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Thesis title: *Their Allotted Place: social conditions, survival strategies and comparative respectability among naval wives in mid-nineteenth century Portsea Island*

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Abstract of Thesis

In exploring the social condition and survival strategies of wives and families of Royal Navy's lower-deck seamen, this thesis brings to light a subset of the nineteenth-century population whose welfare and circumstances were capable of affecting naval manning. Located primarily in naval port towns, these women were dependent upon ill-paid men whose seagoing occupation necessitated long absences and placed them in situations of risk. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a combination of low income, irregular pay, heightened chance of disability and breadwinner-absence had reduced many naval families to destitution, prompting family men to abandon naval service for better-paid work on shore. Anxious to stem the loss of experienced sailors, the Navy introduced a system by which families could be supported financially in their men's absence. Surviving records of this allotment system - known to, but little explored by historians - are used here to reconstruct a previously neglected naval community. Mid-nineteenth century allotment declarations have identified more than 1500 naval dependants living in Portsea Island (modern-day Portsmouth). From cross-referencing of census and parish records, civil registration data and maps, study of this cohort reveals naval women's geographical origins, family backgrounds, nuptiality, the timing and size of their families, their occupations, household structures and economic security, with context and proportion provided via local and national equivalents and selected comparator-groups. The emerging picture is of a near-tribal community of females whose roles as wife and mother, domestic stability and social standing were deeply affected by their connection to the Royal Navy.