to 'professionalise' the Royal Navy via administration and accounting practises.