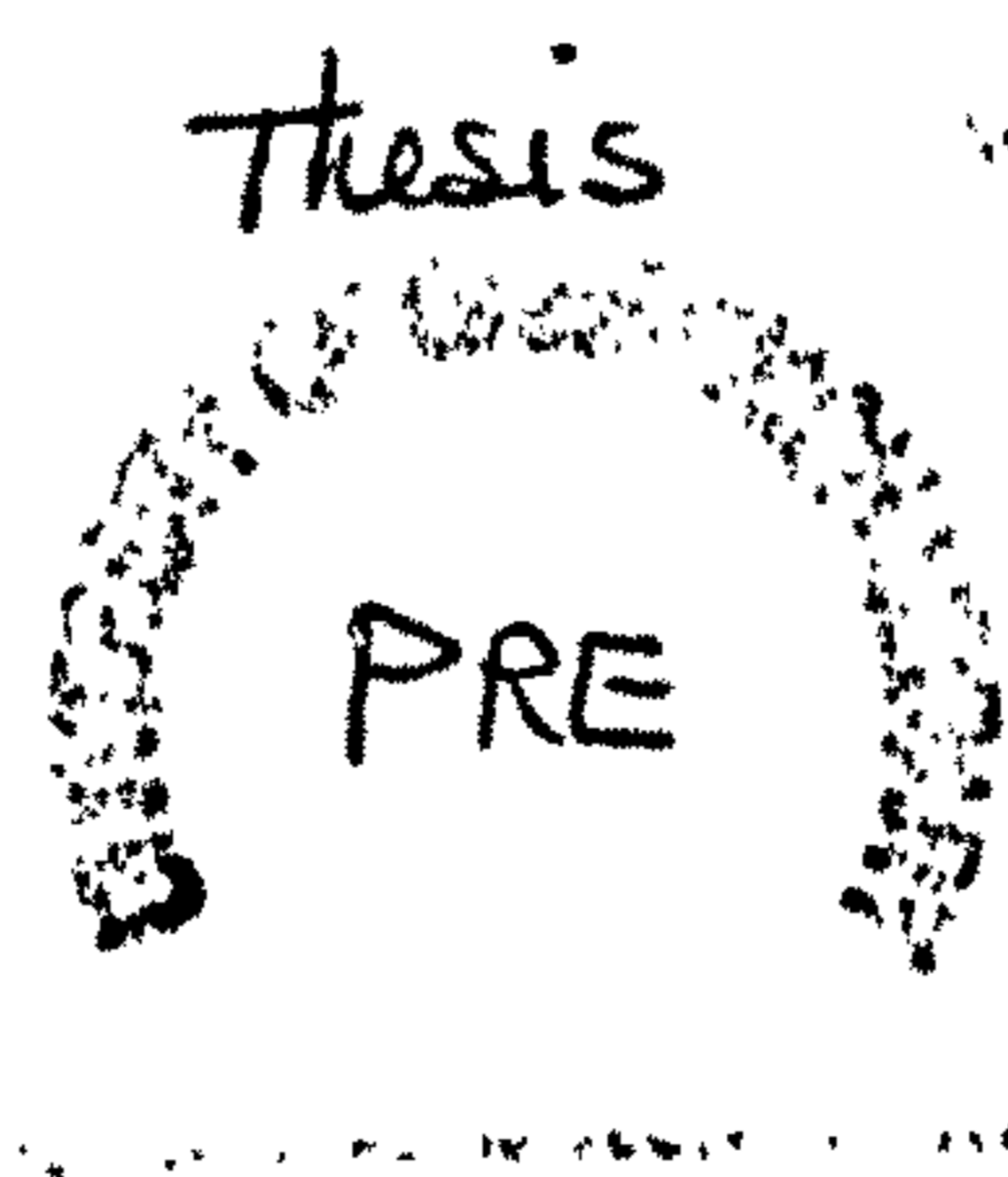


**Constructing Communities:
Living and Working in the Royal
Navy, c.1830-1860**

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**Submitted to the University of
Greenwich for the award of PhD**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the experiences of the sailors who worked in the Royal Navy from the 1830s to the early days of continuous service contracts. With the coming of peace, the Royal Navy had dropped rapidly in size, from nearly 950 ships in 1815 to 128 by 1821, and relied entirely on volunteers to man these ships. It nonetheless remained in operation all over the world as an instrument of British foreign policy, with ships on the west African coast in anti-slave trade patrols, on the China station, in Australasia and north America, and in home waters and the Mediterranean.

This period also saw the start of the change from sail to steam. By 1850 there were 71 steam ships and vessels in the Royal Navy compared to 106 sailing ships. This study considers the reasons sailors volunteered to serve with the Royal Navy, their training, promotion and career prospects, as well as their daily lives on board different types of ship at home and overseas, and how these changed during the period.

Continuous service contracts provided for centralised administration, which made manning ships quicker and meant that for the first time most adult sailors joined the Navy rather than a specific ship. However, many of those who served in the Royal Navy before 1853 already regarded it as their main employer and had long and successful careers within it, with some signing up for longer periods of service.

Recruitment was not a problem for the Navy in this period, and rating systems, pay, training and conditions were already being improved to provide incentives for long service and the development of skills. The new contracts recognised changes that had already taken place in the way sailors saw themselves and the Royal Navy.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Royal Navy, Britain and the World

'If there was any period in history when Britannia could have been said to have ruled the waves, then it was in the sixty or so years following the final defeat of Napoleon.'

Paul Kennedy¹

The Royal Navy after 1815 was a crucial instrument of British foreign, trade and defence policy. It was stationed all over the world, protecting trade, fighting the slave trade and enforcing policy where it was considered necessary. Paul Kennedy describes it as one side of the triangular frame supporting the Pax Britannica, the other two sides being the empire, formal and informal, and the industrial revolution. The French navy was Britain's closest rival, but France was unwilling to challenge British maritime superiority for some time. The United States Navy was only just starting to grow. Britain could temporarily rule the waves through its relative strength to everyone else's weakness.

It was a period of informal empire, when Britain exercised influence in areas such as Latin America without having to take on full imperial responsibilities. At the same time, however, formal empire was expanding, and places such as Singapore (in 1819), the Falkland Islands (1833) and Hong Kong (1841) were added as naval bases as well as trading centres.² The Royal Navy both protected the empire and helped define its

¹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 3rd ed, (London: Fontana, 1991), p.175.

² Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, p.182.

shape. Its first responsibility was the defence of the British Isles, but its second was always to preserve Britain's commercial interests overseas.³

Although this was a time when Britain was largely at peace, there were various crises involving the Navy. In 1827, together with France and Russia, the Royal Navy fought at the battle of Navarino, when the Turkish and Egyptian fleets were defeated.⁴ In 1840 Acre was bombarded to return Syria to Turkish rule from the Egyptians,⁵ and in 1840-42 a force including three battleships was fighting in China to re-establish British trade there, concluding in 1842 with the opening of six ports and the acquisition of Hong Kong.⁶ Lambert lists a total of 19 occasions between 1815 and 1853 when battlefleet units were deployed, and argues that any failures (such as the French occupation of Algiers in 1830) were due to politicians' lack of will, not to any weakness in the battlefleet.⁷ He assumed that one of the foundations that was necessary for such strength was 'a corps of skilled officers and men'.⁸

Throughout this period, whether there were particular crises or not, Royal Navy ships were operating all over the world on a variety of duties, such as patrolling the West coast of Africa against the slave trade. In January 1821, for example, ships were stationed in the Mediterranean, the East Indies, at the Cape of Good Hope, in South

³ Andrew Lambert, *The Last Sailing Battlefleet, Maintaining Naval Mastery 1815-50*, (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1991), p.3.

⁴ Andrew Lambert, 'The Shield of Empire', in J R Hill (ed.), *Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.166-7.

⁵ Lambert, 'Shield of Empire', pp.170-1.

⁶ Lambert, 'Shield of Empire', pp.180-1.

⁷ Lambert, *Last Sailing Battlefleet*, p.9.

⁸ Lambert, *Last Sailing Battlefleet*, p.10.

America, the Leeward Islands, Jamaica, North America, Newfoundland, the African coast, Cork, Plymouth, Portsmouth and the other home stations.⁹

The other two sides of Kennedy's triangle suggest the type of society and economy that these ships were supporting. Continental industrial development had been set back by the Napoleonic wars, whereas in Britain many industries such as copper and wool (for uniforms) benefited from the war.¹⁰ Although immediately after the war there were problems with slumps in agriculture, in war-related industries and with re-absorbing demobilised servicemen,¹¹ overall Britain's industrial strength was growing. Naval victories generated trade which stimulated industrial development, which in turn increased the economic potential available to the Navy. The adoption and promotion of free trade was a crucial element in this expansion.¹² Immediately after the war, customs duties remained the largest part of government income, but from the 1820s these were reduced. The reintroduction of income tax in 1842 allowed duties to be cut further, and after the bad harvests of the 1840s and famine in Ireland, even the Corn Laws were repealed.¹³

One of the major economic and social changes after 1815 was the shift of population and wealth from country to city. In 1815 agriculture was still the major employer in Britain, but the towns were rapidly increasing: Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester and Glasgow more than doubled their populations between 1800 and 1830. The

⁹ TNA: PRO: ADM 8/101.

¹⁰ Clive Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars 1793-1815*, (London: Macmillan, 1979). pp.31-2.

¹¹ Emsley, *British Society*, p.170.

¹² Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, p.177.

¹³ David Thomson, *England in the Nineteenth Century*, (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1977), pp.80-81.

development of the railways from the 1830s allowed the iron, coal and engineering industries to grow further. The cotton mills were powered by steam machinery, and imports of cotton rose from £82 million in 1815 to £1,000 million in 1860.¹⁴ The population was expanding, and so home markets were increasing as well as overseas; they tripled between 1800 and 1870.¹⁵ Consumer demand was, however, largely middle class, with the working classes spending almost all their money on rent and food.¹⁶ As Martin Daunton has shown, the south of England was depressed compared to the north in this period. In the north, because of the competition for labour, wage levels were much higher.¹⁷

The political context for this economic growth changed also. Jonathan Clark has argued that until the 1830s England was an 'ancien regime' state, and that it was religious dissent and Catholic emancipation that destroyed this Anglican aristocratic order and led to parliamentary reform.¹⁸ Despite the arguments put forward by reformers (of the period and those writing later), who sought greater representation and political involvement, he believes that it was not politically corrupt, but instead a society used to thinking of politics as a complex web of obligations, founded firmly on a Protestant monarchy. He argues that 1828-32 marked the choice of monarchy over Church (unlike the changes of 1688) and destroyed this hegemony.¹⁹ For those

¹⁴ Thomson, *England in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.12-13.

¹⁵ Richard Price, *British Society 1680-1880: Dynamism, Containment and Change*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp.32-33.

¹⁶ Price, *British Society*, p.34.

¹⁷ Martin Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, (Oxford: OUP 1995), p.435.

¹⁸ J C D Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), and revised edition (Cambridge: CUP 2000) reviewed by Marion Morris for H-Albion@h-net.msu.edu, December, 2000.

¹⁹ Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, (1985), pp.418-9.

who founded the Chartist movement in 1836, the 1832 reforms had not gone far enough.

Linda Colley considered instead that the long wars of the 18th and early 19th centuries had the effect of developing a distinctively British national and political identity which would survive into the twentieth century.²⁰ For the first time, the English, Scots and Welsh began to consider themselves one state, part of a beleaguered Protestant nation which would nonetheless prevail against the Catholic continental enemy. She points to the popularity of Protestant texts such as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* in generating this self-image, and of course the Royal Navy had a special place in this. Hundreds of thousands of prints and woodcuts of Devis's *Death of Nelson* were circulated and sold, and from the 1790s statues of naval and army heroes were placed in St Paul's, where Nelson is buried.²¹ The recognition of heroism, she argued, was however restricted to officers as the ruling classes, under threat, sought to stress their importance to society.²² One aspect of this was the number of serving military and naval officers who were also MPs (100 naval officers between 1790 and 1820).²³ This was demonstrated in the importance attached to military display at major public events, and Colley also notes that naval and military officers' uniforms had begun to influence elite dress, and this continued long after 1815. The establishment of public days of celebration (for example George III's 50th Jubilee in 1810) also acted as a unifying force on British society, stressing national

²⁰ Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1837*, (London: Pimlico, 1994) pp.367-8.

²¹ Colley, *Britons*, p.182.

²² Colley, *Britons*, pp.185-7.

²³ R G Thorne, *History of Parliament: The Commons 1780-1820, Vol. I: Survey* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), p.315. He notes that a naval background was an electoral asset, but that naval MPs were usually 'awkward politicians', p.317.

unity behind the king, and such celebrations continued throughout the century. J. M. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815*, argued that Colley and others had underestimated the differences between the parts of the United Kingdom, especially Scotland and Ireland, and the importance of local initiatives in the mobilisation against Napoleon. He stressed the expansion of local government and the new roles available to local leaders in driving the change towards parliamentary reform and increased representation.²⁴

The period after the end of the Napoleonic Wars experienced major social and political change, partly precipitated by the war. The 1832 Reform Act, Catholic Emancipation, industrial development and demographic change also all altered the British state and people. The Royal Navy had been essential to the success against Napoleon; this study will consider those who served in it after the end of the wars, why they joined and how they experienced their life as they enforced the 'Pax Britannica'.

The development of the Royal Navy 1815-50

In 1815 the RN had 214 ships of the line, about 100 of which were in commission.²⁵ With the end of the war it was immediately reduced in size, and by 1821 there were only 13 ships with 70 or more guns in active service. As this table shows, it remained at similar levels throughout this period.

²⁴ J M Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.3-4, 261-3.

²⁵ C J Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power, 1815-53* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p.22.

Table 1.1: Size of the Royal Navy 1821-50 (ships in commission)

	Total	1st-3rd rates (70+ guns)	4th-6th rates (24+ guns)	Small vessels (sail)	Steam vessels	Steam ships
1821	128	13	40	75	-	-
1830	178	17	39	119	3	-
1840	267	31	48	121	67	-
1850	177	20	25	61	38	33

Source: ADM 8/101, 1 January 1821; The Admiralty, *Navy List* for April 1830, December 1840, March 1850, (London: John Murray).

This table not only shows the size of the peacetime Navy, but also indicates the start of the change from sail to steam. The wooden sailing ship remained the main type of warship between 1815 and 1850, but by the end of this time steam frigates and sloops (shown as steam ships in the table) had appeared and sail-only construction had ended. Until the development of the screw propeller, however, (and the first ones were not demonstrated by Brunel until the early 1840s) steamships meant paddle steamers, which were difficult to arm. The Navy nonetheless took advantage of the new technology, using steam dredgers and steam tugs which allowed the fleet to leave harbour in adverse winds. Paddle steamers also served with the anti-slavery patrols, where 'it was the use of the paddle steamer which chiefly destroyed the ascendancy of the beautifully built clippers designed for use in this traffic'.²⁶

Greenhill and Gifford, following Andrew Lambert, argue that the Navy did not obstruct steam development, but was in fact very interested in its possibilities from

²⁶ Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, (London: Longman, 1949) p.xi.

the first.²⁷ In 1819 the first steamer was suggested as a towing vessel for Deptford, and by 1827 the first commissioned officers were commanding steam vessels *Lightning, Echo* and *Meteor*.²⁸ In 1835 a Chief Engineer was appointed and by 1847 the construction of new sail-only vessels had ended as the development of screw propeller technology allowed the Navy to build steam ships which could be fully armed and replace sailing ships. The first seagoing screw-driven steamship, HMS *Archimedes*, was launched in November 1838, and Brunel was appointed consulting engineering to the experimental screw-driven vessel *Rattler* in 1841.²⁹ The new technology naturally affected those serving on board, and the need for specialised ratings, such as stokers and gunners, began to change the Navy's attitude to training which took place away from a ship on active service. In 1830 HMS *Excellent* was set up to train gunners. Its graduates could expect extra pay and possible promotion to warrant gunner.³⁰ In 1837 regulations for Engineer Boys allowed apprenticeships to ensure the training of future engineers, and engineers themselves became warrant officers.³¹

The administration of the Navy also changed. In 1832 the Navy Board, which had been responsible for the day-to-day running of the ships, was abolished and absorbed into the Admiralty, which had always directed naval strategy. The Admiralty remained, however, a tiny central administration for such a complex organisation.

²⁷ Lambert, *Last Sailing Battlefleet*, p.95; Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard, *Steam, Politics and Patronage, The Transformation of the Royal Navy 1815-54*, (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1994) p.31.

²⁸ Greenhill and Giffard, p.37.

²⁹ Greenhill and Giffard, pp.139, 145.

³⁰ Greenhill and Giffard, p.79.

³¹ Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition 1814-64*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965) pp.199-200.

There was at this time no manning department. Naval expenses were under pressure after the end of the war, since it was expected that peace should significantly reduce costs. Income tax was abandoned at the end of the war and the naval estimates reduced to £6 million a year until 1830.³² Lambert has shown, however, that despite this the Navy managed to build a large sailing battlefleet, much of which was laid up in ordinary to be mobilised at short notice when necessary, and that most of these ships were ordered and built between 1815 and 1830.³³ By the time, after 1830, when further cuts were made, 'The reserve strength of the Royal Navy was so great that it could safely operate as a gunboat force in time of peace, but it had the ability to mobilise a battlefleet equal or superior to that of any potential rival'.³⁴ However, he does not examine where the sailors to man these ships were to come from.

Sailors of the Royal Navy

'...when I was young ... to go for a sailor was everything for a poor boy'

Royal Commission on Manning the Navy, 1859, evidence of James Carden, Boatswain, p.200.

As noted above, with the end of the Napoleonic wars, the Royal Navy by 1818 had shrunk in numbers of both ships and men, employing 19,000 sailors instead of the 145,000 needed in 1815. The numbers of men and ships did rise during the first half of the nineteenth century, in particular with the 1840s mobilisation over Mehemet Ali's actions against the Ottoman Empire, and the possibility of a clash with France. However, throughout the period of this study the Royal Navy relied on men

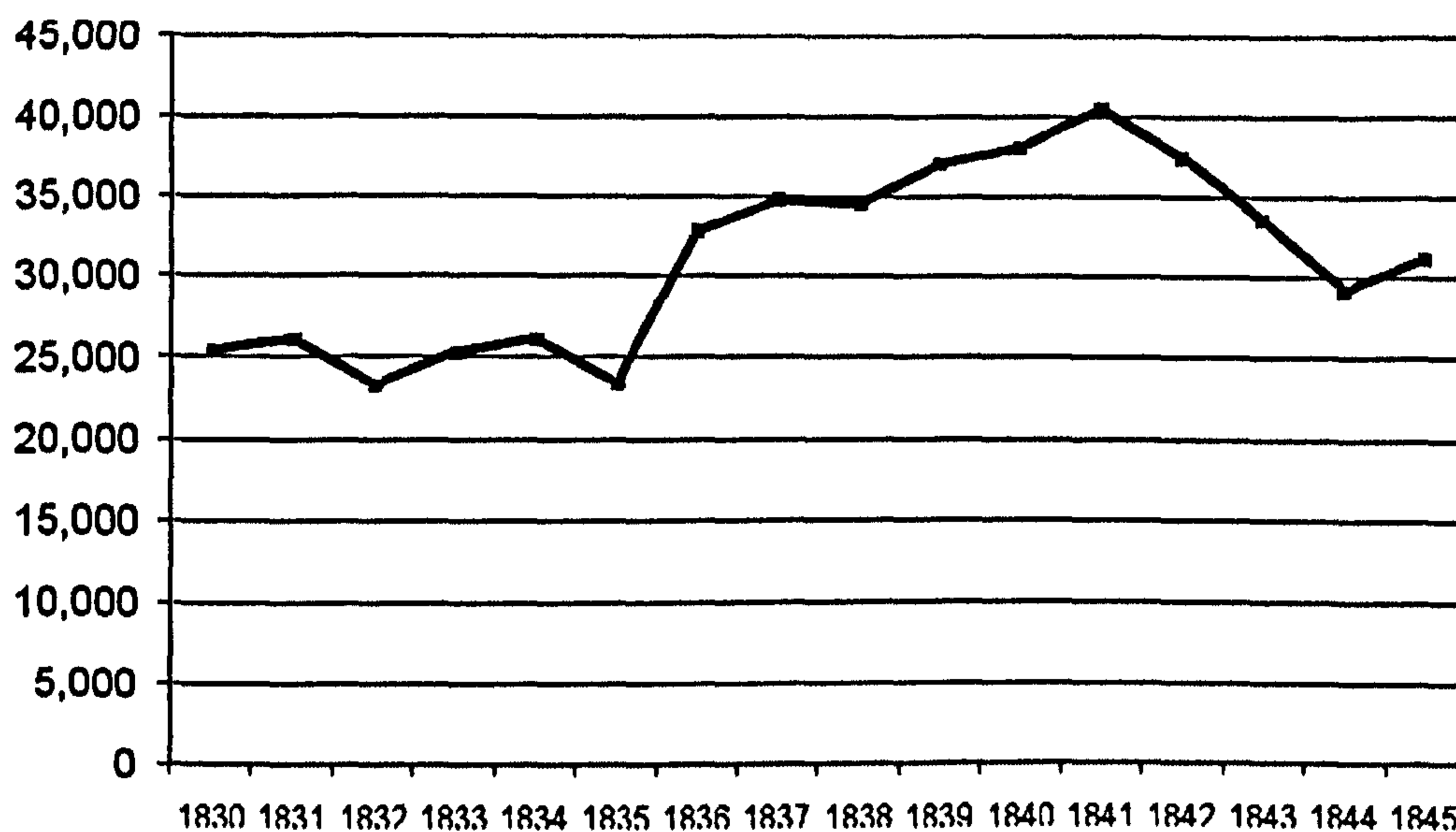
³² Andrew Lambert, 'Preparing for the Long Peace: the Reconstruction of the Royal Navy 1815-30', *Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. 82, No. 1, 1996.

³³ Andrew Lambert, *The Last Sailing Battlefleet*, Part II, p.17 onwards.

³⁴ Lambert, *Last Sailing Battlefleet*, p.6.

volunteering for service. Until the introduction of continuous service contracts in 1853, they normally signed on to a particular ship for the length of its commission, which was usually two to three years but occasionally more.

Figure 1.1 Size of the Royal Navy 1830-45 (men in service)



Source: Navy List, July 1830-June 1845; Eugene Rasor, Reform in the Royal Navy, A Social History of the Lower Deck 1850-1880, ch.5, note 67.

The press gang had immediately ceased to operate with the end of the war in 1815. The possibility of pressing in time of war or national emergency did remain legally available to the Admiralty, and was still envisaged as the likely method of providing Royal Navy crews in time of war.³⁵ The 1835 Bill 'For the encouragement of the Voluntary Enlistment of Seamen, and to make Regulations for more effectually

³⁵ Eugene L. Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy*, (Connecticut, Archon Books, 1976), p.26. The power to impress men for the Royal Navy formed the legal basis for conscription into the army in the twentieth century during the First and Second World Wars.

Manning His Majesty's Navy', for example, recognised the Crown's right to compulsory service under common law, and assumed that this right would be used in a national emergency, as shown by its careful provisions for those who had served five years voluntarily in the Royal Navy to be given exemption from compulsory service.³⁶ The plans for mobilising a battlefleet in the event of a threatened French invasion, as seemed possible in the 1840s, were based on the 30 advanced ships kept 'in a high state of readiness' at Sheerness, Portsmouth and Plymouth. If war had come about, they would have to have been manned not only from the seamen and marines already serving on the Port Guard ships and the flagships but with pressed men as well.³⁷ If the Royal Navy was not to be kept up to wartime strength in time of peace, then impressment appeared to be the only possible solution when ships were needed in commission urgently.

However, pressing remained a deeply unpopular way to deal with the need for sailors. Campaigners against the press gang included naval officers, who wrote to the *Naval Chronicle* and *The United Service Journal*, and published pamphlets, such as Captain Frederick Marrayat's *Suggestions for the Abolition of the Present System of Impressment in the Naval Service*, produced in 1822.³⁸ Impressment powers were never used, however, and as peace continued the campaign died down.³⁹ Politically it would have been difficult to enforce, with so many active campaigners being naval men. Even

³⁶ A Bill (as amended by the Committee) For the encouragement of the Voluntary Enlistment of Seamen, and to make Regulations for more effectually Manning His Majesty's Navy, 24 June 1835. Parliamentary Papers 1835 (320) III.517.

³⁷ Lambert, *The Last Sailing Battlefleet*, p.10.

³⁸ J S Bromley, *Manning Pamphlets 1693-1873*, (Navy Records Society, Vol. 119, 1974), p.xix; F Marrayat, *Suggestions for the Abolition of the Present System of Impressment in the Naval Service*, (London: 1822).

³⁹ Bromley, *Manning Pamphlets*, p.xx.

when war did break out with Russia in 1854, there was no attempt to conscript men to man the Royal Navy's ships. Bromley argued that in the nineteenth century there was a sharp distinction between real sailors and those who were brought in to make up the complement, the pressed men of wartime. Merchant ships were expected to provide the necessary training for men to serve in the Royal Navy. The Navigation Laws, with their requirement that only 25 percent of a British merchant ship's crew be from outside the UK or the Empire, made this plain.⁴⁰ However, the Navy was in fact keen to take on boys (aged 14 to 20) for careers in the service, and there was a good deal of movement between the Royal Navy and the merchant service, as this study will show. As David Starkey has shown, the productivity of seamen could also be increased in wartime by taking up those on shore, and employing older men and boys in the merchant service.⁴¹ In the 1841 census, for example, nearly 46,000 seamen were recorded ashore, compared to 138,000 at sea.⁴² However, any large-scale rapid mobilisation of naval ships would have caused problems, because without paying for men to remain in reserve, there would never be enough of them ready to serve immediately unless merchant shipping was very much reduced. This was impossible because of the importance of merchant shipping to the UK economy.

This study is focused on a sample of 23 ships and their crews, chosen to cover as many aspects of the Royal Navy in the 1830s and 1840s as possible. It includes large and small ships, sail and steam, those on home and overseas service, surveying, anti-

⁴⁰ Sarah Palmer, *Politics, Shipping and the Repeal of the Navigation Laws* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.42.

⁴¹ David J Starkey, 'War and the Market for Seafarers in Britain, 1736-1792', reprinted in Harding, Richard, ed. (2006) *Naval history 1680-1850. The international library of essays on military history* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.525.

⁴² Palmer, *Navigation Laws*, p.11.

slavery patrols and routine duty in the Mediterranean. The sample includes the details of 4,637 men. Although a proportion, which varies considerably from ship to ship, having chosen to sign on with the Navy, rapidly changed their minds and deserted, most stayed on until discharged sick, dead, into another ship or at the end of the commission. Many of them had recent previous experience of serving in the Navy, and some had spent most of their working life on Royal Navy ships. Almost all, except the newest Boys (first and second class) had experience at sea, even if it had not been in a man of war. Able Seamen add up to 1729 men in the sample, 49.76 percent, with 650 rated Ordinary Seamen, 14 percent.⁴³ Only 111 men in the entire sample were taken on with the rating Landsman, 2.39 percent of the sample.⁴⁴ Those not rated Able Seaman, Ordinary or Landsman were taken as servants or assistants to the warrant and petty officers (such as the Carpenter and the Gunner).

These men chose the Royal Navy from a position where they had skills which could potentially be sold elsewhere to the merchant service. They volunteered for the work and they carried it out successfully. Although the press gang may have negatively affected the image of the Royal Navy in the country, and among some sailors themselves, all the men examined here had chosen, for whatever reasons, whether loyalty, attachment or economic necessity, to sail on His or Her Majesty's Service.

⁴³ Excluding 18 Kroomen; see footnote 43.

⁴⁴ This does not include Boys rated LM on first being included in the Ship's Company, as this appears to have been a normal stage on some ships, nor men initially rated higher and then later disrated, which usually reflects a punishment rather than their skill. There are also 13 Kroomen in the sample rated LM, but these are excluded because there were particular rules governing their rating which do not necessarily mean they were unskilled (see below, chapter 2, p.75).

Historiography

Until the 1970s, few historians had investigated the social conditions of the Royal Navy in the 18th and 19th centuries in any depth, and the quotation attributed to Churchill, that it was all 'rum, sodomy, prayers and the lash' represented a popular perception of the sailing navy. The campaigns of the nineteenth century against flogging and the press gang by men such as Frederick Marryat may have helped form such views of the Navy, but flogging was not unique to ships, and as discussed above the press gang stopped operating in 1815 and was never used again.⁴⁵

Marryat's Victorian sea novels reflected his views on the evils of impressment, which he regarded as inefficient and inhumane.⁴⁶ His 1822 pamphlet argued that apart from the core of the crew, the forecastle men, crews were made up from gaols, workhouses, smugglers and those useless at their professions. Analysing the muster book of HMS *San Domingo* in 1805, a line of battle ship, he found 15 farmers, five printers, six hatters, four cotton spinners, three pedlars, one optician and one umbrella-maker. He considered this an indictment of impressment as a system of manning ships, but the same spread of occupations can be found in the ships of the 1830s and 40s, manned wholly by volunteers. And smugglers were often expert seamen; the five in this study who served compulsorily in the Royal Navy all received 'good' or 'very good' certificates of conduct, and four were rated Able Seaman.

⁴⁵ John D. Byrn, *Crime and Punishment in the Leeward Islands* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), p.27. Byrn notes that naval authorities resorted to corporal punishment more frequently than happened on shore, but 'such variations were more a matter of style than substance' (p.153).

⁴⁶ Christopher Lloyd, *Captain Marryat and the Old Navy*, (London: Longmans, 1939).

John Masefield, a century after Trafalgar, published a book on *Sea Life in Nelson's Time*, which claimed that in Nelson's time 'the very slightest transgression was visited with flogging'.⁴⁷ His descriptions of the brutality aboard the ships which had protected British society were based on the memoirs of 'Jack Nastyface' (William Robinson), a self-confessed campaigner against corporal punishment and the press gang. Masefield's descriptions were intended to shock his audience with the privations endured by eighteenth and early nineteenth century sailors, and do not provide a realistic depiction of their lives, nor how this compared to those of other workers of the time.

In 1960 Michael Lewis published *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815*, which included an examination of the backgrounds and careers of those serving in the Navy, but he concentrated almost exclusively on the officers rather than the men.⁴⁸ His book was based mainly on two printed sources: O'Byrne's *A Biographical Dictionary of the Royal Navy* (London, 1849) and John Marshall's *A Royal Naval Biography* (London, 1825) and he used almost no primary sources. The social background of the officers was analysed using the information they themselves supplied to Marshall and O'Byrne, although this sample is necessarily flawed since it obviously excluded all officers who died during the Napoleonic wars, and in O'Byrne all those who died before 1848. Lewis found that the largest groups came from

⁴⁷ John Masefield, *Sea Life in Nelson's Time*, (London: Methuen, 1905), quoted in John Byrn, *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy: Discipline on the Leeward Islands station 1784-1812*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), p.2.

⁴⁸ Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960).

professional backgrounds (50 percent) and from the landed gentry (27.4 percent).⁴⁹ He estimated from their biographies that 6.7 percent had working class backgrounds, 120 out of the sample of 1800, with 18 officers who contributed to either Marshall or O'Byrne saying that they had originally been pressed men. Three reached flag rank, 2.5 percent of the total, but none served at sea in that capacity.⁵⁰ This compared with 22 percent of those with naval backgrounds, and 18 percent of those with business and commercial backgrounds, although the latter was a smaller group of only 71 officers. Lewis argued that the men who were promoted from the lower deck were often 'real characters, eccentric often, but always magnificent seamen'. They would, however, mainly depend on the Captain who originally promoted them to the quarterdeck for 'interest', or help with future promotions and employment, unlike officers from backgrounds which gave them an existing network of senior contacts in the service.⁵¹ War provided officers from the lower deck with an opportunity to distinguish themselves, but when peace came they were unlikely to be given the same chances.⁵² About the men Lewis concluded that there was no reliable information, but that perhaps 75 percent came from seafaring families.

Investigating the geographical backgrounds of the officers, Lewis found that there was a strong bias to the south, and to counties which had a coastline. Devon provided the most officers, followed by Kent, Hampshire, London, Cornwall and Somerset. Proportionately, Hampshire's 89 officers represented 4.06 per 10,000

⁴⁹ The Navy, the church, the Army, the law, the civil service, medicine, government service and the fine arts, in descending order of the numbers of sons entering the Navy. Lewis, *Social History*, p.36.

⁵⁰ Lewis, *Social History*, p.45.

⁵¹ Lewis, *Social History*, p.46.

⁵² Lewis, *Social History*, p.36.

population, higher than Devon at 3.62. Other places also provided high numbers of officers given their populations, such as Guernsey, with 11 (including James Saumarez).⁵³ Scotland provided 197 officers (1.22 per 10,000 population), mainly from Fife, Midlothian and Lanark. Lewis believed that many lower-deck officers came from Scotland and would then promote other Scottish men. Ireland had fewer officers than Scotland, possibly because there was a limited middle class there, though Irish seamen were much valued in the Royal Navy, Lewis believed. Cork with 33 and Dublin with 22 had the largest numbers of officers. In fact, proportionate to its population, Cork contributed more than any county in the British Isles.⁵⁴ For the men, Lewis concluded that it would be too difficult to investigate their backgrounds, but that in 'any muster book taken at random an overwhelming proportion of the place-names and counties mentioned are by the sea.'⁵⁵

In 1965 Lewis published *The Navy in Transition 1814-64*, again based mainly on O'Byrne and concentrating on the officers. For those who came from a working class background, he argued, their prospects of reaching senior rank or having employment were limited: '...after the war, the Navy reversed an incipient tendency towards democratisation, and became more stodgily class-bound than, perhaps, it had ever been before.'⁵⁶ His treatment of the men in this period was extremely brief; he argued that whereas before the end of the war perhaps 75 percent of sailors came from sailing families, after 1815 the additional 25 percent had disappeared, and that all lower deck men had sailors for fathers, except those who came to the Navy

⁵³ Lewis, *Social History*, p.50.

⁵⁴ Lewis, *Social History*, p.51.

⁵⁵ Lewis, *Social History*, p.54.

⁵⁶ Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition 1814-64*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965), p.20.

through the Marine Society, no more than five percent of the total.⁵⁷ This was partly because there were no more quota men, that is, men sent from each county to fulfil a quota of recruits to the Royal Navy under the Quota Acts of 1795-6, who did not have to be men who had been to sea before.⁵⁸ Another reason was, Lewis argued, that far fewer boys would run away to sea in peacetime and were instead recruited through the provision of schooling at the Royal Naval School at Greenwich for the 'sons of seafaring persons' to be brought up to join the Royal Navy. He considered that sailors must come mainly from the larger seaports, but direct evidence was rare since 'very few of the poorly educated, intensely inward-looking "seamen types" will feel the urge, or even be able, to write anything at all.'⁵⁹ Generally, however, he argued that lack of evidence meant further conclusions could not be drawn. He considered that there was a marked change after 1853, when continuous service was introduced. This resulted in men being attracted to the Navy who were not themselves sons of seamen and was, he believed, 'when "the Bluejacket", whom we know and respect today, began to exist as a professional naval rating in his own right. Then indeed there comes a real and very marked change in the nature and habits of "the Men".'⁶⁰

The end of the war, and consequently of the press and quota men, Lewis argued, did mean that standards of cleanliness on board ship went up, and consequently

⁵⁷ Lewis, *The Navy in Transition*, pp.32-3.

⁵⁸ J S Bromley, 'The British Navy and its Seamen after 1688. Notes for an unwritten history', in S Palmer and G Williams (eds), *Charted and Uncharted Waters, Proceedings of a Conference on the Study of British Maritime History*, (London: National Maritime Museum, 1982), pp.152-3.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *The Navy in Transition*, p. 34.

⁶⁰ Lewis, *The Navy in Transition*, p.35.

epidemic disease was rarer, though he does not cite evidence for this.⁶¹ The end of flogging in 1871 he considers overdue, but thinks this reflects ‘a change in the nature of the victim. From somewhere about the middle of last century, his nature, and his normal conduct *had* changed, and changed radically.’⁶² The evidence he offers for this, however, is in the Admiralty’s attitude to the men, whereas changes may in fact have taken place as much in the Admiralty’s and officers’ perception of their role as employer rather than the men they managed. The major change between 1815 and 1817 was of course the extensive demobilisation of the Navy, as it decreased from 145,000 men to 19,000.⁶³ Lewis argued that the large-scale demobilisations wasted manpower, but did acknowledge that an effort was made to retain those rated as ‘Boys’, by drafting them to flagships and other ships remaining in commission.⁶⁴ Clearly this change altered the nature of those serving in one way, because all were now volunteers. R. Taylor, writing in *Mariner’s Mirror* in 1958-59, discussed the introduction of the continuous service system and, like Lewis, considered that it represented a change in the character of men in the navy.⁶⁵ He argued that continuous service ‘offered prospects of a professional career that the old hand-to-mouth methods never did’. This thesis aims to show who the men were who made up the Royal Navy before the introduction of continuous service, and whether some of them were in fact long-serving Royal Navy men, worthy of the description ‘professional’.

⁶¹ Lewis, *The Navy in Transition*, p.166.

⁶² Lewis, *The Navy in Transition*, p.169.

⁶³ Lewis, *The Navy in Transition*, p.176.

⁶⁴ Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, p.177.

⁶⁵ R. Taylor, *Manning the Royal Navy: The Reform of the Recruiting System, 1852-1862*, Second Part, *Mariner’s Mirror*, Vol 45 (1959), p.49.

Eugene Rasor's *Reform in the Royal Navy*, published in 1976, examined the lower deck between 1850 and 1880, but looked at principally from the point of view of the naval authorities. He argued that the Admiralty had a serious manning problem in the first half of the nineteenth century, which they attempted to address in various ways, and which they finally began to solve in the second half with the introduction of continuous service in 1853 and other reforms. Manning was, he said, a vicious circle: those who volunteered to serve were of low calibre, so to keep them in order they had to be harshly punished and given few privileges such as leave, which meant that the public reputation of the Navy was low and better recruits could not be attracted. He argued that until reforms took place after 1859, the Admiralty believed that lower deck seamen were 'degenerate, despicable, immoral, and barely distinguishable from the common criminal'.⁶⁶ Flogging, for example, was considered necessary to control an 'inferior class of men'.⁶⁷ Superannuated officers, who could not be retired, believed this too, and so exacerbated the problem. It was not, he argued, until the Naval Discipline Acts of 1860-66 that fundamental reforms of conditions for those on the lower deck led to a reduction in desertions, drunkenness and venereal disease.⁶⁸ There were officers who tried treating men more generously, with success, such as Captain Sir Bartholomew James Sullivan on HMS *Philomel* in the 1840s, who

⁶⁶ Eugene Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy, A Social History of the Lower Deck 1850-1880*, (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1976), pp.15-16.

⁶⁷ Rasor, chapter 3, p.55.

⁶⁸ Rasor, p.10.

granted generous leave when the ship was in port and kept punishments to a minimum; in four years there were no desertions.⁶⁹

Razor described the changes in the rules under which ships were run, the Articles of War and the *King's* (later *Queen's*) *Regulations* and *Admiralty Instructions*. The latter were revised six times between 1800 and 1850, for example requiring detailed reports of punishments administered on board ship from 1811. He discussed the lengthy campaign against corporal punishment that had begun in the 1810s, and the gradual process of outlawing various forms of physical punishment such as starting (banned 1809, though this was largely ignored), putting in irons (restricted 1853), gags (banned 1867 when a seaman died), and branding for desertion or bad character (not used against naval personnel, but still a Royal Marines practice in 1870, though illegal from 1865).⁷⁰ Razor also noted that from 1850 the Admiralty was starting to offer rewards for good conduct such as increased pay or mitigated punishment.⁷¹ Although badges (up to three, representing two shillings a month each for an Able Seaman) were only introduced in 1849, pay rates had been revised three times already since 1815, with increases in salary to attract and retain men. An Able Seaman's pay had gone up, for example, by two shillings a lunar month to £1 14s in 1824.⁷² Additionally, the captain's assessment of a man's character on his certificate of service at the end of the commission, also noted in the muster books, could provide rewards by promotion to petty officer status.

⁶⁹ Razor, p.23, quoting from Henry Norton Sullivan, *Life and Letters of Admiral Sir Bartholomew James Sullivan, 1810-90* (London: Murray, 1896).

⁷⁰ Razor, p.61.

⁷¹ Razor, p.63.

⁷² TNA: PRO: ADM7/911, *Rates of the Pay of the Royal Navy from 1796*, pp.69-70.

Rasor argued that the Navy had great problems recruiting enough men to man the ships in the second half of the nineteenth century, which drove the reforms of the same period as the Admiralty tried to make the Navy a more attractive potential employer. Stephen Gradish, whose examination of manning the Royal Navy during the Seven Years' War was published in 1980, looked at it like Rasor from the point of view of the authorities. He suggested that the Navy made great efforts to conserve manpower, which was scarce, by providing better food and conditions, illness being the great killer on board ship.⁷³ At the end of 1755 there were 2,000 sick and dying men from Admiral Boscawen's squadron off North America, and 4,000 sent to hospital or sick quarters from the Channel squadron.⁷⁴ Gradish examined how the Royal Navy was administered during this period, and how it dealt with recruiting enough men for the ships, for example by revoking protections from the press when not enough were being found. Most men recruited for the war, he showed, came through the press gangs, with bounties paid for those brought in. There were also attempts to recruit men directly with bounties and wages in advance, though the problem of higher wages in merchant ships remained. He further looked at the role of Parliament in attempting to encourage volunteers, an attempt which failed because it did not raise pay or set any time limits on service, and the consideration of establishing a register of sailors from which some would be chosen for the Navy.⁷⁵ Improving retention rates for those men already in the Navy involved improving their health to keep them on board and active, thus also preventing desertion. The

⁷³ Stephen Gradish, *The Manning of the British Navy during the Seven Years War*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), p.39.

⁷⁴ Gradish, p.41.

⁷⁵ Gradish, pp.14, 204.

Victualling Board and Sick and Wounded Board had crucial roles in maintaining the men's health, for example in fighting scurvy, as well as attempts to improve hygiene and provide clothes.⁷⁶

Both Gradish and Rasor considered the men of the Royal Navy as seen by the Admiralty and central government, attempting to solve their perceived problems, particularly in providing enough skilled sailors to man the fleet. Harold D. Langley, writing about the changes in the United States Navy in the period 1798-1862, also considered it mainly from the point of view of those who campaigned for change and improvement in the conditions of sailors, for example against flogging and the drink ration, and the authorities who implemented these changes.⁷⁷ N A M Rodger's *The Wooden World* (1985), on the Royal Navy during the period of the Seven Years War (1755-63), was a transforming study of the lives and conditions of those serving in the Navy.⁷⁸ The study covered almost all aspects of ratings' lives, from the food to the availability of leave, ill-health, careers, families, discipline and punishment, desertion and morale. It is based on a wide variety of documents, including the Admiralty muster books and pay books, courts martial records, ships' logs, official correspondence and private letters.⁷⁹

Rodger provided an exhaustive analysis of social conditions, related clearly to the society from which officers and men came. Based on a huge range of Admiralty

⁷⁶ Gradish, pp.142, 170, 175, 178, 207-8.

⁷⁷ Harold D. Langley, *Social Reform in the United States Navy 1798-1862*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1967).

⁷⁸ N A M Rodger, *The Wooden World, An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, (London: Collins, 1986).

⁷⁹ Rodger, *Wooden World*, pp.371-6.

documents and officers' papers, it covered the lives of the men as well as the officers, examining among other aspects their recruitment, careers, food, health and morale. He argued that no difficulty 'caused the Navy so much anguish as manning' for wartime, but that this was not because the Navy was an unreasonable employer, as that there were not enough sailors available to man both the Royal Navy in time of war and the merchant fleet (which was also essential to the British economy).⁸⁰ Rodger also pointed out the ways in which the reality of life on board differed from the traditional picture,⁸¹ and argued that the Navy during the Seven Years War 'resembled the society from which it was recruited in many more ways than it differed from it'. Many men were recruited from the area that their officers came from, whether seamen or landmen; Boscawen, commissioning the *Torbay* in 1755 had 55 of 'my Cornishmen' on board.⁸² Officers had to 'persuade and reward' men who knew the value of their skills.⁸³ Cruelty was unusual because it was ineffective: 'a brutal officer was, of necessity, an inefficient officer, distrusted by the Service for reasons both moral and practical'.⁸⁴ *Wooden World* is very specifically about the Seven Years War, and Rodger concluded by pointing out that much change must have taken place by the end of the century to cause the 1797 mutinies. For example, inflation had eroded wage values and coppering of ships reduced the opportunities for leave as they spent less time in port, making the Royal Navy much less attractive as an employer.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.145.

⁸¹ For example in the amount of leave allowed, Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.137-44.

⁸² Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.156.

⁸³ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.345.

⁸⁴ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.212.

⁸⁵ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.346.

Rodger examined in great detail the actual conditions experienced by sailors, for example the daily ration of food they were entitled to, and how well the system for providing it worked. In this case he showed that in general it worked well, and there were few complaints, except about decaying cheese, always a particular problem to preserve and transport. He pointed out that seamen ate well in comparison with the general working population 'and it seems he knew it, for in an age when seamen could and did complain freely, it is remarkably difficult to find them grumbling about the food (cheese perhaps excepted).'⁸⁶

Since *Wooden World* was published, further studies have taken the records available on the details of life in the Royal Navy to explore its social history further. John Byrn published a book on crime and punishment on the Leeward Islands station in 1784-1812 in 1989 which argued strongly that descriptions of naval punishments by contemporaries were often exaggerated for polemical effect, and that the Royal Navy's disciplinary proceedings fitted clearly into late eighteenth and early nineteenth century conceptions of justice.⁸⁷ He argued, for example, that a captain's powers of summary justice were equivalent to those exercised by a Justice of the Peace, who also had the power to order a whipping, fine or imprisonment for a person found guilty when they appeared before him.⁸⁸ Flogging was more prevalent at sea because there was nowhere to imprison men and fines were less effective when their wages were only paid irregularly.⁸⁹ As with many crimes that were prosecuted ashore,

⁸⁶ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.86

⁸⁷ John D. Byrn, *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy: Discipline on the Leewards Islands Station 1784-1812*, (Aldershot: Scolar, 1989).

⁸⁸ Byrn, pp.26-7.

⁸⁹ Byrn, p.124.

punishments were intended to be a deterrent to others, to prevent activities which impeded the working of the community. Aboard ship, these were mainly drunkenness and disturbing the peace; Byrn argued that captains and courts martial 'exhibited a pronounced tendency to enforce only the sections of the Articles of War which proscribed crimes that were regarded widely as outrages or infractions that were injurious to the well-being of the fleet.'⁹⁰ In 2004 Markus Eder published a study of crime and punishment in the Seven Years War, which examined in detail the patterns of crime and punishment in the Royal Navy of the period, using logbooks and courts martial records.⁹¹ He compared this to civil justice, concluding that eighteenth century naval courts were 'somewhat bloodier'. However, he stressed the variations of courts martial verdicts on different naval stations and that courts martial could and did accept mitigating circumstances even if the strict letter of the law did not allow for this. For some offences, such as murder, defendants were much less likely to be convicted, and if convicted, hanged, by a naval court.⁹²

Drunkenness was a serious problem, not least because it was dangerous, but it was not a problem exclusive to the Royal Navy. Eder commented that there was 'no doubt that drunkenness in the armed forces of the eighteenth century was a specific problem'.⁹³ Byrn disputed the argument of historians such as Christopher Lloyd that the men drank to escape an unpleasant reality, and argued instead that it was about resisting an over-regular 'system' of work, something which could also be seen

⁹⁰ Byrn, p.124.

⁹¹ Markus Eder, *Crime and punishment in the Royal Navy of the Seven Years' War, 1755-1763* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

⁹² Eder, pp.83, 93, 127, 130.

⁹³ Eder, p.72.

among industrial workers ashore.⁹⁴ He also argued that Lewis's belief that the Admiralty was 'sanctioning over-drinking as a means of doping the men into enduring the conditions' was inappropriate; the Admiralty was deferring 'to what was perceived as a traditional right of the commonality.'⁹⁵

Byrn's study used log books and courts martial transcripts generated on the Leewards Islands command during this period to examine the details of crimes prosecuted and punishments awarded. Many of the records do not survive, so his study was based on those ships where complete captain's or master's logs exist for the whole commission, 73 of the 417 despatched to the Lesser Antilles 1784-1812. He cautioned that 'the quantification of crime and punishment is a risky business', but, for example, he compared conviction rates with those reported by other historians⁹⁶ and found similar patterns, including that more than half of all deserters ran in the first six months.⁹⁷ He concluded that although captains possessed extreme powers over their men, 'the precepts governing the treatment of military problems within the wooden walls were grounded firmly in the traditions of the common law'.⁹⁸

After the end of the Napoleonic wars the Royal Navy was in many ways a very different organisation from that described by Byrn, or that of the Seven Years War described by Rodger. One of the principal differences is of course that with the end of the wars there was no impressment. The introduction of steam ships during the

⁹⁴ Byrn, p.127.

⁹⁵ Lewis, *Social History*, pp.398-9; Byrn, p.131.

⁹⁶ E.g. N.A.M. Rodger, 'Stragglers and deserters from the Royal Navy during the Seven Years' War', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 57 (135), May 1984.

⁹⁷ Byrn, p.8.

⁹⁸ Byrn, p.184.

period under consideration in this thesis brought further changes in the men's conditions of service. Until 1853, however, the Navy continued to rely on the system whereby sailors volunteered for service on a particular ship and unlike the commissioned and warrant officers, did not belong to the Royal Navy once the ship's commission ended. Oliver Walton's recent study investigated the experiences of sailors in the Royal Navy after the introduction of continuous service. He argued that the Navy became a more structured organisation, providing a corporate identity and a new professionalism for the men.⁹⁹ At the same time as becoming more representative of the nation in the geographical origins of the men, it became more separate in its specialist skills.¹⁰⁰

Rasor had argued that the introduction of the new contracts meant there was a serious problem with the number and quality of seamen available to the Navy before 1853. Yet without a core of trained seamen and the ability to attract others, the ships of the first half of the nineteenth century could not have been manned and sailed and the Navy could not have fulfilled the various duties it undertook around the world with any competence. The present study follows those by Rodger, Byrn and others by using the documents available on the sailors themselves and their backgrounds, to give a picture of their origins, their skills and the way they worked on board ship in the Royal Navy. It investigates the places they came from and their relations with their home communities and considers whether the Navy was becoming a less diverse organisation. It further looks at the conditions of their daily life on board

⁹⁹ Oliver Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy 1856-1900: Corporation and Community', Exeter PhD thesis, 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy', p.347.

ship, the differences between steam and sail, their relations with their officers and the opportunities offered to them for training and promotion, and considers whether these were improving in the period before formal contracts with the Navy were introduced for sailors. It also considers whether the Royal Navy had to introduce continuous service contracts to secure enough men to sail the ships, or whether it was part of a series of more gradual changes in the opportunities and conditions on offer to nineteenth century sailors.

Sources

As Rodger noted in his description of the muster and pay books in the list of sources for *Wooden World*:

The importance of these records for the social history of the Navy, and the use I have made of them, will I hope be evident from the text. Much greater use could be made with the aid of a computer.¹⁰¹

The principal source for this thesis is the series of muster books in the National Archives which survive for almost all the ships in commission from 1815. These are found in the series ADM 37 and ADM 38. They provide information on age, place of birth, last previous service in the Royal Navy, rating, any changes in that rating, whether an allotment had been set up, any charges against wages (for example fines for straggling), date and cause of discharge and a conduct rating (these range from very good to 'bad, idle and lazy'¹⁰²). In a few cases description books survive as well, which provide a physical description of the men, as well as a complete list of previous Royal Navy ships, an indication of the trade they were 'brought up to', their marital status and whether they had been vaccinated against smallpox. Not all information is entered for every man, particularly in the description books, but in general the books were extremely well-kept.

A sample of ships' commissions (see Appendix 2) was selected to cover as many different types and places of service as possible. This is not a random sample of men because that would have involved taking, for example, every twentieth record across all the muster books. This would have made it impossible to understand the

¹⁰¹ Rodger, *Wooden World*, pp.373-4.

¹⁰² TNA:TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7771, HMS *Castor* muster books. Charles Bailey, from London, serving 1843-4, when he was discharged from the service in Hong Kong.

differences and similarities between the crews of different ships. Instead the sample was chosen by constructing a table of ships in commission in the 1830s and 1840s from the *Navy List*, categorising these as first to third-rates, fourth to sixth-rates, smaller vessels and steam vessels, and choosing ships from an alphabetical list roughly in proportion to the numbers in each group. When the muster book for the first ship on the list was not available, the next was chosen. Twenty-three ships make up the sample, with the records of 4,638 periods of service. They cover most of the types of service that ships were undertaking in the period, including surveying, anti-slave trade patrols, service in the Mediterranean, on the home station, in China, Australia and North America. The sample ships include steam vessels as well as the first-rate HMS *Princess Charlotte*. Appendix 2 gives details of each ship, its commission dates and places of service, and the analysis of age and place of birth of its crew. The sample is a large enough to allow safe statistical conclusions to be drawn, though when smaller sections of the sample are considered, the figures are indicative rather than conclusive. Of the 23 ships, seven have surviving description books, which allow more detailed information to be extracted. For example, the description books give information about marriage rates, which were then compared to the information on allotments of money home in the main muster books.¹⁰³

In addition to the muster books, this study makes use of other National Archive records such as the index of courts martial verdicts, and the records of courts martial where available. In particular, the court martial of Captain James Stopford of HMS *Amazon* in 1847 investigated the punishments on board his ship, and whether they

¹⁰³ The database was constructed and analysed using Microsoft Access, and contains all the information available about the sailors in the muster and description books for these books.

were just. It provides detailed information on the disciplines in force, the changes that the Admiralty were trying to introduce, and the sailors' attitudes to different kinds of punishment.¹⁰⁴ Ships' logs also provide some information on punishments and on ships' routines.

The main evidence on the men's health comes from the annual health reports that were instituted in 1836 for collating information from all naval surgeons and the few surgeons' logs that have been preserved in the National Archive. Relevant official publications include the 1859 Royal Commission report on Manning the Royal Navy, the 1850 report on Spirits in the Royal Navy. Local newspapers, especially the *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette*, and the *Devonport Independent and Plymouth and Stonehouse Gazette*, provide some background on life in the two main Royal Navy ports. I have also examined some contemporary pamphlets on conditions in the Navy, and the Royal Humane Society reports giving details of medals awarded for lifesaving to Royal Navy sailors.¹⁰⁵

Very few letters or personal documents from sailors and their families survive. Some are available, mainly in the Royal Naval Museum library, with documents such as allotment papers and letters from the Admiralty on entitlement to widow's pensions. A handwritten memoir, identified as by Edward Hargreaves, who joined the Royal Navy in 1855 aged 16, described the seven years he served in the 'navy', mainly on

¹⁰⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5558, court martial 12-19 January 1847.

¹⁰⁵ Royal Humane Society, *Acts of Gallantry*, facsimile edition, (London Stamp Exchange, 1988).

the China station.¹⁰⁶ Although he joined the Navy just after the introduction of continuous service contracts, his experiences provide a helpful insight into naval life and many of his descriptions of his service are relevant to the earlier period, especially since he joined as a Boy, and they had long been expected to serve several years as they trained. The letters of John Ford AB to Sarah Evans, later his wife, date from 1845-48, and together with some of his personal documents, including his recommendation for a Boatswain's warrant in 1851, give another view of life in the Navy. The messages sent to friends and family from other sailors suggest how relationships could be maintained even if men were illiterate.¹⁰⁷ Robert McKenzie's family papers include three letters from his wife from 1838 and 1839 as well as some of his to her.¹⁰⁸ Although many sailors were likely to have been illiterate and the expression of feeling in letters could be stilted, the McKenzies' correspondence indicated the strength of feeling that could exist. Emma McKenzie wrote to Robert on 11 February 1838:

Dear Husband

It is with a naching heart I write these few lines for as the Ship is going to leave Plymouth I ham afraid it will be A long time before I heare from you again. but I hope this will meet you in good health as it leaves me and the children at present thank God...¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ RNM 1988/44, 'seven years in the navy', memoir (Edward Hargreaves). The author was identified by looking at the muster books of the ships he listed as having served in. Only one person fitted the dates of service, and in the final muster book, HMS *Cornwallis*, TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7857, 1 April 1861 to 31 Dec 1862, Edward Hargreaves's entry in the bound-in description book is conclusive. He was born in 'Doosbury, Yorkshire', (the memoir says he was from Batley Carr, which is near Dewsbury) and had previous service on HMS *Sampson* as a First Class Boy, rising to Ordinary, HMS *Woodcock*, rising to AB, and HMS *Actaeon* (passage back from Hong Kong), before being discharged to the shore on 8 September 1862.

¹⁰⁷ RNM 353/85, Papers of John Ford AB and family.

¹⁰⁸ RNM 1982/1331, Papers of Robert McKenzie, Boatswain, and family.

¹⁰⁹ RNM, 120/87 (6), Letter from Emma McKenzie to Robert, 11 February 1838.

She was presumably pregnant as a postscript notes that 'I forgot to ask what the child's name to be.' Robert McKenzie wrote back to her (a letter which does not survive), and wrote again on 22 February that although he had said he would not write again until they had left England:

I cannot leave without embracing every opportunity of writing, I have nothing particular to say, but the thoughts of My Dear Children and yourself are so much on my mind that as I cannot see and speak to you face to face I have nothing to do but to write every opportunity...

My Dear Wife as I wrote on Sunday there is nothing particular to say but that you kiss my dear Robert and Sarah [their children] for me and keep the love of your ever Constant and Affectionate Husband Robert McKenzie.¹¹⁰

John Ford, writing to Sarah Evans from HMS *Superb* in July 1845, told her that the ship was due to sail for Ireland shortly. He added this below his signature:

Fare thee well
My parting hour is Come
The Sea Bears me from you
To other seas and homes
I do not wish my life to end
Thou hapless it might Be
I live to Praise for those I love
And die remembering thee
God grant the same, if not on hearth [sic]
To meet in heaven again.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ RNM, 120/87 (2), Letter from Robert McKenzie to Emma McKenzie, 22 February 1838.

¹¹¹ RNM 353/85 (13) John Ford to Sarah Evans, 13 July 1845, HMS *Superb*, Spithead.

CHAPTER 2: Origins and Communities

'I have been thinking,' said Mr Seagrave, after a silence of a minute or two, 'that a sailor has no right to marry.'

'I've always thought so, sir,' replied Ready; 'and I daresay many a poor deserted sailor's wife, when she has listened to the wind and rain in her lonely bed, has thought the same.'

Masterman Ready, Captain Frederick Marryat, 1841, ch. V.

Introduction

On 19th June 1843, John Sheppard signed up as a Stoker on HM Steam Vessel *Virago*.

The description book called him a black man, born in 'Gallinas, Africa', and he had already worked on *Eden*, *Druid*, *Alban*, *Spitfire* and *Modeste*. He was married, and

although his place of residence is not given, it was probably in the UK, as he set up

an allotment¹¹² to his family from 1 August 1843, which would only have been

payable there. As well as the allotment, he sent money back to Britain four times

during the commission, a total of £8 10s from his monthly pay of £2 6s as a Stoker.

¹¹³ *Virago* served in the Mediterranean, and John Sheppard stayed aboard until she was paid off in November 1847.

William Robinson, aged 21 and born in Portsea, Hampshire, joined HM Cutter *Raven*

on 20th January 1840 in Portsmouth, nine months into her commission. *Raven's*

complement was 40, although she was usually a few men short of this, and she

sailed in home waters, with musters recorded at Liverpool, Sheerness, Plymouth, off

the Lizard, Berwick, Grimsby, Hull and the Cove of Cork. Her desertion rate was

¹¹² A means of paying part of his wages to a family member each month.

¹¹³ TNA: PRO: ADM 7/911, *Rates of Pay of the Royal Navy from 1796*, compiled 21st October 1840.

very high: 39 of 119 men deserted (compared for example to 45 out of 777 on HM *Princess Charlotte*, serving in the Mediterranean 1837-41). Robinson had been serving in HMS *Scout* until November 1839. He was rated AB, and although sent sick to the Melville Hospital in Chatham shortly afterwards, he had rejoined by April 1842 and was rated Quarter Master in October 1842. At the end of the commission, in December 1844, he was given a 'very good' certificate.¹¹⁴

Another black sailor, William Gumption, was employed on his ship, HMS *Acorn*, in the separate list of 'Kroomen', men born in Sierra Leone and taken on by ships on the West African station. *Acorn* was there from 1839-43 and Gumption served as first AB then a 2nd Class Petty Officer. Although he was disrated to Ordinary in January 1843 before his final discharge in August 1843 when the ship sailed for her home waters, his certificate too read 'very good'.¹¹⁵ James Lee of Portsmouth had a less happy experience of the Navy. He entered HMS *Castor* on 30th May 1843 aged 23, his first entry into the Royal Navy, rated AB and when the ship reached Auckland, New Zealand, in January 1846, he deserted. Brought back by HMS *Calliope* in February, and rated AB again, he stayed on board only until 2nd April, when he deserted in Wellington. He had family at home, since he had set up an allotment on 1st September 1843 (stopped, as the rules stated, when he was first marked R in the books, and not renewed).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/8841, TNA: PRO: ADM 38/1550, William Robinson, Ship's Company no.21, re-entered as no.63.

¹¹⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443, William Gumption, Kroomen for Wages and Victuals, no.1.

¹¹⁶ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7771, James Lee, Ship's Company no.119.

The stories of these men, as they emerge from the information in the muster and description books of their ships, suggest some of the variety to be found in the Royal Navy in the mid-nineteenth century. Their backgrounds and experiences all vary, and yet the majority of them had to learn to live and work together for a ship to function effectively. It was both a dangerous and often monotonous way to earn a living, in a crowded ship, and the living only amounted to £1 14s a month as an Able Seaman (14s 3d per month for a First Class Boy, who might be aged twenty).¹¹⁷ A man like John Sheppard was clearly very committed to his family, sending as much money home as possible, yet sailing involved leaving that family for years at a time. This chapter therefore examines the origins of the sailors of the Royal Navy, and the strength of their ties both to it and to their homes, in order to show where they came from and suggest why they went to sea.

Going to Sea Young

In his examination of the Navy during the Seven Years War, Rodger concluded that in peacetime the Navy was 'a net consumer of trained manpower, drawn from the merchant service.'¹¹⁸ This appears still to have been true a century later, for the sample of men under consideration here includes many who are listed as entering the Royal Navy for the first time, yet rated as Able Seaman. (See Table 2.1, below, p.54.) That is, they are already trained seamen, and must have been trained in the merchant service, unless they were lying about their lack of previous service in the Royal Navy.

¹¹⁷ *Rates of Pay of the Royal Navy.*

¹¹⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986), p.114.

This is possible if they had previously deserted, but is unlikely to account for a large number of these men. Rodger said that men regarded the Navy as an employer like any other, and 'relatively few ratings seem to have joined the Navy in childhood to make a career of it.'¹¹⁹

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Admiralty was still worried that the boys it took on to train up as Royal Naval ratings were not remaining with the Navy. In 1859 a Royal Commission was set up to look into the question of manning the Navy, six years after the introduction of continuous service. Among those who gave evidence was Thomas Howells, a Gunner, who criticised the system of taking boys from the age of 14 to 28 as too long to keep those who might not be 'all we could expect in the navy'. The Commissioners responded to this by saying that when boys were entered for seven years 'at the expiration of that time they almost invariably left us, having become seamen, and went into the merchant service, where they got higher wages.'¹²⁰ However, as examined in more detail below, most of the men (not boys) who entered the Royal Navy with no previous service in it, were rated either able or ordinary, and must therefore have been trained in the merchant service. As had been the case in peacetime in the eighteenth century, the Royal Navy benefited as much from merchant service training as the merchant service benefited from it.

¹¹⁹ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.113.

¹²⁰ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, Parliamentary Papers 1859 Session I [2469] VI.1 (mf 64.40-45), p.194. The Commission took evidence about conditions at sea and the introduction of continuous service contracts in 1853, mainly from officers but also from a few long-serving seamen, and their evidence and remarks usually discuss the ten to 20 years before 1853 as well as the years after.

In *Wooden World*, Rodger made the point that sailors had to go to sea young in order to learn their trade, and that 'deep-sea sailors were overwhelmingly young men, in Britain and all other countries',¹²¹ with most having been at sea since the age of ten or twelve during the period of the Seven Years' War (1755-63). The men and boys serving on the ships examined here, joining ships between 1827 and 1847, are slightly older. The youngest boy in the whole sample is John Rennals, aged ten, born in Kingston, Jamaica, recruited onto *Skipjack* in 1829, and with previous service recorded in *Harlequin*.¹²² Aside from him, there are five twelve-year-olds and six thirteen-year-olds listed, serving on various different ships, but all the rest of the boys are at least fourteen, and most are recorded as first entries into the service. This does not of course preclude them having been to sea with a merchant ship first. Boys were rated Second and First Class by age, rather than skill; up to the age of seventeen or eighteen they were Second Class, and from eighteen to twenty First Class, before being taken into the Ship's Company, normally rated Ordinary at first. The average age of all the boys and men in the sample (excluding those for whom no age is given) is 25.01. This suggests that post-Napoleonic Wars sailors were going to sea slightly later than was the case during the Seven Years War, and certainly shows that the Navy was much less interested in taking on ten and twelve-year-old boys, preferring to wait until they were older, though still young enough to train easily. It is possible that some may have lied about their age, but this only bears out the fact that the Navy no longer officially welcomed ten-year-olds.

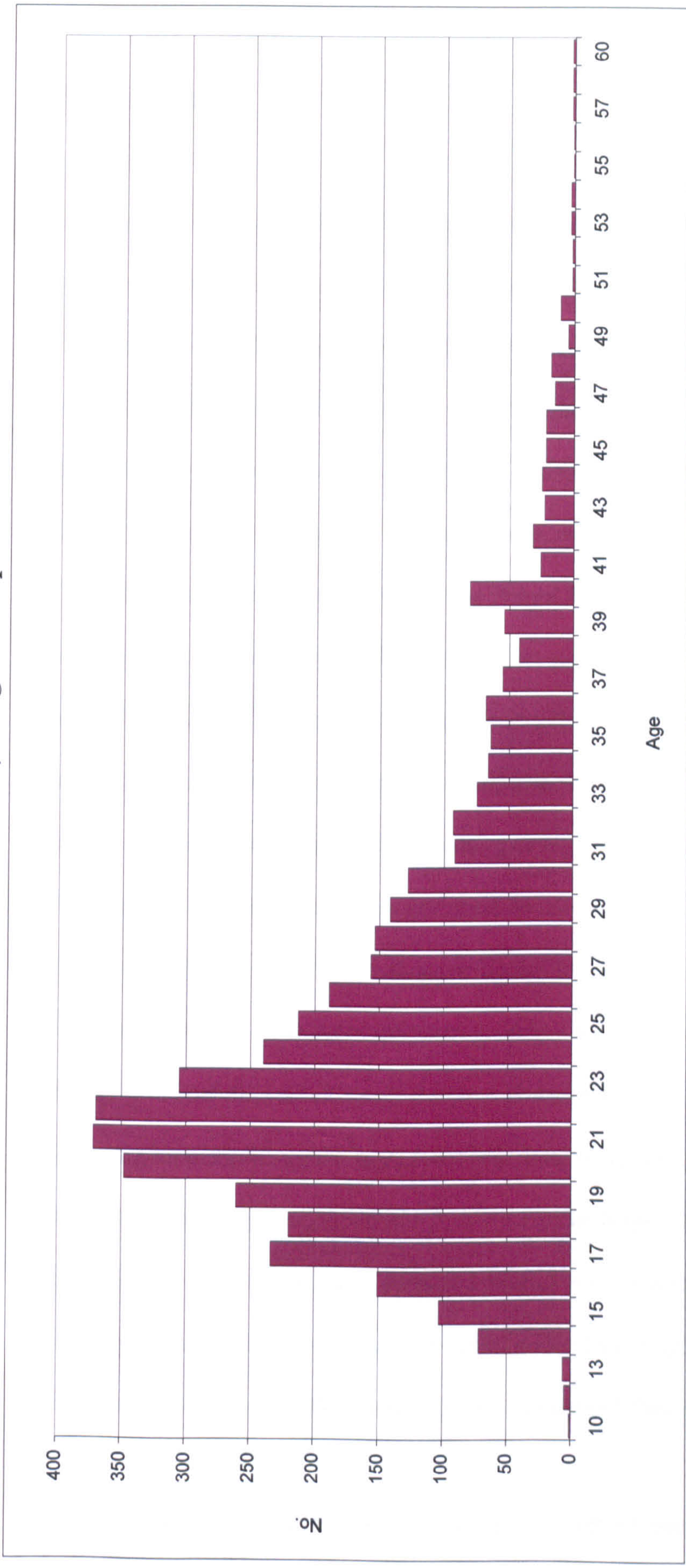
¹²¹ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.114.

¹²² HMS *Skipjack* muster book TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9878, First Class Boys no.5.

The largest numbers of sailors were aged 20, 21 or 22 at the time of joining their ship (not including Boys becoming part of the Ship's Company at age 20). Figure 1 (below, p.6) shows the ages of the sailors in the sample at the time that they joined a ship. Nineteenth-century Britain had a very young population, so to some extent sailors merely reflected this.¹²³ The 1841 census showed that among the population of England and Wales, 45 percent were aged under 20 and those aged 60 or more were less than 7 percent. There are many men in the later twenties and thirties on board ship, however, and a very few who are in their fifties, as well as two men (John Lavers, rated AB on *Raven* and Alexander McDonald rated Quartermaster on *Skipjack*) who give their age as 60. Even among those in their fifties, while several are acting as cooks or stewards, there are a few rated AB and presumably still working actively as sailors. Sailing may have been a young man's trade, but some were able to go on earning their living at it into late middle age.

¹²³ J F C Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain 1832-51*, (London: Fontana, 1988), pp.17-18.

Figure 2.1: Age range of sailors (men and boys) in sample, at date of joining their ship



Source: Database of muster book entries for ships in sample. Note: 72 sailors have no age given against their name and are not included in the chart; 50 of these are Kroomen.

Enforced service

One group of men could still find themselves forced to serve at sea even though the press gang no longer operated: convicted smugglers. Henry Baynham quotes the the case of William and Edward Burnett, given five years' naval service in 1832 as punishment for being found with contraband spirits.¹²⁴ The instructions printed at the beginning of the muster books allow for this possibility, stating in the allotment instructions that 'Those Persons, only, who are borne as part of the Complement, or as Supernumeraries for Wages, by Order, (exclusive of Smugglers, who are always, to be described as such), are to be permitted to allot.'¹²⁵ In the 23 ships' companies under consideration here, five men are marked as such in the muster books. They were William Mockitt, aged 52, who served in HMS *Wasp*, Joseph Robertson aged 23, James Giles aged 27, James Hatton aged 29 and John Hammond aged 38 (all serving in HMS *Princess Charlotte*). All were rated 'AB, Smuggler' except Joseph Robertson, rated Ordinary. They all came from different counties: Kent, Devon, Hampshire, Sussex and Suffolk, and although the four *Princess Charlotte* men were recruited at the same time, via *Vanguard* from *Caledonia*, there is no reason to suppose they were convicted together, especially as two were discharged before the end of the commission, presumably because their sentence was complete. All received 'good' or 'very good' certificates of conduct. They were effectively pressed men on continuous service until their sentence was completed, but with only five of them

¹²⁴ Henry Baynham, *Before the Mast: naval ratings of the nineteenth century* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p.13.

¹²⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9338, HMS *Mastiff*, muster book 1837, printed instructions no.13.

out of a sample of 4637 men, 0.1 percent, they are an insignificant part of the Royal Navy. The only other smugglers found in the ships examined were two men victualled as prisoners (two-thirds allowance and no spirits) on board HMS *Skipjack* at the end of July 1837, but they were rapidly discharged into another ship.¹²⁶

Raising a complement

The figures from the sample of ships examined in this study suggest that many ships remained slightly below complement, and a few operated well below. In general, however, the Royal Navy was able to man its peacetime vessels successfully by having men volunteer for individual commissions. This was the experience of the *Doris*, serving on the South American station 1821-25, as discussed by Brian Vale, in *A Frigate of King George*. 'The muster rolls of *Doris* and of the other ships on the South American station show that these vessels were always fully manned, and indicate that the Navy at this period had few problems in recruiting men either at home or overseas.'¹²⁷ HM Schooner *Skipjack*, in commission from March 1827 to June 1841 when it was lost, recruited its entire complement overseas. This was initially done at Bermuda, but during the time it was in commission was able to find men both there and in Kingston, Jamaica and Havana, as well as from other Royal Navy ships. Eight-six percent of these sailors

¹²⁶ HMS *Skipjack*, muster book, July-September 1837, TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9882, Prisoners at 2/3 allowance.

¹²⁷ Brian Vale, *A Frigate of King George*, (London: I B Tauris, 2001), p.34.

were originally from the British Isles, having been born in England, Scotland, Wales or Ireland.¹²⁸

The volunteer system was not always a very efficient method, however, because it could take two or three months, and sometimes much longer, to find enough men to sail a ship. Men chose which ship they would enter on, and it was assumed by contemporaries that they would do so carefully, influenced for example by the reputation of the captain. The *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette*, in January 1851, reported that:

AMPHITRITE, 25, Captain Frederick, is receiving her tanks, stowing her holds, and receiving her anchors. She has not entered many seamen. There seems to be a great scarcity, for Captain Frederick is a popular man, and Jack is generally a good judge.¹²⁹

Most ships had to spend over 40 days in port from the arrival of the first recruits to the end of the initial commissioning period (whether marked by the ship leaving England for overseas, or leaving the port where it had been commissioning for duty elsewhere in home waters). This time was necessary to put the ship in order and take on stores for its commission, but it was also necessary for recruitment. Some ships did well, such as HMS *Actaeon* and HMS *Aetna* which set sail slightly above complement (117.39 percent after 117 days and 102.38 percent after 75 days respectively), but most ships did not have the full numbers they were in theory entitled to. Sailors recruited on to HMS *Raven* were the unluckiest in this sample in this respect; after 100 days spent recruiting in

¹²⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9878-9885, HMS *Skipjack*, muster books. 62% were English-born, 13% Scottish, 8% Irish and 2.6% Welsh. See ship profile in Appendix 2.

¹²⁹ *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette*, 4 January 1851, No.41 Vol.1, p.8 col.3.

Sheerness and Plymouth in 1839, *Raven* was still carrying only 45.71 percent of her complement, and since she was a small ship (the complement was only 35, plus five Marines) this may explain why she also shows one of the highest desertion rates (39 out of a total of 119 men and boys serving during her commission, 32.77 percent); the work would have been much harder with so few sailors. The ships which recruited fastest were HM Steam Vessel *Alecto* (commissioning in Portsmouth in 1839) and HM Surveying Vessel *Mastiff*, (commissioning in Chatham in 1836), both finding a crew of over 70 percent of their complement, in 24 days for *Alecto* and 20 for *Mastiff*. *Mastiff* also shows a significantly lower rate of desertion than *Raven* at 18.75 percent compared to *Raven's* 32.77 percent, though *Alecto* at 27.83 percent is not much better.

Waiting a long time in port before a commission properly began was almost unavoidable under a volunteering system, especially for large ships such as the *Princess Charlotte*, which took 120 days to recruit 449 men and boys in Portsmouth in 1837. It caused delays in payments to families, since allotments did not commence until the ship had left its initial port, and of course offered opportunities to spend money that had not yet been earned. It took time to get ships ready for sea, for example to take on victuals and water, but the whole crew was not necessarily required for this. Sailors disliked this aspect of the Navy, according to those giving evidence to the 1859 Manning Commission. Thomas Howells, Gunner, said that

it would be advantageous to the country and to the seamen to go on board, and sail in a week or ten days after she was commissioned. There is nothing

that the seaman dislikes so much as what they call a ship on the home station, and it is attended with immense expense.¹³⁰

Early Signs of Continuous Service

In the 23 ships in this sample, there are a few signs of the Admiralty's efforts to recruit men on fixed-term contracts, to serve where they were sent. On four ships men are recorded as discharged, having completed a fixed period of service.

William Kingsford, Quartermaster, and Richard Purver, AB, were both discharged from *Alecto*, then serving in the Mediterranean, in November 1841 'having completed five years' continuous service'.¹³¹ HMS *Skipjack*, which as has been noted recruited entirely overseas, has the largest proportion of such men in the sample. Twenty-eight men were discharged from the ship 'having completed [their] period of servitude' and one as 'time expired'. One is specifically noted as having served three years (Thomas Brimmer, AB, aged 25 at entry, from Ireland) but the other entries do not give the length of service. Their ratings vary from First Class Boys and Landsman to Sailmaker and Quartermaster. In HMS *Castor*, serving in the East Indies 1843-7, five men were discharged for a passage back to England 'having served five years' in the Navy. All had been recruited from either HMS *Agincourt* or *Alligator*.¹³² In HMS *Lapwing*, six men, all rated AB, were discharged at various dates in 1841, 'time expired'.¹³³ And in HMS *Albatross*, a sloop serving in the West Indies 1842-6, one man, Joseph Urquart from Lyme

¹³⁰ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, p.193.

¹³¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7491, HM Steam Vessel *Alecto* muster book.

¹³² TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7771, HMS *Castor* muster book, Ship's Company nos 273-6, Boys 1st Class no. 31.

¹³³ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9280, HMS *Lapwing* muster book, Ship's Company numbers 9, 12, 14, 18, 28, 29.

Regis, a Gunner's Mate later rated AB, Seaman Gunner, trained on *Excellent*, was discharged to await a passage home 'having completed 10 Years continuous service'.¹³⁴ These discharges for completed service do point up one possible disadvantage to the fixed-term system, which is that men could demand to be sent home before the ship's commission was ended, requiring the Navy to provide transport and replacements for them.

The muster books only indicate such men at their discharge, so it is possible that some of those men who are discharged into another ship were also men who had signed up for continuous service. There are 638 sailors in the sample who were sent to another ship rather than on shore without their discharge being noted as invalided or sent for a passage home. For example, when *Alligator* paid off in early February 1842, forty men were listed as discharged to *Alligator* itself, which was recommissioned almost immediately with these 40 men as part of the new crew.¹³⁵ The others included men sent to another ship 'on promotion', 'as part complement', as volunteer 'for service of the squadron' or 'for disposal in the Mediterranean'. It is likely that this last category is for men who had originally, or at the time of their discharge, volunteered for general service. Some were sent to another ship 'on promotion'. The figure of 638 does not include any men promoted to petty or warrant officer within the same ship, but it does include 44 men transferred to the supernumeraries lists within the same ship, since some of these are noted as awaiting transfer to another ship, such as George Irwin, Quartermaster on *Princess Charlotte*, discharged to the supernumeraries' list for

¹³⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7486, HMS *Albatross* muster book, Ship's Company no.64.

¹³⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8649, HMS *Alligator* muster book.

'passage to Victory as Acting Boatswain'¹³⁶ Others, however, have no indication against their name whether they are likely to be sent to another ship, and it cannot be assumed that all men who transfer from one ship to another were contracted to serve for a fixed period.

If all these men are considered to be on continuous service they amount to 14.69 percent of the sample, almost certainly an exaggerated figure. It is not an exaggerated estimate of some of the men who were used to going from ship to ship, however. The numbers who did have recent previous service in a Navy ship, or who had been trained in HMS *Excellent*, the gunnery training ship established in 1830, and those who the description books reveal to have served in several Navy ships, suggest that that many men did regard the Navy as their main occupation, and progressed through the ratings available to them as they worked on successive commissions.¹³⁷ It is also clear, however, that the opportunity to choose which ship they worked on was important to these sailors. The Royal Commission on Manning the Navy in 1859 argued in its report that the old

system was attended with great inconvenience to the public service, and even to the seamen themselves. Men, who had been trained at great trouble and expense, and had been brought to a state of the highest efficiency, were suddenly dismissed, and being unable to obtain re-admission to the service, often sought employment under a foreign flag, and thus, when required for Your Majesty's ships, were not to be procured.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ TNA: PRO: ADM 9552, HMS *Princess Charlotte* muster book, Ship's Company no. 604.

¹³⁷ This subject is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, careers and training.

¹³⁸ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, p.v.

Thomas Howells, Gunner, however, in his evidence to the Commission, believed that continuous service was not 'generally popular among the seamen'¹³⁹, and thought that 'seamen invariably like to choose their own ship, some men always prefer a small ship, and others a large one; they also like to choose their own captain, and if good men are forced into a ship against their will with a lot of bad men, there is always discontent and division between the ship's company.'¹⁴⁰ He objected to continuous service because

we take men, not knowing what characters they are; they have never been in the service, and they are taken on for ten years. We find, before they have been six months on board, they are anything but what we wish them to be; but they keep their characters sufficiently so as not to be called a bad character, and [therefore] to be discharged with disgrace. But they never make seamen, and they are an incubus upon the service...¹⁴¹

John Donnelly, a Seaman Rigger who had served in four Royal Navy ships as well as in the merchant service, gave evidence that he had not become a continuous service man when the contracts were introduced in 1853, and resented the extra pay given to those who were, and were not as experienced as him. Asked why he had not gone on the new scale, he said

The only objection that I have ever known about it is that many men do not fancy it. Perhaps I have got into a ship where the discipline is very strict and the consequence is I may think I have only about eighteen months or two years to run, and the ship will be paid off, and I can go and be my own master; but if I am a continuous service man I might get into trouble.¹⁴²

He clearly felt strongly that 'The only advantage that I ever knew [of non-continuous service] was liberty' but that was enough to make it far preferable to him. 'When I am paid off from my ship, let me have my liberty, and I can go and

¹³⁹ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, p.193.

¹⁴⁰ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, p.196.

¹⁴¹ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, p.194.

¹⁴² *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, p.206.

suit myself.’¹⁴³ The Commissioners tried to persuade him that since continuous service men were paid more, he could always buy himself out of the service if he wanted to leave (assuming, which they do not say, that he had managed to save all his additional pay) but he was not convinced.

The Commission’s suggestion that men were sometimes discharged from one ship and then ‘unable to obtain re-admission to the service’, is supported by the case of John Bechervaise, a Quartermaster and author of *Thirty-Six Years of Seafaring*. In 1824 he could not find a position on a new ship at his rating of Quartermaster. Eventually, he joined HMS *Blossom* in 1825, which was setting off for the Arctic. He did not find this an attractive destination but ‘Just then, ships of war were scarce, and I had no alternative.’¹⁴⁴ He had no intention of finding a merchant ship instead, preferring the King’s service, but the difficulty was finding a Royal Navy ship which would take him on at the appropriate rating, Quartermaster, rather than as an ordinary or able seaman. Even at the latter rating, he commented that for *Blossom*’s voyage ‘men were easily to be got’, so that the ship’s officers were able to enter only ‘such as produced good characters as thorough seamen, or were well recommended.’¹⁴⁵ The ships in the sample examined here recruited men over the period 1827 to 1847, and were not all as lucky as *Blossom*, as the figures quoted above for the length of time it took some ships to reach their complement shows.

¹⁴³ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, p.207.

¹⁴⁴ John Bechervaise, *Thirty-six Years of a Seafaring Life: by an Old Quarter Master*, (Portsea: Woodward, 1839), p.144.

¹⁴⁵ Bechervaise, p.144.

For James Carden, Boatswain, one of the attractions of the Royal Navy had been the appearance of the sailors. There was no official uniform for sailors until 1857, but he felt that:

... our seamen are losing ground; they are losing their popular name in the country that they once had, and I think that is greatly owing to the appearance of the men on shore. The sailors at one time appeared on shore, especially on Sunday, decently dressed, with a good suit of blue clothes, and no one was ashamed to countenance a sailor.

In fact, when I was young, it made all the boys eager to enter the navy – to go for a sailor was everything for a poor boy; but now you frequently see a seamen with his three yards of serge ashore, and society, I think, look round at him and despise him.¹⁴⁶

Scott Hughes Myerly has argued that appearance was an important part of recruiting for the armed services, and that ‘the more public admiration that a unit could win, the better for recruiting’.¹⁴⁷ Carden certainly believed that the Navy had gone downhill in this respect and was therefore having trouble finding enough men. Another factor which may have had some effect is the disappearance of prize money with the end of the Napoleonic wars. The only station with payment by results in which the men could share was the West African one, with head money and ship money for released slaves and destroyed slaving ships. All the boys may have been eager to enter the Navy when James Carden was young (his age is not given) but money and fighting seem more likely attractions than a good suit of clothes.

¹⁴⁶ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, evidence of James Carden, Boatswain, p.200.

¹⁴⁷ Scott Hughes Myerly, ‘Political Aesthetics: British Army Fashion, 1815-55’, in Michael H. Shirley, Todd E.A. Larson, (eds.) *Splendidly Victorian: essays in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British history in honour of Walter L. Arnstein* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p.46. He considered uniform design in both the army and navy.

Clothes could certainly be a source of grievance. Making sure that they had access to proper slops came up several times in the evidence given by sailors to the Commission, which eventually recommended that all men entering for ten years' continuous service be issued with a free set of clothing on joining the Navy, rather than immediately incurring debt for their necessary kit. One of the advantages, after all, of this kind of uniformed employment for working class men was that it included side benefits such as clothes, food and accommodation, and the Commission recognised there was a genuine grievance when these were not supplied or not considered adequate.¹⁴⁸

Merchant versus Monarch

John Donnelly, in his evidence to the 1859 Royal Commission, said he preferred working in the merchant service to the Royal Navy.

It is pleasanter in some respects, but not in others. In the navy you are clean and comfortable; in the merchant service, you are dirty, and there are many things of that kind; you cannot have your grub properly, but you have more of it, you can go and cut off a joint of meat; I have been in one ship of war where on Saturday afternoon, Saturday at dinner time, we shared out the bread dust, and until Monday afternoon, when the bread was served out again, we did not have a mouthful.¹⁴⁹

The Commission itself concluded that

Your Majesty's Service is not so popular as it should be with the great body of the mercantile marine. The disinclination to enter the Navy in the minds of a large portion of the merchant seamen is to be traced, chiefly to

¹⁴⁸ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, pp.x-ix.

¹⁴⁹ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, p.207.

ignorance of the usages of the service, and of the advantages which it offers to the seaman, for we find that the better the service is known, the more its privileges are appreciated, and the greater is the willingness to join it.¹⁵⁰

William Smith, a Boatswain, also giving evidence, said he thought merchant service men kept out of the Royal Navy because 'they consider in the first place, that there is a great deal of what they call nonsense.' They thought, he said, that there was too much drill.¹⁵¹ Henry Baynham argued that the press gang had left a 'legacy' of 'fear and loathing of His Majesty's Service' among merchant seamen.¹⁵² J S Bromley suggested that there was mutual distrust between the merchant marine and the Royal Navy until about 1870, when the Royal Navy had improved and merchant sailors were willing to join the Royal Naval Reserve (set up in 1860).¹⁵³ In the 1830s and 40s, however, there were still many men who had trained by the merchant service and were prepared to join the Royal Navy. In the sample studied here, 77.35 percent of the men (not boys) listed as having no previous service in the Royal Navy were rated as either Able Seaman (50.33 percent) or Ordinary (27.02 percent). The Royal Navy, as in the period of the Seven Years War, was clearly benefiting from the merchant navy's training as well as its own. Except when First Class Boys are taken into the Ship's Company on board the same ship, it is not possible to tell when adult recruits had initially been trained as boys, but two-thirds of those taken on as part of the Ship's Company, as listed in the muster books, list previous service on a Royal Navy ship. The belief expressed by the 1859 Royal Commission (p.48 above), that the Royal

¹⁵⁰ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, p.vi.

¹⁵¹ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, evidence of William Smith, Boatswain, p.205.

¹⁵² Baynham, *Before the Mast*, p.13.

¹⁵³ J S Bromley, , 'The British Navy and its Seamen after 1688. Notes for an unwritten history', in S Palmer and G Williams (eds), *Charted and Uncharted Waters, Proceedings of a Conference on the Study of British Maritime History*, National Maritime Museum, 1982, p.148.

Navy was failing to retain men in its service seems misplaced. On all the ships in the sample, some men are clearly being taken on in groups from recent service on another Royal Navy ship. HMS *Caledonia*, for example, recruiting in Devonport in October and November 1840, took on 25 men who had been serving in HMS *Impregnable*.¹⁵⁴ A few had had an interval of some years between RN ships, such as James Keating AB, paid off from HMS *Stag* on 16th December 1835, who joined HMS *Caledonia* on 8th December 1840. The majority of the men with previous service, however, had paid off only recently, such as Edward Black, AB, paid off from HMS *Queen* on 7 October 1840 and recruited into *Caledonia* on 16 December.¹⁵⁵

Table 2.1 Ratings of men joining the Royal Navy with no previous service in it (not Boys)

Qualities	No.	%
Able Seaman	540	50.33
Ordinary	290	27.03
Landsman	76	7.08
Stoker	27	2.52
Other ratings for which shipboard experience is necessary (eg Carpenter's Crew, Quartermaster)	75	6.99
Other ratings for which no shipboard experience is necessary, e.g Admiral's Cook	65	6.06
Total	1073	100

¹⁵⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8821, HMS *Caledonia* muster book, Ship's Company no.44.

¹⁵⁵ HMS *Caledonia* muster book, Ship's Company no.46.

As Table 2.1 shows, only 76 men joined the Royal Navy with no previous experience in it and were rated Landsman, 7.08 percent of all those first entering the service. Others, such as the Captain's cooks and stewards, need not have had previous seagoing experience, though it is probable that many did. The total figure of 1,073 first entrants amounts to 23.14 percent of the sample, and this is only those men who had (or said that) they had never served in the Royal Navy before; it does not include any who had worked in both the Royal Navy and the merchant service. The 1859 Commission may have been right that many merchant sailors disliked the Royal Navy, but many others clearly did not, and it is equally clear that men who had worked on Royal Navy ships were not all taking their experience to another employer, but regularly re-enlisted with the Navy.

Where were they from?

The men and boys who did choose to serve with the Royal Navy came from all over the world. Each ship's muster books list the place and county of birth for the sailors on board. The country is not normally given when it is England, but other countries of origin, including Ireland, Scotland and Wales are usually added. Table 2.2 (p.57 below), shows all the countries of origin for the total of 4637 men serving in the 23 commissions in the sample. Figure 2.2 (p.58) shows the same figures in descending order of the numbers from each country, but excluding England to make it much easier to see the relative proportions of the other countries.

Both the table and figure make it clear that, after England, sailors were most likely to have been born in Ireland, Scotland or Africa, but also show that the Royal Navy drew crew members from an extremely wide area. Twenty-eight places other than England are represented in the sample. Englishmen, with 3571 sailors, were clearly by far the largest group, providing just over three-quarters of all the men (77.01 percent). There was however considerable variation between the ships, so that for example although African men form only 2 percent of the overall sample, they were a significant presence in ships serving on the West African station. In HMS *Acorn* they made up 17 percent of the crew.¹⁵⁶ In contrast, the steam surveying vessel HMS *Fearless*, working mainly on the south coast in 1843-45, included one North American, one Channel Islander and 36 English-born men.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443, HMS *Acorn* muster book.

¹⁵⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/740-1, HMS *Fearless* muster book.

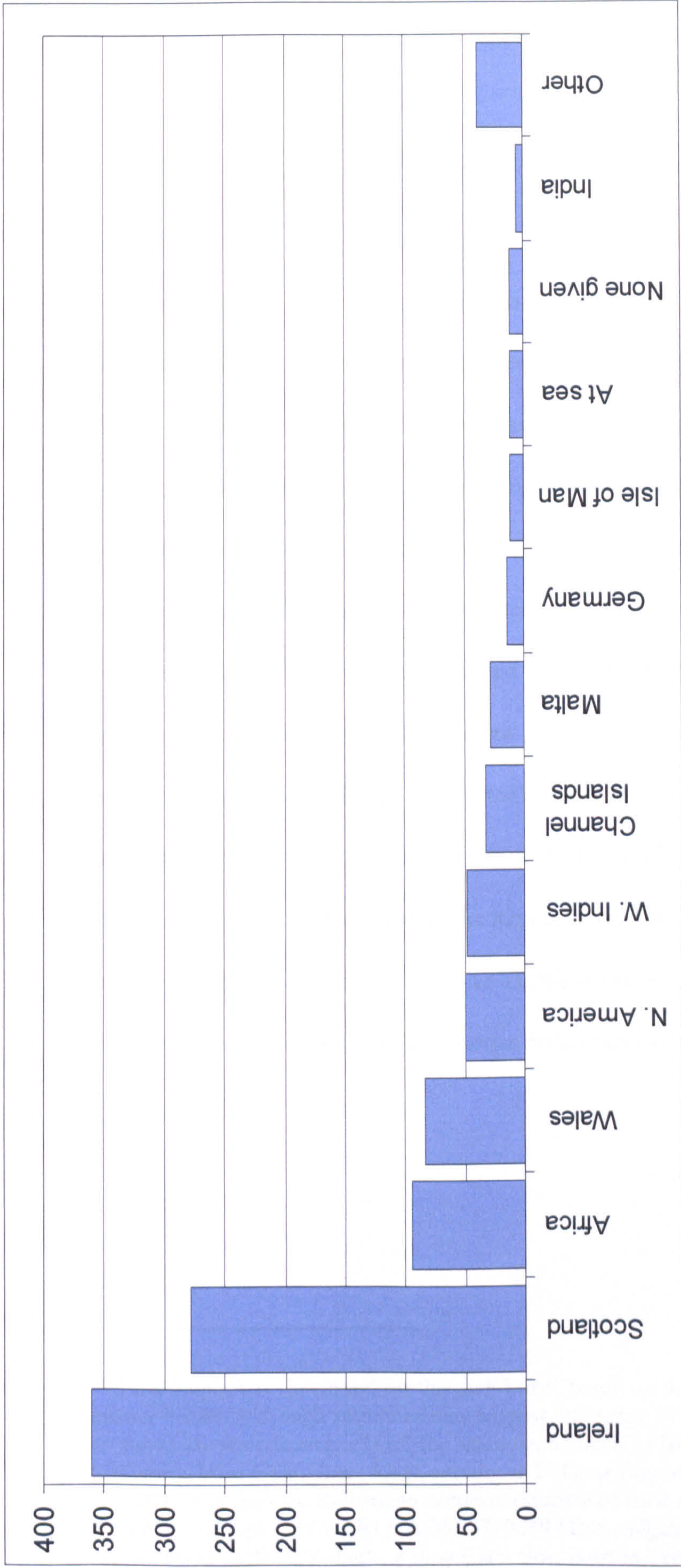
Table 2.2 Royal Navy Seamen by Country of Origin

Country	Number	Percentage of total
England	3571	77.01
Ireland	360	7.76
Scotland	278	6.00
Africa	94	2.03
Wales	83	1.79
N. America	50	1.08
W. Indies	48	1.04
Channel Islands	33	0.71
Malta	28	0.60
Germany	14	0.30
Isle of Man	12	0.26
At sea	11	0.24
None given ¹⁵⁸	11	0.24
India	6	0.13
Hanover	4	0.09
France	4	0.09
St Helena	4	0.09
Gibraltar	3	0.06
Italy	3	0.06
Norway	3	0.06
Sweden	3	0.06
Ceylon	2	0.04
Heligoland	2	0.04
Holland	2	0.04
Spain	2	0.04
Australia	1	0.02
Corfu	1	0.02
Denmark	1	0.02
E. Indies	1	0.02
Isle de France	1	0.02
Sandwich Islands	1	0.02
TOTAL	4637	100.00

Source: Muster books, PRO ADM series 37 and 38, for details of sample used and calculations see chapter 1, p.30.

¹⁵⁸ These instances occur usually when men joined and deserted so quickly that their details were never entered in the books. One example of this is John McMillan, who joined *Skipjack* on 25th March 1831 from *Winchester*, and deserted on 28th March 1831 (TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9878).

Figure 2.2 Royal Navy sailors by country of birth (excluding England)



Source: Muster books, PRO ADM series 37 and 38. Other countries include (in descending order): France, Hanover, St Helena, Gibraltar, Italy, Norway,

Sweden, Ceylon, Heligoland, Holland, Spain, Australia, Corfu, Denmark, E. Indies, Isle de France, Sandwich Islands.

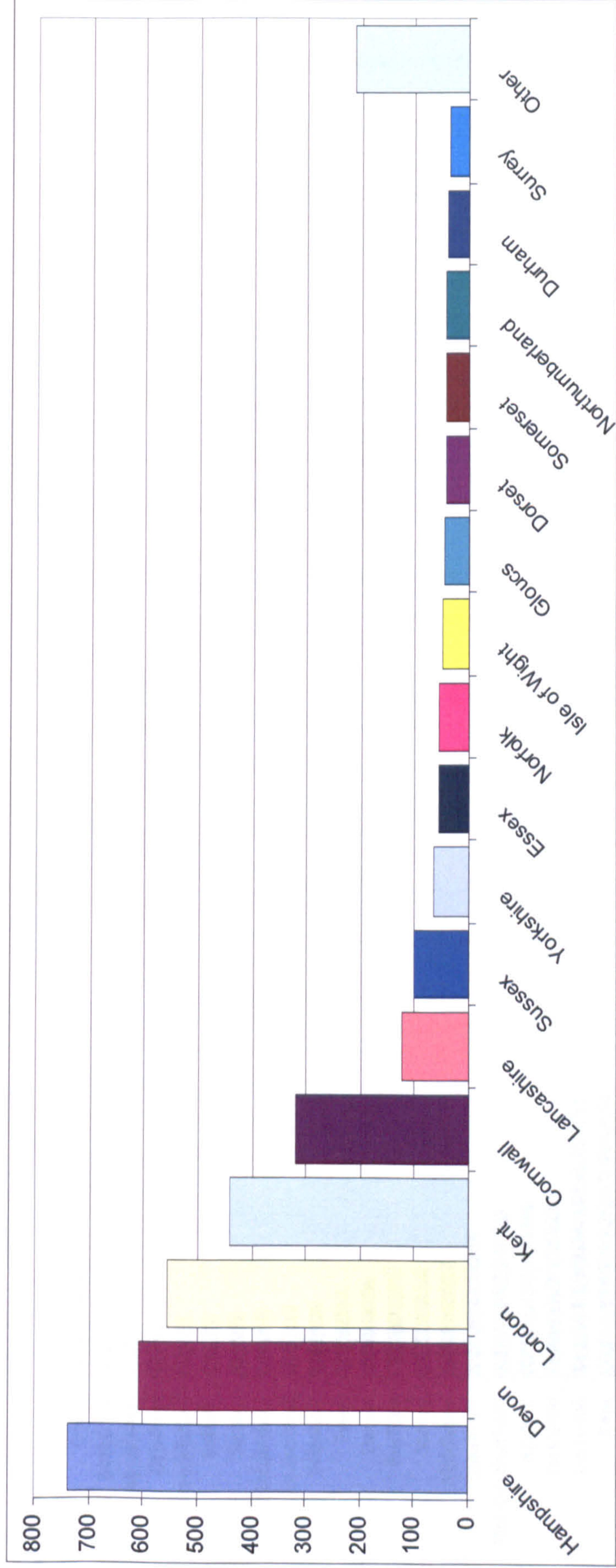
English sailors

As with the distribution across the world, there are English sailors in the Royal Navy from almost every county in the country, but there is a clear bias to the south, to Hampshire, Kent, London, Devon and Cornwall.¹⁵⁹ There is no way of telling, of course, the extent to which place of residence (which for a sailor may be more likely to be a place like Portsmouth or Plymouth) is being given instead of place of birth, but since most of the muster book entries are quite detailed, and where description books survive the place of residence is not always the same as the place of birth,¹⁶⁰ the statistics derived from the muster book entries should give a reasonably accurate idea of sailors' birthplaces. Figure 2.3 shows English sailors by county of birth. Figure 2.4, for comparison, shows the English-born sailors present at the battle of Trafalgar, from the database compiled by Pam and Derek Ayshford. Londoners were the largest group there, and Hampshire sailors are only the fourth biggest group. The Trafalgar sailors, of course, included many who had been impressed into the service rather than volunteered.

¹⁵⁹ I use English as shorthand for 'English-born', based on the place of birth given in the muster books. Although surnames may suggest that some of the sailors born in England or elsewhere are at least partly of, for example, Scottish or Irish origin (such as James McCarthy, born Gillingham, Kent, serving as 1st Class Boy on Winchester in 1839), it would be very difficult to form an accurate estimate of their numbers.

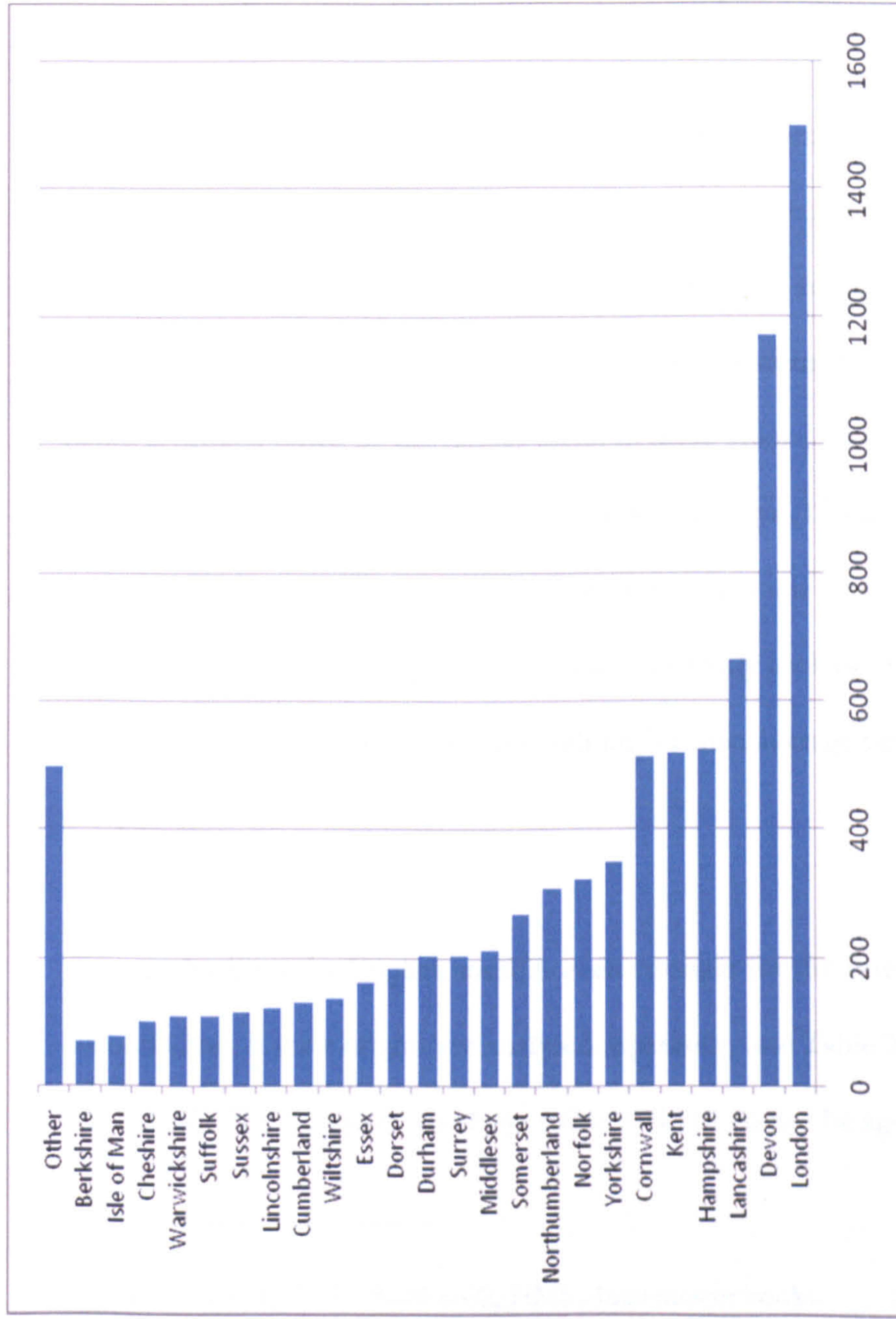
¹⁶⁰ See for example TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8649 HMS *Alligator* description book and muster book. William Roberts, a First Class Boy, born in Tregony, Cornwall and living in Portsmouth, and Thomas Edwards (Ship's Company no.2) born in Heligoland and living in London, are two of several entries where residence and birthplace differ.

Figure 2.3 English sailors by county of birth



The Isle of Wight is listed as a separate category, though technically part of Hampshire, simply to provide a better picture of the sailors' origins. It was clearly considered relevant to separate it at the time, because places on the Isle of Wight are normally identified as such, and not as X, Hampshire. If the men from the Island are added back in to Hampshire's figures, there are 777 Hampshire-born sailors, 22.07% of the overall English total. Other counties include all those with fewer than 30 sailors in the sample, in descending order they are: Cumberland, Suffolk, Lincolnshire, Wiltshire, Cheshire, Middlesex, Berkshire, Cambridgehire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, Bedfordshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Man, Northamptonshire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Sunderland, Worcestershire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Rutland, Westmorland.

Figure 2.4 English sailors at the Battle of Trafalgar, by county of origin



Source: Derek and Pam Aysbford, *The Aysbford Complete Trafalgar Roll, CD-ROM, (Belgium: SEFF, 2004)*.

Since so many ships commissioned in either Portsmouth or Plymouth, it is to be expected that many local men would be among those volunteering for the Royal Navy. This pattern holds good in most ships in this sample, such as *Aetna*, recruiting in Portsmouth and listing 13 men out of 73 from Hampshire, plus two from the Isle of Wight.¹⁶¹ *Albatross*, which also recruited in Portsmouth, took on 61 sailors out of 135 from Hampshire, as well as three from the Isle of Wight; a total of 39.26 percent of the whole crew and 47.41 percent of the Englishmen.¹⁶²

There are variations on this theme. For example, the steamship *Comet*, commissioned in Plymouth in July 1837, included 29 men and boys from London out of its total of 59, 42 percent of the crew.¹⁶³ This may be accounted for by Londoners being more likely to serve as Stokers on a steamship, but when the figure is broken down by the ratings given to these sailors, they are evenly spread across the different qualities in the ship, with eight Boys (1st and 2nd Class), six Able Seamen, one Ordinary Seaman, four Stokers and ten others. Another ship, *Raven*, serving and recruiting in home waters, regularly took on men recruited at Greenock, near Glasgow, ending up with higher than average percentage of Scots at 9 percent.

This emphasis on the English south is even stronger for the Boys, First and Second Class, if their origins are analysed separately, (see Table 2.4 and Figures 2.5, below). These suggest that Boys (who could of course be aged between 14

¹⁶¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8619-8622, HMS *Aetna* muster books.

¹⁶² TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7486, HMS *Albatross* muster books.

¹⁶³ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8906-8, HMS *Comet* muster books.

and 20) were much more likely to come from the counties local to the ship's recruiting bases, less likely to migrate long distances to join the Navy.¹⁶⁴ Later in the century, as Walton has shown, the Navy would make efforts to recruit from all around the UK, but in this period there was no such attempt, or need to do so.¹⁶⁵ Those born in the north of England might later enter the Royal Navy, but they would be more likely to get their training in the merchant service. This was not always the case, of course, as demonstrated by Edward Hargreaves, who ran away to sea in 1855 from his Yorkshire village. He attempted to join the merchant navy in Liverpool, but

I could not get a berth for I had not Been to sea Before And there was plenty of Boyes to be got that Had Been to sea before... I would not come Home Before I Had Been to sea for I did not want to Be laughed at by my companions as I knew that I should be so I went to the naval rendezvous and joined the navy as first class Boy.¹⁶⁶

Hargreaves was unusual, though; 110 Boys served in board HMS *Winchester* in 1839-42, and all but four were from London, Kent, Sussex, Devon or Hampshire.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Migration at this time was normally over quite short distances, see below, p.32.

¹⁶⁵ Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy', see chapter 2.

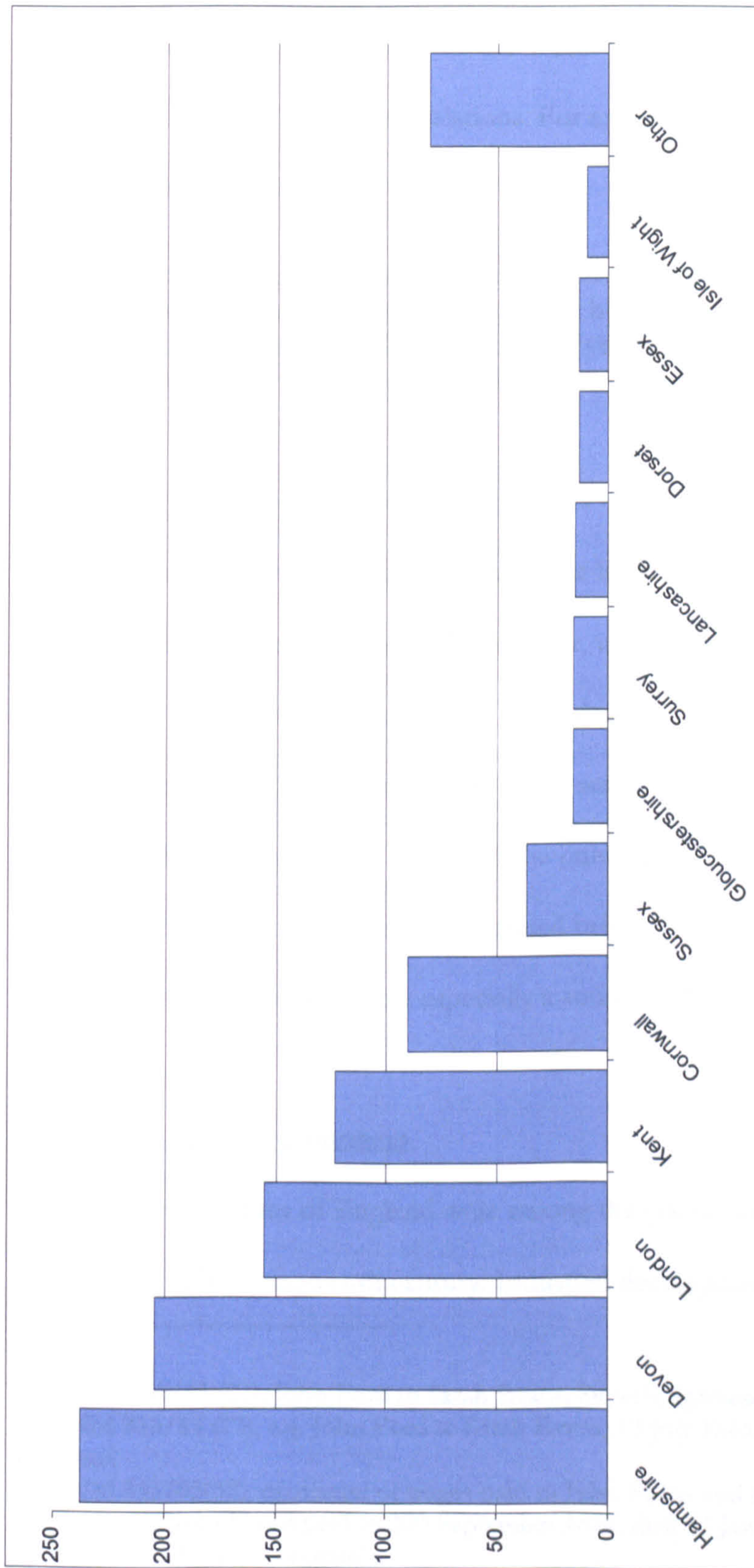
¹⁶⁶ Edward Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy', handwritten memoir, 1855-62, Royal Naval Museum, 1988/44.

¹⁶⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/10107, HMS *Winchester* description book.

Table 2.3 Boys (First and Second Class) serving in the Royal Navy by Country of Birth

Country	No.	Percentage
England	1012	89.08
Ireland	43	3.79
Scotland	34	2.99
W. Indies	11	0.97
Wales	9	0.79
N. America	7	0.62
Malta	6	0.53
Channel Islands	4	0.35
St Helena	4	0.35
India	2	0.18
at sea	1	0.09
France	1	0.09
Germany	1	0.09
none given	1	0.09
Total	1136	100.00

Figure 2.5 English-born Boys serving in the Royal Navy by County



Other counties include all those with fewer than 10 boys in the sample; in descending order they are: Norfolk, Somerset, Wiltshire, Yorkshire, Middlesex, Northumberland, Suffolk, Berkshire, Durham, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Cumberland, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Isle of Man, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Pembrokeshire, Rutland, Shropshire.

The family networks of some of the men and boys who joined the Royal Navy are demonstrated in the letters of John Ford. In 1845, aged about 25, he was writing home to his fiancée, Sarah Evans in Devonport. He sent various messages for her to pass on to friends and relations. For example, writing in December 1848 he asked her to

Give my kind Love to Jane and tell her she is Captitall hand of writing you Can tell her I have a nice young man for her I Dont Know wether she likes a red-jacket or no. For there is plenty of young woman that Likes the red. Her Brother is well and send his Kind Love to her ...¹⁶⁸

In earlier letters he repeatedly asked her to pass on love from 'the Young Man' to 'Julia'.¹⁶⁹ His family were apparently local, since he mentions his sister visiting Sarah, and he later served with Sarah's brother, who was also a sailor, John Evans, who died in the Crimean war.¹⁷⁰ Their daughter, also called Sarah, married another sailor, William Thomas AB, who was sending money home to her in 1875.¹⁷¹ Such families were by no means the only type of background for sailors in the Royal Navy in this period, as discussed below, but they did represent a part of its recruitment base, probably especially a source of Boys.

The English regional economies

The southern counties of England were among the poorer areas of the country in the first half of the nineteenth century. Industrial developments in the north, and

¹⁶⁸ RNM, 353/85 (21), John Ford to Sarah Evans, *Superb*, Spithead, 29 December 1848.

¹⁶⁹ RNM 353/85 (13), e.g. John Ford to Sarah Evans, 13 July 1845, HMS *Superb*, Spithead.

¹⁷⁰ RNM 353/85(38), certificate of wages paid to John Evans and residue due to his sister Sarah Ford. He had been paid to 30th September 1854, died 13 Jan 1855 'originally of Huberston and lately a Seaman'.

¹⁷¹ RNM 353/85(42), certificate of allotment, William Thomas AB to Sarah Thomas née Evans.

the agricultural depression after the end of the Napoleonic Wars had led to serious regional variations in wages and standards of living. During the war agriculture had prospered, but prices fell from 1813 when harvests improved, and with the return to the gold standard in 1821-3 and deflationary government policies, prices dropped further. In addition, men back from the war had to be reintroduced into the economy, while machinery developed to make up for the shortage of labour during the war went on being used afterwards.¹⁷² Although the London economy in the south was improving in the early nineteenth century, this was rather 'a return to an earlier standard of living' after the late eighteenth century depression, 'than the onset of unprecedented prosperity'.¹⁷³

Enclosure of land had increased food production, but also resulted in the loss of traditional rights for some of the smaller holders of land, and often in transfer of ownership to larger landowners, with the previous owners becoming wage labourers.¹⁷⁴ In areas where there was strong industrial development, alternative sources of employment as well as increased demand for food stopped agricultural wages falling too low, but in the south there were few alternatives to the land and wages were very depressed. Table 2.4 (below, p.68) shows the wages for agricultural labourers from the late eighteenth to late nineteenth century. The 1833-45 wage rates, which fall within the period of this study, show a clear difference between northern and southern counties. Wages in Dorset and Buckinghamshire have gone up only 1s 1d and 1s 10d since 1767-70, while in

¹⁷² Pamela Horn, *Life and Labour in Rural England 1760-1850*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp.66-8.

¹⁷³ Martin Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, (Oxford: OUP 1995), p.435.

¹⁷⁴ Horn, *Life and Labour*, p.50.

Lancashire and Northumberland they have increased 5s 8d and 5s 9d respectively.

This is clearly related to competition for labour in the north, where in 1850

weekly wages in the cotton spinning trade were 23s, and coalminers could earn

20s a week.¹⁷⁵

Table 2.4 Weekly wage rate for agricultural labourers, 1767-70 to 1867-70

	1767-70	1794-5	1833-45	1867-70
Buckinghamshire	8s 0d	7s 4d	9s 10d	14s 3d
Norfolk	8s 0d	8s 1d	10s 7d	14s 9d
Dorset	6s 9d	8s 3d	7s 10d	11s 6d
Lancashire	6s 9d	10s 1d	12s 5d	17s 9d
Northumberland	6s 0d	10s 3d	11s 9d	17s 9d
Dumbartonshire	-	7s 0d	10s 6d	16s 6d
Aberdeenshire	-	6s 0d	9s 6d	13s 0d

Source: E H Hunt, 'Industrialisation and Regional Inequality: Wages in Britain 1760-1914', *Journal of Economic History*, 46 (1986), 965-6, as quoted in Martin Daunt, *Progress and Poverty*, (Oxford: OUP 1995), p.427.

Despite the higher wages on offer in the north, population growth in the south was not compensated for by migration towards the more industrialised areas of England; even for new employment migration 'rarely extended beyond a ten-mile radius from a worker's place of origin.' In northern industrial areas, the population grew because of series of short migrations and above-average birth rate, 'not by dramatic long-distance movements of large numbers of people'.¹⁷⁶ A contemporary commentator looking at agriculture in 1850-1 noted that there was

¹⁷⁵ John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain 1850-1939* (London: Longman, 1989), p.41. His discussion of the working class does not include those who worked in the Army, Navy or merchant marine.

¹⁷⁶ Horn, *Life and Labour*, p.107.

a line to be drawn 'at the point where coal ceases to be found', and south of that line only in Sussex did agricultural wages reach 10s per week, whereas in parts of Lancashire some men earned 15s a week.¹⁷⁷ Martin Daunton, in *Progress and Poverty*, used rates of pauperism as another way of measuring regional differences.¹⁷⁸ The Midlands and the north are all in the range of 3.5-5.9 percent pauperism, compared to 7.5 percent in all the counties around London (with the highest measurement 9.5 percent), and 8.5 – 9.49 percent in Devon and Somerset. Cornwall is lower at 5.5-6.49 percent.

In the south, therefore, the economy in the first half of the nineteenth century, after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, was experiencing slow growth and constraints on the standard of living, as reflected in wage rates and pauperism. An able seaman's wage of £1 14s per lunar month (8s 6d per week), which included full board, and a system of allotments so that each sailor could send money home, could appear an attractive career when compared to working on the land in the south. Given that long-distance migration was uncommon, it was one of the few alternatives on offer. This was not the reason the Royal Navy did most of its recruiting in the south, which was instead because that was where its main dockyards and harbours were. It can certainly be concluded, however, that had it been seeking labour largely in the northern ports of Liverpool and Hull, it would have had much greater trouble in finding enough men to sail the ships. These ports were thriving and growing from the late eighteenth century through the

¹⁷⁷ James Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-1* (1852), pp.511-12, quoted in Horn, *Life and Labour*, p.162.

¹⁷⁸ Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, p.459.

expansion of international trade and the development of internal routes for goods, so that Liverpool's population, for example, grew from 78,000 in 1801 to 375,955 in 1851.¹⁷⁹ The very success of the merchant shipping industry there would have made it hard for the Royal Navy to compete for men.

The description books which survive for a few ships include in some cases the trade to which each sailor had been brought up. In HMS *Caledonia*, (commission December 1839 to June 1842) for example, nearly half the crew list 'Sea' under this heading, but there are also ten who put 'Farmer', as well as three labourers, a woolcomber, a house carpenter, a shoemaker, five tailors and two miners.¹⁸⁰ In HMS *Acorn* (commission January 1839-October 1843), there are four brought up to be farmers, a labourer, a seedsman, a shoemaker, a plasterer, an engine builder and a printer, together with four tailors and seven servants.¹⁸¹ There is no indication, of course, whether they have abandoned these trades out of choice, and whether they have done so permanently or temporarily. Some of the trades given by the men other than 'the sea' are clearly related to seafaring, such as caulker, shipwright, sailmaker and ropemaker (there is one of each of these in *Caledonia*) and others are crafts which are needed on board a wooden sailing ship, even if they were not taught the trade with that intention, such as blacksmith (five of these served in HMS *Acorn*), and carpenter. On board HMS *Winchester* (commission March 1839 to March 1842), as well as the 237 brought up to the sea, and the 136 who give no trade of any kind, there are six musicians, seven cooks, eight labourers, three shoemakers, two tailors and two coachmakers, as

¹⁷⁹ James Walvin, *English Urban Life 1776-1851*, (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p.11.

¹⁸⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8825, HMS *Caledonia*, description book.

¹⁸¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443, HMS *Acorn*, description book.

well as 14 men from other backgrounds (including a weaver, a glass cutter and a groom) which have no clear utility at sea, a total of 42 men, or about 10 percent.¹⁸² In his study of *The Navy in Transition*, Michael Lewis stated that the men, 'nearly all of them, were the sons of fathers who regularly "used the sea".'¹⁸³ He considered that with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and the landsmen brought into the Navy by the press, sailors had become a more homogenous group than ever, poorly educated, with 'parents [who] were seamen of one kind or another'.¹⁸⁴ Setting aside any question of their mothers' work, the description books examined here make it clear that Lewis's conclusions are wrong. Although many sailors had seafaring fathers, the Royal Navy was in fact recruiting from a variety of backgrounds, including the land.

Within the men and boys from Hampshire, by far the largest group did come from Portsmouth. On board HMS *Princess Charlotte*, 55 gave Portsmouth, 45 Portsea, nine Landport, two Alverstoke, one Southsea and one Fratton as their place of birth, all of which are located on Portsea Island within easy reach of the naval dockyard. A further 37 were born in Gosport, on the other side of Portsmouth Harbour, and others come from places such as Fareham (five), Havant (one) and Emsworth (one), which are on the coast and not far from Portsmouth. Others come from the coast, but slightly further away, such as the eight from Southampton and the one from Lymington. Far fewer come from further inland, such as Thomas Leach (Landsman, final rating Able Seaman) of

¹⁸² TNA: PRO: ADM 37/10107, HMS *Winchester*, description book.

¹⁸³ Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition 1814-64. A Social History*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), p.42.

¹⁸⁴ Lewis, *The Navy in Transition*, pp.32-5.

Romsey, Robert Woodward (Able Seaman) of Swanmore and Horatio Swan (Ordinary) from Headley. Out of a total of 188 from Hampshire, that is, 152 come from places immediately around Portsmouth Harbour, a further 18 from other places on the coast and another 18 (9.04 percent) from inland villages like Headley.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Portsmouth was the tenth largest town in England and Wales, with a population of 32,000, and Plymouth outstripped it with 43,000.¹⁸⁵ By 1851, places like Manchester and Liverpool had grown from around 80,000 to 370,000, but while neither Plymouth nor Portsmouth could match this, they had continued to expand. In the 1841 census the Isle of Portsea recorded a population of 53,036 people (24,562 men and 28,474 women), though this figure only includes 'such part of the Army, Navy and Merchant Seamen as were at the time of the Census within the Kingdom on Shore'.¹⁸⁶ The total population of Hampshire amounted to 354,940, of whom 15 percent lived in Portsmouth/Portsea, and if the 13,511 recorded in Alverstoke are added, it rises to nearly 19 percent. Considering that many would have been afloat, Portsmouth must have absorbed at least 20 percent of Hampshire's population, and that does not include those living in Gosport. Aside from London, Hampshire has by far the largest number of people employed under the classification 'public administration and defence' in the 1841 census, at 6,049 of the total employed population of 120,679. A further 3,820 were employed in

¹⁸⁵ Walvin, *English Urban Life*, p.11.

¹⁸⁶ *Accounts of the Population and the Number of Houses*, Parliamentary Papers, 1841 Session 2(5)11.277.

'transport', which included merchant sailors. Agriculture, at 36,254, is of course by far the largest group, followed by the classification which includes domestic service, but clearly the armed forces were very important to Hampshire's economy.¹⁸⁷

When looking at the comparative recruitment of Hampshire with, for example, neighbouring Dorset, which recorded the lowest agricultural wage rates (7s 10d) in 1833-45 (see above, Table 2.4, p.68), it is important to remember the relative size of their populations. The 1841 census recorded only 174,743 people living in Dorset, less than half the number in Hampshire, and in Poole, the largest Dorset port, there were only 12,074 people. This is not the only explanation for the much larger numbers going into the Royal Navy from Hampshire than from the poorer county next door, which also bears out Pamela Horn's assessment that most people migrated no more than ten miles. With no Royal Navy port in Dorset, the King's Service was a far less attractive option, despite the poverty of the county, than to those who only had to travel a few miles to Portsmouth or Plymouth and were therefore much more likely to be familiar with the possibilities that the Navy could offer. Working at sea in a man-of-war, however, was still an attractive alternative in terms of the wages and conditions on offer to those available on the land in the 1830s and 1840s, and particularly in the southern counties.

¹⁸⁷ C H Lee, *British Regional Employment Statistics 1841-1971* (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), Total Employment, 1841.

Irish sailors

Sailors born in Ireland make up 7.7 percent of the sample of men under consideration. As with the distribution in England, there is a clear bias to particular places, with 161 men coming from Cork, 46.13 percent of the total, and 58 from Dublin, 16.62 percent of the total. Waterford and Wexford are the next most popular after Cork and Dublin, with 16 and 14 men respectively. All four places are on the coast facing towards the United Kingdom. There are however representatives from every county in Ireland, including for example three men from Kilkenny, well inland. As with southern England, the economic conditions of Ireland at the time, especially in the 1840s with high agricultural prices and eventually famine conditions, would have made employment with the Royal Navy an attractive option for many men. Where the description books give usual place of residence, some still list their place of origin, but others have clearly migrated: in HMS *Virago*, William James and Francis Henson gave London as their place of residence, and John Buckley Devonport.¹⁸⁸ As the muster books only list place of birth, there is no indication of how many sailors came from Irish parents who had already migrated to England or elsewhere.

¹⁸⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/9281, HMS *Virago* description book.

Overseas-born sailors

There is a distinction in the muster books between overseas-born sailors who are recruited into the Ship's Company, or as Boys First or Second Class, either at home or abroad for the rest of the commission, and those taken on locally and discharged before ships head for home. The largest number of the latter are the Kroomen taken on by Royal Navy ships on the West Africa station, on anti-slavery patrol, who account for most of the African-born sailors in Figure 2.2 (p.58 above). Apart from them, most overseas-born sailors were recruited as individuals, and as the table and figure above show, come from a wide variety of backgrounds. The different treatment of the Kroomen is not simply a question of colour, since the description books reveal some men described as having black skin (as opposed to dark, or swarthy, which seem to be descriptions of white men) and recruited straight into the Ship's Company in the ordinary way. One such is Charles Smith, born in Bristol, recruited into *Acorn* as an Able Seaman in 1839; another is John Young, born in Kingston, Jamaica (though giving his usual place of residence as Liverpool), also recruited onto *Acorn* as an AB.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, the Royal Navy appears to have been fairly pragmatic about recruitment; if men were willing to serve and had the requisite skills, it would employ them to man its ships.

¹⁸⁹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443, HMS *Acorn* muster book, Ship's Company nos. 49 and 98.

Kroomen

Kroomen were treated differently from those recruited as individuals. They are listed separately in the muster books, and paid differently. HMS *Acorn*, a 16-gun brig serving on the Coast of Africa station from 1839-43, took on a total of 34 Kroomen during the course of its commission, with about 15 of the men serving at any one time.¹⁹⁰ Rather than being absorbed into the crew, they had specific duties:

For many years they have rendered good service to the African squadron, being literally its hewers of wood and drawers of water, duties which could not be performed by Europeans without an enormous sacrifice of health and life.¹⁹¹

According to this report, the Kroomen were 'an athletic, hard-working race' and came from near Cape Palmas, about 500 miles to the south of Sierra Leone. They had lived at Sierra Leone for many years, 'where they seek for employment either at sea or on shore; but the naval service they prefer to all others.' Sierra Leone had been founded as a 'Province of Freedom', with 400 black settlers sent from Britain in 1787, though it was administered from London. The population of Freetown was regularly increased by the settlement of recaptured slaves, or 'Liberated Africans', taken by the Royal Navy from slave ships.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443, HMS *Acorn* muster book.

¹⁹¹ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy for the years 1837, 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843, Part III*. House of Commons Papers 505, 12 August 1854, Preliminary Remarks on the West Africa Station, p.62.

¹⁹² T C McCaskie, 'Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century', in Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (eds), *Black Experience and the Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.168-9.

The Kroomen employed on *Acorn* came in many cases from other ships in the squadron, the initial group principally from *Fantome*, and a few of these on their discharge transferred to yet another ship, *Lily* or *Curlew*. Since most were given a passage back to Sierra Leone, they presumably did this from choice. Unlike other men in the Navy, they were recruited and treated as a group, as the instructions for their pay make clear: 'Kroomen employed in Ships on the Coast of Africa to be paid the following rates of pay:

Chief Head Man	As Quarter Master
One in every 12	As Able
The Others	As Ord and LM. ¹⁹³

So whatever skills they developed, and even if they did 'soon acquire a tolerable knowledge of all the duties required on deck'¹⁹⁴, there was very little scope for an improved rating. *Acorn* certainly followed this system, rating one man, William Gumption, as AB, and the rest LM or Ordinary.

From 1843 new rates were introduced for these men, as follows:

Head Kroomen 1 st Class	As 2 nd Class Petty Officer
Head Kroomen 2 nd Class	As Able
Kroomen 1 st Class	As LM
Kroomen 2 nd Class	As Boy 1 st Class.

which may have made greater allowance for individual assessment, though making it clearer that they ranked below white men of equivalent skills. A Landsman got £1.3s.0d per month, and a First Class Boy 14s 3d at this time. These wages, however, must have been reasonable in the context of the local

¹⁹³ *Rates of Pay of the Royal Navy, Special Rates and Allowances*, p.95.

¹⁹⁴ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.62.

economy, and it may be that their being 'left to follow the bent of their own natural propensities with respect to any useful employment', messing by themselves, being allowed to sleep on deck and to wear 'the dress of their own country, which consists, simply, of a piece of printed calico wrapped around the loins' helped, along with the pay, to make naval service an attractive form of employment to them.¹⁹⁵

Another group recruited into the Navy on this station were called (in *Acorn*) Liberated African Lads, of which it had six. They all served for about nine months, and were aged 15 or 16 at their entry in May 1840. According to the *Health of the Navy* reports, such boys, who were liberated slaves, were, unlike the Kroomen, 'dressed in the same manner as the seamen' and efforts made to teach them a trade, but 'with rare exceptions, neither make good sailors nor artificers; listless, indolent, and of a low grade of intellect'.¹⁹⁶ The boys who served in *Acorn*, however, who all left the ship at Ascension on 26th February 1841 for passage to Sierra Leone, were given certificates of behaviour with three marked 'good', two 'fair' and one 'very good', so presumably cannot have conformed to this stereotype. There is no evidence to show whether they served in the Navy again, or how they responded to their treatment, but all are listed as having previously served in either *Fantome* or *Melville*.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, pp.62-3.

¹⁹⁶ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.62.

¹⁹⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443, HMS *Acorn* muster book.

Family ties

The remittance system was set up under the 1758 Navy Act to allow sailors to send money home to their wives and/or families, followed by a revised allotment system under the 1795 Navy Act, the system in operation in this period.

Appendix 1 shows the instructions printed in the muster books on how such allotments should be managed. Initially, the system was not much used. Rodger noted that in 72 ships paid at Plymouth in 1759, where some of the men made remittances, this still only amounted to 365 men (3 percent of their complements), and there were other ships where no one made any remittance at all. For those who did want to make remittances, the new system was free and simply required the sailor to sign a 'will and power' which gave the name of the person who should receive the money. Among the 365 men Rodger looked at, 'just over half the payments were to wives, or to women of the same surname who might have been wives.' This does not necessarily account for all the men who sent money home, as Rodger also cites the experience of Admiral Boscawen, who twice arranged to send money home on behalf of some of his men, via his banker. Rodger also pointed out that remittance figures are likely to underestimate the number of married men, who would be mostly likely to use the new system, and that some remittances to families may have been for the use of wives.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.134.

By the time of this study, as can be seen in the instructions quoted in Appendix 1, the Navy was, in theory at least, very strict about who should receive allotments, and that those 'wives' who did receive money should be legally married to the sailor sending it to them. From 1853 this restriction was relaxed, and sailors could allot money to anyone they chose, allowing them, for example, to give money to illegitimate children. Giving evidence to the 1859 Royal Commission on Manning the Navy, R P Chaplin of Portsmouth Dockyard, who dealt with payment of wages and allotments, analysed 1000 allotments of wages at the yard. He thought that about 20 percent of allotments went to people not covered under the previous degrees of relationship allowed, but argued that this would continue if the law changed, since sailors would revert to doing what they had when the rules were stricter, and call the person to whom they wanted to send money their sister, their cousin or so on.¹⁹⁹ In the Commission's report, however, it recommended a return to the rules in force up to 1853, and still in effect in the merchant service, whereby only wives, fathers or mothers, grandfathers or grandmothers, children or grandchildren, brothers or sisters, could receive money by allotment. The Commissioners reported that 'we have the evidence of those well acquainted with the present practice, that allotments are frequently made by seamen to very undeserving characters, to persons who have no natural claim whatever on them, whilst their families are perhaps compelled to resort to the parish for relief.'²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, pp.273-4.

²⁰⁰ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, p.ix.

Being forced onto the parish for relief, however, could happen even to legally married women whose husbands had set up an allotment for them. The system required the wife, or other recipient of the allotment, to take the ticket to the dockyard offices and receive the agreed payment there, perhaps 15s a month. This was not enough money to prevent her needing to work as well, so collecting it could be inconvenient, as Captain Robert Gambier pointed out to the 1859 Commission. He was resident at Alverstoke, Hampshire, and claimed that the wives of marines and Royal Navy seamen often came before the parish. The local board had written to the Admiralty on 12th May 1844 to say that they had on their books

the wives of 64 marines and 22 seamen, and 173 of their children, who were then receiving parish relief, and had been receiving it for from three to four months (often many more months); and upon one occasion actually thirteen months. And we ascertained that, in general, the men were all willing to have allotted their pay as soon as they could. At the same time we had but one case of a merchant seaman's family, who applied for relief, and it was in the case of a man who had quite left his family, and had gone to Australia...²⁰¹

In his opinion, it was the delays in setting up the allotments, and the difficulty in receiving them, which caused so many of the problems.

As shown above (Figure 2.1, p.41), the largest numbers of sailors were in their early twenties, an age at which they were unlikely to be married. The birth rate of the whole population of the United Kingdom during the 1840s was about 33 per 1,000 of population, lower than previously, which suggests later marriages. The depression of 1837 to 1842 may have also kept marriage rates low, and in 1851

²⁰¹ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, p.266-7.

nearly 2.5 million people aged 20 to 44, both men and women, were unmarried.²⁰² Southall and Gilbert, in their study of marriage and the economy from 1839 to 1914, argue that 'most couples married only when the man had achieved a certain level of earnings, had reasonably secure prospects, and once sufficient savings had been accumulated in order to set up house,' since getting married normally meant establishing a new household.²⁰³ All these factors would tend to keep sailors' marriage rates low.

Although allotments are one of the few ways in which we can assess a sailor's links with his community, not having an allotment does not of course imply a lack of family ties, since it may merely mean that a sailor's family (whether parents, siblings, wife or children) were not in need of his financial support, or that the sailor preferred to save money and take it home at the end of the voyage (remembering that allotments could be troublesome to collect and were most suitable for those living within easy reach of a dockyard), as well as that he chose to spend it all himself. Up to the age of 20 they could not send money home anyway, as Boys were not allowed allotments. Edward Hargreaves in his memoir makes little mention of his feelings about being away from home from the ages of 16 to 22, except once. Writing about March 1856, when his ship HMS *Sampson* was at Hull, he commented that

²⁰² Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain*, p.17.

²⁰³ Humphrey Southall and David Gilbert, 'A good time to wed?: marriage and economic distress in England and Wales, 1839-1914', *Economic History Review*, XLIX, I (1996) pp.35-57.

I thought it very Hard to Be so near Home And not Be Aloud to come
And see my parents And if I could Have got on shore I Believe that I
should Have deserted But I did not get the chance.²⁰⁴

It should also be noted that the concept of a 'family wage', considered to be enough to allow a working man to support a wife and household, was only developing during this period; it was during the political arguments preceding the Second Reform Act that the assumption that an independent man should be able to maintain a family became more prominent.²⁰⁵ Sailors' wives and families would have expected to contribute to the household income as well; the allotment would not have been enough to live on except perhaps for warrant officers. Figures for the amount being sent home are not given in the muster books, but John Ford, serving as Chief Boatswain's Mate in HMS *Dapper* in 1856, was sending £2 a month to his wife.²⁰⁶ This represents nearly two-thirds of his pay, which was £3 9s 9d a month. For an able seaman at the same time, the most he could earn was £2 10s 1d a month under the non-continuous service rates, and then only with three good conduct badges.²⁰⁷

Even when men kept all their wages, this in no way precludes emotional attachments on shore, even if it does rule out financial responsibility for anyone. A few letters from sailors of the period do survive, and suggest that family and friendship ties at home were valued by sailors, both unmarried and married. Since 1795, they had been allowed a special cheap postage rate of 1d for letters at home

²⁰⁴ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

²⁰⁵ C. Hall, K. McClelland, J. Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation. Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.99-100.

²⁰⁶ RNM 353/85 (40), John Ford, allotment certificate, 29 August 1856.

²⁰⁷ *The New Navy List December 1861* (London: John Murray, 1862), pp.242-3, 245.

and overseas, along with soldiers and other service personnel.²⁰⁸ However, since letters could of course only travel by ship, communication remained difficult and uncertain. Emma Mackenzie, married to Robert, a boatswain in HMS *Alligator* serving in Sydney wrote to him in 1839:

Dear Husband I have sent you six letters since last August I have rote to you every opportunity I heard of ... and have received no answers I think I ham quite forgot as though I had never been in the wourd I have received but three letters from you since you left Plymouth.²⁰⁹

She had been unwell, as had one of their children, and was plainly feeling very cut off from support. In fact three letters in seven months from a ship in Australia was a reasonable rate of correspondence (it had taken *Alligator* five months to reach Sydney). Only three letters from her survive in the archive of family papers, and three of his from February 1838 and April and May 1840.²¹⁰ In the last he refers to other letters, and noted that he was taking advantage of an officer being invalided home to send this one, but clearly there were more. John Ford wrote home regularly and included messages to be passed on to friends and family, though one letter also demonstrates the problems that could arise when communication was so troublesome. In 1848 he wrote to his future wife Sarah:

My Dear I am the same as your self I thought you had run away. My Dear I have had A very rough Cruize this last and very Cold one but you Did not

²⁰⁸ Peter B Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters: The History of the British Army Postal Service from 1795*, (London: National Army Museum, 1990), p.4. The special rate, payable when letters were sent, was in fact introduced to stop the loss of money on post that followed sailors and soldiers around the world. Letters had to be signed on the outside by the commanding officer to be entitled to the 1d rate. In 1840 the general penny post was introduced within the United Kingdom, but for sailors overseas the special rate continued to be useful, Boyden, p.7.

²⁰⁹ RNM 1982/1331 (1), E Mackenzie to Robert Mackenzie, dated 21 February 1839.

²¹⁰ RNM 120/87 (6) E Mackenzie to Robert Mackenzie, 11 February 1838: no response survives to the postscript of this letter, where she notes 'I forgot to ask what the childs name to be'.

say that you had received the letter I send you the same Day we left the Sound for the Cruize has I had a very Particular question on it which I should like to have an answer as I have been longing to hear... The next time you write I hope you will be able to send a hole sheet of Paper instead of a quarter of one.²¹¹

Twelve letters from John Ford to Sarah survive (though none of hers to him), all from before their marriage, as do two short notes addressed to their daughter and written from Naples in 1860 (possibly enclosed in letters to his wife, as there is no cover with them, unlike the earlier letters).²¹² Their courtship appears to have been conducted mainly by letter, and he proposed in a letter of 1846, suggesting it was 'fine weather to make the Banns grow'.²¹³ His links to home before 1852, by which time they were married, would not show up in an examination of allotment rates since he could not send money to her until they were married, but clearly they were vitally important to him. Once they were married she administered the household finances, for example taking charge of the prize money of £48 14s 6d he had earned with HMS *Janus* on which he sailed from 1848 to 1852 as well as the monthly money he sent home.²¹⁴

In considering sailors' allotments the figures to compare are the percentage of the Ship's Company with an allotment and the percentage married. Table 2.5 shows the numbers of sailors with allotment, and Table 2.6 shows the figures for marital status where they are available in the description books. Only on board HMS

²¹¹ RNM 353/85 (20), John Ford to Sarah Evans, 14 December 1848.

²¹² RNM 353/85 (22) (23), Two letters from John Ford to daughter Sarah, 11 November and 24 December 1860, both from HMS *Hannibal*, Naples.

²¹³ RNM 353/85 (16), John Ford to Sarah Evans, HMS *Superb*, 5 June 1846, Cove of Cork

²¹⁴ RNM 353/85 (32), Letter from the Admiralty about prize money order, 30 October 1855.

Caledonia, which has an unusually high number of married men at 54.62 percent, is the percentage with an allotment lower (at 50.00 percent) than the percentage of sailors who are positively identified as married. Not all the married men have allotments, of course; on *Acorn*, five of the 25 married men do not; on *Alligator* 14 of the 37 married men; on *Caledonia* 24 of the 71; on *Comet* all the married men have allotments; on *Espoir* three do not; on *Lapwing* one married man does not; on *Virago* eight, more than half, do not. Married men are far more likely than unmarried ones to have an allotment to family at home, but many single men are also sending money, possibly (as the 1859 Commission feared) to women who were not their wives, but also just as probably to parents or siblings. For communities of young men with a marriage rate of 22.62 percent (where information is given), that the number with allotments stands at 38.25 percent, or 1,131 men, suggests that their links to home and families were in fact strong. The original remittance scheme may have been unpopular, or at least underused, in the Seven Years War period, as Rodger has shown, but by the time of this study well over a third of the sailors had set up an allotment.²¹⁵ This corresponds with the general trend for larger numbers of allotments found by an Admiralty study of 1859. This showed an increase from 19 percent with an allotment in 1812 to 32 percent in 1832 and 46 percent in 1850.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.134.

²¹⁶ T Pitcairn, *Report on the Allotment System in the Navy*, 1859, TNA: PRO: ADM 7/710, quoted in Rasor, *Reform of the Lower Deck*, Ch.V note 67.

Table 2.5 Sailors with allotments (total numbers and percentages)*

Ship	With allotment	Without allotment	Percentage with
Acorn	53	62	46.09
Actaeon	62	61	50.41
Albatross	21	25	45.65
Aetna	48	73	39.67
Alecto	18	58	23.68
Alligator	53	149	26.24
Ardent	26	83	23.85
Caledonia	61	61	50.00
Castor	156	160	49.37
Comet	32	19	62.75
Espoir	41	19	68.33
Fearless 1	21	12	63.64
Fearless 2	31	3	91.18
Lapwing	43	25	63.24
Mastiff	33	24	57.89
Princess Charlotte	215	402	34.85
Rattlesnake	47	91	34.06
Raven	35	37	48.61
Skipjack	11	274	3.86
Virago	38	77	33.04
Wasp	29	66	30.53
Winchester**	0	454	0.00
Wolf	57	45	55.88
TOTAL	1131	2280	33.16
Total excl.	1131	1826	38.25

Winchester

* The figures given here exclude all Boys (1st or 2nd Class) as these never have allotments against their names; they also exclude men in muster book categories such as 'Kroomen', 'Liberated African Lads' and 'Native Servants' as these also never have allotments against their names, presumably because no arrangements could be made to pay regular allotments to their homes.

** HMS *Winchester's* muster book is missing information in all columns relating to money, so it is reasonable to conclude that the allotment information is missing as well. The overall figure of 38.25 percent of the sample having allotments is therefore the more reliable one.

Source: Muster books of ships listed, Allotment and Allotment details columns.

Table 2.6: Marriage rates among sailors

	Acorn	Alligator	Caledonia	Comet	Espoir	Lapwing	Virago	Winchester	Overall
Single	111	74	50	34	23	40	46	364	742
Married	25	37*	71	13	34	16	14	65	275
no information	0	91	9	4	3	12	55	25	199
% of SC** single	81.62	36.63	38.46	66.67	38.33	58.82	40.00	80.18	61.02
% of SC married	18.38	18.32	54.62	25.49	56.67	23.53	12.17	14.32	22.62
% no data	0.00	45.05	6.92	7.84	5.00	17.65	47.83	5.51	16.37
% single of those giving information	81.62	66.67	41.32	72.34	40.35	71.43	76.67	84.85	72.96
% married of those giving information	18.38	32.93	58.68	27.66	59.65	28.57	23.33	15.15	27.04
% of SC with allotment	46.09	26.24	50.00	62.75	68.33	63.24	33.04	no information	38.25

**includes one widower*

*** Ship's Company*

Source: Description books for ships listed: Acom ADM 38/7443, Alligator ADM 37/8649, Caledonia ADM 37/8825, Comet ADM 37/8908, Espoir ADM 37/9070,

Lapwing ADM 37/9780, Virago ADM 38/9281, Winchester ADM 37/10107

Conclusion

The men joining the Royal Navy in the period 1827 to 1847, as shown by the sample examined here, were volunteers with experience and competence in their work. Many had served in Royal Navy ships before, and preferred this service to going to sea on merchant ships. The Royal Navy offered them reasonable wages, and at this time the ability to choose between different ships, whether on the basis of their destination or the officers in charge of them. These experienced seamen came from a wide variety of backgrounds, both in terms of the trades they had been brought up to and the places they had been born. How these groups of men experienced their life in the Navy and formed effective working communities is the subject of the next section of this study.

CHAPTER 3: Careers and Training

‘Any one could get on on Board of the Sampson if they Attended to their duty
And Behaved themself...’
Edward Hargreaves, ‘seven years in the navy’.

The system of ratings and pay on board ship for members of the ship’s company was extremely complicated, and it was revised several times during the nineteenth century. For example, the introduction of steam ships required the introduction of ratings for engineers and stokers. Additional incentives for sailors were also introduced, such as the badges worth 2s 4d a month each for good conduct.²¹⁷

Most men joined as ordinary or able seamen, the latter paid £1 14s a month, but from that rating they could aim to hold a petty officer’s post, and there were at least 27 of these open to them, from Captain of the Foretop, with two shillings or more a month extra pay, to the Master at Arms, paid £2 12s a month in a first rate.²¹⁸ Warrant officers such as the gunner or the boatswain could only be appointed by the Admiralty, but petty officer ratings were decided by the captain, who could re-rate men as he wished.²¹⁹ As the official table of ratings and pay shows, the captain’s steward and cook, the gunroom steward and the sick berth attendant, for example, all received the same pay as an able seaman.²²⁰ The muster books show that many men moved up through one or two petty officer ratings during a commission, building skills which might eventually allow them to

²¹⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 7/911, *Rates of Pay of the Royal Navy from 1796 compiled in pursuance of Admiralty Minute of 21 October 1840*, p.70, rates of pay for seamen.

²¹⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 7/911, *Rates of Pay of the Royal Navy from 1796 compiled in pursuance of Admiralty Minute of 21 October 1840*, p.96, rates of pay for petty officers. A Captain of the Foretop on a first rate would be paid £2.1.0 a month.

²¹⁹ In analysing the information given in the muster books about changes of status, promotions and demotions have only been counted where this led to a change in the rate of pay a sailor received.

²²⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 7/911, Table 1, Pay and Ratings 1824-44.

achieve warrant officer status. Figure 3.1, below, shows the various ratings available on board Royal Naval ships during this period.

The numbers of men who did have recent previous service in a Navy ship, or who the description books reveal to have served in several Navy ships, as well as the few who had been trained on HMS *Excellent*, the gunnery training ship established in 1830, suggest that that many men did regard the Navy as their main occupation, and progressed through the ratings available to them as they worked on successive commissions. Robert McKenzie, whose papers survive in the Royal Naval Museum, followed such a path. When he was successfully examined for his Boatswain's qualification in July 1832 (a warrant position), he had served on eleven Royal Navy ships, starting as an Ordinary seaman and working his way up to Boatswain's Mate by 1829 on HMS *Asia*.²²¹ After passing the examination, he was posted as Boatswain to HM Surveying Vessel *Beacon* three days later.²²² By the time he retired in March 1848 he had served in the Royal Navy for 32 years and earned a pension of £60 per year.²²³ Only then did he start working on merchant ships, supplementing the pension with work as a Boatswain's Mate in the early 1850s.²²⁴ John Ford AB was another of these men, working as an Able Seaman on

²²¹ RNM 1982/1333, Papers of Robert McKenzie and family, (1), handwritten testimonial that Robert McKenzie served as Boatswain's Mate on *Asia* 'under my command' from 28th July 1829 – 25th October 1829 and was 'steady, deserving Man'. Signed Wm Johnstone.

²²² RNM 1982/1332 (1), Appointment of Robert McKenzie as Boatswain to HM Surveying Vessel *Beacon*, 7 July 1832.

²²³ RNM 1982/1333 (4), Pensioner's Certificate, 1 April 1848.

²²⁴ RNM 627/86 (5), 627/86 (4), certificates of discharge.

Figure 3.1 Pay and ratings in the Royal Navy, 1824-44

Rating	Pay
LANDSMAN	£1.3.0
Purser's Steward's Mate)
ORDINARY	£1.6.0
Cook's Mate)
Barber)
AB	£1.14.0
Yeoman Storeroom)
Capt's Steward/Cook)
Gunroom Steward)
Purser's Steward (to 1839))
Sick Berth Attendant)
Mids/Young Gents')
Cook/Steward)
Trumpeter/Bandsman)
Gunner's Crew	to 1839
Cooper's Crew	£1.16.0
Carpenter's Crew)
Rating	Pay
Master at Arms	to 1835 : £2.1.0 (Sloop) to £2.12.0 (1 st Rate)
Armourer	1835 on
Caulker	£2.7.0 (Sloops); £2.9.0 (4-6 Rate); £2.12.0 (1-3 Rate)
Ropemaker)
Sailmaker)
Carpenter's Mate)
Musician	£2.3.0 (all rates)
Leading Stoker	£2.12.0
STOKER	£2.6.0
KROOMEN	to Aug 1843 as
Chief Head Man	Q'master
One in 12	AB
Others	Ord & LM
Head Krooman 1 st Class	from Aug 1843 as 2 nd Class P.O.
Head Krooman 2 nd Class	AB
Krooman 1 st Class	LM
Krooman 2 nd Class	Boy 1 st Class
Rating	Pay
Coxswain Pinnacle	to 1839
Yeoman Signals	£1.16.0
Sailmaker's Mate	to
Capt Main/ Foretop/ Mast/ Afterguard	£2.1.0
Ship's Corporal	£1.17.0 (Sloop)
Quartermaster	to
Captain's Coxswain	£2.6.0
Coxswain Launch	(1 st Rate)
Capt Hold/Focсле)
Cooper)
Armourer & Caulker's Mates)
Gunner & Bosun's Mates)
Capt Mizzen Top	£1.16.0
Purser's Steward (from 1839)	to 1842
	1842 on £1.18.0 (Sloop)
	£2.0.0 (4-6 Rate)
	£2.1.0 (1-3 Rate)
Painter)
Sailmaker's Crew)
Cooper's Crew (1839 on)	£1.16.0
Carpenter's Crew (1839 on))

HMS *Superb* in the late 1840s, and progressing to Boatswain's Mate by 1854, when he was serving on HMS *Conflict*, and sending £1.6s home each month in allotment to his wife.²²⁵ Both were clearly men who saw the Royal Navy as their main continuous employer, well before the Admiralty formalised this relationship with the long-term contracts introduced in 1853.

Table 2.1, p.54 above, shows the ratings given to the men in the sample on joining the Royal Navy for the first time. It demonstrates that between 1825 and 1853 men continued to enter the Royal Navy having learnt their skills in merchant ships. Of the 1073 men who entered with no previous service in the Royal Navy, over half were rated able immediately. Only 76 (about seven percent), were rated Landsman, suggesting they had previously spent little or no time on board a ship. On HMS *Comet*, a steam vessel in commission from 1 July 1837 to 22 November 1841, the surviving description book lists all the Royal Navy ships men had served on before joining. Twenty-three of the 69 men who served during the commission were first entries, of whom twelve were Boys. Six Boys had previous service, and the remaining 40 men, 58 percent, had served on a total of 117 commissions between them. The amount of their experience varied considerably, with eleven having only served on HMS *William and Mary*, but the oldest of these was James Brown, a Stoker aged 24; the rest were aged between 19 and 22. Of the 22 men aged 27 and above, only one was a first entrant at 29, 13

²²⁵ John Ford papers, letters to Sarah Evans, RNM 353/85.

men had served on at least three Royal Navy ships previously, and six on six or more.²²⁶

Stokers and Engineers

The development of steam ships complicated the rating system existing for sailing ships with the addition of engineers and stokers. In 1837, Engineers and Engineers' Boys were regulated as warrant officers, with engineers ranking alongside gunners, boatswains and carpenters, though the engineers were better paid.²²⁷ Engineer Boys, however, were paid at the same rate as 1st and 2nd Class Boys. Later in the century engineers would claim parity with commissioned officers, but in the 1830s to 1860s they were more likely to compare themselves with artisans on shore; there were also not enough of them to have developed a strong group identity, and they could move easily between sea and land-based employment.²²⁸ They had to be able to make repairs to the engines while at sea, and would often have served an apprenticeship in an engine shop ashore.²²⁹ Men who served as Stokers were better paid than Able Seamen, receiving £2.6.0 compared to £1.14.0 per month, 23 percent more. The Leading Stoker was a petty officer, on £2 12s a month. The job of Stoker was extremely unpleasant (see chapter 3), and when the ship was not under steam, they worked as seamen anyway, so without this incentive Stokers would have been hard to recruit. The

²²⁶ HMS *Comet*, description book, TNA: PRO: ADM37/8906-8908

²²⁷ Greenhill and Giffard, *Steam, Politics and Patronage. The Navy 1815-54* (London, 1994), p.79.

²²⁸ H. Campbell McMurray, 'Ships' Engineers: Their Status and Position on Board, c.1830-65', in Stephen Fisher (ed), *West Country Maritime and Social History: Some Essays*, Exeter Papers in Economic History, no.13, 1980, pp.89-92.

²²⁹ McMurray, p.85.

pay they received put them alongside Quartermasters and Gunner's Mates serving on a first rate in the Navy's hierarchy.²³⁰

Admiralty research in 1904 found that Stokers were more likely to enter the Navy as men than boys, and Walton finds that their rates of completing service contracts and re-entering for a second ten years in the second half of the nineteenth century were higher than the overall cohort of seamen.²³¹ In the period from 1825-53 Stokers tended to be older than other men joining a ship. Of the 63 men in the sample who joined as Stokers, their average age was 27.93, compared to 25.01 for all men.²³² Of these, 27, nearly 43 percent, were first entrants into the Navy, a much higher proportion than found overall (32.64 percent, of those entering directly into the Ship's Company and therefore aged 20 or more). There are also 18 Engineer Boys in the sample, on HMSs *Alecto*, *Ardent*, *Comet*, *Fearless* and *Virago*, but none of these reached the age of twenty in the commissions under consideration, so it is unclear whether they were promoted to Engineer or Stoker, and therefore how successful their training had been.

Retaining men in the Royal Navy

The Royal Commission which inquired into manning issues in the Royal Navy in 1859 after the introduction of continuous service argued that the old system of volunteering for ships had been 'attended with great inconvenience to the public service, and even to the seamen themselves'. Men, they believed,

²³⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 7/911, Rates of Pay of the Royal Navy from 1796 compiled in pursuance of Admiralty Minute of 21 October 1840.

²³¹ Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy', p.130.

²³² See Chapter 2, p.40.

who had been trained at great trouble and expense, and had been brought to a state of the highest efficiency, were suddenly dismissed, and being unable to obtain re-admission to the service, often sought employment under a foreign flag, and thus, when required for Your Majesty's ships, were not to be procured.²³³

This report was of course being written after the Crimean war, when it was believed that mobilisation had been extremely slow. The ships in the sample, recruiting in the 1830s and 1840s, often took two months from first taking on men to being ready for sea. The fastest in the sample was HMS *Mastiff* in 1836, taking 20 days to recruit to 73 percent of complement; the slowest HMS *Skipjack* in Bermuda in 1827, taking 161 days to reach 70 percent of complement.²³⁴ This period was also used to prepare the ship for sea, however, so delays could be caused by this as well as by the need to recruit enough men. There is no evidence that ships mobilised for the Crimea took longer to prepare for sea than normal, but of course in time of war it was more important to have them ready quickly.

During peacetime it is also clear that experienced men were joining and rejoining Royal Naval ships. As discussed in chapter two, although a few ships operated well below complement, in most cases enough men were volunteering for service, both at home and abroad, to keep the ships' companies at an effective level.²³⁵ And these men included many who had recently completed another commission with the Navy. It was normal for a ship recruiting shortly after another had paid

²³³ *Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, 1859 Session I [2469] VI.1 (mf 64.40-45), p.v.

²³⁴ Muster books, HMS *Mastiff* 1836, TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9337; HMS *Skipjack*, 1827, TNA: PRO: ADM 37/987.

²³⁵ Since the instructions to captains strictly forbade going to sea 'with more men than the complement of the ship', ship's companies would tend to be under rather than over complement at all times, given the inevitable attrition of men from, for example, illness or injury. See *Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, Admiralty, 1833, p.41.

off to take a group of men who had served together on the commission that had just ended. For example, HMS *Albatross*, recruiting men in May and June 1842, took 15 men with previous service on HMS *Daphne*, all of whom had been paid off on 20th May 1842. Aged between 19 and 43, ten were rated able, three ordinary and two Captain of the Foretop. Eight of them were promoted during their time on *Albatross*. Another nine came from HMS *Ganges*, paid off on 18th April 1842. Two were first class Boys, who shortly afterwards joined the ship's company rated ordinary; among the others were a Ropemaker, a Boatswain's Mate, a Carpenter's crew, Captain of the Maintop, a Sailmaker and two able seamen. HMS *Caledonia*, recruiting in Devonport in October and November 1840, took on 25 men who had been serving on HMS *Impregnable*.²³⁶ A few had had an interval of some years between RN ships, such as James Keating AB, paid off from HMS *Stag* on 16th December 1835, who joined *Caledonia* on 8th December 1840. The majority of the men with previous service, however, had paid off only recently, such as Edward Black, AB, paid off from HMS *Queen* on 7 October 1840 and recruited onto *Caledonia* on 16 December.²³⁷ Overall, two-thirds of those taken on as part of the Ship's Company, as given in the muster books, list previous service on a Royal Navy ship. The belief expressed by the 1859 Royal Commission that the Royal Navy was failing to hold men in its service seems misplaced. In fact, the Navy was continuing to attract and retain highly skilled seamen.

²³⁶ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8821, HMS *Caledonia* muster book.

²³⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8821, HMS *Caledonia* muster book, Ship's Company no.46.

The problem with the volunteering system was not therefore that men were being lost to the Royal Navy, whatever the perceptions of contemporary commentators, but that it could not necessarily recruit quickly in time of war, and that since the drastic reduction of the size of the Royal Navy after 1815 there were not enough sailors for a large-scale wartime establishment. Experienced able seamen were most likely to be aged between 20 and 30 (see chapter two, p.41), and so within a decade of 1815 many of the additional men trained during the Napoleonic wars would have been too old to serve effectively. The expansion of the maritime labour force had, however, provided a large pool of labour for the postwar Royal Navy and merchant shipping to draw on. Had large-scale mobilisation been needed again, the market would probably have worked as effectively as it did during the Napoleonic wars, as David Starkey has shown, increasing productivity and drawing older sailors and men new to the trade into work.²³⁸ Certainly, for the roles in which the Royal Navy was mainly used during the first half of the nineteenth century, there were enough trained men willing to join for the ships to be well-manned.

Continuous service contracts were introduced in response to the fear that the Navy was not retaining its trained men, but this study suggests this was not the case. However, even though it was believed that continuous service had made it possible to maintain the 'peacetime establishment', and it was certainly more efficient than volunteering for individual ships, this would not have provided enough trained men, quickly enough, to man the ships needed by the Royal Navy

²³⁸ David J Starkey, 'War and the Market for Seafarers in Britain, 1736-1792', reprinted in Harding, Richard, ed. (2006) *Naval history 1680-1850. The international library of essays on military history* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 524-32.

in time of war.²³⁹ Lambert notes that ‘seapower cannot be extemporised in wartime, it must have solid foundations, a corps of skilled officers and men and enough ships to make an effective challenge...’²⁴⁰ As he has shown, the ships were readily available; the men were probably less so. However, with or without continuous service, if the Navy ceased to regard the merchant service as providing a suitable training ground for its men (see below, ‘Boys and training’, pp.99-102), any rapid mobilisation would have caused problems, since it would still only employ enough men to man the ships actually in commission in peacetime. The 1835 register of merchant seamen showed that the need to take up sailors from merchant shipping in wartime was still taken seriously. Unless the Navy was maintained at a wartime level, or set up a reserve, compulsory service would have been necessary to fight a large-scale war at sea in the nineteenth century.

Boys and Training

Both the Royal Commission of 1859 and the 1852 Committee on Manning concluded that it was those received into the Navy as boys, that

become from early habits and associations more attached, and adhere more closely to the service, than those entered at a more advanced age, and that they eventually constitute, from their superior education and training, the most valuable part of the crews of Her Majesty’s ships.²⁴¹

²³⁹ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, p.vii.

²⁴⁰ Lambert, *Last Sailing Battlefleet*, p.10.

²⁴¹ *Committee on the Manning of the Royal Navy*, 1852, quoted in *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy* 1859, p.vi.

Bromley, in his edited collection of pamphlets about manning, argued that in the nineteenth century the Admiralty ceased to regard merchant ships as the main place for training sailors for the Royal Navy, and began to pay more attention to the systems for training available within the service. Palmer, in her analysis of the repeal of the Navigation Laws, has discussed whether this represented a move away from regarding merchant ships as the natural place to produce sailors for a wartime Royal Navy. Some of those who supported repeal believed that the Navigation Laws could be separated from the importance of merchant shipping to defence.²⁴² Others argued in favour of separating the services and providing a large enough establishment in peacetime to provide for war.²⁴³ Some sailors were opposed to repeal, and demonstrated against it in 1848, for fear that allowing more foreign seamen would depress wages.²⁴⁴ In fact, although there was a rise in the numbers of foreign sailors in British ships at the time of the Crimean war, and in foreign vessels involved in trade, tonnage was going up overall, and British ships continued to be manned mainly by British and colonial sailors.²⁴⁵

Bromley argued that 'Boys were never in short supply. The difficulty was to retain them'.²⁴⁶ The 1859 Commission certainly took the view that boys (despite being brought up to the Royal Navy) were leaving the service at the end of their training:

²⁴² For example, Sir James Graham, Palmer, *Navigation Laws*, p.64.

²⁴³ Sir James Stirling, Palmer, *Navigation Laws*, p.101.

²⁴⁴ Palmer, *Navigation Laws*, pp.119-21.

²⁴⁵ Palmer, *Navigation Laws*, p.184.

²⁴⁶ Bromley, *Manning Pamphlets 1693-1873*, (NRS 1974), introduction, p.xv.

at the expiration of [their] time they almost invariably left us, having become seamen, and went into the merchant service, where they got higher wages^{247]}

As discussed above, the Royal Navy in the first half of the nineteenth century was in fact continuing to recruit experienced men from the merchant service as well as boys, and retaining many sailors who had trained in Royal Navy ships, but this was not the Commission's view. For this reason they believed that boys should be taken on with a contract from age 14 to 28.²⁴⁸ They also recommended more training vessels, so that all boys should go for instruction on one of these before being sent to sea on an active commission. In 1860 about 500 of the boys entering the Navy went through this. They recommended a training vessel at Plymouth which could take 500 boys and that four additional training vessels should be provided.

In 1855, when Edward Hargreaves joined the Navy, he was one of those who spent some time training in port before being sent to sea. From May to November 1855 he was on board HMS *Victory* in Portsmouth, learning the gun drill, how to get his hammock on deck as fast as possible in the mornings,

to drill with cutlass And Musket or Big guns As the captain orders And the Boys Both first And second class Has one Hour in the fore noon to Learn knotting And splicing²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy* 1859, p.194.

²⁴⁸ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, p.vi.

²⁴⁹ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

When he then went to sea, it was on a steam ship, HMS *Samson*, but since steam ships still used sail whenever possible, and the Navy still used sail-only ships, such sail training remained an essential part of a sailor's education.

The Regulations of 1844 required that First Class Boys must have some sea or boat experience, and be aged at least 17; they

are to continue to be so rated until they shall have completed their twentieth year, when they shall, if qualified, be rated ordinary seamen, in the first vacancies which may occur in the Ships in which they are serving...²⁵⁰

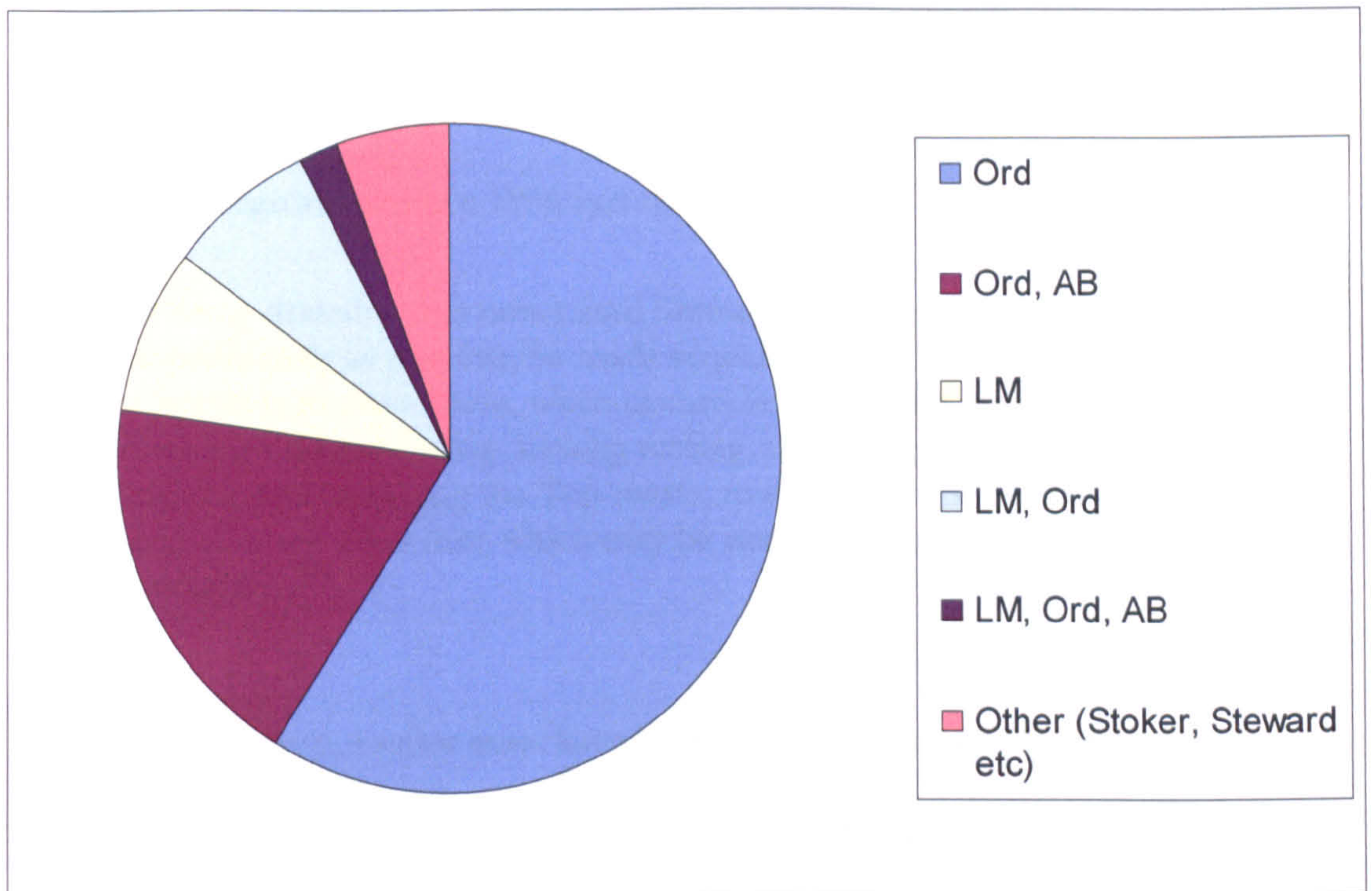
Captains were instructed to ensure that boys were being properly trained for their future in the service as 'expert Seamen or Mechanics', and not to allow them 'to wait on the Officers as Servants'. Officially, the rating of Captain's servant had been abolished in 1794, and captains paid more to compensate for this, but according to NAM Rodger many were still in fact acting as domestic servants during the Napoleonic wars.²⁵¹

Boys who were taken into the ship's company could, if they were rated Ordinary, see their wages rise from 14s 3d a month to £1 6s a month. Figure 3.2 shows that the majority of them were rated Ordinary:

²⁵⁰ Admiralty, *The Queen's Regulations for the Government of Her Majesty's Naval Service*, (London: 1844), p.56.

²⁵¹ NAM Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean, A Naval History of Britain 1649-1815*, (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p.499.

Figure 3.2: Boys moving into the Ship's Company (total of 268 in sample)



However, as the figure also demonstrates, rating as Ordinary was not automatic. Forty-five were rated Landsman on first joining the Ship's Company, and since this was not the routine practice on any ship (for example, HMS *Alecto* promoted different boys to AB, Ordinary and Landsman when they entered the ship's company), it suggests they had not reached the standard required, and that some form of examination or test was being made by the officers. In some cases, as can be seen, they were later rated Ordinary; and other Boys came into the company as Ordinary, and then achieved Able rating before the end of that ship's commission. Since Boys were intended to be training for full service in the Navy, it would have been a problem if most of them were not achieving Ordinary rating by the time they were 20, but as Figure 3.2 shows, over three-quarters of them were.

The training given to Hargreaves before he went to sea was not available to most of the boys on the ships in the sample under consideration, but captains were expected to ensure that both boys and men on their ships received appropriate training. The Regulations since 1806 had stated that

It being desirable that new-raised Seamen or Landmen should, as expeditiously as possible, be made acquainted with all the[ir] duties... the Captain is to cause them, when circumstances permit, to be exercised in bending and unbending, loosing reefing, and furling the Sails; shifting, rigging, and unrigging the Top-masts; rowing in Boats; heaving the Lead; and in every other duty which may be necessary for a Seaman to perform...²⁵²

To be rated Ordinary, a sailor must have been at sea for twelve months, and be 'able to go aloft and perform some of the duties of a Seaman'²⁵³ To be rated Able he had to have been at sea for three years and be capable of 'most of the duties of a Seaman.'²⁵⁴

After entering the ship's company, they could continue to progress. Hargreaves recorded that after being rating Ordinary on HMS *Sampson*, there were continual opportunities to progress, and to earn more money:

And the first Monday in every Month there is A examination And Any Ordnery Seaman can try to pas As Able Seaman And I tried to pas every Month And the 3rd Month I pased as AB And After I had Been AB for 6 Monthes I pased As Leding seaman that is the next rate to petty officer And I Had pased my examination As traned man in gunnery²⁵⁵

²⁵² *Regulations and Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, Admiralty, 2nd edition, 1806, p.141.

²⁵³ Admiralty, *Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, 1833, p.79. Also *Regulations Established by the King in Council and Instructions issued by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, p.141.

²⁵⁴ *Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, 1833, p.79; 1824 p.141.

²⁵⁵ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

His wages went up from 18/1 a month to £3 4s 7d a month in two years, and he credited this progress to a good captain

for captain Hand was A very kind officer And the rest of the officers was good officers Any one could get on on Board of the Sampson if they Attended to their duty And Behaved themself.²⁵⁶

Hargreaves' advancement was swifter than most, but opportunities for training and improvement were being developed and encouraged by the Admiralty. The 1806 and subsequent Regulations included provision for a schoolmaster, but only to teach the midshipmen and future officers.²⁵⁷ A significant development during this period was the establishment of the post of Seamen's Schoolmaster,

to teach Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, so far as the rules of Common Arithmetic, including the Rule of Three... Any Petty Officer, Seaman or Marine who may wish to avail himself of this means of education is to be taught by the Seamen's Schoolmaster; and all the Boys are to be put under his Instruction.²⁵⁸

This quotation is from the *Queen's Regulations* of 1844, the first time the details of this position appear in the general printed instructions. It was the commanding officer's responsibility to appoint the schoolmaster, though this had to be approved by the Admiralty. If a vacancy arose abroad, a replacement could be chosen from within the Ship's Company or recruited from another ship if necessary. The muster books of the ships under study here show that the position was not being filled in many ships in the 1830s and 1840s. Of the 24 ships in the sample, three had schoolmasters. On HMS *Caledonia*, William Jenkins of Stoke Damerel was appointed in October 1840 and served for a year before being

²⁵⁶ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

²⁵⁷ E.g. Admiralty, *Regulations for His Majesty's Service at Sea*, 1833, p.21.

²⁵⁸ Admiralty, *The Queen's Regulations for the Government of Her Majesty's Naval Service*, (London: 1844), p.58.

discharged to HMS *Minden* in December 1841. He was 25. On *Castor*, William John Mays, aged only 18, was appointed in July 1843. On HMS *Princess Charlotte*, one of the able seamen, Edward Shirwell, was promoted to Seamen's Schoolmaster in January 1838, and replaced by Francis Patton in February 1840, also promoted from AB. Schoolmasters were paid between £2 10s a month (on a first rate) and £2 1s (on a sloop). For any men or boys who had not mastered reading and writing and aspired to warrant rank such as Gunner or Boatswain, this provided an invaluable opportunity to acquire these skills. Among the conditions for a Gunner's or Boatswain's warrant was the ability 'to write sufficiently well to keep a rough account of his Stores in clear and intelligible writing'.²⁵⁹

There is no evidence on literacy rates among the men. Although they were being provided in some cases with the opportunity to learn to read and write if they could not already, it is not clear how many took advantage of this, and it was not considered an essential part of their training until the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁶⁰ At the end of the eighteenth century some officers opposed the cheap letter rate for sailors 'since reading and writing was bound to encourage men to think'.²⁶¹ There were chances to learn before going to sea, such as for those who attended the free school in Devonport for the sons of sailors, which the *Devonport Independent* reported in 1833 as including 106 children of sailors on overseas stations. The school cost about £78 a year to run, and although the

²⁵⁹ *Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, Admiralty, 1833, p.17, 'Appointment of Gunners'.

²⁶⁰ Oliver Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy 1856-1900: Corporation and Community', Exeter PhD thesis, 2003, p.74.

²⁶¹ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p.490.

curriculum mainly stressed learning 'passages of scripture' and 'moral poetry', the boys were also taught orthography, writing and arithmetic.²⁶² In Greenwich, the Royal Hospital Upper and Lower Schools, partly resulting from the amalgamation of the Royal Naval Asylum and the Greenwich hospital school in 1821, recruited from the families of petty officers and able seamen, and in the early 1840s had up to 800 children on its waiting list (it taught some girls as well as boys). One of the aims was to provide boys for the Royal Navy and merchant service, though by no means all went to sea. In the two years from 1st April 1840 495 boys left, 91 to join the Royal Navy and 154 to the merchant service.²⁶³ There were other schools in London such as the Green Coat school, 'for about 100 sons of needy watermen, fishermen, soldiers and sailors in east Greenwich'.²⁶⁴ Again, not all those sons went to sea, but the opportunity to learn to read, write and calculate was increasingly available long before the 1870 Education Act.

Once a boy had joined the Navy, the important aspect of his training was seamanship, not writing. Examining the boys on board HMS *Princess Charlotte*, one of the ships with a schoolmaster, provides more detail of the way the system worked on individual ships. During her commission from February 1837 to July 1841, 95 boys were recruited as First Class. Their ages ranged from 15 to 23, well outside the Admiralty limits at both ends. The 15-year-old was demoted to Second Class, and then returned to First Class when he reached 17 or 18 in 1840, but the 16-year-old, Samuel Lambeth, remained First Class to the end of the

²⁶² *Devonport Independent and Plymouth and Stonehouse Gazette*, Vol.I No.10, 13th April 1833, p.3 col.1.

²⁶³ David McLean, *Education and Empire. Naval Tradition and England's Elite Schooling*, (London: British Academic Press, 1999), pp.25-29.

²⁶⁴ Maclean, *Education and Empire*, p.27.

commission when he received a 'good' certificate. Some boys did not last long: seven ran before the ship had left Portsmouth., and one was discharged as he was already an apprentice. Edward Newbery died in Malta Hospital in February 1838, and John Williams was discharged sick there at the same time. George Saunders died on board in November 1840. Others were rejected or left by agreement: John Kemish was discharged with no reason given in June 1837 and William Young was discharged with disgrace in 1841.

Of those left, not all who reached 20 during the commission were promoted to the ship's company, despite the fact that like most Royal Navy ships, *Princess Charlotte* operated permanently slightly under complement. George Penny, aged 17 when first recruited in February 1837, had not been promoted by the time the ship was paid off in July 1841, when he should have been old enough; his certificate was 'very good', however. It is possible that his birthday had only just occurred before his original recruitment, so he may have only turned 20 in the first months of 1841, and it is clear that on board the *Princess Charlotte* the practice of this captain appears to have been to take them into the Ship's Company at some point during the year after their 20th birthday, since there are a number of first class boys aged 20 or more on initial recruitment. Some of these may have been acting as servants, but in most cases it appears that the captain used it as a way to assess their abilities before finally rating them, as with John Bales, recruited in February 1837 aged 20 and rated Ordinary in the ship's company in May that year. The majority of the boys who should have reached an adult rating did so, and four had achieved Able status by the end of the commission in 1841. *Princess Charlotte* appears to be a ship where the captain, Arthur Fanshawe, took

training seriously, but was not rigidly confined by the age structure set out in the regulations.

Seaman Gunners

Another important development in training during the first half of the nineteenth century was the establishment of HMS *Excellent* in 1830 for training men in gunnery. Graduates of *Excellent* were rated Seaman Gunners (SG) in the muster lists, and paid extra for their work. They were also taken on for five or seven years, rather than for the ship's commission, an early version of the continuous service contract. Taking the course on *Excellent* entitled men to an additional 2s a month for the first five years they served, 4s a month for the second five years, and 5s a month for the third, in addition to whatever rating they held, bringing an Able Seaman's pay up to £1.19s a month even if he never achieved any other rating, an increase of nearly 15 percent.²⁶⁵ Only 14 men of the 3355 adults in the sample, however, were taken on as Seamen Gunners. An additional 13 passed their examination during the commissions recorded in the sample, but at only 0.8 percent of the whole sample, not many men were yet benefiting from this attempt to provide additional training, reward it with extra pay and for the Navy to benefit by having men on longer contracts.

Obtaining promotion

Since men were not on continuous contracts, to prove their previous service they had to carry their certificates, signed by previous captains, with them to a new

²⁶⁵ *Rates of Pay of the Royal Navy from 1796*, p.73. These rates applied from 1838, and if men claimed their discharge at the end of any period of service they were to be received 'as fresh entries only'.

commission, and only information verified in this way was supposed to be entered in the description books. Three of John Ford's service certificates survive among his papers, listing for example the twelve different ships he served on from 1839 to 1861, starting out as Ordinary on HMS *Stag*, and ending as a Boatswain's Mate on HMS *Hannibal*.²⁶⁶ The description of his conduct is listed for each ship (his are all 'very good' except the first two, which are 'good'), his number on the ship's books, and the name of the captain he served under, so that if necessary his service time could be traced back to the muster books.

Equally, however, there is no evidence that the men joining with experience from elsewhere were less well-trained than those who had mainly served in the Royal Navy, as the following tables show.

Table 3.1: Promotion/demotion by experience

Of men with no previous experience in the Royal Navy

	No.	%
Remained at original rating	874	82.38
Promoted	149	14.04
Demoted	38	3.58
Total	1061	100

All men starting as part of Ship's Company

Group	No	%
no change	2957	79.83
promoted	568	15.33
demoted	179	4.83
	3704	100

Of all the men first entering the Navy, 82.38 percent remained at their original rating, compared to 79.83 in the whole sample of men; a slight but not great

²⁶⁶ Papers of John Ford, RNM, 353/85.

advantage for those with RN service. Similarly, the overall promotion rate is 15.33 percent, while for first entry men it is 14.04 percent.

Promotion from an ordinary or able member of the ship's company to petty officer status was entirely at the discretion of the captain or commander. Warrant rank however, for example Gunner or Boatswain, could not be awarded except by the Admiralty or by the Commander-in-Chief of a foreign station when a vacancy occurred because of court-martial or death.²⁶⁷ Men needed to have served at least a year as a petty officer, have certificates of good conduct, and satisfy examiners that (in the case of a Gunner):

he is in all respects a good practical Seaman; that he knows the use and exercise of the great guns, and how to secure them, and lash their muzzles; that he knows the proportion of powder for guns of every description...²⁶⁸

and that as noted above he was able to read and write well enough to keep account of his stores. A Boatswain, also in addition to petty officer service and certificates of good conduct, needed to show he was

in all respects a thorough practical Seaman; that he perfectly understands the rigging of Ships... how to stow and secure the Anchors, how to erect and secure Sheers, and how to get the Tops on or off the Lower Masts

and could read and write.²⁶⁹

A petty officer's rating and a certificate of good conduct was therefore essential to reaching warrant rank, and these ratings were entirely in the hands of the

²⁶⁷ *Regulations for His Majesty's Service at Sea*, Admiralty, 1833, p.19.

²⁶⁸ *Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, Admiralty, 1833, p.17.

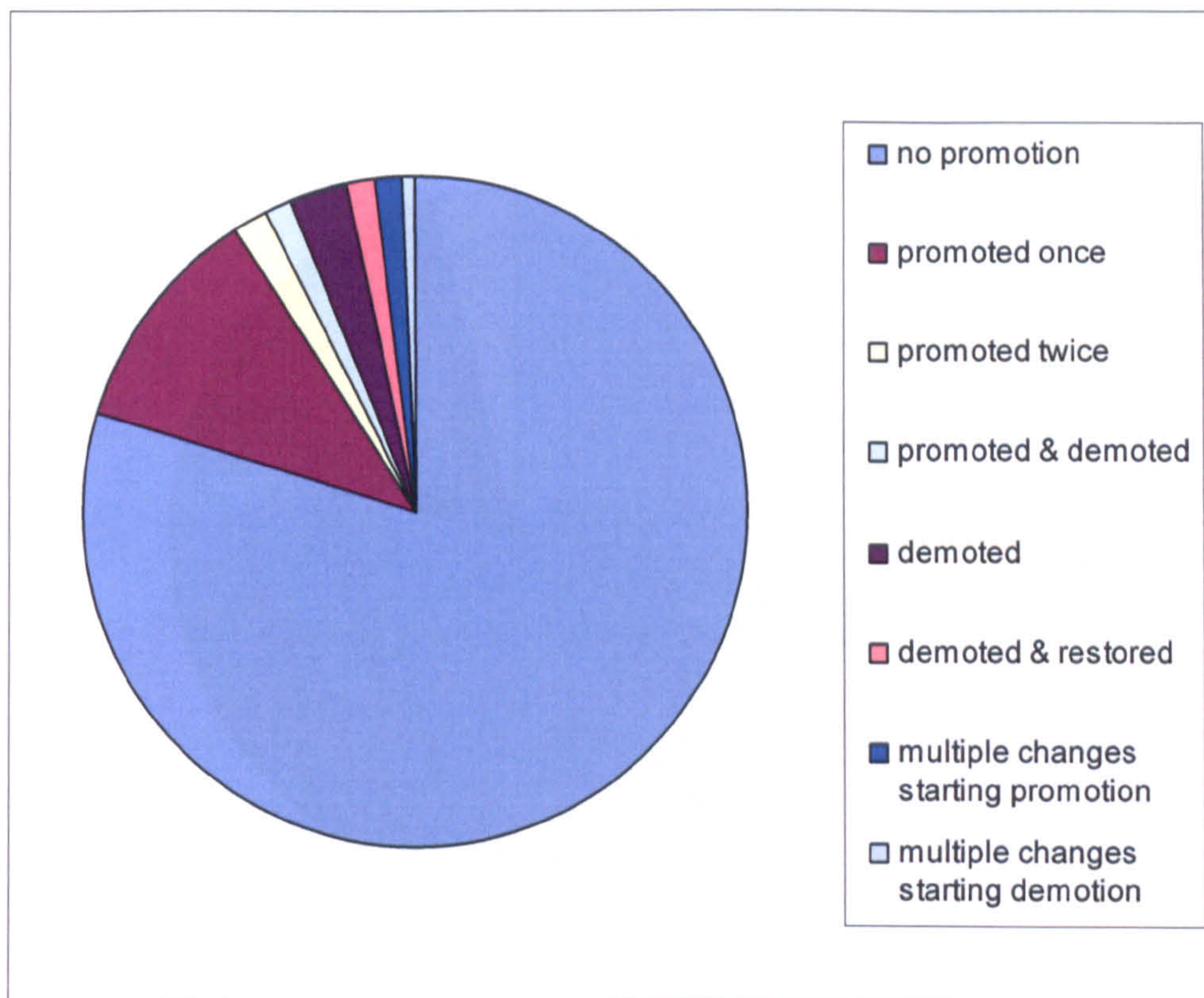
²⁶⁹ *Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, Admiralty, 1833, pp.17-18.

captain or commander. Hargreaves, as discussed above, achieved rapid promotion under a captain he liked and respected. Opportunities for promotion also arose when men were invalided or discharged. When Hargreaves was on the China station in HMS *Samson*, gunboats arrived from England with crews 'in A Bad state of Health ... And A part of the 4 crews was invleded Home soon After they Arrived'. He volunteered, in the reassignment of men that followed, to join HMS *Woodstock*, where he was promoted again: '2 of the petty officers was invleded Home And I got the rate of Boatswan Mate...'²⁷⁰ In contrast to his description of Captain Hand on *Samson*, he does not comment on the character of his new captain, but his previous promotions and experience had left him in a good position to take advantage of openings for promotion.

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate the numbers of men who changed their rating positively or negatively during their time on board. Promotion is considered as meaning a move to a rating with higher pay, so men who, for example, changed from Quartermaster to Boatswain's Mate are not counted, as these ratings were grouped together and received the same pay. Promotions include that from Ordinary to Able Seaman, or from Able Seaman to the group of ratings including Captain of the Main or Foretop, Captain of the Mast or Afterguard, Coxswain of the Pinnace and Yeoman of Signals, all of which were grouped together, and paid from £1.16s a month (see Figure 3.1). As Figure 3.3 shows, about 18.5 percent of the men in the sample, therefore, were promoted during their ship's commission (excluding those restored to a rating after a demotion). Slightly over three-quarters (76.02 percent) remained at their original rating.

²⁷⁰ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navey'.

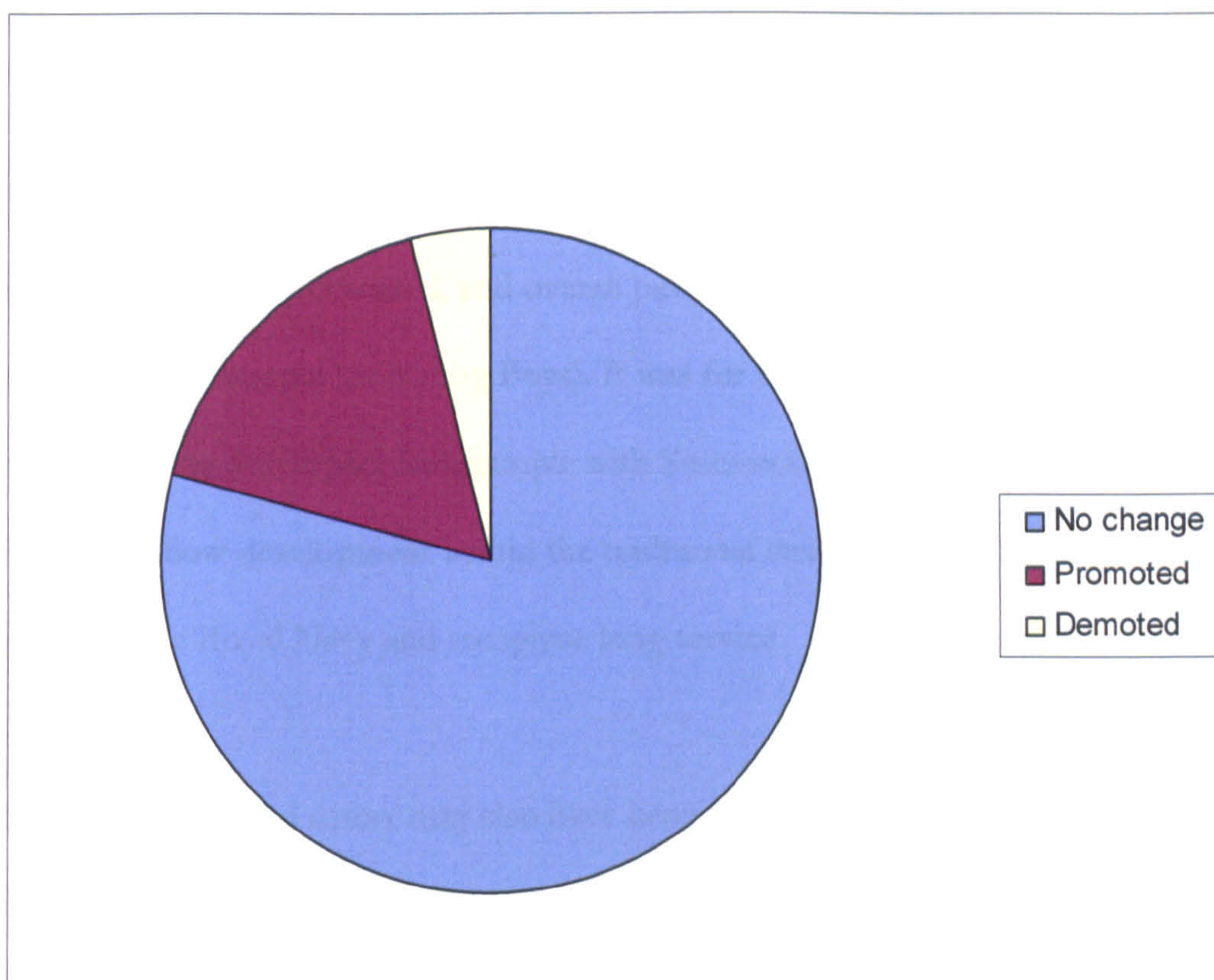
Figure 3.3: Promotions and demotions in the sample of sailors (excluding Boys)



Source: Muster books in sample

Figure 3.4 shows only those men whose rating had changed overall by the end of the commission, thus excluding those who were promoted and then lost the promotion, or demoted and then restored to their original rating.

Figure 3.4: Overall change of rating during commission



Source: Muster books in sample

The men who were at the same rating at the end of the period make up 79.09 percent of the sample, with the promotion rate 17.11 percent and demotion 3.8 percent. Since demotion could be in response to a disciplinary issue rather than lack of skill, it should not be assumed that these represented a lack of skill. Some men, indeed, were repeatedly promoted and demoted, such as John Radford, who served on HMS *Acorn* from January 1839 until the end of her commission in 1842. Aged 32, he started as Boatswain's Mate, earning £1.17s a month, then was demoted to Able in June 1839, promoted to Captain of the Fore Top in October of that year, back to Able in January 1850 and then promoted again in June 1841 (to Captain of the Afterguard) and again back to Boatswain's Mate in February 1842. His status at the beginning and the end of the commission was thus the

same, but does not reflect a lack of skill on his part, nor a failure on the part of his captain to promote appropriately.

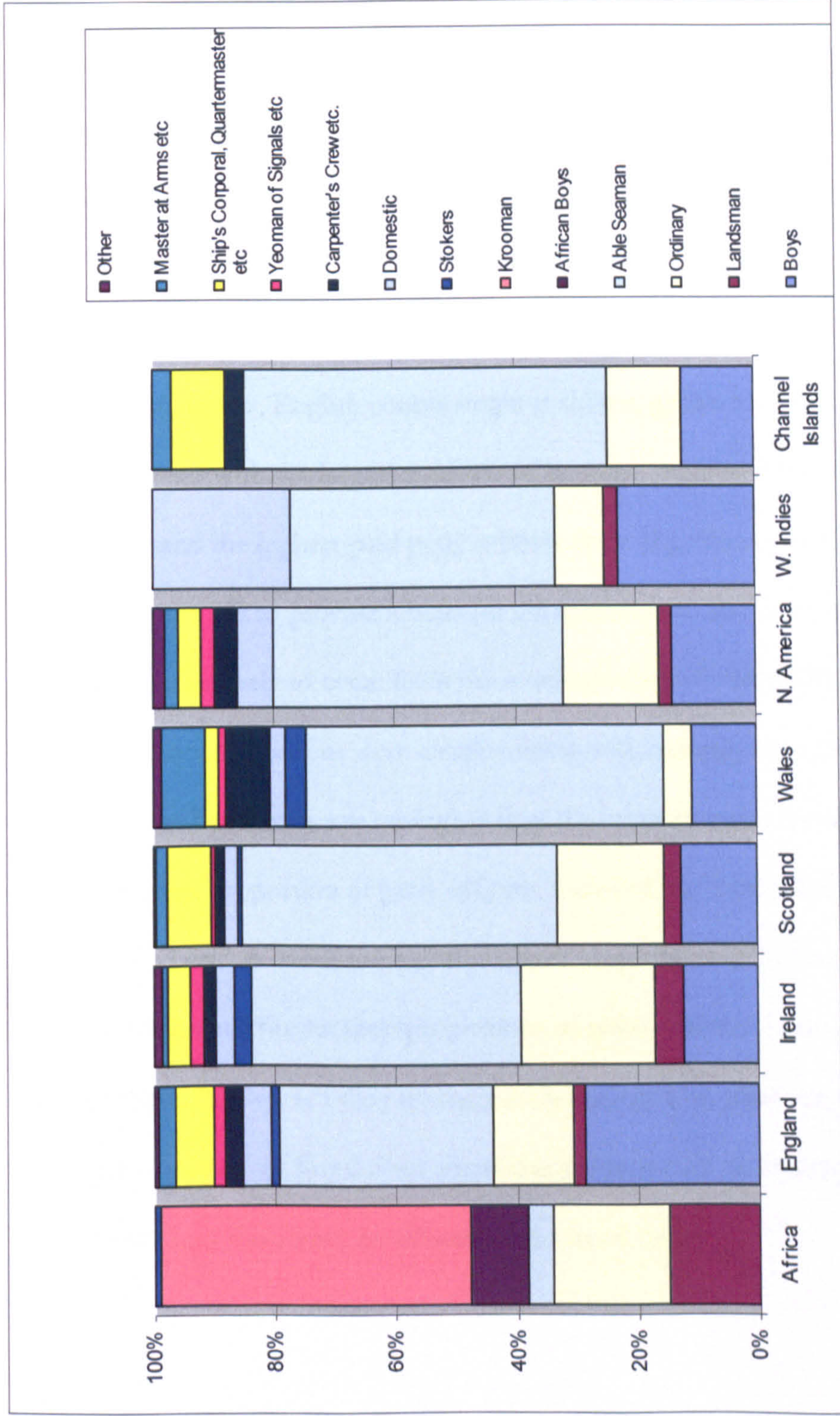
Petty officer status, however, was only available at the beginning of a commission and when a vacancy occurred, and overall petty officers amounted to only 18.05 percent of the sample (excluding Boys). It was for this reason that recognition was also being developed, for example with Seaman Gunner training, as discussed above, to allow development within the traditional structure, encourage men to stay with the Royal Navy and recognise long service.

A sailor's rating and career may also have been influenced by his place of origin. Figure 3.5 shows sailors' rating by their country of birth, for the countries with the largest groups of sailors in the sample. It is organised in line with the ship's hierarchy and pay rates, with Boys at the bottom and the highest-paid petty officers at the top. Since the English-born sailors represent about three-quarters of the total number, the proportions in that group should be treated as the norm. The most distinctive group are those from Africa; as discussed in chapter 2 there was a special system of pay and ratings for Kroomen, whose pay rates were determined by their group rather than their personal skills, and whose pay in fact decreased in 1843. There were other men in the group, such as John Sheppard, a Stoker on HM Steam Vessel *Virago*, who were taken on as individual members of the crew and treated as such. It is noticeable, however, that there are no men in the higher petty officer rankings born either in Africa or the West Indies. Rodger recounts the story of a black boatswain serving on HMS *Orpheus* in 1780, whose captain requested he be given an exchange into another ship, because he 'wants

that great requisite (in a boatswain) of making himself of consequence among the people, who have, I find, taken a dislike to the man's colour'.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Captain John Colpoys, quoted in Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p.394.

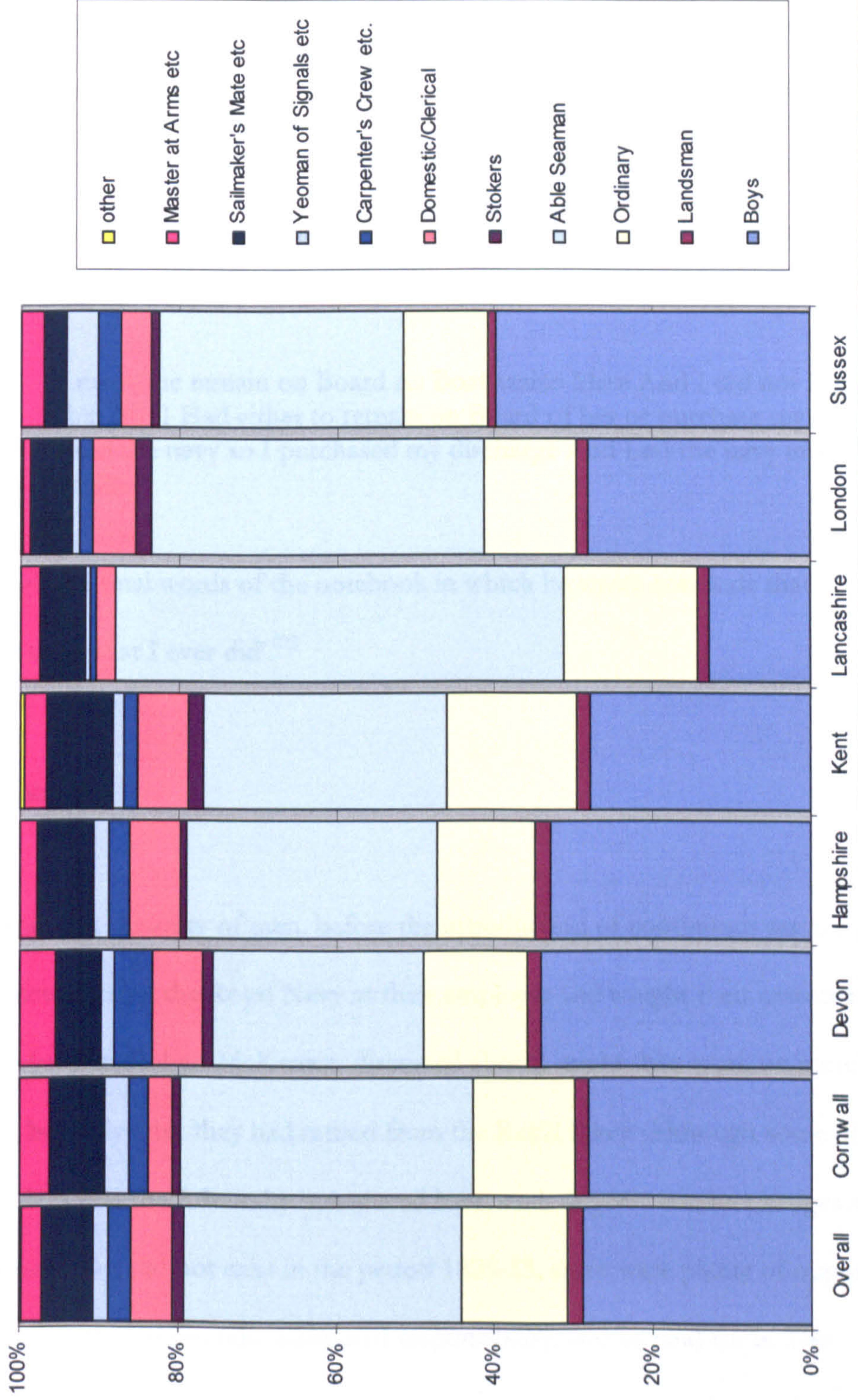
Figure 3.5: Rating by country of birth



Among the other countries of origin shown, men born in Ireland were more likely to be rated Landsman initially, and have a higher proportion of Stokers and a smaller proportion of petty officers compared to the English norm. Channel Islanders by contrast included a slightly higher proportion of petty officers. Since the numbers in the different groups vary significantly (see chapter 2), these proportions should be treated with caution, but they may be indicative of additional factors affecting how likely a man was to make a good career in the Royal Navy.

In Figure 3.6, below, English county origin is shown against initial rating, again for the counties with the largest numbers of entrants, organised with the Boys at the bottom and the highest-paid petty officers at the top. The overall English sample is at the left to provide a basis for comparison. As discussed in chapter 2, Boys were more likely to come from the southern counties than from Lancashire; however, Lancashire sailors were clearly joining with training, since their proportion of Landsmen was no higher than the other counties shown. Devon had the highest proportion of petty officers, followed by Cornwall, then by Hampshire. London and Kent had the highest proportions of Stokers. London and Lancashire had the smallest proportions of petty officers. Again, these figures can only be indicative, but they do suggest that being from what may have been regarded as traditional Royal Navy recruiting grounds such as Devonport or Portsmouth may have been an advantage in a naval career.

Rating of English-born sailors by county



The figures may also suggest that men from Devon, Hampshire and other southern counties were the most likely to remain with the Royal Navy for long enough to achieve petty officer status, perhaps because they were able to return to their homes regularly. For example, Hargreaves, the runaway from Yorkshire, only stayed in the Navy for seven of his ten years, despite his exemplary record. Arriving home from the China station in 1862, he finally had two months' leave before joining *Cornwallis*, which was lying at Hull. He wanted to join the coast guard, but his captain would not release him, he

...made me remain on Board As Boatswains Mate And I did not Like the ship But I Had either to remain on Board of her or purchase my discharge from the navy so I purchased my discharge And Left the navy in september 1862..

Though the final words of the notebook in which he wrote conclude that 'it was the worst thing that I ever did'.²⁷²

Conclusion

A significant minority of men, before the introduction of continuous service contracts, treated the Royal Navy as their employer and sought their careers in it. Some (such as Robert McKenzie, discussed above) might then work on merchant ships, but only after they had retired from the Royal Navy. Although some of the incentives that the Admiralty introduced later, such as good conduct badges and additional pay, did not exist in the period 1825-53, there were plenty of opportunities to develop their skills, take additional responsibility, and be paid for it. The

²⁷² Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

professionalisation which Walton identifies as having occurred in the Royal Navy by the end of the nineteenth century, in the development of rewards for longer service, opportunities for training, and the reorganisation of petty officer grades, had begun well before the establishment of continuous service contracts in 1853.²⁷³

²⁷³ Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy', pp.338-9.

CHAPTER 4:

Discipline, Crime and Punishment

After the end of the Napoleonic wars, the Royal Navy continued to be governed by the Articles of War, and by the Admiralty Regulations and Instructions which were periodically revised and republished, for example, in 1826, 1833 and 1844. These set out instructions for how captains should run their ships, the qualities required for the various positions on board, and the importance of keeping the ship's company healthy, busy and well-trained. The first paragraph in the section on 'Discipline' stressed the captain's duty to ensure 'cleanliness, dryness and good air' for the ship's company, and the instructions go on to detail his responsibility for rating, training and developing the men, as well as, for example, making sure that no one sell 'beer, wine or spiritous liquors to the Ship's Company'.²⁷⁴ Discipline was seen as the general state of the ship and its men, not simply as the punishment of those who breached its codes.

The main types of punishment available on board included stopping grog, stopping smoking, the imposition of extra duties and flogging. Some traditional forms of punishment were disappearing. Starting – hitting men with a stick or a rope's end to make them work harder – was officially prohibited in 1809, though it continued to be used after that. Putting men in irons was not restricted until 1853, and gags were only outlawed in 1867, but the Queen's Regulations were very clear on corporal

²⁷⁴ *Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service At Sea*, (London: Admiralty, 1833), pp.76, 78.

punishment and when it could be employed. They stated that only the captain or person in command could order corporal punishment, which

... is to be understood only to signify the usual punishment by Cat at the Gangway; every other description of Corporal Punishment, whether by Rope, Stick, or other Instrument, being hereby forbidden.

Another option for punishment was demotion. Byrn, in his study of the Leeward Islands in 1784-1812, found that this only amounted to 0.34 percent of all summary punishments.²⁷⁵ Among the men of this sample, however, there were a few for whom this was a regular experience. John Radford joined HMS *Acorn* in January 1839 aged 32 as Boatswain's Mate, was demoted to Able Seaman in June 1839, promoted to Captain of the Fore Top in October of that year, demoted back to Able in January 1840 and then promoted again in June 1841 (to Captain of the Afterguard) and again back to Boatswain's Mate in February 1842. Both his demotions involved drunkenness, but he was obviously a competent sailor. Of the 3419 men who started out rated as part of the Ship's Company in the sample of ships I have been looking at, 287, or 8.4 percent, received a demotion at some point during the commission. Only 4 percent, however, were at a lower rating by the end of the commission. Of course, some demotions may have been for incompetence, and the logbooks do not always note re-ratings, or the reason for them, but many were clearly done as a punishment.

Rasor, in his study of the Royal Navy from 1850 to 1880, argued that punishments on board ship remained harsh while recruits under the volunteer system were of low calibre, but that officers who treated their men well found that they could establish a

²⁷⁵ John Byrn, *Crime and Punishment in the Leeward Islands station 1784-1812*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), Appendix D table 2.

successful system of discipline which did not involve many punishments. He gave the example of Captain Sir Bartholomew James Sullivan of HMS *Philomel* in the 1840s granted generous leave to the men of his ship when in port, and had one case of drunkenness and no desertions in the four years of the commission.²⁷⁶ In fact, the evidence of the period suggests that punishments were not too harsh, and that although a few men were regarded as useless and regularly in trouble with their officers, most worked well without having to be beaten into it.

The relations between officers and men were essential to forming a successful ship's company, such as that described by Edward Hargreaves on board HMS *Samson* in 1856:

the crew of the sampson was A smart one for we Had been drilled in All kinds of drill As often As the weather permitted And we Had a very fine passage out we Ad one gale of wind of the Cape of good Hope But we did not lose Any spares [spars] or sails But sea off cape of good Hope were very High But we rode over it All right for captain Hand was a good seaman And All the officers under was good seaman...²⁷⁷

This illustrates the way in which discipline, seamanship and good officers had to work together to produce a 'smart' crew. Hargreaves does not refer to any punishments on board *Samson*, though he later comments on two court martials held elsewhere in the fleet, and has complaints about other officers he served with, suggesting that he saw nothing unjust in the discipline on this ship.

HMS *Herald*, as described by Midshipman Comber, who served on her from 1838-42, was a far less happy ship, as there was conflict between the officers. In Sydney in

²⁷⁶ Eugene Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy, A Social History of the Lower Deck 1850-1880*, (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1976), pp.15-16.

²⁷⁷ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

1839 he compared *Herald* to *Alligator*, which had just arrived on station. There were problems with scurvy on *Alligator* but nonetheless he believed that ‘They seem to be very comfortable on board, and all the officers agree very well. Not so with us.’²⁷⁸ Instead, on board *Herald*, the captain and the first lieutenant were ‘like 2 mad dogs snapping at everyone they come across. I wish them both apud inferos [in Hell].’²⁷⁹ Although Comber was writing from the point of view of a junior officer, not a member of the ship’s company, it is likely that the bad feeling among the officers also affected the men, and that the captain and the first lieutenant did not exclude the sailors from those they snapped at. Certainly there were desertions from HMS *Herald* when she was in Australia.

Officers could be punished for mistreating their sailors, as happened to Richard Crawford, Lieutenant on HMS *Charybdis* in 1833. He was brought to court martial ‘For several breaches of the Articles of War & of the Naval Instructions, also unofficerlike, unjust and oppressive conduct’ and dismissed the service (though ‘recommended to the favourable consideration of their Lordships’).²⁸⁰ Another lieutenant, Edward H Alston of HMS *Cambridge*, was dismissed the service in 1842 for want of respect to superior officers and for ‘violently striking and beating with a stick a Volunteer of the 1st Class belonging to HM Cambridge until he broke the stick over his back at the same time calling him a liar and a son of a bitch’.²⁸¹ Lieutenant Commander Christophe Bagot was dismissed from the service in 1834 for ‘Firing a

²⁷⁸ W. David McIntyre & Marcia McIntyre (eds), *Tour of Duty. Midshipman Comber’s Journal Aboard HMS Herald On the East Indies Station – Australia, New Zealand & China, 1838-42*, (New Zealand: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury 1999), pp.86-7.

²⁷⁹ *Midshipman Comber’s Journal*, p.88.

²⁸⁰ Court martial 1833, Dec 9-12, TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103.

²⁸¹ Court martial 1842, Oct 11-12, TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103.

carronade by the explosion of which James Grainger, a Marine, was killed, also improperly punishing a seaman of the same ship'.²⁸² Courts martial for such offences of officers against men were very rare, however, and captains did still have extreme powers over the lives of the sailors serving on their ships. Rasor pointed out that the development of punishment returns in the first decade of the nineteenth century meant that the Admiralty had a record of all the legal punishments administered in the Royal Navy, and that officers who were considered to punish too much might find their careers cut short.²⁸³ Once peace had come in 1815, and opportunities for officers were harder to come by, this became a much more serious sanction influencing their behaviour.

For the men of the ship's company and petty officers, complaining about their officers' behaviour could be a risky procedure. In March 1838 William Babb of the *Rainbow* was tried at court martial for 'Combining with the Bosun [Wm John Scott] to endeavour to induce Mr Wm Stewart the Gunner to write an anonymous letter to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty against the Captain and officers of that ship'. He was in fact fully acquitted, but the risk was there.²⁸⁴ Markus Eder in his work on *Crime and punishment in the Royal Navy of the Seven Years' War, 1755-1763* found men who preferred to bring a case against their officers in the civil courts for oppressive behaviour rather than pursue a court martial.²⁸⁵ It is unclear whether this happened at all in the nineteenth century; certainly there are no mentions of such

²⁸² Court martial 1834, Apr 28, TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103.

²⁸³ Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy*, p.99.

²⁸⁴ Court martial 1838, Mar 12-13, TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103.

²⁸⁵ Eder, p.25.

cases in local newspapers or the Navy Solicitor's letters (though only some of these have been preserved).

Flogging

Flogging, however, remained common. There were occasional mentions of it in the local press. The *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette* reported without censure in March 1851 that 'a little flogging had taken place' when several men deserted from HMS *Asia*, under a Captain Stopford, in Valparaiso and were recovered.²⁸⁶ Comber, in *Herald*, noted that on 14 September 1838 two boys were flogged for neglect of duty, and later that month 'Rob[er]t Mullins (AB) and John Cole Marine [were punished] with 24 lashes each for Drunkenness and unclean[ness]'.²⁸⁷ In February the following year two men were flogged for drunkenness and mutinous conduct.²⁸⁸

Campaigns against flogging were taking place on shore, by people like Captain Frederick Marryat (see chapter 1), and some papers in naval areas took an anti-flogging line, such as the *Devonport Independent and Plymouth and Stonehouse Gazette*, which published letters on 'Naval Tortures'. In 1833 the newspaper had a dispute with the local MP about the necessity of corporal punishment in the Navy.²⁸⁹ It also published a serialised account of the mutiny on *Hermione* in 1797, called 'A Naval

²⁸⁶ *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette*, Saturday 8th March 1851, No 50, Vol. II, p.8 col.5.

²⁸⁷ *Midshipman Comber's Journal*, p.47.

²⁸⁸ *Midshipman Comber's Journal*, p.66.

²⁸⁹ *Devonport Independent and Plymouth and Stonehouse Gazette*, Vol. I No. 12 Saturday April 27th, 1833.

Tyrant's Career of Savage Cruelty and Ultimate Punishment', which mainly consisted of lengthy descriptions of the punishments issued by Captain Pigott on that ship.²⁹⁰

It was flogging which brought Captain James John Stopford, of HMS *Amazon*, a sixth-rate, to a court martial in 1847 over his disciplinary record. This case is particularly interesting because the charges were brought by the Admiralty, not by anyone on his ship, and came directly out of their concern at his punishment returns.²⁹¹ HMS *Amazon* was serving on the Mediterranean station, under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir William Parker. In September 1846 Parker wrote to Stopford about his punishment returns that 'I should have been better satisfied (as I am sure the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty would also) if the awards had been in some of the cases less severe.' He was particularly concerned about the cases of a Marine and a 2nd Class Boy, 'who appear to have been struck by the Corporal of Marines and Ship's Corporal respectively, contrary to the regulations expressly stated in Chap 5 p. 92 of the Admiralty Instructions' as already quoted. Captain Stopford, in his reply, assured the Admiral that these men had been punished.

Some of the punishment returns for *Amazon* survive, bound into the documents for the court martial, and include Parker's comments. For example on 10 January 1846, about the returns for June to September 1845

I observe with regret that the cases are numerous and the inflictions severe. I have expressed this opinion to Captn Stopford and hope that a milder course of discipline will be hereafter observed on the Amazon.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ *Devonport Independent and Plymouth and Stonehouse Gazette*, Vol. II No. 71 Saturday 14th June 1834, 'A Naval Tyrant's Career of Savage Cruelty and Ultimate Punishment'.

²⁹¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5586, letter from Admiral Parker, 10 September 1846.

²⁹² TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5586, letter from Parker to the Admiralty, 10 January 1846.

The return shows that 15 men were flogged during that quarter, with sentences ranging from 24 to 48 lashes. Eleven men were flogged in the following quarter, all receiving 30 or more lashes. From January to March 1846, presumably after receiving the Admiral's comments, there were only four floggings and for the first time five men had their payment of monthly allowance stopped. In April to June it was up again to eight men flogged and five men were flogged in the next quarter which Parker still thought too severe. In the last quarter of the year only one person was flogged, a Second Class Boy, Francis Crowther, who received 24 lashes for drunkenness, which Parker considered 'satisfactory'. The Admiralty, however, had already written to Admiral Parker that

Such a system of governing a Ship's Company is not only in their Lordships opinion most reprehensible and incompatible with the good of Her Majesty's Service but appears to them in this instance to evince an apparent inattention on the part of Captain Stopford to your remonstrance and observations.²⁹³

and requested him to convene a court martial to investigate the discipline on board *Amazon*, which took place on 12-19 January 1847.

The evidence given at the trial, mainly by petty officers, revealed other punishments as well as flogging and which ones were most resented. Men could be put into the Black List book, and given punishments such as having their grog watered, being made to stand between the guns on the quarter deck after grog until the watch was turned up, or after the work was over in the evening until the men were piped down. They might also be made to do any dirty work needed. Those punished for making a noise or using improper language were made to stand by the main mast with a log of

²⁹³ TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5586, letter from the Admiralty to Parker, 19 October 1846, as read in the evidence to the court martial.

wood around their neck which had the word 'Noisy' on it, as described in the evidence of Lieutenants Pigott and Hillyer.²⁹⁴ These punishments were usually inflicted by the first lieutenant, who at the time of the trial was Lieutenant Hillyer. He had only been in *Amazon* four months, and had seen one Boy flogged in that time, which he did not think unnecessarily severe.

It emerged from the evidence that the some of the punishments given by the original First Lieutenant, Lieutenant Downes, were thought over harsh by some of the men. Corporal Barton, of the Royal Marines, complained for example that he had been put in the Black List by Lieutenant Downes for not being at his station when it was not where he was supposed to be.²⁹⁵ John Williams, Master at Arms, thought it was too severe when petty officers were put in the black list and made to work 'with any lazy, or troublesome characters' as this was degrading.²⁹⁶ Edward Strickland, Carpenter's Mate, thought Lieutenant Downes had been too severe at times, but again did not complain of corporal punishments but of, for example, the Ship's Cook being made to muster with the Boys, and some men being turned out of their hammocks every hour of the night for three months. This last punishment was for pissing their hammocks, and he admitted he would not like to have slept near them, but still thought three months too severe. He thought there had been less punishment since Lieutenant Downes had left. On another ship, HM Steam Ship *Vixen*, where Downes was serving as Lieutenant in 1842, the Surgeon Edward Cree had recorded that

²⁹⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5586, Stopford court martial, pp. 5, 12.

²⁹⁵ Stopford court martial, evidence of Corp Barton, RM, pp.44-47.

²⁹⁶ Stopford court martial, evidence of John Williams, p.54.

...he is an ill-tempered man and too fond of flogging. Not many days pass but I have to attend a corporal punishment. The ship's company will rejoice when Downes goes.²⁹⁷

Being made to carry the block of wood marked 'Noisy' was one of the most resented punishments. Joseph Baskett, Able Seaman, was given 36 lashes for throwing it overboard when made to carry it for making a disturbance at the gangway, in April 1846.²⁹⁸ When a Lance Corporal of the Royal Marines was made to do this, the Royal Marine Lieutenant, Stanley Browne, wrote to Admiral Parker to complain, as it undermined the Lance Corporal's authority as a non-commissioned officer. The Admiral agreed that this was 'injudicious and objectionable' and wrote to Stopford that it would have been better to reduce him to the ranks or give him extra duty.²⁹⁹ John Richards, Boatswain, said in his evidence that he had never wanted to intercede for seamen over corporal punishments, but had over Black List ones.

The Boys were routinely struck with a cane by the Ship's Corporal to hurry them when he considered they were moving slackly, or if they were dirty at the morning muster. This usually amounted to two or three strokes, according to the evidence of various men, and all suggested that they considered this normal and reasonable. There had not been any complaints from the Boys about this. The only punishment of a Boy that attracted censure was when John Young, considered very troublesome, and eventually discharged as useless, was put on low rations under the guard of the

²⁹⁷ Michael Levien (ed.), *The Cree Journals. The Voyages of Edward H. Cree, Surgeon R.N. as related in his private journals, 1837-1856* (Exeter: Webb & Bower Ltd, 1981), entry for Wed 14–Sat 17 June 1843, p.121.

²⁹⁸ Stopford court martial, Punishment return for Apr-Jun 1846, attached to court martial papers.

²⁹⁹ Stopford court martial, letter from Parker, HMS *Hibernia* off Lisbon, 31 Oct 1846.

sentry under the poop. It was cold weather at the time, and the surgeon ended up putting him on the sick list after ten days.

The objections raised by the men questioned at the court martial were all to specific punishments which they considered unfair. No one suggested they found the level of punishments unusual, though the questioning of men who did complain about their own or others' punishments was fairly hostile. The court made a point of asking men who had served in the merchant service whether they thought *Amazon's* discipline would repel others from joining the Navy, and all said no. HMS *Amazon* was, it appears, an efficient ship; Admiral Parker commented on their readiness for battle. The new Gunner, James Cooke, said he had found them a 'willing and contented set of men.'

In his defence, Captain Stopford said that he wanted to be sure that no more men from *Amazon* would end up before a court martial as had happened in 1845. He believed that flogging was necessary and did improve behaviour, and that the very resentment of punishments such as the 'Noisy' log showed how effective they were. The questioning of the court martial appears to have aimed to bring out any evidence that flogging had a positive result, but even so some of those giving evidence argued instead that behaviour improved with rewards. For example the Master at Arms, John Williams, thought that Thomas Dreawry, a first Class Boy who was flogged more than once for being dirty, had now improved because he wanted to be rated and have a man's privileges. John Bell Able Seaman had been flogged twice for neglect of duty and then for being mutinous when his grog was stopped, but was still complained of. He did however believe that corporal punishment had improved the

Boy Henry Perkins, who had been 'very troublesome' but was now much improved.³⁰⁰

Stopford was acquitted, the court considering that the 'Government and discipline of *Amazon* has not been opposed to the letter or spirit of the Articles of War, and the custom of the Service', though when Stopford left *Amazon* in 1848 he seems to have spent some time waiting for his next command, as the next reference to him on active service has him commanding HMS *Calcutta* in April 1854.³⁰¹

Flogging remained an established part of the system of discipline on most ships, but it was not resented by the men, who were more likely to object to humiliating punishments such as wearing the log of wood. There may have been, as James Wing, who had joined as Able Seaman, said to the court martial, 'a little more' punishment on *Amazon* than on other ships, but not, he thought, more severe ones.

The drink problem

In 1850 a Parliamentary Committee was appointed to report into 'the Expediency of Diminishing the present Quantity of Spirits Served Out Daily to the Seamen in the Royal Navy'.³⁰² It was believed that drink caused most of the discipline problems in the Royal Navy, and that reducing the quantity of spirits allowed to the men would

³⁰⁰ Stopford court martial, Statement of Captain Stopford to the court martial.

³⁰¹ *Navy List*, 1854.

³⁰² *Report of the Committee appointed to inquire into the Expediency of Diminishing the present Quantity of Spirits Served Out Daily to the Seamen in the Royal Navy*, (London: HMSO, 1850).

help with this. Historians such as Byrn and Rodger have pointed out that the alcohol issue was part of the traditions of the service, believed to be due to the men both by them and their officers. Markus Eder, in his study of the Royal Navy during the Seven Years War, had 'no doubt that drunkenness in the armed forces of the eighteenth century was a specific problem'. The report of the Parliamentary Committee noted that in 1824 the ration of spirits had been reduced to one gill, 'half the former allowance', and the evening service of grog stopped, and 'a sensible improvement in discipline took place, to the content and comfort of all on board'.³⁰³ In 1825 the imperial measure came into use, adding one fifth back to the ration. 'The quantity thus increased was found too much for a single issue, and the mischievous custom of an evening serving was forced into use a second time.' Their evidence, they argued, 'clearly proves that the evening grog is the source of those evils which render discipline irksome and give to the Naval service a character for harshness which it does not deserve.'³⁰⁴

Comber, on *Herald*, recorded some instances of the ship's company getting drunk, for example:

Sunday 26 May 1839 At anchor. Some of our officers went on shore to visit Sir R[ichard] Spencer and family, among them the Captain, he gave permission to the ships company to go on shore, they returned in the evening all raving drunk, as might have been expected.

Sydney: Thursday 12 December 1839 ... {heavy gale in afternoon} ... Captain Nias has stopped the leave of the ships Company because they got drunk and occasioned a paragraph being pub[lished] in the Sydney Gazette titled "A comparison between the American & British Seamen", puffing up the Yankees as a quiet, sober and orderly set and condemning us as drunken reprobates. It's a wonder if our men don't pull their house about their ears.³⁰⁵

³⁰³ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.vi.

³⁰⁴ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.vii.

³⁰⁵ *Midshipman Comber's Journal*, pp.80, 107.

In fact, as the report of the Committee also makes clear, one of the problems was the use of alcohol as currency on board ship. Men would sell their ration of rum if they preferred tea, or 'the men who are expert in making clothes, or other articles, very frequently receive payment for their work in liquor.'³⁰⁶ Additionally, the cook of the mess and his mate would sometimes get some or all of the spirits allowance for the mess. The evidence from the sailors taken by the committee is not always clear on this; some argued that it was not a practice they were familiar with, but most agreed that drunkenness was the cause of many punishments on board ship.

Drunkenness was certainly a recurring theme at courts martial for men of petty officer rank brought before them. Examples include Thomas Ankers, Carpenter in HMS *Birkenhead*, brought to court martial in January 1848 for 'Drunkenness, disobedience of orders and mutinous language'. He was dismissed the service and rendered incapable of serving again, and imprisoned for six months. William Jones, Boatswain in HMS *Scylla*, was court martialled in July 1838 for drunkenness, absenting himself from his station and otherwise neglecting his duty on 19 June 1838 and was reprimanded.³⁰⁷ Of the 523 charges brought to court martial and recorded in the Admiralty indexes, 151 explicitly involved drunkenness.³⁰⁸

There were also believed to be problems with depredations from the ship's stores when she was being fitted out. The Committee argued that there needed to be a

³⁰⁶ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.vii.

³⁰⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103, Index of courts martial 1803-56 with verdicts alphabetically by surname.

³⁰⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103.

‘Corps of higher qualified, and better paid person – men of proved steadiness, activity and intelligence’ and more activity to stop spirits being brought on board illicitly (strictly forbidden in the Naval Instructions).³⁰⁹ Charles Baker, Gunner, was dismissed the service in 1833 for stealing rum from the spirit room when left in charge of the *Sheldrake* packet.³¹⁰

The Committee interviewed 17 first class petty officers and able seamen as well as officers.

The seamen, without one exception, admit in their evidence that *drunkenness* is the prevailing crime on board Her Majesty’s ships, and they acknowledge with equal frankness that *drunkenness* is the cause of almost every punishment. Younger sailors especially thought to need ‘to be guarded from the dangerous temptation’ of drinking more than his allowance.³¹¹

Commander Edward Tatham of HMS *Raleigh* told the committee that on his ship punishments were mainly for drunkenness or behaviour that arose from drunkenness. He said that mainly

stopping the smoking; I found that efficacious. I put the men under the sentry’s charge during the smoking hour, and prevented them from smoking, and I found that that was a great punishment. I never allowed any punishment to exceed four or five days at the most...

He did not use corporal punishment, because

I do not think it can ever be efficacious as a remedy for drunkenness. No man was flogged for being drunk, if he did not get into any other scrape; if drunkenness was attended with extraordinary insubordination, it would be so punished.

He believed a reduction in the allowance would be effective.³¹²

³⁰⁹ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.vii.

³¹⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103, Court martial 15 August 1833.

³¹¹ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.vi.

³¹² *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.51.

William Coles, who had most recently served on HMS *Rodney*, as Coxswain of the Launch then Gunner's Mate, thought that 'A man's allowance [of spirits] would never make him drunk, provided he only drank his own allowance.' He was not in favour of a reduction in the allowance, even if compensation were offered:

I do not think it would. A good many of the men would almost put their victuals aside for the sake of their allowance of grog, particularly at sea, when on salt provisions.

He denied that men were selling their grog to each other, though he admitted the cook and the mate of mess often got extra, and also denied that men whose grog had been stopped as punishment for being drunk were being given a share of their messmates' grog. 'I never saw a man drunk at dinner time; [ie noon] it is almost always at the night serving.' The Committee also asked about 'splicing the mainbrace', when grog was given as a reward for particular effort on the part of the crew, and whether a cup of coffee would be an acceptable substitute. 'When a man comes down from aloft after being half an hour shortening sail, I consider that a glass of grog enlivens a man.'³¹³

Other men were happier about a reduction in the allowance. James Mason, late of HMS *Penelope*, Boatswain's Mate, did not like the idea of drinking the grog at the tub (that is, as soon as it was issued), thinking that British seamen were 'too proud spirited for that; they would not go for it unless they could have it served out in the messes.' But he was happy to have a reduced amount, with compensation, only

³¹³ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, pp.46-7.

served at noon.³¹⁴ Robert Angeley, late of *Constance*, *Sparta* and other ships, thought evening grog caused most of the drunkenness and insubordination on board ship.³¹⁵

Captain George Giffard of HMS *Vixen*, (a steam vessel), also thought it would be a good idea to get rid of the evening allowance, except 'in very cold, wet weather, gales of wind, or when you have very hard work, the men absolutely require it.' and tea was not then a substitute for 'a small quantity of spirits mixed with lemon-juice and water'. He had already stopped the extra allowance of spirits to the Stokers as it caused drunkenness.³¹⁶ George Murray, Quartermaster, who had been at sea for 30 years and in the Service for 16, thought punishments all arose from 'Theft, drunkenness and insolence' and that nine out of ten cases of the latter came from drinking. He thought two-thirds of the men would be happy with tea in the evening instead of grog. It was in the evening that 'if a man has any grievances they come out then, and it causes him to make a great deal more noise than otherwise'.³¹⁷

Officers also drank and caused disciplinary problems. Surgeon Edward Cree noted in his journal when on board *Rattlesnake* that their Second Master had been 'tried by court martial for putting his captain under arrest. It was supposed that both of them were drunk', and described another officer as 'a jolly... fellow... I fancy given to rum and water'.³¹⁸ Commander Tatham, again in his evidence to the committee, said he had:

³¹⁴ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.57

³¹⁵ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.58

³¹⁶ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.59.

³¹⁷ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, p.108-12, 112.

³¹⁸ Michael Levien (ed.), *The Cree Journals. The Voyages of Edward H. Cree, Surgeon R.N. as related in his private journals, 1837-1856*, (Exeter: Webb & Bower Ltd, 1981).

no hesitation in stating that in framing rules for the prevention of drunkenness amongst the men, it requires an equal provision to prevent drunkenness among the officers; and I think in any legislation upon a point of this kind a uniform coat should be no protection at all...' which would help 'the well-being of the public service.'³¹⁹

As a result of the Committee's report, the ration of spirits was halved to a quarter of a pint, but they did not feel able to insist that it be served out and drunk at the tub.

Despite the traditional nature of the issue of alcohol to the men, the Navy had to try and control drinking, because of the risk of accidents as well as bad behaviour.

Looking at the Seven Years War period, Eder found that after negligence drinking was most often the cause of summary punishment, 20 percent of all cases in his sample, as opposed to 6 percent of courts martial cases.³²⁰ Nearly 70 percent of all cases of drunkenness found in the indexes for 1830-56 also involved another offence, and in 66 percent of all drunkenness cases the second offence was either neglect of duty or quarrels with other persons.

Mutiny

There is very little evidence of mutiny during the whole of the period examined here.

The behaviour of individual men was sometimes described as mutinous (as with Thomas Ankers, above), but there were no actual mutinies. Admiral Parker, indeed, went to some lengths to avoid describing or treating an incident on board HMS

Superb in 1847 as a mutiny. Instead, in his letter to the Admiralty, he referred to 'very

³¹⁹ *Report of the Committee on Spirits*, pp54-5.

³²⁰ Eder, p.72. He found 27% were for neglect of duty and 39% for quarrelling. Byrn found only 35%. Possibly drunkenness was considered more of an offence on its own by the end of the 18th century compared to the Seven Years War.

serious acts of insubordination committed by a part of the crew of the *Superb* in Malta Harbor [sic] on the evening of the 31st ultimo. [31st October]'.³²¹

The Captain had been out of the ship at the time, and the Commander, Wilmot, 'immediately suppressed [the disturbance] and good order [was] restored'. The Admiral had had two ringleaders and seven others 'since severely punished by my order'; the ringleaders had been discharged with disgrace and others sent to different ships. Good feeling, he claimed, now prevailed in the ship's company, 'who brought to light one of the principal delinquents who was before unknown'. He hoped therefore he would not regret not bringing them to court martial.

The cause of the disturbance appears to have been that the men were not allowed to take tobacco as usual that night because the fore part of Main Deck was often 'made very filthy from many of the men persisting in spitting on the Deck and Guns instead of using the spitting kids which are now provided in every ship.' They had been warned about the proposed punishment if the deck was dirty and it was implemented. The Royal Marines were not ordered under arms until 'cheers of defiance were repeated, the lights on the Lower Deck extinguished, Ports lowered, Mess utensils and even Shot, thrown at the Officers.' However much this may sound like a mutiny, the Admiral was determined to consider it otherwise. A letter from Captain Corry claimed that on the night in question 97 of the best men were on shore on leave, and there were 99 men in the sick list, so those left on board were not representative of the crew at its best, in justification of the decision only to punish a few of the men.³²²

³²¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5576, No.314, Sir Admiral Parker to the Admiralty, HMS *Hibernia* at Sea, 16 November 1847.

³²² TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5576, No.314, Captain Corry to the Admiralty, Malta, 2 November 1847.

Otherwise, considering mutinous behaviour as proportion of offences brought to court martial, there are only 13 references to it of the 523 records of verdicts for 1825-56. All of these men were convicted. One, a second master, received 48 lashes. The rest received sentences varying from being reprimanded and dismissed their ship, to two years in the Marshalsea prison.

Indecency

There were 18 courts-martial for indecency or sodomy in the period 1825-56. Only two were actually for sodomy, and these were both of the same man, William Maxwell, Boatswain on HMS *Tweed*. He denied the charge, but was convicted in May 1828, according to the index of courts martial, and sentenced to be hanged, then convicted again in January 1829. He had been reprieved because of irregularities in his original trial, but the Admiralty denied his application against being tried a second time. He was 'the last British sailor ever executed for sodomy'.³²³

The other trials all refer to indecency, and there were four acquittals among the 16. In one of these Henry Clark, Mate in *North Star*, was 'Fully and honourably acquitted of charges disgraceful to Lieutenant John Elliot the prosecutor' when accused of taking indecent liberties with a Volunteer First Class.³²⁴ William Meldrum, Gunner in *Rattlesnake*, was also 'fully and entirely acquitted' and sent from the court 'without the slightest stain on his character' when accused of 'taking indecent liberties with the

³²³ Arthur Gilbert, 'Buggery and the British Navy 1700-1861', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Autumn, 1976, p.85.

³²⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103, court martial of Henry Clarke, 26 October 1842.

persons of three Boys of that ship' in 1838.³²⁵ Eder found four people convicted of sodomy in three courts martial in the Seven Years War period. Both civil courts and courts martial drew a distinction between sodomy and other forms of homosexuality. Twenty men were indicted for homosexuality or bestiality, and four were sentenced to death of the ten men (including three officers) convicted.³²⁶ Gilbert noted that the conviction and punishment rates for those actually brought to trial on sodomy and indecency were very high in the period up to 1815. He argued that the decline in numbers of trials was partly because the Royal Navy was much smaller, but also because the Royal Navy was 'affected by the more humane attitude towards crime that characterized the mid-nineteenth century'. Capital convictions did however continue in the civil courts, where for example sodomy was second to murder in the number of capital convictions from 1842-9.³²⁷

Of the 14 convictions for sodomy or indecency from 1825-56, ten men were dismissed the service, two were dismissed from their ships, and as already noted one man was executed. There is no record of any additional punishment. It was noted in the verdict on Lieutenant Morgan of HMS *Pembroke*, who was dismissed the service, that he had been tried at his own request for 'using obscene language and taking indecent liberties with the persons of an Able Seaman and a Midshipman of that ship'. There is no evidence from this period to suggest a particular campaign against homosexuality and sodomy in the Royal Navy.

³²⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103, court martial of William Meldrum, 14-15 December, 1838.

³²⁶ Eder, p.113.

³²⁷ Gilbert, p.85.

Smuggling and stealing

As noted in chapter 2, smugglers could be made to serve in the Royal Navy as a punishment. Local newspapers also show a few instances of men attempting to smuggle while in service, and being prosecuted in local courts. For example, in January 1851:

William Ash and William Eyre, of H.M. Steam-ship OBERON, were summoned before the court charged with having unlawfully in their possession a certain quantity of tobacco liable to duty. The defendant Ash was sentenced to pay a fine of £3 or ten days imprisonment. Eyre was discharged, there being no evidence against him.³²⁸

In March, Thomas Buckell, 'a sailor belonging to H.M. ship Powerful, was sentenced to pay a fine of £2 for having unlawfully in his possession 2lbs 14oz of tobacco.'³²⁹ Others ended up before the courts for stealing, such as 'Thomas Silvier, a marine, belonging to H.M.S. Prince Regent' who was remanded for five days on suspicion of felony. He had tried to sell pair of soup-ladles and a spoon to a jeweller 'but Mr Ogburn suspecting these articles to have been stolen, from the initials being defaced' had him arrested.³³⁰ Another sailor, William Bunce, Boatswain on HMS *Tyne*, was caught trying to 'land some canvas and twin being part of the ship's stores, with the intention of embezzlement' and court martialled for it, but 'dismissed his ship only, in consideration of the Testimonials which he produced of good character'.³³¹

³²⁸ *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette*, Saturday January 25th, 1851, No.44 Vol. II p.5 col.3.

³²⁹ *Portsmouth Times*, Saturday 8th March 1851, No 50, Vol. II p.5 col.4.

³³⁰ *Portsmouth Times*, 15th March 1851, p.6 col.3.

³³¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103, court martial of William Bunce, 13 April 1835.

Sailors could of course be victims of crime themselves, and there are references to men who having been paid off, had plenty of money, having it stolen from them. For example, in January 1851 Harriet Wilson was charged in Portsmouth with stealing £4 12s 6d from John Hutchings, who had been paid off from *Water Witch*. There was not considered enough evidence to commit her for trial, however. The kind of crime described cannot have been uncommon, though:

It appeared that the prosecutor was at the Rattler beer-house, in White's Row, on Friday night last. He called for some beer, and tendered in payment a £5 note. Prisoner served him with the beer, and gave him his change, which he placed in his waistcoat pocket. Prisoner put her hands into the pocket, removed them, and ran away, and he found himself minus his money.³³²

Similarly, Harriet Burrows and Mary Ann King were accused of stealing £17 from a sailor called Robert Heald, from HMS *Powerful*, but discharged for lack of evidence, while Mary Lynch

...was committed to prison to take her trial at the next sessions for robbing a sailor named William Anglin of 24s. last evening at the Albion public house, Warblington-street, Portsmouth.³³³

Stealing on board ship was regarded very seriously, but the culprit could not always be found. John Messum, Captain's Steward in HMS *Vesuvius* in 1854 recorded that

Mar 13th Some person stole £1.14.6 out of my pocket while I was asleep in my hammock at night.

Mar 14th All hands were mustered on deck at 1 o'clock PM with their bags and ditty boxes to be overhauled but it could not be found.³³⁴

Edward Cree, Surgeon on board HMS *Rattlesnake*, then serving as a troop ship, in 1838, wrote in his journal on 19 November that

³³² *Portsmouth Times*, 4 January 1851, p.5 col.3.

³³³ Both reported in the *Portsmouth Times*, 15 March 1851.

³³⁴ NMM JOD/205, John Messum, Captain's Steward, journal, January 1854 to December 1855.

Today there has been a disagreeable break in the quiet monotony on board. A military punishment of 100 lashes – an Artilleryman, for theft.³³⁵

Capital punishment

Apart from the sentence for sodomy, there are no references to capital sentences in the courts martial in the index for the period 1825-1856. Two death sentences are mentioned in Edward Hargraves' memoir, in both cases for attacking an officer. In one case '..the marine Had got drunk on duty...', been flogged for drunkenness, blamed the sergeant who reported him and had shot at him a few days later. The sergeant was 'only slightly wounded' but the Marine was sentenced to death, brought back to Hong Kong and hung on board the troop ship *Espoir*.

...And the same day the sergeant went Back to canton to join his company fit for duty I thought that was not right But it was done whether it was right or not...(Canton to Wampo run, 8 months 1858)

Another Marine was also sentenced to death when in 1860 he shot at the captain of *Lee* and wounded him in the shoulder.

...And the morning After ... the Marine was Hanged on Board of the Lee gun boat in sight of the whole of fleet ... I did not think the Marine ought to Be Hang for the captain of the Lee was not wounded Bad for He was on deck on Board of the Lee All the time the Marine was Hung I see him walking the quarter deck my self And He did not Look much worse for the wound But He enjoyed seen the Marine Hanged if the Marine Had killed Him the crew of the Lee would not Have Been sorry for He was the worst captain in the fleet He flogged Almost the whole of His crew the first 12 months the Lee was out on the chain station...³³⁶

In general, however, during the period 1825-56, hanging was for sodomy or attacking a superior officer, and not used for other crimes. Clive Emsley has shown that capital

³³⁵ Levien, *The Cree Journals*, p.39.

³³⁶ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

punishment was in decline in the UK in general for everything except murder by the late 1830s.³³⁷ Imprisonment was increasing as an alternative, as indeed was the case with the Royal Navy. Thirty-six prison sentences were handed down by court martial, none for more than two years, most three or six months. A few received lashes as well, such as James Neal, given 50 lashes and 18 months' imprisonment for desertion from *Retribution*, at the end of which he was dismissed the service with disgrace. A Royal Marine, tried in Portsmouth on 7 July 1848 for striking his superior officer, was sentenced 'to be transported for the term of his natural life'. The Admiralty, however, in a letter of 24 October that year considered that the sentence was not legal, and instead instructed that he be discharged without certificates or papers from his custody on HMS *Victory*.³³⁸

Walton also noted that terms of imprisonment were increasing towards the end of the century, to five and ten years, compared to those being given out during the first half of the century.³³⁹ Crime and punishment in the Royal Navy was separate from that dealt with under the civil justice system, but general changes in attitudes towards punishments such as flogging, which was once used frequently in the civil courts as well as military ones, were reflected in military as well as civil practice.

³³⁷ Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900*, p.223.

³³⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5586.

³³⁹ Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy', p.257.

CHAPTER 5:

Life on Board: Everyday Experiences

Eating

And at 11.45 o'clock the Boys is Allowed to go And get the dinner from the galley ready for the Men. At 12 o'clock All Hands go to dinner. Dinner is 1 pound of Beef And vegetables And Bread. The Beef is All Boiled together Along with the vegetables And it is very good soup.

Edward Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'³⁴⁰

The standard issue of food for the men in the ship's company was the same as it had been since 1733, as then described in the *Regulations and Instructions relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*.³⁴¹ This allowed a pound of ship's biscuit every day, plus 4 lb beef, 2 lb pork, 2 lb peas, 1½ lb oatmeal, 6 oz sugar, 6 oz butter and 12 oz cheese, divided over the various days. Meat was distributed on four days a week, Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, which then had to be boiled in nets in the galley, with whatever vegetables could be obtained.³⁴² Edward Hargreaves, writing above about his initial period of training in 1855 on HMS *Victory*, which was permanently stationed in Portsmouth, described the beef stew they had for their main meal. The bread, since they were in port, would have been fresh, not ship's biscuit. Also since they were in port they would have easy access to fresh vegetables, and he clearly recalls that this is what they were given on a normal day. Macdonald suggests that

³⁴⁰ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

³⁴¹ Janet Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, (London: Chatham, 2004), pp.9-10.

³⁴² Rodger, *Wooden World*, pp. 83, 85-6; Macdonald, pp.101, 114.

meat might have been eaten every day, even if it was only issued on four days a week, perhaps with the men saving some of the ration for the next day.³⁴³

The day began with biscuits and cocoa:

There is A Half Hour Allowed for Breakfast And the Boys Have to put the Biscuits on the mess table And And [sic] fetch the cocoa from the galley And serve it out to the men And eat his own Breakfast And fetch Hot water from the cook's galley And wash the Mess traps or Basins up And put them Away in the rack And take the water on deck And throw it overboard... All this Has to be done in one Half Hour from 7.30 to 8 o clock.³⁴⁴

Again, being in port there was not a problem having hot water every day for cocoa, which at sea could not always be managed.

Once Hargreaves joined a sea-going ship, his diet changed to the classic salt pork, salt beef and ship's biscuit, food which could be preserved on board for long periods of time, but dinner would still be served at noon from the galley. Fresh vegetables were to be included when the purser could buy them, and fresh meat instead of salt when the ship was in port. For example, in Faro Sound in about March 1856,

Hargreaves recalled that

We took 12 Live Bullocks on Board for fresh meat for the crew for we Had Been on salt Beef And salt pork from the time we left England And it was the first time that I Had Been so Long on salt Beef And the fresh Beef was A treat I never eat Any Beef that tasted so nice...³⁴⁵

He had a similar reaction to the potatoes obtained for the ship's company by HMS *Actaeon* on the passage home in 1862: '... And we got some new potatoes the first

³⁴³ Macdonald, p.115.

³⁴⁴ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

³⁴⁵ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

that I Had tasted since 1856 it was A treat to me And they tasted good...³⁴⁶ Ships supplemented the official ration with fresh food and local supplies whenever possible. There were long lists of what food was to be considered equivalent to others in the *Regulations*, for example that

1 pint of Wine or 2 quarts of Strong Beer or 1 gallon of Small Beer is to be considered equal to $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pint of Spirits...
'2 lbs of Cheese are to be considered equal to 1 lb of Chocolate or Cocoa'.
' $\frac{1}{4}$ lb of Onions or $\frac{1}{4}$ lb of Leeks is to be considered equal to 1 lb of other Vegetables.'³⁴⁷

John Ford, in his surviving letters to Sarah Evans, mentioned food several times, and usually suggesting that he was missing it. In December 1848 he wrote that he was 'very sorry that you had the Misfortune of Scalding your hand. But I hope it is better by this time. I am very glad that the turnips boiled so well for I should like to had some'.³⁴⁸ The previous Easter he commented that she had mentioned 'hot Cross Buns and Cream you only make my Mouth water, I have not seen Buns nor Cream since you Was on Board it was lucky on Easter Sunday for I had nothing to Eat that Day.'³⁴⁹

Rodger noted that naval victualling improved significantly during the eighteenth century, and that soldiers carried on naval ships commented favourably on the quality of the food.³⁵⁰ Macdonald showed how the Victualling Board was successful in supplying good quality food to the ships of the Royal Navy throughout the war

³⁴⁶ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

³⁴⁷ *Queen's Regulations*, 1844, pp.85-86.

³⁴⁸ RNM, 353/85 (21) John Ford to Sarah Evans, *Superb*, Spithead, 29 December 1848.

³⁴⁹ RNM, 353/85 (18) John Ford to Sarah Evans, *Superb*, Lisbon, 28 April 1847.

³⁵⁰ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p.306.

period, and their systems continued to work for the much smaller Navy after 1815.³⁵¹ The Admiralty and ship's captains understood the importance of taking on fresh provisions whenever possible, to prevent scurvy (see chapter 6).³⁵² Michael Lewis, writing about the Navy after the end of the Napoleonic wars, thought that the sailor's diet in this period was becoming 'more varied, more satisfying, more scientific, more appetisingly served.'³⁵³ There is little evidence for this, as the old methods of cooking had not changed, nor had the basic diet. It was not until 1847 that the Admiralty started to use canned food.³⁵⁴ As Hargreaves' account shows, seamen could be delighted by a change in their food, since it was normally so monotonous, even though it was largely adequate and healthy. Midshipman Comber, writing in his journal in 1839, when he was serving aboard HMS *Herald*, recorded that when the ship arrived at Trincomalee on the north-east coast of Ceylon,

The natives surround us all day with boats offering their goods for sale. They deal chiefly in curries, which they bring off warm, the men are very fond of them but we have been warned of what they are made, so I never take any, a dead dog or crow is the most savoury dish they can boast of.³⁵⁵

Clearly to the men, however, the curries were a welcome change from their usual diet.

The men of HMS *Hecla* and *Fury*, on an expedition to explore the north west passage in 1821-23, hunted seals to supplement their diet, as described by Samuel Wilkes, Armourer on *Hecla*, in his journals. From October 1821 to 21 June 1822 they were frozen in, and the distribution of food became a very serious matter. Macdonald

³⁵¹ Macdonald, p.170.

³⁵² Macdonald, pp.485-6.

³⁵³ Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, p.166.

³⁵⁴ Macdonald, p.10.

³⁵⁵ Comber, *Tour of Duty*, p.68, 18 February 1839.

describes how meat would be distributed fairly on board all ships, with the cook 'pricking' pieces of meat for random mess cooks to receive.³⁵⁶ On *Hecla*, once they were trapped in the ice, the captain issued a list of winter provisions 'pasted up in the Mess deck that all hands may read it'. These were less than the usual rations when the men were working the ship; Wilkes noted on 1 April 1822 that they were 'back on full allowance [of food]'.³⁵⁷ Every mess was 'striving to excel' in cleanliness and good order, and all day there had to be two men feeding snow into the tank fitted to the cook's range's chimney for melting.³⁵⁸ Their food was as monotonous as most naval diets, with only seal hunting to supplement it, and the following April Wilkes recorded that on Sunday 7 April 'It being Easter Sunday we were favoured with a good Dinner of roast beef and Plum pudding a pound a man Same as Sunday last it cheered us up a bit'.³⁵⁹

A less cheerful episode took place on the 23 May, when one of his messmates, the chief quartermaster, was found to have been stealing food from the others. Wilkes's mess, which also included the chief carpenter's mate, the gunner's mate and the sailmaker, tried to deal with it themselves, but the quartermaster broke his promise to stop, and so they reported him to the first lieutenant. When brought before 'the captain and all hands', he denied it, but 'a piece of meat some Bread and a Bottle of Rum' were found in his hiding place on the ice. He was disgraced from quartermaster and given four dozen lashes. Wilkes recorded that 'I felt sad and low all thro [sic] the

³⁵⁶ Macdonald, p.102.

³⁵⁷ NMM MS/76/055, Samuel Wilkes, Three journals kept in HMS *Hecla* on voyage of discovery in the polar seas, 1821-23, 1 April 1822.

³⁵⁸ Wilkes, entry for Oct 14th 1821.

³⁵⁹ Wilkes, 7 April 1822.

day afterwards.' The thief was thrown out of their mess and had to mess alone.³⁶⁰

Stealing food was a very serious crime against the mess and the community, especially when supplies were so limited.

Tobacco

The quantity of Tobacco to be demanded by the Paymaster and Purser is to be at the rate of about Two Pounds per Lunar Month, for a number of persons equal to two-thirds of the Complement... It is to be issued, at a rate not exceeding Two Pounds per Man per Lunar Month, to those Men only who shall use it and form part of the Crew of the Ship ... The Captain, however, will be particularly careful not to allow any Man to take up Tobacco who shall not be known to be generally in the habit of using it, nor is it to be issued to any person when in any Port in the United Kingdom.³⁶¹

Tobacco was not issued free to the men, but many took advantage of the opportunity to buy it, as the muster books show. The amount they spent was recorded against their name, to be deducted from their wages along with slops and other expenditure. In the sample of men discussed here Abraham R Mills, AB and later Quartermaster, spent the most: 70s 8d during the period July 1837 to February 1842 on HMS *Alligator*.³⁶² A few others spent 50s or more, but most spent between 10s and 20s. Of the whole sample, 2059 spent money on tobacco. Most Boys appear not to have been allowed to buy it, but there were some who did. These were mainly the First Class Boys, who were over 18, but 26 of those aged 14-18 had spent up to 18s.

When HMS *Hecla* was preparing for her polar expedition in 1821, Samuel Wilkes noted that visitors to the ship from the College of Physicians had advised the captain

³⁶⁰ Wilkes, 23 May 1822.

³⁶¹ *Queen's Regulations*, 1844, p.144, para.55.

³⁶² TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8649, HMS *Alligator* muster books.

‘to let every man smoke plenty of tobacco to keep away distempers.’³⁶³ In general, however, the sailors had mainly to chew their tobacco, not smoke it, as that would have been too dangerous on board ship. The Regulations were very clear that the captain was not ‘to allow any person to smoke tobacco, except in the galley, and not even there on any account after 8 P.M.’³⁶⁴ The consequent spitting from chewing tobacco could cause trouble, as the events on board HMS *Superb* in October 1847 showed, even though ‘spitting kids’ were provided for them to use. The record of events there shows that the men were usually allowed to have tobacco in the evening, as part of their rest from work, rather than being allowed to chew it during the day.³⁶⁵

Daily routines

The Regulations for the Government of Her Majesty’s Naval Service are very clear on the importance of regular washing.

The Captain is to be particularly attentive to the cleanliness of the men, who are to wash themselves daily, and to change their linen twice every week. They are never to be suffered to sleep in wet clothes or wet beds, if it can possibly be prevented; and they are often, but particularly after bad weather, to shake their clothes and bedding in the air, and to expose them to the sun and wind.³⁶⁶

However, the logbook for HMS *Winchester*, for example, does not record when the men washed themselves, only when they washed their clothes or hammocks, so it is not clear how much this rule was observed. Hargreaves, describing the daily routines on HMS *Victory* when he was training, commented that in the breakfast half hour, as

³⁶³ Wilkes, p.19.

³⁶⁴ *Queen’s Regulations*, 1844, p.54.

³⁶⁵ See above, chapter 4, p.138.

³⁶⁶ The Admiralty, *The Queen’s Regulations for the Government of Her Majesty’s Naval Service*, (London: 1844), pp.90-1.

well as fetching the cocoa, eating and washing up the mess traps, a boy had to 'wash himself And shift is clothes As the captain gives the order for the crew to dress', which did not allow much time for getting himself clean.³⁶⁷

Alongside tobacco, the muster books include columns for recording how much the men spent on soap, which was also charged against their wages. The 17 men who spent most on soap, from 53s to 85s over the course of four years, all served as stokers on HM Steam Sloop *Ardent*. As discussed in chapter 6, below, the new steam ships could be very hot, unpleasant and dirty places to work, and getting clean after shovelling coal for several hours would have been very difficult. No special places were set aside for washing, either, in the early steamships. The money that Joseph Arney and others spent on soap cut considerably into the extra wages they earned for working as stokers.³⁶⁸ This was unusual, however. 1,610 men and boys of the sample of 4,638 are not recorded as spending any money on soap at all (though this may simply be information missing from the surviving records), and 2,550 as spending between 1s and 29s. According to the *Regulations*, each man was to be entitled to about one pound of soap per lunar month, and anyone on board, whether part of the ship's company or a supernumerary, was entitled to receive it.³⁶⁹

Winchester's logbook, as others, did record when clothes were washed, and this appears to have taken place regularly. At the end of October 1839, for example, the entries give a strong sense of the regularity of a ship's world, when not interrupted by bad weather:

³⁶⁷ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

³⁶⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7543, HMS *Ardent* muster books.

³⁶⁹ *Queen's Regulations*, 1844, p.144, para.55.

Sunday 27th Oct - mustered by divisions and performed divine service.

Wed 30th Scrubbed hammocks

Sunday 3rd Nov - mustered by divisions and performed divine service. Read the Articles of War.

Mon 4th Nov – scrubbed hammocks and washed clothes

Sat 9th Nov – sent 4 men to the hospital

Sun 10th Nov - mustered by divisions and performed divine service.³⁷⁰

HMS *Virago*, a steam ship, similarly recorded washing as a regular event in the log, for example:

August 1843

Sun 20th Mustered by divisions and performed divine service.

Mon 21st – arrived Plymouth, showed no. to *Caledonia*.

Sat 26th – Dressed ship in honour of Prince Albert's birthday.

Sun 27th – divine service.

Tues 29th – washed clothes.³⁷¹

Hargreaves found washing his own clothes an unpleasant necessity:

There was Plenty to eat And good warm clothing to were But it did not go down very well to Have to wash my clothing my self But I had. And I had to Be up At 5 o clock every Wednesday morning to wash clothes And we Had to Have done By 6 o clock And there was from 4 to 500 on Board to wash clothes And you Had to get your water served out to you And Have your clothes out to dry By 6 o clock or you would be punished for it. You Had to move About smart to get done And your clothes must Be clean or you will get Blacklisted.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 54/320 HMS *Winchester*, Master's Log.

³⁷¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 53/3358 HMS *Virago*, Ship's Log.

³⁷² Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

Clothes

There was no uniform for the sailors of the Royal Navy for the first half of the nineteenth century. As noted above, chapter 2, the 1859 Royal Commission recommended that one should be issued free, and in fact the Admiralty had started to make regulations about uniform for sailors in 1857.³⁷³ Instead, the men were issued with slops that they were charged for, and materials to make their own clothes. Hargreaves commented that:

You Have to make your own clothing or to pay for them making out of your own wages And it is the rule to learn to make your own. There is no tailor kept on Board of A ship in the British navy.³⁷⁴

There are very few references to clothes in any of the sources, though Wilkes recorded that before *Hecla* set off for the Arctic, ladies sent them gifts of warm clothes for the winter there.³⁷⁵ Men giving evidence to the Royal Commission complained about being charged for their clothes, not least because this meant they were in debt as soon as they had begun their service.³⁷⁶ Throughout this period, however, that was the practice.

Training routines

Whenever possible, the men would find themselves drilling. For example, on HMS *Winchester* in November and December 1839, the logbook records that

³⁷³ Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy*, pp.100-1, 112-6.

³⁷⁴ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

³⁷⁵ Wilkes, p.19.

³⁷⁶ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy*, 1859, pp.x-ix.

Wed 20th exercised men at the cutlass exercise.
 Sun 24th mustered by divisions and performed divine service.
 Mon 25th exercised men at the cutlass exercise.
 Tues 26th exercised men at the cutlass exercise.
 Exercised a division at the gun exercise.
 Wed 27th exercised men at the cutlass exercise.
 Exercised a division at the gun exercise.
 Thurs 28th Exercised a division at the guns
 Exercised Marines firing at a target.
 Monday 2nd Dec – Exercised a division at quarters firing at a target.³⁷⁷

It was of course essential that the men should be exercised in this way, so that if the ship ever needed to fight they were ready, and to help build a sense of community among them. It was laid down in the *Regulations* that captains must see that the men were regularly using the guns and were ‘taught use of Cutlass and Half-pike, how to board a ship and how to repel boarders’.³⁷⁸ It was also the captain’s responsibility to train the men in the duties of Able Seamen, as discussed in chapter three, above. However, part of the point of drill was to keep the men occupied, in what were often long, boring periods at sea or in harbour if they were not allowed much leave. Hargreaves records that the crew of HMS *Sampson* ‘Had been drilled in All kinds of drill As often As the weather permitted’ on their journey to China. This had made them a ‘smart’ crew, who worked well together when the weather was bad and took pride in their ship.

³⁷⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 54/320 HMS *Winchester*, Master’s Log.

³⁷⁸ *Regulations*, pp.60-1.

Hargreaves clearly took pride in the Royal Navy to which he belonged. In the summer of 1860, he described the fleet sailing into the Bohai Sea (which he calls the Gulf of Pechili, as it was then known) from the Yellow Sea

...it was A grand sight to see the fleet And the troop ships And transport ships sailing through the yellow sea into the gulf of pechili [now the Bohai Sea] there was over 100 ships under steam And sail I never see so many ships under way Hat one time Before nor since it was A sight not to be forgotten...³⁷⁹

Earlier in his time in the Royal Navy, he had also taken part in the Spithead Review of 1856. He had been disappointed that the war had ended without him having 'seen what it is Like to Be in A real engagement on Board of ship', and resented having no leave to visit his parents, but was nonetheless inspired by the Review.

It was a grand sight one to be remember for A Lifetime. There was 2 Lines of Ships 2 Miles Long Anchored At each side of Spithead, ships of All classes the 3 deckers and Line of Battle ships the frigates And corvettes And dispatch Boats in the other Line And the gunboats And mortar Boats was Anchored close to the needles.

Spithead was filled with ships the sampson was one of flying squadron And we escorted the queen And the prince of wales then only A little Boy. The queen And the royal family was on Board the royal yacht victoria And Albert And the royal yacht steamed Along Both Lines And the ships fired A royal salute As the queen passed Each ship...

There was also

A sham fight that was A grand sight... I shall never forget the sight that I see that day there was every ship of war that could Be got And A squadron of french ships was there to represent the french Our Allies during the Crimea war.³⁸⁰

Other personal accounts make much less mention of the Royal Navy as a whole, or their feelings about belonging to a particular ship. John Ford did note in one letter to Sarah Evans that HMS *Superb*, in which he was serving, and which had been taking

³⁷⁹ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

³⁸⁰ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

part in an experimental squadron set up to test different ship designs, including steam ships, 'has been the best ship this time' when they reached the Cove of Cork in June 1846.³⁸¹

Religion

As the quotations above from the logbooks of HMS *Winchester* and *Virago* show, divine service on Sunday could be a regular part of naval life. When HMS *Hecla* and *Fury* were icebound in the winter of 1821-2, a service was held every Sunday and provided an opportunity for ship visiting. The chaplain with that expedition was George Fisher, who was also acting as astronomer to the expedition.³⁸²

The Articles of War began by stating that:

All commanders, captains, and officers, in or belonging to any of His Majesty's ships or vessels of war, shall cause the public worship of Almighty God, according to the liturgy of the Church of England established by law, to be solemnly, orderly and reverently performed in their respective ships; and shall take care that prayers and preaching, by the chaplains in holy orders of the respective ships, be performed diligently; and that the Lord's day be observed according to law.³⁸³

If there was no chaplain on board, there would not be a regular service, but the Articles of War might be read instead, and the crew would usually be mustered by divisions and inspected on a Sunday. Such secular rituals could serve a similar purpose to a religious service in bringing the crew together and stressing their responsibilities to the ship, the Navy and each other.

³⁸¹ RNM 353/85 (16) John Ford to Sarah Evans, 5 June 1846, Superb, Cove of Cork.

³⁸² Gordon Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains* (Oxford: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1978), pp.254-5.

³⁸³ Rodger, *Articles of War*, p.22.

Frequently there was not a chaplain on board in this period. In 1824 there were only 39 active chaplains, and it was the same in 1842. During the Chinese war of 1839-42 there were four chaplains on the 38 Royal Navy ships in service there. From 1812 there was a requirement 'that every ship in the Navy from a fifth-rate upwards should carry a chaplain' but this had become impossible.³⁸⁴ The position of Chaplain General of the Fleet had been abolished in November 1815, and there was no leading chaplain until the then Duke of Clarence appointed Samuel Cole, then Senior Chaplain of Greenwich Hospital, 'to superintend the issue of religious books to the fleet, and to correspond with the several Chaplains of His Majesty's Ships'. Chaplains were instructed to write to him 'on all matters relating to the religious instruction given by them to the ships' companies and generally regarding their sacred duties.'³⁸⁵

The chaplain on board HMS *Winchester* in 1843 was Pascoe Grenfell Hill, who later wrote that

The post occupied by me of chaplain on board the "Winchester" differs widely... from the situation which a clergyman fills in the case of a parish on shore... The professional duties of the naval chaplain... are necessarily limited by peculiar restrictions. Time allotted to divine service on the Sabbath morning can hardly exceed an hour and a half.³⁸⁶

The sailors' attention would not, however, he said, be engaged by a sermon of more than a quarter of an hour, so despite only having an hour and a half 'there remains no plea for curtailing the offices of the liturgy, to suit private convenience or practice.' He described a typical service on board:

³⁸⁴ Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.245.

³⁸⁵ Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, pp.249-50.

³⁸⁶ Pascoe Grenfell Hill, *A Voyage to the Slave Coast of West and East Africa*, 1849, quoted in Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.259.

When the state of the weather is favourable to congregating on the upper deck, the benches used by the men in their messes are brought up and placed in order, under the screen of flags and awnings; and the assemblage of the whole ship's company, on the wide main and under the open sky raising their united prayer... produces an impressive effect...

A liberal supply of bibles and prayer-books is provided by the Admiralty for the use of sailors; and, by an order of the Board, services of Communion-plate are provided at the several dock-yards of the kingdom, with which any ship fitting out may, upon application, be supplied. The beautiful "forms of prayer to be read at sea" I have known in daily public use in several vessels of war. This rule was observed in H.M.S. "Princess Charlotte" while flag-ship of Admiral the Honorable Sir Robert Stopford, in the Mediterranean.³⁸⁷

Religious books were, according to the *Regulations*, to be provided free for the use of the crew. They were to include one Bible for every 32 men of the ship's complement, 'and One Copy of the New Testament, Two Common Prayer-Books, and two Psalters, to every Eight Men', which were 'to be put into Covers for their preservation; and mustered at Divisions, with the Clothes of the Ship's Company'.³⁸⁸

There is very little evidence of how any of the sailors felt about religion. Letters include such phrases as 'God Bless You'³⁸⁹, and Samuel Wilkes conventionally noted in his journal that 'all hands well & cheerful with God's blessing'³⁹⁰. John Ford only referred to Easter or Christmas in terms of food, for example commenting in a letter to Sarah in January 1847 that 'My dear I spend a Very fine Christmas in the Eating Line But Very Bad in the drinking Line..³⁹¹ Samuel Wilkes referred to the Christmas dinner they ate in *Hecla*, though he did also comment on 9 September 1821 that 'Mr Fisher our Chaplain preached a most Encouraging sermon upon Faith, Hope and

³⁸⁷ Hill, *Voyage to the Slave Coast*, quoted in Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, pp.259-60.

³⁸⁸ *Regulations for His Majesty's Service at Sea*, 1833, p.345.

³⁸⁹ For example, RNM 353/85 (22) (23), John Ford to daughter Sarah, 11 November 1860, from HMS *Hannibal*, Naples.

³⁹⁰ For example, Wilkes, p.86.

³⁹¹ RNM 353/85 (17) John Ford to Sarah Evans, *Superb* Lisbon, January 1847.

Trust in God for his Mercy and Goodness is Great.³⁹² The muster books include a column in which to record expenditure by the men on 'Foreign remittances and religious books'. There are varying amounts from a shilling to 2s 8d charged against many men's names in HMS *Actaeon*, and a few similar amounts in HMS *Castor*, which may have been for books, but in general the column is empty.

One change that did take place during the period, and may have affected some of the men, was Catholic emancipation. This was enacted by the Catholic Relief Act of 1829. It had little immediate effect on the provision made for Catholics serving in the Royal Navy, but by the middle of the century the Admiralty was responding, at least in part, to those campaigning for the 'spiritual wants of Catholics in the Navy'.³⁹³ A memorandum on the subject was presented by the Earl of Derby in 1859, which claimed that the

grievances of Catholics in the Navy arise from the want of adequate provision for their spiritual wants, on the scale established for their Protestant shipmates; the want of religious instruction for seamen and boys; and from the insufficiency of the existing regulations to secure freedom of conscience and proper facilities for religious worship.³⁹⁴

He requested that when Protestant services were offered, Catholics should be allowed to assemble separately, and a Catholic officer or petty officer should read prayers for them. In his reply to the memorandum of 20 April 1859, Sir John Pakington noted that this depended on having a Catholic officer, but he had already issued an order to 'protect' Roman Catholics from having to attend Protestant services. The Earl of Derby also wanted a Catholic priest to visit ships regularly to

³⁹² Wilkes, *op.cit.*, pp.86-7.

³⁹³ *Memorial and Papers respecting the treatment of Catholic Sailors in the Royal Navy*, Parliamentary Papers 1860 (73), XLII.539.

³⁹⁴ *Catholic Sailors in the Royal Navy*, Memorandum presented by the Earl of Derby, p.1.

give instruction to Catholic boys, but Pakington noted that this 'appears to me to be possibly only in harbour ships'.³⁹⁵ Most other requests met with a similar response, that when in harbour or hospital Catholic sailors should be allowed leave to attend Mass, and priests given access to them, but that, for example, a Catholic funeral could only be provided 'in hospitals or harbour ships... at sea, no.'³⁹⁶

The following year, Lord Clarence Paget noted for the Admiralty that at Woolwich Roman Catholic boys and men 'attend service every Sunday, properly escorted' and that there were chapel ships in Sheerness, Portsmouth and Devonport, with the priest at each paid £120 per annum. The Lords of the Admiralty were happy to pay 'every respect consistent with discipline' to the needs of Catholic sailors, 'but they cannot sanction any interference with the authority of the officers, or with the discipline of the ships, on the ground of religious persuasion.'³⁹⁷ By the end of the century Catholic chaplains were allowed to lead services on troop ships, the only non-Anglicans to hold services on naval vessels, but Anglican chaplains remained the only official naval chaplains on board a ship of war.³⁹⁸

Also in the parliamentary papers is the following table, which though it dates from 1876 gives an idea of the numbers of different denominations serving in the Navy in the nineteenth century.

³⁹⁵ *Catholic Sailors in the Royal Navy*, letter from Sir J Pakington to the Earl of Derby, 20 April 1859, p.3.

³⁹⁶ *Catholic Sailors in the Royal Navy*, Pakington, p.3.

³⁹⁷ *Memorial and Papers respecting the treatment of Catholic Sailors in the Royal Navy*, Parliamentary Papers 1860 (356), XLII. p.543, letter from Lord Clarence Paget 9 April 1860.

³⁹⁸ Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy', p.304.

Table 5.1 Returns of the Religious Persuasions of the Seamen of the Royal Navy and also of the Royal Marines³⁹⁹

	Church of England	Presbyterians	Other Protestant	Roman Catholic
Seamen	22,816	1,150	2,675	3,866
Marines	9,545	462	1,295	986
Total	32,361	1,612	3,970	4,852

Catholics, like non-Anglican Protestants, were a small minority compared to those considered Church of England, so it is not surprising the Admiralty felt it was doing enough to provide for their spiritual needs.

Weather

The routines of the ship were most likely to be interrupted by bad weather.

Hargreaves records how in 1856 he left Portsmouth in HMS *Samson* to go 'up the

Baltic', where they encountered a great deal of ice near Fårö island in the Baltic and

we cruised About for 4 weeks And could not get no further up. The ice did not Break up And it was very cold And we Had some stormy weather for the first month. The first gale of wind that I was in At sea was up there in the month January And it was A very Heavy one. Some of the Hold Hands said it was the Herest[worst] gale that they Had seen, it was the Herest [worst] that I Had seen And did not want to see A Hearer [p heavier] One.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ *Returns of the Religious Persuasions of the Seamen of the Royal Navy and also of the Royal Marines*, Parliamentary Papers 1876 (132) XLV.619, p.2.

⁴⁰⁰ Hargreaves, seven years in the navy'.

However, he admitted that despite the cold, 'It was A very grand sight to see the ship After the gale she was covered with ice up to the Lower yards And the running gear or the ropes that worked in Blocks was so thick with ice that we Had to Beat the ice off them Before they would run through the Blocks.'

Robert McKenzie, writing to his wife in April 1840, described how

I should have wrote before but we have been so much at Sea that I had not an oppertunity but My Dear Wife could you but for on Moment form the anxiety of my mind on your account, I am well aware that you would not lay any blame to me. we have had several very rough passages, first from [Port] Essington to Sidney, and then from Sydney to Norfolk Island and back to Sydney again were we lay only 8 or 10 Days when we saild for Penang in the Straits of Mallacca. from there to Madras in the Bay of Bengal, from there to Trincomalee on the Island of Ceylon where we left on the 1st Feby 1840 for Port Essington and very wet dreary passage we had⁴⁰¹

John Ford described to Sarah how 'My Dear I have had A very rough Cruize this last and very Cold one', not helped perhaps that he had not yet had an answer from her to his 'Particular question' in a previous letter, when he had proposed marriage.⁴⁰²

Entertainment: Ceremonies and rituals

There were occasional opportunities for the men to let off steam, when normal regimes were suspended, for example the crossing the line ceremony. On HMS

Herald in 1838, this involved

Neptune with His wife and family. I cannot describe their dress, it was mixture of all sorts, flags, sheepskins etc. He had a coachman, footman, two

⁴⁰¹ RNM, 120/87 (3), Letter from Robert McKenzie, 17 April 1840 At sea in the Java Sea.

⁴⁰² RNM 353/85 (20) John Ford to Sarah Evans, from *Superb*, 14th December 1848.

Bears dressed in sheepskins, constables, Barbers with razors made of hoops like a saw, Doctors, and a shaver with a tub full of tar...⁴⁰³

coming on board to initiate those who had not crossed the equator before into his kingdom. Hargreaves, writing about the summer of 1856 when HMS *Samson* crossed the line on the way to Hong Kong, described how

over the Bow of the ship one of the queerest thing came that I Had ever seen in my life I could not make out what it was it Had A crown on its Head I do not know what it was made of But it was A Motley Affair when the Animal got on Board...⁴⁰⁴

Having come on board, Neptune and his court proceeded to set up a sail with water in it for a pool and 'shave' all those new to the line. This kind of event could allow the sailors and junior officers a chance to express their feelings about other officers, as Comber described:

All the Officers got ducked in their turn, but only a few got shaved, those who resisted most. When my turn came I jumped into the sail and escaped a good ducking, but I was almost smothered with the sheep skin. The Marine officer resisted very much but we bundled him in his uniform coat and epaulet[te]s, with a gold watch in his pocket, it was his own fault as he had been warned of it beforehand, one of the Midshipmen who had hold of his leg when he was thrown in, was dragged in with him, and they both rolled down together...⁴⁰⁵

Comber appears to have enjoyed the ceremony, though once it was over he resisted Neptune's (an old shipmate) invitation to dance with the men in the evening, escaping after giving him 'a tot of wine'. Too much freedom in an officer's behaviour with the men was not appropriate; in 1813 a second lieutenant, James Arthur, had been dismissed the service for 'Drinking and singing songs with the seamen'.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Comber, *Tour of Duty*, p.48.

⁴⁰⁴ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

⁴⁰⁵ Comber, pp.48-49.

⁴⁰⁶ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103, court martial 5 February 1813.

Edward Hargreaves' experience of the crossing the line ceremony was less pleasant, suggesting perhaps that officers were treated more gently than ordinary shipmates.

He wrote that

And of course I Along with A few more Had to Be shaved By the Barber
that came on Board with Neptune ...
[Some of the crew had got one of the topsails and spread it over the main
hatch and part-filled it with water for the shaving. The razor was a]...piece of
iron Hoop And the Lather was grease And tar Mixed together And the Brush
was A piece of Oakum And the Barber did not forget to rub the Lather in
Before He scraped Your face...

When that was over, they still had to be washed

And we was tumbled into the water And we was kept there As long As the
assistants Had A mind to keep us in for we could not get out for the weight
of water was in the middle of the sail And we Could not get out till we was
Helped out And I was in the water tumbling About Like A porpoise for some
time And when I got out of the water it took me some time to get the grease
And tar off my face.

It was fun for the crew that Had not to Be shaved But it was not fun for me
And I was glad when it was over And when Neptune went over the Bows of
the ship I did not want to see Him Any more.⁴⁰⁷

A report of the ceremony on HMS *Doris* in 1821 described how 'the rest of the ship's
company, officers and all, proceeded to duck each other unmercifully'.⁴⁰⁸ Surgeon
Edward Cree, writing about the ceremonies on board HMS *Rattlesnake* in December
1838, had bribed Neptune with rum to be treated gently, but described how some of
the sailors

got a lathering with pea soup and tar and scraped with a bit of iron hoop and
a dab of tarbrush in the mouth if they opened it and afterwards half-drowned
by the bears...

⁴⁰⁷ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

⁴⁰⁸ Mrs Graham (wife of Captain Graham), in Vale, *Frigate of King George*, p.60.

Afterwards,

all got into dry clothes. The ship was put under easy sail and the sailors were allowed to get drunk on the rum which had been given by the officers – a regular saturnalia – but all was right again next day.⁴⁰⁹

The contrast between the accounts by officers and Hargreaves's story suggests that there may have been limits to the indignities that could be inflicted on an officer on such occasions, but perhaps not on a crewmate.

For the men trapped in the ice in 1821-2 on *Hecla* and *Fury*, a special effort at entertainment was needed, as they had nothing much to do for eight months. Before the voyage, special supplies were laid in by the officers and crews, as Wilkes described:

[The Captains bought] dresses, scene's, Machinery and other things that was required for the purpose of performing plays, and the Crews likewise did the same...⁴¹⁰

When in July they were beset by ice and moored to a floe, 'we wash clothes, amuse orselves in all kind of sport to keep the Blood in circulation such as footballing, leaping, jumping and many more games'.⁴¹¹

Once they were really frozen into their 'winter prison', the officers of both ships acted a play once a fortnight for the men, opening the 'Theatre Royal Winter Island' with Sheridan's *The Rivals* on 9th November 1821.⁴¹² A lady had given the ship 'a large Phantasmagoria with a great variety of views', which provided something like a

⁴⁰⁹ Levien, *The Cree Journals*, pp.39-40.

⁴¹⁰ Wilkes, p.21.

⁴¹¹ Wilkes, p.65.

⁴¹² Wilkes, book 2, 9 November 1821.

slideshow of images and sound effects. The men also requested an 'evening school' to be established and the officers 'supplied the Men with Paper to make Books also Ink and Pens'. The Purser's Steward of *Hecla*, who had been educated at 'Christ Church School' acted as Schoolmaster, and 'Myself and some of the officers assisted as teachers'. All this, Wilkes thought, meant that 'We are becoming more reconciled and settled in our minds to our Arctic Prison'.⁴¹³

While *Hecla* and *Fury* had an especially acute need to keep the men from boredom, the kind of entertainments and activities that Wilkes described could happen elsewhere in the Navy. The Admiralty, with the institution of Seamen's Schoolmasters, certainly hoped that the men would use some of their spare time to become literate and numerate. It was recognised, however, that sailors needed time to themselves at the end of the day, unless needed to work the ship or the weather was too bad, and Hargreaves's description of the evening on HMS *Victory* probably applied to most ships of the Royal Navy:

At 5 o'clock All Hands is Mustered And After that the Crew can Amuse themselves As they think fit. There is plenty dancing [~~'And singing'~~ is crossed out] And All kinds games going on till 9 o'clock. And at 9 All lights is put out And the day's work is over.⁴¹⁴

Entertainment: Hobbies

Sailors regularly carved or sewed various items to pass the time. Sewing their own clothes was of course required, but they also did it for fun. For example, the National

⁴¹³ Wilkes, book 2, November 1821.

⁴¹⁴ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

Maritime Museum folk collection includes an embroidered picture of 'H.M. ship Rodney passing the Rock of Gibraltar 1840', according to its embroidered inscription. It is done in black and yellow cotton on linen canvas.⁴¹⁵ Woolwork pictures were more fashionable in the second half of the nineteenth century, but some examples do survive from the earlier period, including two dated to about 1850 in the Compton Verney collection. One shows HMS *Serapis*, in wool stitched onto ship's canvas, and another Nelson, Britannia and *Victory*, possibly on a stage.⁴¹⁶

As well as embroidery, many sailors also engaged in carving objects such as this wooden tankard, now in the National Maritime Museum collection:



⁴¹⁵ NMM, Sailor's craftwork, TXT0002.

⁴¹⁶ Compton Verney collection of British folk art, Compton Verney, Warwickshire.

The carved decorations include a British ensign and a foul anchor, as well as a ship in full sail and the date 1834.⁴¹⁷ Of course, there is no way of knowing whether this was made by a Royal Navy sailor in particular, but merchant sailors and Navy sailors would both have done this kind of work. They might also decorate their tools, as in this ‘seam rubber’ (a tool used to flatten folds of sailcloth before the seam was sewn):



It is carved with a rope twist and the initials JK and WB, and is made from whalebone.⁴¹⁸ Sailors also made ship models, though anything very fragile may have been more likely to be done on shore, after the voyage was over. Some objects may have been intended as presents for family and friends at home, as were items bought at ports the ship visited. John Ford, when HMS *Superb* was in Lisbon in September 1846, bought ‘Four Pincushion for a present if you will accept them’ for Sarah Evans.⁴¹⁹ She sent him homemade presents in return; in particular he requested a ‘A homeward bound ribbon with the name on it...’ in March 1848 when he hoped the *Superb* would shortly be sailing for England.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁷ NMM, tankard, AAA0070.

⁴¹⁸ NMM, AAC0008.

⁴¹⁹ RNM 353/85 (10) letter dated *Superb*, 21 Sept 1846, At sea off Cadiz, to Sarah Evans from John Ford.

⁴²⁰ RNM 353/85 (19) John Ford to Sarah Evans, *Superb*, Naples, 21 March 1848.

CHAPTER 6:

Life on Board: Disease, Accidents and Death

Beware and take care of the Bight of Benin
There's one comes out for forty goes in.
(traditional song)

This chapter examines the threats to their health that sailors experienced in the first half of the nineteenth century in the Royal Navy, the treatments and preventive care available to them, and how that compared with the rest of the British Isles at the time. Diseases experienced on board ship, for example, ranged from smallpox and cholera, which were known and devastating on land around the world, to yellow fever, which was a specific risk of serving on the West African station. Accidents such as drowning or falling from aloft were also special risks attached to serving at sea, but jobs on land had their own occupational hazards.

On board HMS *Acorn* on the Cape station in 1839-41, there were 661 cases of sickness among the 156 men who served on her during that three years, as Table 6.1 shows.⁴²¹ Six men died and 27 were invalided. There were no deaths from 'fever', though 24 cases were recorded, causing two men to be invalided, but four men died of diarrhoea, one of 'inflammation of the liver' and one from another disease, not given. When *Acorn* was then sent to the West Coast of Africa station (1842-43), five men caught intermittent fever (almost certainly malaria), and of the 20 who came down with 'continued and remittent fever', two died. One man died of erysipelas (a disease caused by streptococcal infection) and two drowned (John Thompson, an AB

⁴²¹ HMS *Acorn* then went to the Coast of Africa; a total of 225 men served aboard at some point during the whole commission.

from St Andrews, and Job Gardner, a 1st Class Boy from Romsey). The most frequent health problems that were not the result of a wound or accident on this ship, however, were diarrhoea, ulcers, dyspepsia and rheumatism. Many of the health problems faced by sailors were those which also affected the general population in the area where they were serving. English-born sailors risked catching yellow fever when serving on the West African station, though the Kroomen from Sierra Leone who worked on the same ships may have been less likely to catch it than when living on shore. Cholera was as much of a danger in Portsmouth or London as on board ship. Crowded living conditions both on board ship and in poor areas of towns meant outbreaks of such diseases, or of directly contagious ones such as smallpox, could be extremely difficult to contain.

Table 6.1: Diseases and injuries on HMS *Acorn*, Cape and West African stations, 1839-1843

	Cape station, 1839-41			West African station, 1842-43		
	no. sick	invalided	died	no. sick	invalided	died
Intermittent fever	0	0	0	5	1	0
Continued & remittent fever	24	2	0	20	2	2
Smallpox	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scarlatina	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inflammation of the lungs and pleura	37	0	0	2	0	0
Inflammation of the liver	24	2	1	2	2	0
Rheumatism	19	8	0	19	1	0
Influenza and catarrh	17	0	0	5	0	0
Phthisis & Haemoptysis	2	1	0	0	0	0
Erysipelas	6	0	0	2	0	1
Delirium Tremens	0	0	0	1	0	0
Dysentery	18	0	0	11	0	0
Diarrhoea	68	1	4	0	0	0
Cholera	0	0	0	0	0	0
Syphilis and Gonorrhoea	1	1	0	8	0	0
Ulcer	21	0	0	7	0	0
Wounds and Accidents	105	0	0	55	1	2
Other Diseases*	319	12	1	93	8	1
Total	661	27	6	230	15	6

*Dyspepsia is one of the commonest 'other diseases' on the station, with 44 cases in the overall table in 1840, also 'phlegmone' (boils), of which there were 208 cases on station in 1840.

Source: *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-1843, Part III, pp.42-3, 46-9.*

In nineteenth century England there were four main causes or groups of causes of death. These were food and waterborne diseases like cholera and typhoid; the infectious diseases of childhood such as measles and scarlet fever; respiratory diseases like pneumonia; and pulmonary tuberculosis, also known as consumption or phthisis (as it is described in the naval statistics), which caused about 10 percent of all deaths in the general population.⁴²² In the sample of men being considered in this study, 365 men were discharged sick and not readmitted to the ship they had been serving on, 7.87 percent of the total. The number who were discharged sick and then readmitted to the same ship is only 33 (0.71 percent) but since readmission would require them to be fit for service before their ship left the port where they had been discharged, or was paid off, it is likely that many more of those sick went into different ships when they were better.

Table 6.2 Sickness and death discharges from a sample of ships in the Royal Navy, 1829-1847

	No	%
Total sailors	4637	
Discharged sick & readmitted	33	0.71
Discharged sick & not readmitted to that ship	365	7.87
Discharged dead	176	3.79
Total sick/dead	574	12.38

⁴²² Andrew Hinde, *England's Population. A History since the Domesday Survey*, (London: Hodder Arnold, 2003), p.206.

The expectation of life at birth in England had increased from about 35 in 1750 to about 50 by 1830, but then stayed much the same until the end of the century.⁴²³ It varied very much, however, by area and by occupation. Large towns and cities had much higher death rates than rural areas. As shown above in Table 6.2, 3.79 percent of men in the sample died during their service with the Royal Navy. That equates to a probability of death of 0.0379, meaning that over the period of time covered by the sample, 37 men out of every thousand could be expected to die. Mortality figures for all men in the general population of England for 1838-54 give a probability of dying between the ages of 20 and 39 (the age group into which most sailors fall, as discussed in chapter 2) of 0.185, and of 0.099 for those aged 5-19.⁴²⁴ If the probability of death in the general male population for the age group 20-39 is 0.185, that means 185 men in 1000 will die in that period of 20 years, or 9.25 per year (obviously it will not in fact be that evenly spread). For the sailors in the sample, the death rate is 37.9 per 1000, over a period of about three years for each man,⁴²⁵ which gives a rough death rate of 12.63 per 1000 per year, considerably higher than the average national rate.⁴²⁶

In the total population, it has been demonstrated that occupation affected male mortality rates, so that for example farmers in the 1860s had a life expectancy at age 20 of over 45, while for others, including casual workers in inns and hotels and those in unhealthy conditions like tin-miners, it was less than 35. Sailors should certainly be counted among those whose life expectancy was adversely affected by their

⁴²³ Hinde, *England's Population*, p.195.

⁴²⁴ Hinde, *England's Population*, p.197.

⁴²⁵ Average length of service of the men in the sample has not been calculated.

⁴²⁶ This is not a definitive figure, but the sample is large enough for it to be indicative.

occupation. Of the 156 men on board HMS *Acorn* (see Table 6.1, p.173), 12 died during the six-year commission. That means the probability of death was 0.0769 over six years, which gives a probability of 0.0128 per year; 12.8 deaths per 1000 men, in line with the figure for the whole sample and certainly a higher figure than the average for the male population.⁴²⁷ Lloyd and Coulter quote Sir Gilbert Blane's estimate that average mortality per 1000 men in the last three years of the Napoleonic wars was 33, based on hospital returns, while the death rate for 1856-8 (based on rather better statistical information) was 21 per 1,000 (which would give 10.5 per year). They compared it to agricultural labourers with a rate of eight per 1,000 per year.⁴²⁸ As noted above, farmers have a higher life expectancy than the average, as in fact do those living in rural areas. Sailors were certainly a higher risk group than those working on farms, but there were other equally dangerous occupations.

One benefit of serving in the Royal Navy was that sailors received free health care and treatment from the surgeons and assistant surgeons who worked on board most ships. Such free care was not available outside the Navy and Army. Many surgeons were extremely dedicated to the welfare of their ship's companies and officers, and were interested in understanding the health problems they saw and improving the way they were treated.⁴²⁹ Their care, and their surgical skills, doubtless have saved the

⁴²⁷ These calculations probably underestimate rather than overestimate the death rate for sailors, since many of the men in the sample did not remain on the books of one of the sample ships for a full three years.

⁴²⁸ C. Lloyd and J. Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy 1200-1900*, Vol IV, 1815-1900, (Edinburgh & London: Livingstone Ltd, 1963), Vol. IV, p.266. Blane's rate probably excluded deaths at sea, so the real rate would have been higher.

⁴²⁹ For example John Rees, surgeon to HMS *Arrogant*, a new steam vessel, reporting on her first voyage in 1849-50, *Medical Journal*, TNA: PRO: ADM 101/87/2.

lives of many. Unfortunately, many of the diseases they treated were not yet well-understood, and some of the treatments available and regularly used were often pointless, and sometimes actively harmful. In 1823, Captain Owen of the *Leven* reported that 60 men had died of fever on board that ship while she was surveying the east coast of Africa, and that in his opinion the bleeding that the surgeons insisted on inflicting on the patients was a contributory factor in the deaths (which included one of the surgeons; their belief in bleeding, or phlebotomy, was sincere).⁴³⁰ Bleeding continued to be a normal treatment for fever throughout this period (c.1830-1860), though at the same time some surgeons were rediscovering and developing the use of quinine for what is now known as malaria. Another popular treatment was calomel, which is mercury chloride, given for example to cholera patients as a purgative. Aside from mercury's poisonousness, since cholera causes extreme diarrhoea already, giving purgatives probably only increased the risk of death. Surgeons (and the Admiralty) continued to progress from their reliance on Ward's drop but not always to the benefit of the men who depended on their skill.⁴³¹

Drowning and falling from aloft caused 45 percent of deaths in the Royal Navy where the cause is given in the records. Figure 6.1 shows the information given in the muster books about the 176 men in the sample (covering 1829-47) who died in service. Conclusions from this have to be limited, since for half there is no information further than their death but, for example, death in action accounts for only eight of the 176. The figure shows that those who died in hospital, probably mainly suffering from diseases, and those who died of fever make up slightly less

⁴³⁰ Lloyd and Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol IV, p.173.

⁴³¹ C. Lloyd and J. Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy 1200-1900*, Vol III, 1714-1815, ((Edinburgh & London: Livingstone Ltd, 1961), p.296.

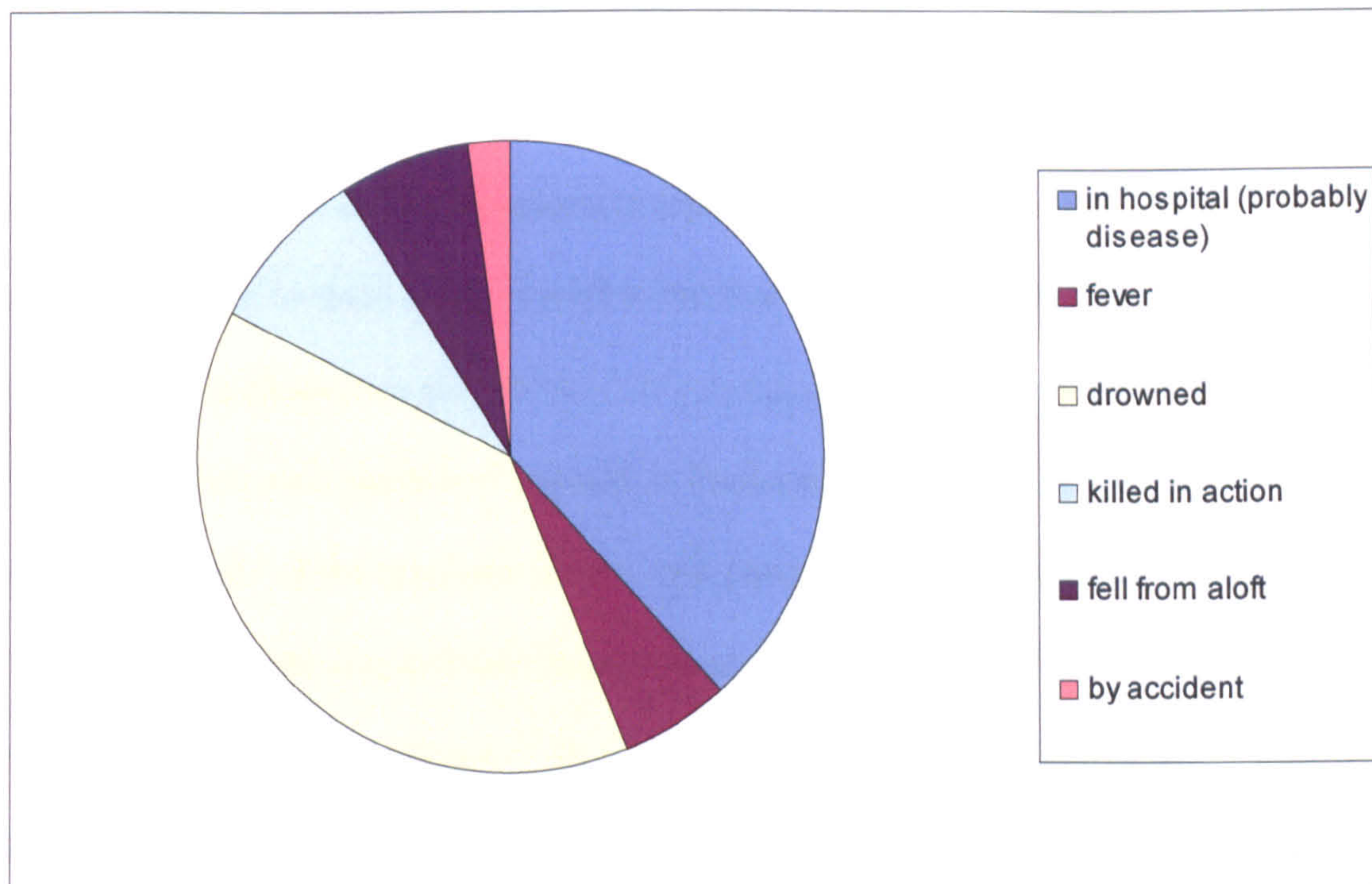
than half of those for whom the cause of death is known. Accidents and deaths in action account for 56 percent. However, among the 85 men (48.3 percent) whose cause of death is not recorded, 30 percent died on board ship, and may well have done so from some form of disease. 'Drowning' or 'fell from aloft' are clear causes of death, easy to record in the muster books. Accurate diagnosis of disease may well have been left to the surgeon's log.

The Royal Navy was not involved in any major battles during this period, but even when Britain was at war, disease always killed far more men than fighting. Michael Lewis estimated that in 1810 50 percent of the Royal Navy's casualties were caused by disease, 31 percent by individual accident, ten percent by accident to the ship (such as wreck or fire) and eight percent by enemy action.⁴³² So 3.8 percent for deaths immediately attributable to action, in a sample of men serving during a period of peace, seems comparatively high. However, given that the Navy after 1815 was so much smaller and that the medical examination given to the men when they were recruited was more likely to be rigorous and attended to, since the need for men was no longer desperate, actual casualties to disease or any other cause probably decreased as a percentage of those serving during this period.

⁴³² M. Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815*, p.420.

Figure 6.1: Deaths in a sample of men serving in the Royal Navy, 1829-1847

(where given)



Sailors who became too ill or disabled to work, and were sent home ‘invalided’ as a result, that is with a disability or illness that seemed to prevent them continuing to serve in the Royal Navy or to hospital as a result, were a much larger group.⁴³³ Many of them recovered and can be found serving in another ship later. For example, the description book for HMS *Acorn* notes that William Dunlop (Captain of the Forecastle, aged 34) and William Truscott (AB, aged 25) had both been invalided from the Navy previously.⁴³⁴ Dunlop was sent home from the Cape of Good Hope in January 1841 with ‘disease of the heart’ and Truscott from the East Indies in July

⁴³³ No attempt is made here to distinguish between those ‘invalided’ and ‘discharged sick’ in the table of figures, as the usage is idiosyncratic; eg ‘invalided’ is the only word used in the HMS *Acorn* muster book (TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443) but not at all in that for HMS *Actaeon* (TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8612-14).

⁴³⁴ HMS *Acorn* description book January 1839 to October 1843, TNA: PRO: ADM38/7443

1838 with dysentery. Dunlop was invalided again from *Acorn*, though not until February 1842 (the reason is not given);⁴³⁵ Truscott served to the end of *Acorn*'s commission.⁴³⁶

Detailed information on the illnesses and injuries experienced by sailors and the treatments given to them can be found in the *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*. These exist for all stations for 1837 to 1843, though they then ceased until 1856. From 1856 they were published annually in Parliamentary papers. As well as statistical returns of the numbers of men with particular diseases, and the outcomes of these, the reports also included lengthy commentaries on each station, contributed by their editor, Dr. John Wilson.⁴³⁷ In addition, there is a small sample of medical journals in the National Archives, the detailed records kept by surgeons of the men in the sick lists and the treatments given to them. This chapter is largely based on the information found in these sources, as well as the comments of a few of the men themselves in their letters and personal accounts.

Actions and Accidents

Sailors experienced all kinds of threats to their health on board ship, but the most obvious particular risk taken in joining the armed forces was that they would be injured or die in battle. Unlike dangers such as that of falling from the rigging, or

⁴³⁵ HMS *Acorn*, muster book January 1839 to October 1843, TNA: PRO: ADM38/7443, Ship's Company no.104.

⁴³⁶ HMS *Acorn*, muster book January 1839 to October 1843, TNA: PRO: ADM38/7443, Ship's Company no.8. What happened to those men who were permanently invalided is discussed in chapter 7; this chapter is concerned with their health while on board ship.

⁴³⁷ Lloyd and Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, p.4.

contracting rheumatism, this was also one which could suddenly threaten a whole crew, and produce large numbers of casualties in a short period of time. Sailors were fully aware of this risk. Charles M'Pherson's account of the Battle of Navarino of 1827, when he was serving on board HMS *Genoa*, described how the day before the battle took place the men made their preparations for fighting, some for example making a point of writing what might be final letters home. M'Pherson himself was

...aroused by my messmate, Lee, who had been looking about the decks for me, to give me the share of a bottle of wine, and to write a letter for him to his mother... as we were to go into action tomorrow he would like to write home through me; and having borrowed the sentry's lantern, I took the crown of my hat for a table, and the pile of shot on the combings for an easy chair, and after some remarks and advice regarding what he should say, I began...⁴³⁸

Having written the letter, they finished the bottle of wine together and then turned in to get some sleep. The next day

The probability of never meeting again cast a soberness over the mess, which is generally a scene of banter and mirth. One or two tried to raise the spirits of their messmates by the usual sallies of nautical wit, but the effect was only momentary.⁴³⁹

M'Pherson stressed that despite this sombreness the men carried out their duty enthusiastically, except one who was subsequently punished for cowardice.⁴⁴⁰

Edward Hargreaves, serving nearly thirty years later, saw action in China during the Opium wars, but had earlier been disappointed, when aboard HMS *Sampson* in 1856, that

when we Arrived At Sheerness the war was over And peace was proclaimed Between england and russia. I was disappointed for I thought that I should Have seen what it is Like to Be in A real engagement on Board of ship.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ Henry Baynham, *From the Lower Deck. The Navy 1700-1840* (London: Arrow, 1972), p.190.

⁴³⁹ M'Pherson in Baynham, p.192.

⁴⁴⁰ M'Pherson in Baynham, pp.199-200.

⁴⁴¹ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

He had his wish later, when *Samson* was sent to China and took part in the Opium War. In late 1858 he was aboard HMS *Woodcock* when she was part of the force attempting to collect the agreed ransom from the Chinese at Tiensin, and was fired at. He found it,

Hot work And when the Woodcock got out of range of the fortes that evening I Believe that every Man and Boy on Board was glad. Anyhow I was I had Had enough fighting for that day But I thanked god that He had guarded me through that day without one scratch...

That evening he was one of the crew of the captain's gig which was taken to the flagship *Coromandel*,

it was A frightful to hear the groans of the wounded [where] ... the doctors of the fleet was on Board Attending to them I did not go on Board for I did not care to see the sight...⁴⁴²

When the fleet returned to Shanghai three days later the wounded were sent to Hong Kong where the *Princess Charlotte* had been sent out as a hospital ship. The '...patients was very comfortable on Board of her. there was Hospital on shore But it was not As comfortable As the Heat was not so Bad Afloat...'⁴⁴³

By this time, Hargreaves's wish to see some action had already been gratified several times. Other parts of his account are more dispassionate about the fighting he was involved in, for example with HMS *Sampson* in late 1856 or early 1857, they chased the crews of some 'pirate' junks to

⁴⁴² Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

⁴⁴³ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

...A small village we killed And wounded About 50 of the pirates And ...We Burned the village And we Joined the other 3 Boats that Had remained to guard the Junks...⁴⁴⁴

He reported the prize money given to the *Sampson's* crew and the casualties sustained in the same tone:

...the money was served to the crew of the *Sampson* And the Junks 42 in Number was destroyed We Had 6 men wounded And one of them Had to sent to Hong kong And He died of his wound...⁴⁴⁵

HMS *Genoa*, at the battle of Navarino, lost 26 men killed during the battle of Navarino, which along with her 33 wounded, out of a crew of 460, according to M'Pherson, showed 'the honourable share the *Genoa* had in the action'. Treatment for those injured during battle on a sailing ship took place in what M'Pherson described as 'a horrid scene of misery' in the cockpit where

The surgeon and his mates [had] their bare arms and faces smeared with blood, the dead and dying all round, some in the last agonies of death, and others screaming under the amputating knife...⁴⁴⁶

M'Pherson criticised some of the women on board, who 'pretended, or were really so much affected by the shocking sight around them, that they were totally unable to render any assistance to the sufferers', while others were helping. However, when he visited the cockpit himself after the battle was over, he admitted that the smell and groans made him feel sick.⁴⁴⁷

Hargreaves and M'Pherson's accounts show that sailors were very aware of the dangers involved in being in action. For the period covered in the sample considered

⁴⁴⁴ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

⁴⁴⁵ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

⁴⁴⁶ M'Pherson in Baynham, . p.194, 199-200.

⁴⁴⁷ M'Pherson in Baynham, . p.205-6.

here, however, from 1829-47, the Royal Navy was only occasionally involved in fighting. It is therefore unsurprising to find, as discussed with Figure 6.1 above, that only eight men died 'killed in action'. Seven of these were killed on shore in New Zealand when serving on HMS *Castor*, on 11 January 1846.⁴⁴⁸ The eighth man was Edward Gordon AB, 'killed in attack on St Jean D'Arc', (that is, the bombardment of Acre) on 3 November 1840 on HMS *Princess Charlotte*.⁴⁴⁹ Even in time of war, however, accidents were a far more common cause of casualties.

Falling from the rigging was an inevitable hazard of large sailing ships and could be fatal, as the following account shows:

It was on a Friday that I was overhauling my chest when I was startled by the cry a man overboard. The ship was brought to and the cutter manned and lowered but it was too late. The Monday after I dined with the Capt. and after dinner we as usual had reef topsails, and a man was coming down the mizzen topmast rigging. He slipped and fell. He struck against the mizzen chains. He was killed for they saw him floating for a second or two. He did not move, and then went down. The boat was lowered and every thing done that could be. I was surprised how little the Capt. seemed to be affected.⁴⁵⁰

This account is from Samuel Gurney Cresswell, then on his first voyage as a volunteer apprentice (that is, future commissioned officer) in HMS *Agincourt*, 1842.

Not everyone was so unlucky; Cresswell goes on:

The very next day as we were just setting down to dinner we saw a man swimming. He was a beautiful swimmer, he had fell from the fore rigging, was picked up.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ HMS *Castor*, muster book January 1846, TNA: PRO: ADM38/413, Ship's Company nos 9, 87, 114, 130, 140, 240 and 285.

⁴⁴⁹ HMS *Princess Charlotte*, February 1837 to July 1841, TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9552, Ship's Company no. 615.

⁴⁵⁰ Dominick Harrod (ed.), *War, Ice and Piracy. The Journals and Letters of Samuel Gurney Cresswell* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2000), letter to parents, 2 September 1842, pp.28-29.

⁴⁵¹ Harrod, *War, Ice and Piracy*, p.29.

He had already recounted in his letter the case of another man, when in August that year 'we had some gales of wind rounding the end [of Java head]. One night she rolled tremendously ... Three or four chests went adrift, a man got his arm broke so that they were obliged to take it off...'⁴⁵² In a later letter Cresswell noted that the man had made a good recovery and was to be sent home,⁴⁵³ but his career in the Royal Navy was almost certainly over. Another whose career ended with an accident was John Hayes, who when Captain of the Forecastle on HMS *Albion* in January 1827, aged 39, received 'A Blow on the right arm' when working on the foretop, 'by which the humerus [upper arm bone] was fractured' above the elbow, and the elbow damaged, and his wrist 'fractured and dislocated with commination [fusing] of bones and laceration of ligaments'. His injuries healed but he was left with permanently damaged joints and a deformed wrist, and had to be invalided from the Navy.⁴⁵⁴

Most accidents, of course, were not fatal, nor did they result in permanent disablement. For example, John Spears, aged 22, Captain of the Main Top in HM Surveying Ship *Aetna*, 1837-38, went into the sick list with a sprain on October 13 1837, and was discharged to duty again on 17th October.⁴⁵⁵ On board HMS *Eagle* in the River Plate in 1846, six men were treated for contusions in January, of legs and arms, and all were discharged to duty after a few days treatment. William Hodge AB, aged 24, spent the longest time in the surgeon's care, in the list for seven days with a

⁴⁵² Harrod, *War, Ice and Piracy*, letter to his parents, 29 August 1842, p.28

⁴⁵³ Harrod, *War, Ice and Piracy*, letter to parents, 2 September 1842, p.29.

⁴⁵⁴ Medical journal for HMS *Albion*, 1 Oct 1826 to 19 Feb 1828, Surgeon Robert Purkiss Hillyer, TNA: PRO: ADM 101/83/1

⁴⁵⁵ Journal of HM Surveying Ship *Aetna*, John Coulter Surgeon, Oct 1837 to Nov 1838, TNA: PRO: ADM 101/81/2

contusion of the humerus (upper arm), but it healed and he was able to return to work.⁴⁵⁶

In HMS *Winchester*, serving at the Cape in 1843, there were 90 wounds and accidents in the course of the year,⁴⁵⁷ but only one, a drowning, resulted in a death. For all the ships on the Cape station that year, the total mortality from all causes was 17, 12.7 per 1,000 men, which included two accidents, both of men falling from aloft, and five drownings.⁴⁵⁸ In her previous commission, 1837-42, *Winchester* had six deaths among the ship's company: three of men who had been sent to hospital, one drowned (William Badger, AB, drowned in the St Lawrence and two 'killed on board', one, John Pearl, a First Class Boy aged 17, 'falling from aloft'.⁴⁵⁹ Even falling a much shorter distance could be fatal: the *Health of the Navy* reports record the death of a man aboard HMS *Pique* in 1839 who fell out of his hammock at midnight one night, a fall of about six feet,

and his messmates, finding they could not rouse him, left him lying on the deck until the following morning, under the belief that he had gone to bed intoxicated. The Surgeon saw him about four o'clock, shortly after which he expired.⁴⁶⁰

John Ford, some of whose letters and papers survive, was twice invalided out of the Royal Navy after being injured. In 1852 he was 'severely wounded' after distinguishing himself 'in the destruction of some Piratical Boats by HMS *Janus*', on

⁴⁵⁶ Medical Journal of HMS *Eagle*, Mr Peter Leonard, Surgeon, 1st January 1846 to 31 December 1846, TNA: PRO: ADM 101/98/1.

⁴⁵⁷ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*, 1837-43, p.56.

⁴⁵⁸ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*, 1837-43, p.57.

⁴⁵⁹ HMS *Winchester*, muster books, TNA: PRO: ADM 37/10105.

⁴⁶⁰ *Statistical Report on the Health of the Navy*, 1837-43, p.227.

which he was serving in the Mediterranean, and sent home.⁴⁶¹ In 1862, aged 42, he was invalided again, this time from Halifax, where he had been working as Chief Quartermaster on HMS *Melpomene*, after his left femur was fractured.⁴⁶² Although his leg apparently healed well, 'slightly arched' but with 'no perceptible shortening',⁴⁶³ there is no evidence that he went back to the Navy after this. He had in any case already served long enough to be entitled to a pension.⁴⁶⁴

Unfortunately, none of the surgeon's journals or sick lists survive for these ships, so it is not possible to investigate these cases in any detail. As noted, in almost half the cases the cause of death is not listed, but the numbers of accidents and drownings are likely to be accurate. This shows that of the 176 deaths 35, or 19.89 percent, were by drowning, and six, or 3.41 percent, by falling from aloft (and one of these cases involved a man who fell from aloft into the sea and was picked up dead, Richard Carter, a 20-year-old First Class Boy on HMS *Albatross*⁴⁶⁵). The *Health of the Navy* reports often note that the reasons for drowning are not given in the surgeons' returns,⁴⁶⁶ so that the explanation for the large number who drowned on the home station ships in 1841 (16, a large increase on previous years, 3 per 1,000 men) could not be established.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶¹ RNM, 353/85 (35) Testimonial for John Ford from Richard Powell, Commander, HM Ship *Janus*. Gibraltar, 6 April 1852, papers of John Ford and family.

⁴⁶² RNM 353/85 (36) RN Hospital at Halifax, 17th July 1862, papers of John Ford and family.

⁴⁶³ RNM 353/85 (36) Surgeon's certificate, HMS *Mersey*, papers of John Ford and family.

⁴⁶⁴ RNM 353/85 (37) RN Hospital at Halifax, certificate for John Ford.

⁴⁶⁵ HMS *Albatross*, muster books May 1842 to July 1846, TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7486, no.

⁴⁶⁶ See for example, *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy 1837-43*, pp.185, 191.

⁴⁶⁷ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy 1837-43*, pp.179, 185.

'By accident' covers a variety of circumstances. Working with guns, for example, could be as dangerous as going aloft. In 1833 two men died on HMS *Sparrowhawk* in 1833 from a gunnery accident. The ship was at Spithead, and visited by the Commander in Chief who watched the men go through the great gun exercise 'with great precision'. Then when a gun which had failed to fire was being adjusted, the charge exploded and killed James Miller, AB, and Edward Parker, a supernumerary invalided from HMS *Racehorse*.⁴⁶⁸ On HMS *Penelope* a man was killed in 1843 'while in the act of ramming home a cartridge, which accidentally exploded',⁴⁶⁹ while in the same year on HMS *Camperdown*, serving in home waters, a powder-box exploded while men were firing a salute, killing one seaman-gunner and wounding ten others.⁴⁷⁰ Another man, already being treated by the surgeon for tuberculosis, though presumably still fit enough to work, 'was accidentally shot on board the *Madagascar*' when she was on the West African station in 1843.⁴⁷¹ No further details are given of how this happened.

Another accident is reported in the returns for the home station in 1840, aboard HMS *Howe*:

the man was in the act of veering away the chain cable, which flew through the hawse-hole with such rapidity, that he was unable to detach the hook-rope, which passed twice round his thighs, and bound him firmly to the cable; in this position he was dragged round both bits, and only extricated when between the fore-bit and manger. On examination, life was found to be entirely extinct.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ *Devonport Independent and Plymouth and Stonehouse Gazette*, Vol. I No. 13 Saturday May 4th, 1833, p.3 col.3. The report does not specify exactly how the deaths occurred.

⁴⁶⁹ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy 1837-43*, p.267.

⁴⁷⁰ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy 1837-43*, p.197.

⁴⁷¹ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy 1837-43*, p.114

⁴⁷² *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy 1837-43*, p.177.

This particular horrific incident was obviously unusual enough for the report to describe it in detail, and it makes clear the risks that sailors could run in doing their ordinary duty on board. On HMS *Acorn*, as Table 6.1 (above) shows, wounds and accidents accounted for nearly 16 percent of the cases seen by the surgeon while she was serving on the Cape station from 1839-March 1841, though none were fatal, or even serious enough for the sailor to be invalided home. In the following two years, on the West African station, the ship was much healthier overall, as the figures in the table indicate, largely because there was no outbreak of dysentery/diarrhoea. This meant that although there were fewer wounds and accidents, a total of 55, although this included two deaths from drowning they made up a larger proportion, 23.9 percent, of the surgeon's cases.

Ship diseases and conditions

Of all the diseases associated with the sea, scurvy is probably the best known, and the lime juice which was used as a preventative gave the English and Royal Navy sailors one of their nicknames, Limeys. Scurvy is caused by a lack of vitamin C in the diet, and since primates, including humans, are unable to manufacture vitamin C, they need a constant supply of fresh food in order to stay healthy. Although vitamin C itself was not identified until 1917, the connection between scurvy and diet was understood by the Royal Navy in the eighteenth century, and the importance of providing fresh food in the diet to counteract it.⁴⁷³ Scurvy can produce horrible effects: 'large discoloured spots... swelled legs, putrid gums, and above all, an

⁴⁷³ Vitamins were identified in 1912, and vitamin C as the particular substance which would prevent scurvy in 1917. Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, p.123.

extraordinary lassitude of the whole body ... [which] at last degenerates into a proneness to swoon, and even die, on the least exertion of strength...’, with other symptoms including ‘pleurisy, jaundice, ulcers And the reopening of old wounds...’⁴⁷⁴

Sailors’ health was in fact more likely to be endangered by scurvy in the second half of the nineteenth century than the first, since as described by Lloyd and Coulter, the distinction between different limes and lemons was not clearly made, and in fact there is a great variance in the amount of vitamin C to be found in each.

Contemporaries saw what are now known as *Citrus medica* (citron), *c. medica acida* (lime) and *c. limonum* (lemon) as interchangeable.⁴⁷⁵ Acid West Indian limes began to be most used by the Royal Navy after 1860, but it was finally established in 1917 that they are ‘comparatively deficient in vitamin C and in ascorbic acid’ and consequently of little use in preventing scurvy.⁴⁷⁶ Understandably, it was thought that the acid content of the fruit was what mattered, and this was what could be tested for, but in fact the acidity and the vitamin C content are not related.⁴⁷⁷ Consequently, whenever lime juice was depended on by the Royal Navy ‘it fails’.⁴⁷⁸ In general, it was the availability of fresh food that meant scurvy was under control again by the end of the nineteenth century, although it was a problem on, for example, polar explorations

⁴⁷⁴ Surgeon’s journal from HMS *Centurion* on Anson’s voyage 1740-44, quoted in Lloyd and Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol.III, p.294.

⁴⁷⁵ Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, p.115.

⁴⁷⁶ Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, pp.115-16. Lemons have 50mg of ascorbic acid per 100g of raw fruit to limes’ 25 mg. Blackcurrants have 200 mg.

⁴⁷⁷ A. Henderson Smith, 1919, ‘An Historical Inquiry in the Efficacy of Lime-Juice for the Prevention and Cure of Scurvy’, *Jnl Royal Army Med Corps*, Vol. 32, pp.93-116, 188-208, mentions a 1917 experiment which found that lemon juice with all the citric acid removed still worked as an antiscorbutic. Quoted in Lloyd and Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, p.116.

⁴⁷⁸ Henderson Smith, quoted in Lloyd and Coulter, Vol. IV, p.117.

which depended entirely on the food they took with them.⁴⁷⁹ The switch from sail to steam, which meant that ships had regularly to visit coaling stations, meant that all crews and those responsible for feeding them had frequent access to fresh food, and the lime juice used on board maintained its symbolic significance as the cure for scurvy.

Scurvy had become sufficiently uncommon by the mid-nineteenth century that when the men on board HMS *Eagle* and the other ships blockading in the River Plate in 1846 developed it, the surgeon Peter Leonard commented in his journal how unusual this was. Scurvy, he wrote, 'has been occasionally met with at no distant period among the ill-fed inmates of some penal Establishments and Parish Unions at Home' but was 'a Disease that was by many supposed to be blotted out from the Medical Register of the Service'.⁴⁸⁰ Admiralty regulations specified that the issue of lemon juice should begin when salt meat had been served for a fortnight, and ships took on supplies of animals at the beginning of a voyage and during the commission when possible. For example, Midshipman Comber noted in his journal for 14 and 15 January 1840 when HMS *Herald* was in Sydney that the ship's crew were 'employed preparing for sea, taking live bullocks [on board]'.⁴⁸¹ *Herald* had left Plymouth on 29

⁴⁷⁹ Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, p.121. It was noted by some contemporaries that expeditions which 'adopted the Eskimo diet of raw meat or blubber suffered little from scurvy', p.118.

⁴⁸⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 101/98/1, Journal of HMS *Eagle*, Mr Peter Leonard, Surgeon, 1 January 1846 to 31 December 1846, General Remarks, p.1

⁴⁸¹ W. David McIntyre & Marcia McIntyre (eds), *Tour of Duty. Midshipman Comber's Journal Aboard HMS Herald On the East Indies Station – Australia, New Zealand & China, 1838-42*, (New Zealand: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, 1999), p.110, 14,15 January 1840.

August 1838, and lime juice was served out for the first time on 25 September; 'this is intended to prevent Ship's Company from catching [sic] the scurvy...'⁴⁸²

When HMS *Eagle* and the other ships blockading in the River Plate in 1846 had difficulty obtaining suitable food supplies, scurvy was the result. The scurvy which Peter Leonard described was initially seen as a complication of dysentery. There were only five really serious cases, three of whom already had dysentery. But other men, he commented, had scurvy 'sufficiently well marked' to be noticed, though not badly enough to be released from duty, and 'A Scorbutic Drathasis or a tendency to Scorbutic debility was distinctly general amongst the Ship's Company' and in other ships of the blockading squadron.⁴⁸³ Scurvy was also present in the local population, which led to the belief

among some non-professional persons on the Station (but was not entirely confined to them) that there was something in the Climate which caused or at least was peculiarly favourable to the development of the Disease. There will be no ingenuity required to prove that notion to be erroneous.⁴⁸⁴

Leonard constructed a table in his notes (Table 6.3, below), to demonstrate why the scurvy had arisen in HMS *Eagle*, which is also useful in showing that it was routinely expected that ships would obtain local produce to supplement their basic supplies. Underneath the table Leonard noted that the ship's company had not been able to obtain any fruit for 19 months, and that

It is to be observed that the usual quantity of vegetables allowed with the Fresh Meat (viz. ½) Pound per man daily) was not always to be obtained. The meat was then boiled and the Soup thickened with oatmeal only. It is also to be

⁴⁸² Comber, *Tour of Duty*, p.47, 25 September 1838

⁴⁸³ Leonard, *Journal of HMS Eagle*, p.8.

⁴⁸⁴ Leonard, *Journal of HMS Eagle*, p.8.

observed that the very irregularity of the supply of both Meat and Vegetables prevented any long continual general use of Lemonjuice; agreeably with the Admiralty Instructions, which direct that it is not to be issued within a fortnight after the last issue of Fresh Meat or Vegetables unless the Surgeon shall consider it necessary. And no suspicions were entertained by any one that it would be more frequently necessary until the Scorbutic habit appeared.⁴⁸⁵

The regulations, although working imperfectly in this case, make it clear that it was understood that scurvy could be prevented by eating fresh meat as well as fresh fruit and vegetables.

Table 6.3: Food served to Ship's Company on HMS *Eagle*, 1845-6

1845	Fresh Meat Days		Salt Meat Days
	No		No
March	1	30 th Mar ship sailed from Spithead	0
April	3	8 th Apr anchored at Madeira 10 th Sailed. Fruits purchased in abundance	27
May	11	6 th May Anchored at Rio de Janeiro. 7 th Sailed. Fruits tolerably abundant	20
June	20	1 st June Arrived in the River Plata and anchored at Monte Video. No Fruits of any kind to be had; and only a very small quantity of poor vegetables	10
July	13		18
Aug	9		22
Sept	13		17
Oct	12		19
Nov	14		16
Dec	13		18
1846			
Jan	15		16
Feb	10		18
March	14		16
Total no. of fresh meat days during the year. Meat generally of bad quality.	148	Total no. of days during the year when the usual salt meat rations were issued:	217

Source: ADM 101/98/1, Medical journal of HMS *Eagle*, general remarks, p.9.

⁴⁸⁵ Leonard, Journal of HMS *Eagle*, p.8.

Great efforts were made by the squadron to import meat for the men, and finally animals were obtained from Rio Grande. Leonard considered the meat of inferior quality, but after so long on an unvarying diet,

the People were glad of it; simply because it afforded a change to the flagging palate and gave some relief to the craving for a fresh Meal: certainly not of the most agreeable or nutritive kind, but without which it is probable that a still greater and more unmanageable amount of sickness would have been endured.⁴⁸⁶

Eventually the situation was ameliorated, he noted, by the Admiralty sending out freshly preserved meat and potatoes from England. In fact, the preserved meat would not have contained enough vitamin C to be useful, but potatoes are an excellent source, retaining a large proportion of their vitamin C even when cooked.

The particular problems of these ships arose because they were on blockade and there were no easily available local supplies. When HMS *Doris* spent three months on blockade off Pernambuco in 1824, she was initially able to stay in touch with the shore and take on fresh meat and vegetables regularly, until a dispute with the shore at the end of April cut off supplies. The ship's company had to rely on salt meat until the end of May, but then were able to take on fresh food again.⁴⁸⁷ The ships in the River Plate had far longer without suitable food, and by March 1846, having arrived on station in June 1845, the first serious cases of scurvy had appeared.

Even the lemon juice supplied by the Admiralty to make up for the deficiencies of preserved food was not always effective. It is now known that heating the juice

⁴⁸⁶ Leonard, p.11.

⁴⁸⁷ B. Vale, *A Frigate of King George*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001) pp.137-8.

destroys most of the vitamin. Unfortunately, one method used at the time to preserve the juice involved boiling it before it was bottled. Those who were issued with juice which had been preserved by adding 10 percent brandy to the liquid were more likely to benefit.⁴⁸⁸ So although the routine issue of lemon juice, and the efforts made to buy fresh food whenever possible made the risk of scurvy much smaller than it had been for most sailors, it could still occur. Hargreaves does not identify what was wrong, but records that when HMS *Woodstock* and other vessels arrived in China in November 1857 after a very long passage:

...the crews of the gunboats was in A Bad state of Health when they Arrived in hong kong And A part of the 4 crews was invalided Home soon After they Arrived out And the crews was filed up By volunteers from the remainder of the ships of the fleet...⁴⁸⁹

It seems quite likely that one of the reasons for their bad health was scurvy. When HMS *Alligator* (one of the ships in the sample) arrived at Sydney on 10 July 1839, Comber noted in his journal that 'They have been 10 months at sea and a great many of their people are laid up with the scurvy.'⁴⁹⁰ The muster book reveals that four men died around this time on *Alligator*. John Cowell, Captain of the Mast and Edward Calman, Caulker both died on 8 June 1839, while James Seaborn AB and Edward Hambrook, Ordinary, died at Sydney, the former on 31 July and the latter on 31 October in Sydney Hospital. Also three men, William Webb, Ordinary, Patrick Finnan, Boatswain's Mate, and Daniel Larkin, Captain of the Afterguard, were invalided that July.⁴⁹¹ The causes of death and invalidism are not given, but although scurvy is normally curable with fresh food, it can cause permanent damage and death

⁴⁸⁸ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.113.

⁴⁸⁹ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

⁴⁹⁰ Comber, *Tour of Duty*, p. 86, 10 July 1839.

⁴⁹¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8649, HMS *Alligator* muster book.

and it may well have been a contributing factor at least. Providing adequate provisions was, as the authorities well knew, essential for health and not just for happiness. In general, though, they succeeded in this, at least to the satisfaction of the men: none of those who gave evidence to the Royal Commission in 1859 suggested that their health had been in danger from inadequate food, though some of them complained that there had not been enough of it.

Alcohol

Drink was another part of the official ration, which brought its own health problems. Sailors were issued with a ration of half a pint of rum each per day until 1824, when it was halved to a quarter of a pint. However, the change to imperial measures in 1825 had increased it by one fifth.⁴⁹² In 1850 this was halved again, and tea and sugar made available to be taken in lieu. According to Greenhill and Giffard, on the steamships that were gradually taking over the Navy fresh water was also much more readily available, presumably for the same reason that fresh food was more common, that the ships could not stay at sea for long periods of time, but had to visit coaling stations for fuel supplies.⁴⁹³ The effect of alcohol on discipline is examined in chapter 4, but alcoholism and drunkenness could also of course affect the men's health. It is possible that the rum ration increased the likelihood of accidents, though Rasor notes that there is no evidence that any officer encouraged drunkenness on board, despite contemporary accusations that the Admiralty used rum to 'dope' the men.⁴⁹⁴ When on leave, of course, it was assumed that the men would drink too much. On

⁴⁹² See above, chapter 4, p.132.

⁴⁹³ Greenhill and Giffard, *Steam, Politics and Patronage. The Navy 1815-54* (London, 1994), p.79.

⁴⁹⁴ Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy*, chapter IV.

occasion this could have disastrous consequences. For example, in 1839 on the Cape station, one man from HMS *Melville* died of what was recorded as apoplexy, caused by 'inordinate drinking... [This] occurred on shore, where the man, a blue jacket, had gone on liberty: the body was found hanging half out of bed, with the head downwards.'⁴⁹⁵ In HMS *Dolphin*, on the West African station in 1842, another death from apoplexy was recorded, but according to the editor 'the patient unquestionably died from the effects of long-continued intemperance'.⁴⁹⁶ Delirium tremens is listed as a separate disease in the tables of statistics, with 58 cases being reported between 1837 and 1843 on the home station. Twenty-three of these men were sent to hospital, and four died.⁴⁹⁷ The men's drunkenness was also blamed for the onset of some diseases. Dr Wilson, in the *Health of the Navy* reports, commented that seamen and marines on shore were:

like children let loose, they are the more apt to commit those imprudencies which are characteristic of British seamen, and peculiar to youth in every grade of society... [and lead to fevers, with] permanently impaired health, or ... death.⁴⁹⁸

Steam and health

The first steam vessel was ordered for the Royal Navy in 1827, and these new ships meant new working conditions for some of the men on board them. Stokers had to work, as their name suggests, supplying the engines with coal, and often in extreme temperatures. The discomfort of this, particularly in hot climates, was recognised in the higher pay given to Stokers compared to Able Seamen (£2 6s a month compared

⁴⁹⁵ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*, 1839, Cape station, p.42.

⁴⁹⁶ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*, 1839, West African station, p.107.

⁴⁹⁷ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*, 1837-43, Home station, p.198.

⁴⁹⁸ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*, 1837-43, West African station, p.63.

to £1 14s in 1827 when the rating was introduced), and the fact that when a Stoker had to work 'within the Tropics' he was to receive 'half his Pay in addition'.⁴⁹⁹ The possibility that stoking was more damaging to a sailor's health than ordinary sea service would seem to be borne out by the sickness discharges on HM Steam Ship *Comet*. Seven of the 14 Stokers on board were discharged sick, compared to two out of the 14 Able Seamen. However, the evidence from the other steam ships in the sample (HMS *Comet*, *Alecto*, *Fearless* twice and *Virago*) suggests this was not always the case, as on HMS *Virago*, for example, none of the 20 Stokers were discharged sick, compared to one Able and one Ordinary seaman, and three Boys. On one of HMS *Fearless*'s commissions, the only sickness discharge was an Engineer Boy 4th Class (though no Stokers), but on the next commission the only discharges were of Able Seamen (and the Captain's Coxswain). *Alecto* falls more into *Comet*'s pattern, with four out of 14 Stokers discharged sick, compared to one 2nd Class Boy (of 12), one AB (of 20), one Ordinary (of ten) and the Ship's Cook.⁵⁰⁰

Surgeons were aware of the possibility of health damage caused by the new engines, and the heat they generated on board ship. John Rees, surgeon to HM Steam Ship *Arrogant* when she made her test voyages in 1849-50, commented in his 'General Remarks' that

The Steam-Engine in this ship is placed below the water line; and occupies principally the Main Hold. The Funnel measuring ... Twenty Six feet in circumference rises through the decks nearly midway between the fore and Main masts. About the middle of the lower deck, are also situated the Two Stoke Holds. But the fires are placed on a plane Ten Feet below it. The position of the fires is calculated to keep the lower deck dry, and to establish

⁴⁹⁹ Rates of Pay of the Royal Navy, TNA: PRO: ADM7/911, pp.69-70.

⁵⁰⁰ Muster books for HMS *Alecto*, *Comet*, *Fearless* and *Virago*, TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7491, TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8906-08, TNA: PRO: ADM 38/739-741, TNA: PRO: ADM38/9281.

better ventilation in that part of the vessel. These advantages, however, would be more than counterbalanced, especially in hot climates, by the increased temperature.⁵⁰¹

The ship had only been under steam once for any time, going

from Gibraltar to Mogadore and back, passing nearly five days under steam. In the Fore stoke-Hold the men were working in a temperature ranging from 120 to 146: In the after Stoke-Hold the heat averaged about 12 degrees less; and in the ventilation was much better - was indeed excellent; and principally through the means of a fan worked with a small separate engine.⁵⁰²

By the fourth day of steaming, two of the 19 men working as Stokers

were laid up; and it was considered necessary to place the remainder in three watches, volunteering for that purpose a sufficient number of the ship's company. On the sixth day - the day after the conclusion of the voyage - three out of the five Engineers were also on the sick list. But the compliment [sic] of Engineers is perhaps too small.

No hammocks could be used near the funnel, because it was too hot, and the Fore-Stoke-Hold was

where the temperature must be reduced, and the ventilation improved, before this ship can be well made to work out her Ten days coals, in a tropical climate, with any moderate complement of Stokers.⁵⁰³

The steamships of the period were all combined sail/steam vessels, so the Stokers did not have to work in such conditions all or most of the time. In the statistics and comments for the West African station for 1837-43, where small steamers formed part of the squadron, there is no indication that they were inherently more unhealthy than sailing ships, although since they were able to go closer inshore than sailing ships, those on board may have been more likely to be exposed to malaria and yellow fever, as on the Niger expedition of 1841 (discussed below).

⁵⁰¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 101/87/2, Journal of Her Majesty's Ship *Arrogant*, Mr John Rees, Surgeon, 4 March 1849 to 31 March 1850, General Remarks.

⁵⁰² Journal of HMS *Arrogant*, General Remarks.

⁵⁰³ Journal of HMS *Arrogant*, General Remarks.

Infectious diseases

As well as the dangers particularly associated with the sea, such as drowning or scurvy, sailors were also of course exposed to other diseases common in the nineteenth century, such as smallpox and cholera. Sailors were also believed to be particularly prone to colds, influenza and 'chills', because they worked in damp conditions.

Dampness and cold on board ship were believed to cause various health problems, particularly chills and rheumatism. The latter could be a long-term problem and result in invaliding. On HMS *Acorn* (see Table 6.1 above), there were 39 cases of 'inflammation of the lungs and pleura', all of whom recovered, and 38 cases of rheumatism, of which nine had to be invalided. William Simpson, serving as Master-at-arms on HMS *Plover* during the expedition to the Arctic in search of Franklin which left England in January 1848, wrote in his diary on 29 July 1850 that

I, for one, much as I wish to see my friends would be sorry to leave the expedition till it is finished, but I am much afraid I shall not be allowed to remain as I have been suffering from rheumatism since Christmas and am much afraid it is getting worse.⁵⁰⁴

He was indeed sent home on HMS *Investigator*, arriving in spring 1851. Rheumatism was blamed on exposure to cold and wet, as with the 293 cases in ships on particular service in 1839, a ratio of 69.8 per 1000 men, of which 38 men were sent to hospital, eight were invalided and one died.⁵⁰⁵ The comments note that 'newly-raised, badly-clothed men, who had been exposed to cold and wet while employed on dock-yard

⁵⁰⁴ William Simpson, journal, as quoted in Baynham, *Before the Mast*, p.84.

⁵⁰⁵ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.221.

duties, or in the damp hulks in which they reside [while waiting for their ship] ... were the greatest sufferers.⁵⁰⁶ On the West African station conditions could become cold and damp in the rainy season, and Wilson claimed that on some ships the men had thrown away their bedding when it was hot, only to be reduced to sleeping on damp mats when the rain came, which brought on bronchial and rheumatic complaints.⁵⁰⁷ Men, he claimed, then sometimes put forward claims for pensions based on these illnesses, when such complaints might be their own fault, or the result of 'hereditary predisposition'.⁵⁰⁸

Rheumatism, though it could be incapacitating, did not normally affect more than a few men a year, unlike the chills or bronchial complaints which were also believed to be caused by cold or damp, and which could spread rapidly among a ship's crew. For those men who did catch colds and influenza, the treatment they received could vary extremely. On HMS *Express* in 1837 there were 14 cases of influenza, and the treatment given is described in detail in the *Health of the Navy* reports. Rather than being bled, as happened 'in some vessels in the Mediterranean', the patient 'on being seized, was placed in bed, and an extra covering put over him'. He was then purged, and given ipecacuanha, and then encouraged 'to drink freely of dilutents until perspiration was produced; when this was well established, every bad symptom vanished, and the patients rapidly recovered their strength in from 24 to 48 hours'.⁵⁰⁹ Apart from the emetic and the ipecacuanha, this treatment is similar to that recommended for those with colds and flu now. Those men unlucky enough to be

⁵⁰⁶ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.227.

⁵⁰⁷ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.63.

⁵⁰⁸ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.64

⁵⁰⁹ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, pp.126-7.

on ships 'where venesection [blood-letting] was freely practised' often 'did not recover for weeks, and even months, after the attack.'⁵¹⁰

Occasionally such diseases were more serious, as with the 'numerous and severe' infections of the respiratory organs on the Cape station in 1843.

One man, belonging to the *Winchester*, died of bronchitis in the hospital at Simons Town; the attack appears to have been brought on by the patient jumping overboard, and remaining too long in the water; another man, who also belonged to the *Winchester*, died in the same establishment of phthisis...⁵¹¹

Phthisis, or tuberculosis, was a serious health problem in the general population in the first half of the nineteenth century, causing about ten percent of all deaths; its decline in the second half of the century was a major contributor to improved life expectancy.⁵¹² Although cases were recorded among sailors, it does not appear to have been so significant among them (though again diagnosis was difficult, so the statistics cannot be wholly relied upon). For example, again on the Cape station, in 1839, there were three cases of phthisis. One of the men, from HMS *Acorn*, was sent back to Haslar Hospital, where he died. Overall, for 1837-43, there were five deaths from phthisis, 6.41 percent of the total of 78.⁵¹³

As well as colds, bad weather on board ship or being new to the sea could also cause seasickness, though the surgeons did not record it. Frederick Wilson, writing home to his parents in 1846, said

⁵¹⁰ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.127

⁵¹¹ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.57.

⁵¹² Hinde, *England's Population*, p.211.

⁵¹³ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.58.

I am sorry to say that I have been sea sick for two days and I send my kind love to my Brothers, hoping they are quite well. We are now laying at Portland under a heavy gale of wind and I don't expect that I shall see you for 8 months to come but I hope you will not fret for I am very comfortable [sic]⁵¹⁴

Samuel Gurney Cresswell, serving as a volunteer apprentice on HMS *Agincourt* in 1842, noted that a few hours after the ship left Portsmouth

sea sickness soon began to appear & by the evening all the volunteers, 30 in number except me, Huthwaite and another chap were sick, you may fancy the agreeableness of the cockpit, a great many are not by any means right yet⁵¹⁵

Smallpox

The development of a vaccination for smallpox meant that the disease was becoming less common in the first half of the nineteenth century. Smallpox, or *variola*, is a viral disease. Fatality rates vary; it was particularly dangerous to young children. The patient usually has a fever and a scarring rash of spots which develop into pustules and can result in blood poisoning and death. It is contagious (that is, can be passed easily from person to person) and so was a particular problem for small enclosed communities, like ships. In the eighteenth century attempts had been made to immunise people against smallpox by 'variolation', introducing what were hoped to be weak strains of smallpox into patients so that they would develop antibodies. The disadvantage of this method was that it was extremely difficult to tell whether the particular variant of the smallpox virus that someone was suffering from was weak or not, and that the person so infected was then liable to infect others. Famously,

⁵¹⁴ Frederick Wilson, letter to his parents dated Portland, October 20 1846, NMM MS 7631 AGC/W/8.

⁵¹⁵ Harrod, *War, Ice and Piracy*, letter to parents, 9 May 1842, p.25.

Edward Jenner noticed in the 1790s that people who had caught cowpox from their animals, a very mild disease, seemed to be immune to smallpox, and in 1796 he carried out the first vaccination, by making scratches on a boy's arm and introducing pus from a cowpox spot into it. He then showed that attempts to infect the boy with smallpox by variolation failed.

By 1808 the Royal Navy was already recommending vaccination in the Instructions to Surgeons, though it remained voluntary. In later instructions the formula was:

It being expedient that the practice of the vaccine inoculations should be extended throughout H.M. Navy, the surgeon is to advise all men who have been known to have hitherto escaped the Smallpox, or may have been ever doubtful of having the disease, to be inoculated with the vaccine virus.⁵¹⁶

By 1814 there were detailed instructions on the method to be used. Mass vaccination was achieved by vaccinating one person with cowpox, introducing the cowpox material under the skin of the arm, then by transferring material from that person to a succession of others eight days later, when the original person would be harbouring the virus. The Navy's instructions to surgeons were that there must be three punctures made in the arm, presumably to ensure that the patient was properly infected.⁵¹⁷ According to Lloyd and Coulter, the quality of the lymph carrying the cowpox vaccine was variable, and did not improve until after 1860.⁵¹⁸

Children were more likely than adults to die of smallpox. In the 1830s and 1840s the mortality was especially bad: 'during the 1839 epidemic just over one-quarter of the

⁵¹⁶ Quoted in Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.210.

⁵¹⁷ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.210.

⁵¹⁸ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.211.

8,714 deaths recorded were accounted for by children under the age of one', and children aged up to four had a death rate of 2.73 per 1,000 to smallpox in that year, much higher than for any other age-group.⁵¹⁹ In the Royal Navy, the death rate, among teenagers and adults, was of course much less, as Table 6.4 shows.

Table 6.4: Smallpox cases and deaths in the Royal Navy, 1837-1875, compiled by T J Preston, Staff Surgeon

Year	Cases	Deaths	Ratio of Cases per 1000 men
1837	22	3	0.85
1838	23	2	0.81
1839	25	3	0.75
1840	61	14	1.9
1841	25	2	0.68
1842	37	4	0.95
1843	34	1	0.98
1858	83	10	1.9
1859	128	11	2.4
1860	327	25	5.2
1861	315	24	5.0
1862	103	18	1.7
1863	121	15	2.2
1864	462	33	8.8
1865	164	15	3.2
1866	239	8	4.9
1867	251	14	4.9
1868	83	2	1.6
1869	82	5	1.1
...			
1875	17	1	0.3

Source: Lloyd & Coulter, Medicine and the Navy, Vol. IV, 1815-1900, p.211.

From 1854 vaccination against smallpox was compulsory, so it might seem surprising to find that the rates of smallpox in the Navy were increasing after that date, but in fact it was not until 1871 that the legislation began to be enforced, after a severe

⁵¹⁹ Horn, *Labouring Life*, p.193.

national outbreak, and against parents who protested about giving their children vaccinations.⁵²⁰ By the end of century smallpox was under control in Britain, and by 1873-77 was only responsible for 0.1 infant deaths per 1,000 in the country districts.⁵²¹ The Navy began to enforce vaccination earlier than this, through an Admiralty order of 15 April 1864 which stated 'No person is to be entered for the Royal Navy who has not been, or is not willing to be vaccinated.'⁵²² In March 1871 it was required that all new entrants should be re-vaccinated,⁵²³ presumably in case their original vaccination had been of poor quality, and credit was given to this for there being only three deaths when an epidemic of smallpox broke out at Malta shortly afterwards. This was contrasted to the epidemic of 1830 in the same place (the disease having been introduced by HMS *Asia*) when there were 1500 deaths on the island, though it is not clear how many were in the Navy.⁵²⁴

The description books include a column for information on smallpox, which is intended to note whether men have been inoculated or vaccinated against smallpox, or have already had the disease.⁵²⁵ Putting together the information from the seven description books where the column has been filled in,⁵²⁶ which cover commissions

⁵²⁰ Horn, *Labouring Life*, p.193

⁵²¹ Horn, *Labouring Life*, p.194.

⁵²² Quoted in Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.211.

⁵²³ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.211.

⁵²⁴ G. Milroy, G., 1862, *The Health of the Royal Navy, Considered in a Letter Addressed to Sir John Pakington* (London: Hardwicke), p.38, quoted in Lloyd and Coulter, Vol. IV, p.212. They note that during the Crimean War there were 81 cases in the Black Sea Fleet and 303 in the Baltic Fleet while in 1856 there were only 39 cases in the whole Navy, in 1857, 20, and in 1858, 83, with 10 deaths.

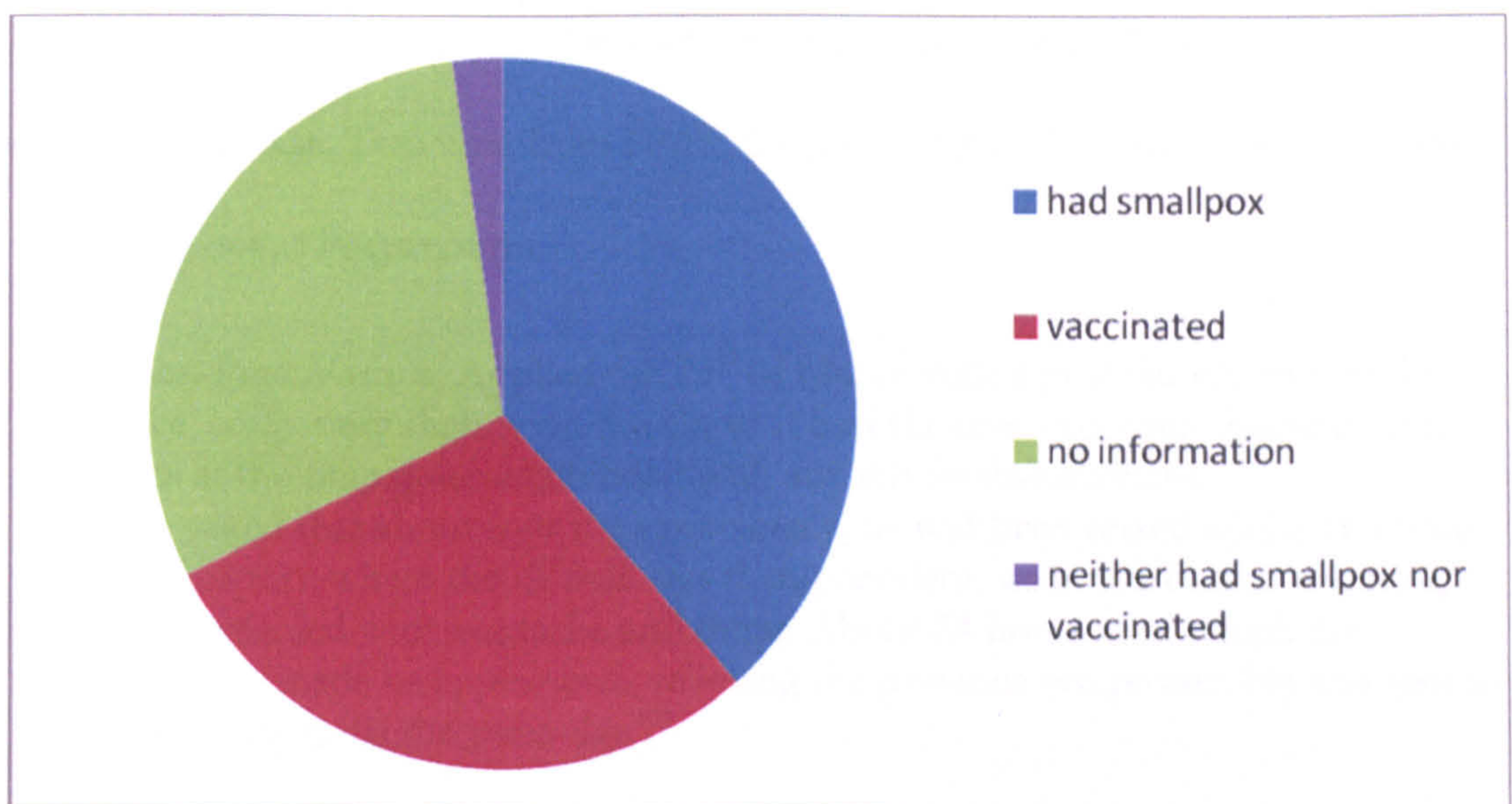
⁵²⁵ Vaccination, as described above, meant being treated with the cowpox (vaccinia) virus, which protected against smallpox. Inoculation or variolation meant being treated with a weakened smallpox virus itself (*New Oxford English Dictionary*, p.3537). The terms have now become interchangeable. In the *Winchester* description book (TNA: PRO: ADM 37/10107) some men are listed as inoculated, the rest as vaccinated. I have grouped them all together.

⁵²⁶ HMS *Acorn*, *Alligator*, *Caledonia*, *Comet*, *Lapwing*, *Virago* and *Winchester*.

taking place from 1837-43, gives an overall figure of 618 having had smallpox and 467 having been vaccinated, out of a total of 1608 men. As with all the description book information, the columns are not filled out for everyone, so for about a third of the men there is no entry. In the description book for HMS *Espoir* there is no information given for any of the men, so it has been excluded from the figures.⁵²⁷

The chart from this information is as follows:

Figure 6.2: Smallpox incidence and vaccination in the Royal Navy, 1837-47



Source: Description books for HMS *Acorn* ADM38/7443, *Alligator* ADM 37/8649, *Caledonia* ADM 37/8825, *Comet* ADM37/8908, *Lapwing* ADM 37/9780, *Virago* ADM38/9281 and *Winchester*,. ADM37/10107.

If we assume that many of the men for whom there is no information had in fact been vaccinated or had had smallpox, then they correspond well with the figures in the table of incidence of smallpox in the Royal Navy, given in Lloyd and Coulter. It would seem that in the 1830s and 1840s smallpox was under control in the Royal Navy, with enough men having had the disease or been vaccinated to prevent it

⁵²⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9070 HMS *Espoir* description book bound in with muster books.

becoming epidemic. The increase in incidence later, and subsequent control, may have been due to poor lymph, and then to the Navy's particular measures, or to the fact that as vaccination increased, but was not universal, smallpox was still present but fewer men would have been exposed to it as children. As vaccination increased and then became compulsory in the general population, this benefited the Navy as well. As noted above, the figure for smallpox deaths in the most vulnerable group, very young children, had fallen by the mid-1870s just as it had in the Royal Navy.

For those who did have it, smallpox remained an extremely unpleasant and dangerous disease. Two men from HMS *Arrogant* caught it in March 1849 while she was fitting out at Portsmouth.

John Pratt Variola, Applied the 23rd of March with a pustular eruptio on the face, scalp, very slightly on the chest. It had the true variolous character, but was at the time quite unattended with any febrile disturbances. He stated that about four days previously, he had been seized whilst on shore at Gosport; where the disease was then prevalent, with nausea and vomiting, accompanied with headache and thirst. About 24 hours after which the eruption made its appearance, relieving the previous symptoms. He was sent to Haslar Hospital the same day.⁵²⁸

Seven days later, on 30 March, William Page, a seaman who had been sleeping at Gosport sent to report himself sick.

Was visited at his lodgings, and found thickly covered with pustular eruptions, and had been ill for 36 hours. Small Pox had been prevalent in the neighbourhood for some time. In this case the fever was considerable. It did not appear that he had been vaccinated. He was taken at once to the Hospital where he subsequently died.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 101/87/2, Medical Journal of HMS *Arrogant*, , second in sick list.

⁵²⁹ Medical Journal of HMS *Arrogant*, fourth in sick list.

Both these men were clearly infected by a shore outbreak, and did not infect any of their fellow crew, since they were the only cases reported on HMS *Arrogant* during that commission. This may have been because all the other men were safely vaccinated or immunised by exposure, or because Page at least had not been on board while infectious. Edward Cree, when Surgeon on board HM Steam Sloop *Fury* at Hong Kong in early 1849, also recorded a single case on board,

in one of the midshipmen; I reported it to the Captain and afterwards to the Admiral, who wanted to put us in quarantine, but I found I could get him into sick quarters near the Merchant Seamen's Hospital.⁵³⁰

He did not note anyone else going down with the disease.

Cholera

Cholera, unlike smallpox, is not passed directly from person to person, but through infected water, though this was not understood until the middle of the nineteenth century. Its effects, however, could be even more devastating. So-called Asiatic cholera reached the UK in 1831. 'Little was done by the government, beyond calling a day of national prayer and fasting. By autumn, 5000 had died from the epidemic, but still no counter-measures were taken.'⁵³¹ The outbreak was national, but worst of course in towns with poor sanitation, which included ports such as Plymouth and Portsmouth, and outbreaks continued after the main epidemic was over. In February

⁵³⁰ Michael Levien (ed.), *The Cree Journals. The Voyages of Edward H. Cree, Surgeon R.N. as related in his private journals, 1837-1856* (Exeter: Webb & Bower Ltd, 1981), p.190.

⁵³¹ Roy Porter, *London: A Social History*, (London: Penguin, 2000), p.315.

1833, for example, a letter in the *Devonport Independent* referred to the recent outbreak of cholera in Stonehouse.⁵³²

John Wilson, the editor of the *Health of the Navy* reports, wrote a pamphlet on the treatment of cholera in 1849. He 'associated the disease with bad sewerage, a low standard of housing and a starvation level of existence, such as was to be found in the slums of Portsmouth and every large town at that date'.⁵³³ He concluded that it was not contagious, since nurses at the Haslar hospital did not get it. With its many crowded slums, London tended to suffer particularly badly in cholera epidemics; it was also affected by the pollution of the river Thames with human sewage, from which much drinking water was taken. Serious epidemics took place in 1832, 1849 and 1854. During the 1854 outbreak Dr John Snow identified water as the carrier with his analysis of the Soho Broad Street pump deaths, but it was not until the 'great stink' of 1858 that a proper sewer system was begun, which eventually prevented future outbreaks.⁵³⁴

Sailors were thus as likely to be exposed to cholera on shore as on board ship during one of these epidemics, as happened on HMS *Arrogant* in the 1849 outbreak, when she was at Portsmouth in August. Three men on board *Arrogant* were taken ill with cholera, and all died. One

a seaman, [a] well-conducted and healthy man, had leave to go on shore to attend on his wife, then ill of cholera, and living in a small, badly ventilated, court in Portsea; where the Disease was at the time raging. He returned to his

⁵³² *Devonport Independent and Plymouth and Stonehouse Gazette*, Vol. I No.3, February 23 1833, p.3, col.5.

⁵³³ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.209.

⁵³⁴ Porter, pp.319-20.

duty, on the 13th and about 11 a.m: on the same day, and whilst employed washing the main deck, was seized with cholera. He was taken at once to the Hospital, where he died the following day.

The sailmaker, who was also 'a healthy and well-conducted man', was taken ill a few days later

on the 21st of August at his own house, and died in a few hours, under the charge of a Private Practitioner. He had been sleeping on shore every night since the arrival of the ship. The last Four days, his wife had been ill of Cholera, and every night he had been in close attendance on her. In the district of Portsmouth where his wife resided Cholera was then prevalent.

It is likely that they had both become infected from the same source of contaminated water, rather than that he had caught the cholera from her. The surgeon's journal does not note whether his wife died too.

The Third, and last case, could not be traced to the shore, and a focus of Infection, in the same satisfactory manner. The 31st of August, a Marine Artillery man was seized with the Disease ... He was, at once, taken to the Hospital where he soon died. He had only been once on shore – Four days before the attack, but on which occasion, he slept on shore.⁵³⁵

Since there were no other cases on board, the Marine was probably exposed to contaminated water during his stay on shore rather than when working on board ship.

John Rees, the Surgeon, complained that

On the first appearance of Cholera I recommended, as the most important preventive measure, that the men should be kept from sleeping on shore; but which was not attended to, on the plea that such a step had not been taken by the other ships.

⁵³⁵ Medical Journal of HMS *Arrogant*, General Remarks.

Of course, not sleeping on shore would not in itself prevent cholera, but it might mean sailors were less likely to obtain water from an infected source. In this instance, fortunately, there were no further cases. Other ships were far less lucky, for example at Varna in 1854 at the time of the Crimean war. The surgeon on HMS *Agamemnon* attributed the outbreak to contaminated water, and recorded 31 cases of cholera, 277 of diarrhoea and 49 of dysentery. On HMS *Albion*, also at Varna, there were 68 deaths from 97 cases identified as cholera.⁵³⁶ *Agamemnon*'s surgeon 'Like other surgeons ... only diagnosed the worst cases as cholera, because there was as yet no certain way of distinguishing between such similar ailments.'⁵³⁷ It is now known that most persons infected with it do not become ill or only have mild symptoms, so some of the cases diagnosed as diarrhoea or dysentery may have been caused by cholera bacteria.⁵³⁸

Men on the China station were considered particularly at risk of cholera, once the disease had reached China in 1817. It had been brought by a junk from Siam, according to the information given to Dr Wilson by Chinese doctors in 1843.⁵³⁹ Edward Hargreaves, during his time on the China station, recalled that in 1858 '...the troops Had A great Amount of Sickness Amongst them...'. The ship on which he was working, HMS *Woodcock*, spent about eight months doing duty taking the sick each day on the 20-mile trip from Canton to Wampo, where the *Simon* troopship had

⁵³⁶ Medical Journal of HMS *Arrogant*, General Remarks.

⁵³⁷ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.206.

⁵³⁸ World Health Organisation, 'Cholera',
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs107/en/>

⁵³⁹ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.207, quoting Macnamara, *A History of Asiatic Cholera*, 1876.

been set up as hospital, and those who had been cured back again.⁵⁴⁰ Cholera was one of the diseases by which they were affected, though the casualties in the second Opium war taking place during Hargreaves' time on the station were far fewer than those in the first, in 1839-42, when many more men were affected by cholera than by the results of fighting.⁵⁴¹ Cresswell, writing home in 1842, commented that:

This climate [Hong Kong bay] is very sickly. We lost two men today in the hospital ship, and have lost about 30 in the last two months, I think 70 since we have been in here. Since ower [sic] first arrival in China the Hospital ship seems to be quite useless. Out of about 50 we have sent, three have come back cured, 30 died. We have got ower sails bent and are going round the other side of the island tomorrow for the good of the ship's co's health.⁵⁴²

Even if not cholera, other diseases 'of a dysenteric character' could be just as horrible for those sailors who caught them. On HMS *Acorn* in 1839, off Madagascar, several men came down with dysentery.

In some instances it commenced with vomiting and severe cramps ... there were cases in which the evacuations were green and frothy .. lastly, there were cases in which the evacuations were thin, and of a bright yellow colour ... in many instances the attack was followed by acute inflammation of the liver, which required the most active treatment ...
Out of about 30 attacks, five proved fatal.⁵⁴³

On HMS *Eagle* in the River Plate, already suffering from scurvy, dysentery was also a problem. Twelve cases had been recorded by the end of 1845, and

Thirty-one cases subsequently presented themselves during the early months of 1846 ... [there were a total of 43 in 1845-5 amongst the ship's company]. Many of these were severe and protracted, one terminated fatally, another was carried off by the supervention of cholera, and a third was invalided...

⁵⁴⁰ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy',

⁵⁴¹ Lloyd and Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, pp.207-9.

⁵⁴² Harrod, *War, Ice and Piracy*, Letter to parents, 9 November 1842, p.29.

⁵⁴³ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*, 1837-43, pp.42-3.

[The dysentery of the river Plate, though] less violent than that of India and elsewhere ... is yet a very formidable Complaint, similar in its nature, painful and exhausting, obstinate and difficult of management, occasionally fatal, and remediable only by similar remedial means: as far as the experiences obtained here has enabled us to judge.⁵⁴⁴

The contemporary remedies for cholera and other dysenteric diseases normally given to patients consisted of calomel (mercury chloride) and opium, followed by brandy, champagne, ether or ammonia. None of these would have helped, and the calomel, a purgative, would probably have made the men worse, since it would have increased their dehydration. John Wilson, in his pamphlet on cholera, recommended calomel, and frequent doses of opium, oil of turpentine and camphor, even though he admitted that 'the results were not altogether satisfactory'.⁵⁴⁵ Those men who survived did so in spite as much as because of the surgeon's care, because the best modern treatment for cholera is rehydration, plus antibiotics when diarrhoea is severe. The one treatment was not being offered and the other would not be available until the discovery of penicillin in the twentieth century. Nor was it generally accepted that cholera was a water-borne disease until 1883, when the bacillus was identified, and that the best way to prevent it was to keep the water supply clean and close down contaminated sources as soon as possible.

⁵⁴⁴ Leonard, Journal of HMS *Eagle*, General Remarks, p.1, and sick list for total dysentery cases.

⁵⁴⁵ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.209.

Feyers

Just as cholera was and remains difficult to distinguish from other kinds of dysenteric illnesses, the various kinds of fever are also difficult to diagnose and surgeons of the nineteenth century certainly found them so. Only the worst dysentery cases tended to be diagnosed as cholera, and it was the same with yellow fever, one of the feared diseases of the West African station. Yellow fever is caused by a virus, transmitted through infected mosquitoes, and it is now known that only about 15 percent of those infected actually enter the second 'toxic phase' of the illness, when fever reappears, accompanied by the jaundice which gives the disease its name. Today, about half the patients who enter this phase die, the rest recovering almost completely.⁵⁴⁶ With malaria, also transmitted through infected mosquitoes, the different types cause different symptoms, and fevers were usually classified by whether the patient had a period of remission, and how frequently, although some malarial fevers are continuous.

Although it was a particular problem on the west African coast, malaria was endemic in Europe in the nineteenth century as well, and had been since the late Roman empire.⁵⁴⁷ In England, it was endemic in Kent, Essex and parts of London.⁵⁴⁸ The fen country in East Anglia, where stagnant water lay in summer, providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes, was particularly bad.⁵⁴⁹ Infant mortality in parts of Norfolk and the fen country around the Wash was anomalously high in the mid-nineteenth

⁵⁴⁶ World Health Organisation, 'Yellow Fever',
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs100/en/>

⁵⁴⁷ Fiammetto Rocco, *The Miraculous Fever Tree* (London: HarperCollins 2003), p.35.

⁵⁴⁸ Rocco, p.96.

⁵⁴⁹ Rocco, p.98.

century, compared to other rural areas,⁵⁵⁰ and malarial fevers may help to explain why. The use of cinchona bark, or quinine, to treat fevers, though a treatment available in England from the seventeenth century, was not fully understood or accepted. One of the most disastrous results of this was that when the Walcheren expedition to Holland took place in 1809, it was seriously undersupplied with bark, leaving the soldiers and sailors taking part unprotected from the fevers that resulted from the flooding of the Scheldt, and the consequent breeding of mosquitoes. Among those who caught it was Rifleman Harris, who recovered but had to be invalided from the army as a result. He described how he watched others die, once back at hospital in Hyde:

The ward ... accommodated eleven men, and I saw, from my bed in the corner where I lay, this ward refilled ten times, the former patients being all carried out to the grave.⁵⁵¹

The fever statistics recorded by ships serving on the home station in 1837-43 confirm that fever was not only an overseas problem, as Table 6.5 below shows. The notes recorded by the figures claim that those who died had caught fever before joining the service or while on leave⁵⁵² (though this still suggests that they caught it in Britain, since this was where most of the recruits to these ships would have come from, and where they would have taken leave), but there were still 633 cases of continued or remittent fever, and 287 cases of intermittent fever. Since the figures combine continuous fever (some of which may have been malaria) and those which recurred every two, three or four days (remittent fevers, which were almost certainly

⁵⁵⁰ Hinde, *England's Population*, p.204.

⁵⁵¹ Christopher Hibbert (ed.), *The Recollections of Rifleman Harris* (Gloucestershire: Windrush Press 1998) p.117.

⁵⁵² *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.200.

malaria) it is difficult to say how many of the 633 cases of continued/remittent fevers were malarial, but the intermittent (recurring after a longer period) ones almost certainly were. Some may of course have been men who had caught malaria previously and were having a repeat episode, characteristic of one form of the disease.

Table 6.5 Fevers in ships on the home station, 1837-43

Home station 1837-43								
p.198								
	no. of cases	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength	sent to hospital	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength	invalided	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength	died	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength
Fevers								
Continued, remittent	633	20	162	5.1			18	0.6
Intermittent	287	9.1	59	1.8				

Among 'ships employed variously' between 1837 and 1843, there were 1,637 cases of 'Continued, remittent' fever recorded, and 203 of intermittent, ratios of 55.9 and 6.9 respectively to 1,000 of mean numbers of men.⁵⁵³ Forty men died of continued or remittent fever and none of intermittent fever. The notes on the figures comment that they showed a 'slight increase in the annual ratio of cases of fever...' with at least 23 deaths 'due to fevers contracted within the tropics' of which 14 were yellow fever, caught in the West Indies.⁵⁵⁴ Compared to these, the home station figures are much lower, with ratios of 20 cases of continued or remittent fever per 1,000 of

⁵⁵³ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.268.

⁵⁵⁴ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.271.

mean strength and 9.1 cases of intermittent per 1,000, as shown in Table 6.5.⁵⁵⁵ A much greater number of men were sent to hospital with fever, 162 compared to the 180 sent from the variously employed ships, but this reflects their access to hospitals rather than the severity of the fevers.

However, the risks of fever were much greater on the West African station, and on ships which went to the tropics. Within the contemporary category of remittent fevers, medical theory identified fevers as quotidian (occurring every day), tertian (recurring at 48-hour intervals) and so on, depending on the intervals between attacks, since the various causes had not been identified. Such intervals are characteristic of malaria, though as noted above, with yellow fever, the first stage often passes without being diagnosed. Wilson noted, however, that on the West Coast of Africa station,

it is seldom ... that the paroxysmal attacks of this form of fever occur, with anything like the regularity which has been described by most writers, so that it is impossible to arrange the cases under the distinctive heads of quotidian, tertian or quartan, the intervals between the attacks being extremely irregular in almost every individual case.⁵⁵⁶

Since several types of fever were probably being confused in the 2,356 cases of continued, remittent fever recorded on that station 1837-43, it is not surprising they failed to conform to contemporary definitions. Intermittent fever (recurring occasionally), of which there were 207 cases over the same period, was rightly noted as 'the result ... of the endemic remitting fever of the country, contracted either on

⁵⁵⁵ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.198.

⁵⁵⁶ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.119.

shore, or on boat-service near the shore';⁵⁵⁷ this return of fever months or years after the original infection is characteristic of some types of malaria (benign tertian and quartan).⁵⁵⁸

Table 6.6 Cases of fever in ships on the West African station, 1837-43

Diseases	No. of cases	Ratio per 1000 of mean strength	Sent to Hospital	Ratio per 1000 of mean Strength	Invalided	Ratio per 1000 of mean Strength	Died	Ratio per 1000 of mean Strength
Fevers: continued, remittent	2,356	252.5	187	20	56	6	452	48.4
Fevers: Intermittent	207	22.2	10		9		5	

Source: Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, pp.115-17.

As the Walcheren expedition proved, a malaria epidemic could be disastrous, and the Niger expedition of 1841 demonstrated this once again, when three paddle steamers set sail up the Niger, travelling less than 300 miles before 51 of the 145 Europeans who had embarked were dead of fever; the rest returned to save themselves.⁵⁵⁹

Quinine had been discovered and shown to be effective against fever in the seventeenth century, but it had still not been fully accepted by the nineteenth century, nor had the correct ways to use it been established. Lloyd and Coulter noted that the theory of miasmas causing fevers, put forward by Dr Richard Mead in the

⁵⁵⁷ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.119.

⁵⁵⁸ <http://martin.parasitology.mcgill.ca/jimspage/biol/plasmod.htm>, accessed 9 May 2004.

⁵⁵⁹ Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, p.161; TNA:TNA: PRO: ADM 101/82/1, Medical and Surgical Journal of His Majesty's Steam Ship *Albert*, 16 September 1840 to 11 October 1842.

mid-eighteenth century, was still 'generally accepted 100 years later'.⁵⁶⁰ Admiralty instructions of 1808 recommended the use of bark in wine as a prophylactic against fever, but influential surgeons continued to prefer bleeding. In 1831, James Boyle's *Medico-Historical Account of the Western Coast of Africa*, the first attempt to classify African fevers, included the advice that 'blood-letting is the best general practice in tropical fevers', although he did recommend quinine for remittent fevers.⁵⁶¹ Dr James Johnson, who wrote about the *Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions*, and Sir William Burnett, head of the medical department, both believed in letting blood in cases of fever, to restore the balance of the body.⁵⁶² Cresswell's experience in 1842 shows that this was often the treatment given on board ship, though in this case it seems not to have prevented recovery, when he had

a very bad illness I had the feavour [sic] very bad... They bleed me in the first part of my feavour. There were seventy in the list at one time, but we have not lost a single man by illness.⁵⁶³

Captain Owen of HMS *Leven*, on a surveying expedition in 1823 which suffered a bad fever epidemic, and who observed that the first fever cases were the most bitten by mosquitoes, had an assistant surgeon was so convinced of the importance of bloodletting that, according to Owen, he 'bled himself to death'. Without a surgeon, Owen relied much more on quinine, with much better results.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁰ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV p.175.

⁵⁶¹ Quoted in Lloyd & Coulter, op.cit, Vol IV, pp.178-9.

⁵⁶² Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p.180.

⁵⁶³ Harrod, *War, Ice and Piracy*, Letter to parents, 2 September 1842, p.28.

⁵⁶⁴ Watt, 'Health of Seamen', p.75.

Sir James Watt, however, has suggested that some surgeons were working to develop better treatments.⁵⁶⁵ The traditional treatment involved letting blood from the patient, purging and administering calomel (as with cholera), and only using quinine during the intermissions of the fever. There is no intermission in the most malignant form of malaria, so quinine was not given.⁵⁶⁶ On the Niger expedition of 1841, the senior surgeon only used quinine rarely, and never in high enough doses. At the same time, however, the surgeon of HMS *Wanderer* in 1840 was not letting blood from his patients, who had caught fever while pursuing slavers and their captives around the Gallinas river, and all the men in his care survived. Alexander Bryson, one of the editors of the annual health reports, endorsed quinine as a treatment for malaria in 1847, and in the 1850s it was finally recognised that it prevented as well as curing malaria.⁵⁶⁷ By 1865, it was claimed in the *Health of the Navy* report for that year that 'nobody bleeds now'.⁵⁶⁸

The cause of malaria was not discovered until 1880, a one-cell parasite called plasmodium.⁵⁶⁹ Until then surgeons continued to try to find explanations in the 'bad air' or miasmas that people were exposed to on the west African coast for the fevers which were caught there, yellow fever as well as malaria. This was their response to the epidemic of yellow fever that took place on HMS *Aetna* in 1838. *Aetna*,

⁵⁶⁵ Sir James Watt, 'The Health of Seamen in Anti-Slavery Squadrons', *Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. 88 No. 1., Feb 2002, p.75.

⁵⁶⁶ In malignant tertian malaria, although paroxysms begin every 48 hours, they normally last 24-36 hours, so allowing a very short recovery period, and therefore in contemporary treatments little opportunity to dose the patient with quinine. See <http://martin.parasitology.mcgill.ca/jimspage/biol/plasmod.htm>.

⁵⁶⁷ Watt, 'Health of Seamen', p.75

⁵⁶⁸ Quoted in Watt, 'Health of Seamen', p.75.

⁵⁶⁹ World Health Organisation, http://www.rbm.who.int/cmc_upload/0/000/015/372/RBMInfosheet_1.htm

commanded by Lieutenant Vidal, was on the West African station to complete the surveying work initially done by HMS *Leven* under Captain Owen and Vidal in *Barracouta* 1823-26, a commission which also suffered badly from fever.⁵⁷⁰ One hundred and one men of HMS *Aetna* were diagnosed by Surgeon John Coulter as having yellow fever, and 24 of them died.⁵⁷¹

Yellow fever is now defined as 'a tropical disease caused by an arbovirus and transmitted by mosquitoes, characterized by fever and jaundice and leading to degeneration of the liver and kidneys'.⁵⁷² In the mid-nineteenth century diagnosis was extremely difficult, and some surgeons refused to acknowledge yellow fever as a separate disease at all.⁵⁷³ As well as the yellow fever Coulter identified other fevers among the African Boys on board *Aetna*, which may have been malaria, or first stage yellow fever which did not go on to the second stage. One episode of yellow fever confers lifetime immunity, so some of the African crew members may well have been immune from previous exposure. It is not clear from the record how many of the yellow fever cases were identified during the first phase of the fever, so the death rate of nearly 25 percent overall on his figures, compared to the modern percentage which would be expected to be about 7.5 percent, is not reliable. The death rate may well have been higher than necessary, however, since Coulter bled all the patients, in line with contemporary practice. The outbreak started on 10 December 1837 and the last man to develop the fever was admitted to the sick list on 11 February 1838; the last two men were not discharged to duty until 9 March (Edward Nichols, admitted

⁵⁷⁰ Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, p.158.

⁵⁷¹ Journal of HM Surveying Ship *Aetna*, John Coulter Surgeon, 4 October 1837 to 13 November 1838, TNA: PRO: ADM 101/81/2.

⁵⁷² *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2 vols., 1993, Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁵⁷³ Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, Vol. IV, p.178.

to the sick list on 26 January 1838, aged 22, Gunner's Crew, and William Robinson, aged 30, Marine, admitted on 26 December 1837).

John Coulter, Surgeon on the *Aetna*, in his report of 1838 wrote that 'the Endemic [his underlining] from which they so severely suffered, cannot be attributed to either undue exposure to the sun or Night dews, and must rest solely upon one or both of the follow causes, Viz, either contagion or Miasmita.'⁵⁷⁴ He thought it possible that the yellow fever on *Aetna* 'might have been propagated by the African boys, as they were distributed in Messes with the Ships company, and on the second day of thier (sic) arrival symptoms of fever began to appear amongst them...'⁵⁷⁵ Coulter also considered that

Miasm appeared to be a fruitful source of disease, as the dry season had just began, and the low extensive swampy banks of the Sierra Leone River covered with mangroves, exposed to the rays of a vertical sun ...offering a fresh source for the evaporation of decayed animal and vegetable matter ... the land wind ... [presents] a foggy appearance, accompanied by a foetid smell, producing an unpleasant sensation in those who are within the pale of its influence, and no doubt being the principal cause of the vast mortality which annually takes place on board of Merchantmen in that River.⁵⁷⁶

He was puzzled by the way that epidemics did not occur every year, but though this

might incline us to look for some other agent than Marsh Effluvia, without placing due importance to an exhalation of that kind, or admitting it to be capable perhaps from increased concentration, or rendered more obnoxious from some other cause, to propagate Yellow Fever, as well as the Intermittents and Remittents of other years. That it possesses this power need not be doubted, and when once established from its highly contagious nature soon becomes capable of propagating itself.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 101/81/2, Medical journal, HM Surveying Ship *Aetna*, John Coulter Surgeon, 4 October 1837 to 13 November 1838, General Remarks, p.25.

⁵⁷⁵ *Aetna* medical journal, General Remarks, p.1.

⁵⁷⁶ *Aetna* medical journal, General Remarks, pp.2-3.

⁵⁷⁷ *Aetna* medical journal, General Remarks, p.3.

Bleeding was, he believed, by far the most effective treatment to offer. He gave details in the medical journal of ten cases of fever, six resulting in death, which he considered typical.

From three to seven days was the extent of their existence (sic), but more died on the fourth and fifth day than at any other time, Black Vomit was nearly a constant attendant upon the whole, but none died without (first) yellowness of Conjunctive (?) and afterwards of the whole body, generally some hours before dissolution ...⁵⁷⁸

Other symptoms included dark blood in vomit and faeces, 'spasms, restlessness, and low muttering delirium', but he believed that the violence of these symptoms was reduced if 'depletion [i.e. blood-letting] at first was carried to its full extent, viz, to syncope or the relief of the symptoms', and the chance of recovery was much improved.⁵⁷⁹ Some of the patients developed dysentery when they were recovering from the fever, but he treated them with 'the Scorbutic mixture' (presumably lemon juice), and this had 'a most happy effect'.

Huge efforts were made on board HMS *Aetna* to get rid of the contagion.

We hauled to the wind for better ventilation, stoves were constantly below during the day, the Ships Company Mess'd on deck. The decks both Main and Lower were frequently whitewashed (a practice which we adopted on our first arrival on the Coast) chloride of Lime mixed with the whitewash sprinkled in the well, and buckets were by the sick. Notwithstanding every exertion the contagion continued to spread, to such an alarming extent that we were obliged to give up our destination and steer for Ascension, on my recommendation to the Commanding Officer.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ *Aetna* medical journal, General Remarks, p.4.

⁵⁷⁹ *Aetna* medical journal, General Remarks, p.5.

⁵⁸⁰ *Aetna* medical journal, General Remarks, p.6.

The ship did leave the station for Ascension Island, which did put a stop to the outbreak; it is now known that the mosquitoes do not breed there.

Venereal infections

The traditional fecklessness of sailors was sometimes blamed by the naval authorities for the diseases they caught, as with six cases of fever in HMS *Lily* in 1841, 'contracted on shore by men who drank to excess while on leave' on Madagascar,⁵⁸¹ and the comments of Wilson in the health reports that seamen and marines were

seldom permitted to land, either on duty or liberty, on any part of the African coast, as experience has shown that they have not sufficient prudence to refrain from the intemperate use of intoxicating liquors, or to avoid exposing themselves at unseasonable times, and in unwholesome places, to the influence of weather, and the emanations from the soil, which, either separately or combined, produce the endemic fevers peculiar to the country...⁵⁸²

In the case of venereal infections such as syphilis and gonorrhoea, however, the men's immoral and reckless behaviour was considered far more obviously the cause of their illness. Lloyd and Coulter quote a pamphlet by an Evangelical Admiral, Edward Hawker, published in 1822, which described

a very large and low room with 500 men and probably 300 or 400 women of the vilest description shut up in it, and giving way to every excess of debauchery that the grossest passions of human nature can lead them to; ... [this is] the deck of a 74-gun ship upon the night of her arrival in port. Add to this, that many of the poor wretches have dreadful diseases, which they communicate to the men...⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.50.

⁵⁸² *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.63.

⁵⁸³ *A Statement of Certain Immoral Practices prevailing in H.M. Navy*, Admiral Edward Hawker, 1822, quoted in Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and The Navy* Vol. IV, p.197. Hawkins criticised officers for similar behaviour as well, if more privately indulged.

In the eighteenth century, the belief that men had brought such diseases on themselves meant that they were charged 15 shillings for the cost of their treatment for venereal infections, but this was abolished in 1795 in the Royal Navy, since it was recognised that it discouraged men from seeking treatment, leading to long-term health problems, and in any case the payments were difficult for surgeons to collect.⁵⁸⁴ Royal Navy seamen in the nineteenth century were thus much better off than their counterparts in merchant ships, where captains and companies were still fining their crews for catching venereal infections and charging for the drugs to treat it in the 1920s.⁵⁸⁵ The Admiralty could not afford to treat sailors in the same way, since it was much more concerned with retaining men once recruited.

Admiral Hawker's description may have been exaggerated, but if sailors had a propensity to visit prostitutes when in port, it was one they shared with many others in Victorian England. There were at least 2,828 brothels in London in 1859, quite possibly a great many more, and 80,000 prostitutes according to the *Lancet*. Streetwalkers were as common in areas such as Bank and Haymarket as they were in places which sailors frequented near the docks and the river.⁵⁸⁶ It was claimed in 1824 by the author of a pamphlet on sexual infections that there were 20,000 prostitutes in Portsmouth. In 1863, the police recorded a more believable figure of 1,791 known prostitutes, one per 53 of the local population.⁵⁸⁷ One of the motivations behind the mid-nineteenth century campaigns to set up Sailors' Homes, where sailors could stay

⁵⁸⁴ Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine and The Navy Vol. III, 1714-1815*, pp.357-8.

⁵⁸⁵ Lesley A. Hall, 'What shall we do with the poxy sailor? The problem of venereal diseases in the British mercantile marine, 1860-1950', *Journal of Maritime Research* October 2004, <http://www.jmr.nmm.ac.uk/server/show/conJmrArticle.179>.

⁵⁸⁶ Porter, *London*, p.364.

⁵⁸⁷ Pamphlet quoted in Lloyd & Coulter, *Medicine & the Navy 1200-1900*, Vol IV, p.198.

when in port, was to provide them with alternatives to spending all their time in pubs, or staying with prostitutes, which otherwise were often the main places on offer to them when they had leave. While ships were preparing for sea there were also opportunities to pick up an infection. On HMS *Arrogant*, while she was fitting out at Portsmouth in March and April 1849, the surgeon John Rees recorded several cases of syphilis, including Robert McEvoy, who had 'a chancre on the penis and a suppurating bubo in the left groin', and Andrew Armstrong, who had two buboes. Both men were sent to Haslar Hospital. Once *Arrogant* was at sea, no new cases were recorded.⁵⁸⁸

Syphilis is caused by a corkscrew-shaped bacterium called *treponema pallidum* and is acquired by direct contact with someone in the first two stages of the disease which can last up to two years. The initial symptoms include an ulcer and a skin rash. The treatment on offer in the nineteenth century was mercury, which in fact did not cure the infection; instead it entered its dormant phase, which would eventually result in tertiary syphilis in the person infected. Since the progress of the disease was not understood, tertiary syphilis was not always recognised and might be believed to be a disease of the brain. Gonorrhoea is also a bacterial infection, and causes urethral infections in men, though it is often asymptomatic in women. It is less serious than syphilis, but could cause chronic conditions especially if hygiene was poor.⁵⁸⁹

Unsurprisingly, the subject of prostitution, sex or sexual infection is not mentioned in sailors' letters and memoirs. Midshipman Comber, for example, included

⁵⁸⁸ John Rees, Surgeon's Journal, HMS *Arrogant*, 4 March 1849-31 March 1850, TNA: PRO: ADM 101/87/2.

⁵⁸⁹ Hall, 'What shall we do with the poxy sailor?'

comments on the men's drinking habits in his journal, intended for his family to read, but never mentioned any other habits they might have while on shore.⁵⁹⁰

Similarly, although J M Powell wrote to his mother in 1805 that 'This is the place where Blasphemy reigns triumphant', and admitted to being drunk in another of 1810, there was no mention of any other sins in his letters.⁵⁹¹ The evidence of the medical statistics, however, shows that it remained a serious problem in the Royal Navy, particularly for ships serving on the home station.

As Table 6.1 for HMS *Acorn* (p.173 above) shows, only one man was recorded sick with syphilis or gonorrhoea during their time on the Cape station in 1839-41. In contrast, among the men serving in ships on the home station in 1837-43, there were 2,551 cases of venereal disease and infection, including 1,456 of syphilis, a ratio of 46.1 per 1,000 of mean strength (between 3,500 and 5,000 men were working for the navy in each of those years). The editor, Dr John Wilson, commented that:

Syphilitic diseases were not so numerous [presumably compared to previous returns; unfortunately these are not available] by nearly one-half: from this it might be assumed, and there are other sources of information which lead to the same conclusion, that this disease is becoming both less common and less severe than it was formerly amongst the more degraded classes of society ... There is also a considerable decrease in the ratio of gonorrhoeal attacks.⁵⁹²

This decrease did not continue; in 1856 there were 168 cases of venereal infection per 1000 cases of illness, and in 1862 125 per 1,000,⁵⁹³ though the numbers did then start to fall.

⁵⁹⁰ *Midshipman Comber's Journal*, e.g. entry for Sunday 26 May 1839, King George, Australia, p.80.

⁵⁹¹ NMM:AGC/P/17, letters of J M Powell, 1805-1810, Sunday June 2nd 1805.

⁵⁹² *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy*, 1837-43, p.201.

⁵⁹³ Lloyd & Coulter, Vol. IV, p. 200.

Table 6.7 Cases of venereal disease and infection, Home Station 1837-43

	no. of cases	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength	sent to hospital	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength	ratio Invalided	ratio died per 1,000 of mean strength	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength
gonorrhoea	1010	31.9	91	2.8	1		
stricture	85	2.6	38	1.2	2	1	
syphilis	1456	46.1	537	10.8	2	3	
Total	2551	80.6	666	14.8	5	4	

Source: Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43, p.198.

Again in contrast to the Navy's home ports, on the north coast of Spain, where between 2,000 and 3,000 men were serving in the period 1837-40, the ratios were much lower, as Table 6.8 below shows. Dr Wilson claimed that the comparative rarity of syphilis and gonorrhoea on this station 'speaks well for the moral condition and habits of the lower orders in the country'.⁵⁹⁴ It is not clear whether he means by this that sailors could not find sexual partners when ashore, or that they did, but these were uninfected and therefore morally superior, or that they did, but the infections which some sailors almost certainly passed on did not become general, suggesting that they remained with their original partner.

Table 6.8 Venereal infections on the North Coast of Spain station 1837-40

	no. of cases	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength	sent to hospital	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength	ratio Invalided	ratio died	ratio per 1,000 of mean strength
gonorrhoea	194	19.9	8-	-	-	-	-
stricture	36	3.7	12	1.2-	-	-	-
syphilis	229	23.5	12	1.2-	-	-	-
Total	459	47.1	32	2.4			

Source: Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43, p.30

⁵⁹⁴ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43, p.33.*

Of the home ports, Plymouth apparently was considered particularly bad. In the health reports for ships on the home station in 1839 it was noted that

Syphilitic and gonorrhoeal affections were most numerous in such vessels as the *Hercules*, *Implacable* and *Blenheim*, whose crews had frequent communication with the shore at Plymouth. Of the former, there were 312 cases, 81 of which were sent on shore for hospital treatment, and three, in which the disease had become constitutional, were invalided, and discharged out of the service. On referring to the returns, it is sufficiently remarkable that an increase in the number of these affections almost invariably took place in every ship of the force soon after her arrival in one of the home ports, but the greatest number of cases were contracted at Plymouth.⁵⁹⁵

Referring back to the Cape station, where HMS *Acorn* was serving, among the men serving in the ships there in 1837-43 the ratios recorded were of 27 per 1000 of mean strength for syphilis and 15.2 for gonorrhoea,⁵⁹⁶ despite having 'frequent communication with the shore at the Cape and at the Mauritius'.⁵⁹⁷

One negative inference could be drawn from these figures. Some sailors must have been carriers of syphilitic infection, as contemporary treatments could not cure it. Since the authorities expected and found sexually transmitted infections immediately after ships were in port, and there were not new infections once they are at sea, this suggests that sexual contact among men at sea was rare. This is of course complicated by the fact that men might have been reluctant to present for treatment in such a case (this was probably often true for venereal infections, but especially if they had any idea an infection had been caught this way); by the fact that syphilis can be caught from non-sexual contact; and by the fact that it is impossible to assess how many men might have been syphilis carriers. The figures in the tables are for cases of

⁵⁹⁵ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, pp.226-7.

⁵⁹⁶ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.58.

⁵⁹⁷ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.61.

infection, not individuals; some men may have been repeat cases, or cases of syphilis recurring in a later stage. For example, on the Cape station, three men were invalided back to England with syphilis because 'the constitution had become tainted', which may well be a reference to its later stages rather than initial infection.⁵⁹⁸

As Lesley Hall notes, unattached men with high occupational mobility are always at high risk of sexually transmitted infections, and tend to be blamed for contracting them.⁵⁹⁹ The Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s were intended to protect the army and navy, however much their implementation was ineffective (not least because of the difficulty of diagnosis, and the lack of useful treatments) and resented. Comments in the *Health of the Navy* reports about 'Ships employed variously' in 1837 indicate the kind of thinking that lay behind the Acts.

Compared with other sections of the naval force serving on foreign stations, the amount of venereal disease in these vessels was remarkably large, and it is to be regretted that by far the greater number of the cases were contracted in our own sea-ports, where unfortunately, from the want of hospitals for the reception of infected prostitutes, the disease is much more common than it is in the majority of foreign towns, where there is much less pretension to purity of living: out of 274 cases, 67 were sent on shore to the naval hospitals, where, it is to be presumed, they recovered, as there is no death or invaliding under this head.⁶⁰⁰

Sailors of the Royal Navy were at least offered care for these diseases by their surgeons and hospitals, as with their other ill-health; men in the merchant marine were far less likely to be offered treatment, especially for something which was considered to be their own fault, resulting from their immoral behaviour.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁸ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, p.61.

⁵⁹⁹ Hall, 'What shall we do with the poxy sailor?'

⁶⁰⁰ *Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy, 1837-43*, Ships employed variously, 1837 reports, p.211.

⁶⁰¹ Hall, 'What shall we do with the poxy sailor?'

Conclusion

Serving with the Royal Navy in the nineteenth century did involve a higher risk of mortality or disability than, for example, working on the land. One of the more common accidents, falling from the rigging, was usually fatal unless the sailor missed the deck and fell into the sea, when they risked drowning instead. These two causes accounted for 45 percent of deaths on board when the reason is known. A less serious accident could leave one disabled. Fever was also a major cause of death, particularly on the West African station. Sailors were not alone in having a higher than average risk of mortality for their age group, though, and compared to the general population, received far more health care when they were ill or injured. Surgeons in the Navy were also often doing their best to develop new treatments, and the system of reports meant that these could then be passed on to other medical officers if they worked. Sailors' families, if living in towns like Portsmouth or London, were as much at risk as they were of diseases such as cholera, and their life expectancy would be little higher. The conventional beginning to all the letters home I have seen, hoping their correspondent is well as they are, 'thank God for it', reflects the real uncertainty they must have felt, not only about their own lives, but those of their families at home as well.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰² E.g. John Ford to Sarah Evans, 13 July 1845, papers of John Ford and family, RNM 353/85 (13).

CHAPTER 7:

At the End of the Commission

...the case is altered we are going to Malta for a change. I dare say you would be very happy of the Ship coming home I should Be the same myself. But I expect it will Be some time first.

John Ford to Sarah Evans, April 1847⁶⁰³

Although sailors had a choice about which ship they entered, once they had done so they were subject to the Articles of War and the Admiralty Regulations, and were not entitled to end their employment without the agreement of the commanding officer before the ship was paid off. Nonetheless, men left the Royal Navy all the time, individually and in groups, with consent and without. The largest numbers leaving together were of course at the end of a commission, when a ship would normally return to her original port, pay the crew their outstanding wages and dismiss them. Four hundred and fifty-seven men were still aboard HMS *Princess Charlotte* in July 1841, for example, when she returned from the Mediterranean to Portsmouth; they received their pay and left the ship.⁶⁰⁴ Over the course of the four and a half year commission, however, a total of 773 men had served in *Princess Charlotte*, so 306 had already left the ship by one means or another. Tracing the men after the end of a period of service is difficult. The service records compiled by the Navy Pay Office are organised by surname and date of application for a pension, gratuity or medal, so

⁶⁰³ RNM 353/85 (18) John Ford to Sarah Evans, HMS *Superb*, Lisbon, 28 April 1847.

⁶⁰⁴ The only ship in the sample for which this did not happen was HMS *Skipjack*, because she was shipwrecked on 1 June 1841 off Grand Cayman. The ship's officers and men returned to George Town, Grand Cayman, and as always when a ship was lost, a court martial. This found 'no actual blame is to be imputed' to her officers and crew, and a letter was sent requesting that the crew be paid. TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9885, final section.

do not lend themselves to finding large numbers of men.⁶⁰⁵ They have therefore only been checked for some individuals. In many cases the men simply disappear from the records. Unless they transferred directly to another ship, later service is extremely difficult to establish.

For some of those leaving *Princess Charlotte* in 1841, it would have been the last time that they were paid off. Niel Ennis, the Ship's Cook, aged about 57 by that point, or John Flinn AB, about 50, may have retired as too old to serve further. Others may have chosen to work elsewhere, perhaps in the merchant navy or on shore. The muster books do provide some information on when a sailor's service ended and whether it was from desertion, sickness, a change of ship or discharge from the service during or at the end of the commission. This chapter examines the records of discharges to consider the reasons why sailors left the Navy.

Discharged at request

In some cases commanding officers did agree to discharge men during a commission. The muster books in the sample list 104 men whose discharge is said to be at 'request', although it is not always clear whose request this was.⁶⁰⁶ Thirty-two men were specifically listed as discharged from the service at their own request. One of these men, Salvo Baldaqui, was taken on in 1843 from Malta, his birthplace, as Gunroom Steward in HMS *Virago*, and discharged back to Malta in 1846 with a 'very

⁶⁰⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 29, Officers and Ratings Service Records, Series II, 1802-1919.

⁶⁰⁶ This excludes men marked 'R', which is often noted as being done 'by request' of the Commander in Chief, and men requesting discharge after completing their agreed period of service.

good' certificate.⁶⁰⁷ Clearly it was acceptable practice to discharge men who had been recruited locally before the ship returned to home waters. Other men, however, were discharged away from their home. When a ship was still serving in home waters, they would of course be able to return easily if they wished. For example, James Stewart of Gosport, Gunner's Mate, was recruited in Portsmouth for HMS *Espoir* in January 1834 and discharged at his own request in November 1834 in Woolwich.⁶⁰⁸ There were men, however, for whom getting back to their home might have been more of a problem, such as Robert Lecky, Commander's Cook in HMS *Alecto*, who was recruited in Woolwich in 1839, but discharged in Malta in January 1840 'at his own request'.⁶⁰⁹ Lecky was from Shadwell in London and it is not clear whether he was planning to stay in Malta. Of the ships in the sample, proportionally the most men listed as discharged at their own request were in *Espoir* (with a complement of 44) under Lieutenant Commander Charles Riley. Twenty-two were discharged out of a total of 88 who served in that ship.

'Being useless'

Others were discharged from the Navy because they were unable to perform their duties adequately. Fourteen men in the sample were discharged with disgrace, two of them after it had been found they had already been dismissed the service with

⁶⁰⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/9281, HMS *Virago* muster book, Salvo Baldaqui Ship's Company no. 107.

⁶⁰⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9067, HMS *Espoir*, James Stewart Ship's Company no.1.

⁶⁰⁹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7491, HMS *Alecto*, Robert Lecky, Ship's Company no.8.

disgrace, one from HMS *Romney* and one from HMS *Blonde*.⁶¹⁰ Two other men, David Finn and James Judges, were discharged 'with disgrace for foul, beastly & disgusting practices' from HMS *Castor* at Auckland on 17 February 1847, though what these practices were is not specified.⁶¹¹ John Coombe, a First Class Boy in HMS *Caledonia*, was discharged in April 1841 after five months' service for 'imbecility of mind contracted previous to entry in the service'.⁶¹² William Dunning, a Gunroom Steward in HMS *Virago*, was dismissed the service in October 1846 after only a month's service, because he was a 'drunkard'.

Others appear to have been simply incompetent. William Andridge, recruited into HMS *Acorn* in November 1842 from HMS *Iris*, was rated Landsman, and discharged the following April, 'being useless'.⁶¹³ His certificate was 'very bad'. William Phelps of HMS *Comet* was discharged in Plymouth in November 1840 after nearly four months' service 'as useless', with an 'indifferent' certificate.⁶¹⁴ Those discharged as useless might have spent some time being punished before they were sent ashore, as had happened to John Young, a Boy in HMS *Amazon* under Captain Stopford. His punishment, of being put on low rations under guard for ten days, which eventually

⁶¹⁰ John Dyer and Michael Sparks, both recruited as ABs and discharged from HMS *Skipjack*, Michael Sparks in 1837 (TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9882). John Dyer had been promoted to Gunner's Mate four months before he was discharged in Halifax, 'he having stated that he was D with Disgrace from the service in the *Blonde*', TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9884.

⁶¹¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/414.

⁶¹² TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8825. If the illness was contracted before he began his service, he would not be eligible for financial support.

⁶¹³ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443

⁶¹⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8906-8

put him in the sick list, was one of those which attracted censure at Captain Stopford's court martial in 1847.⁶¹⁵

Figure 7.1 below shows the various reasons given for discharge during a commission, of the 2504 men in the sample to whom this happened. In some cases this is simply 'per order'. Where it is clear that this is because a local man was being discharged before the ship left that port this is indicated as 'resident', a term occasionally used in the muster books. Those who were found to have deserted from elsewhere, in one case, from the army, are shown as 'deserter', and those who deserted from the ship in the sample as 'ran'. Apprentices were not allowed to enlist for the navy, and eight boys were returned to shore because they were already apprenticed.

⁶¹⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 1/5586, see above, chapter 3, p.127.

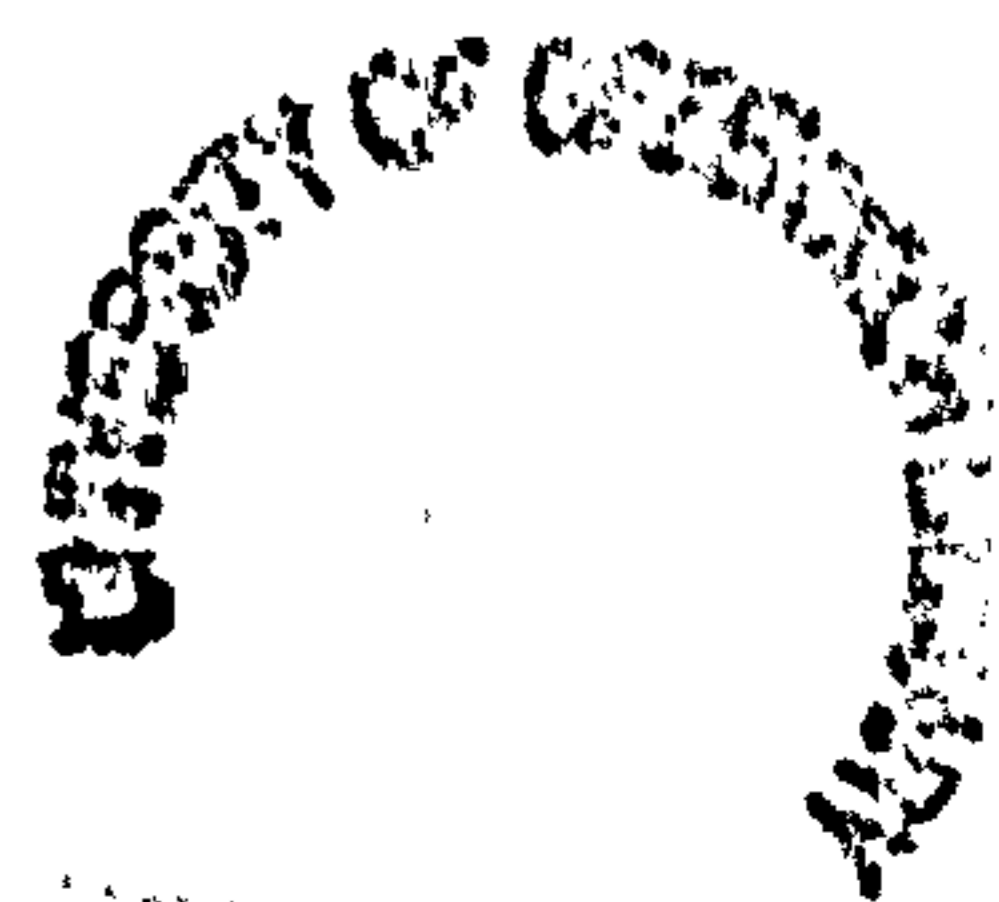
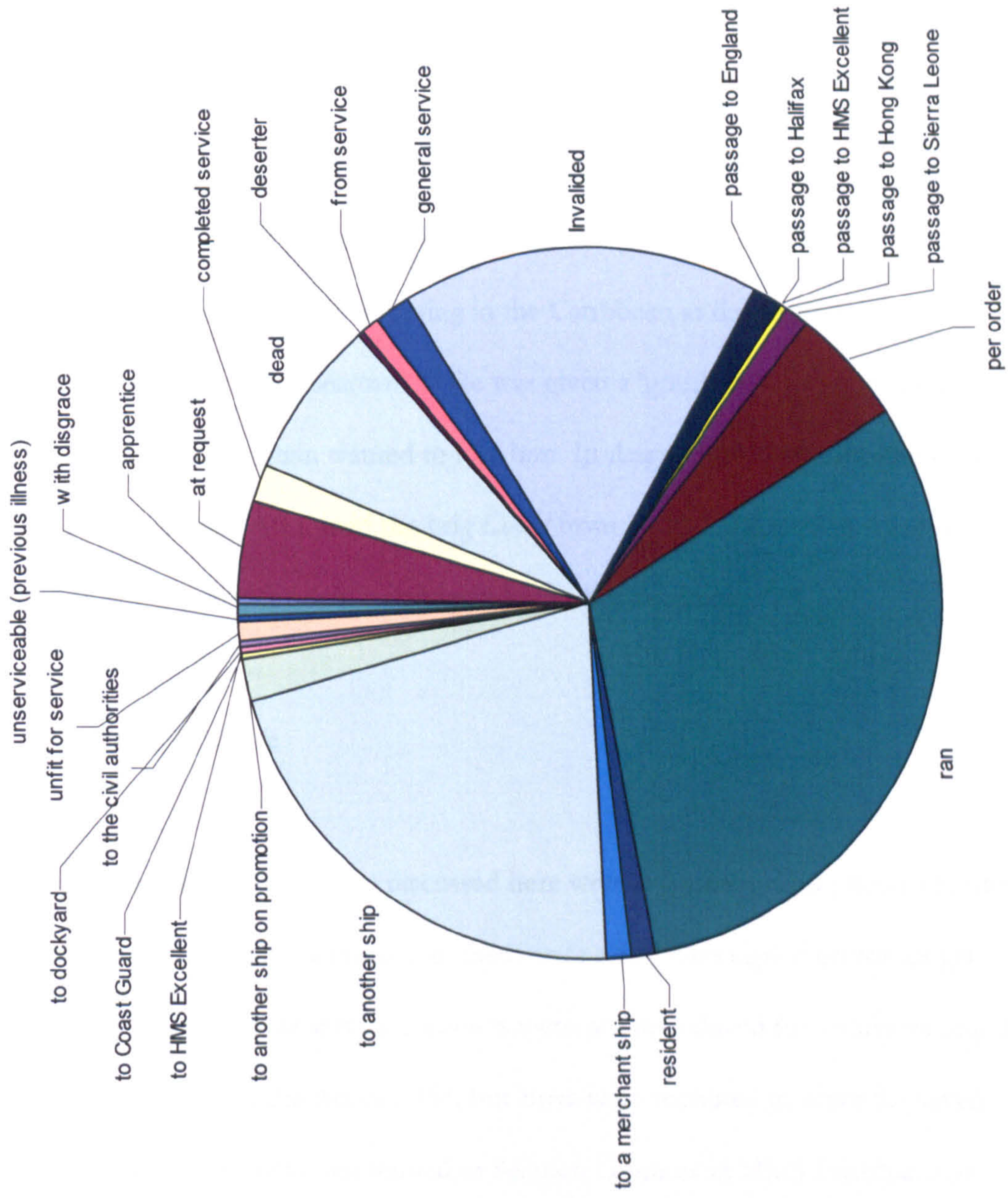


Figure 7.1 Reasons for discharge before the end of the commission



In unusual circumstances

In a few cases there were unusual reasons for the discharge. Four men were given up to the civil authorities, though no detail is given. One man, included in the overall 'passage to England' group in Figure 7.6, was 'released from Halifax jail by the Mayor and allowed to proceed to England'.⁶¹⁶ Twenty-eight men were discharged into various merchant ships, to help sail them home. These included Charles Headon, Quartermaster in HMS *Albatross*, sent into the merchant vessel *Naiad* (HMS *Albatross* was serving in the Caribbean at the time) in June 1843, she 'having applied for a seaman'.⁶¹⁷ He was given a 'good' certificate, so there is no suggestion his captain wanted to lose him. In August 1836, 'by captain's order', George McKay AB joined the brig *Comet* from HMS *Rattlesnake* in Australia, 'she being in distress for men to navigate her to her destination'.⁶¹⁸

Completed service

Although most of the men discussed here were volunteers who joined a particular ship for a particular commission, there were a few who signed on for longer periods. Continuous service contracts were not introduced for sailors joining the Royal Navy until the Act of 1853, but Boys were recruited to serve for seven years, and those who had trained as Seamen Gunners in HMS *Excellent* were expected to work for five or seven years, and ideally for longer. The Seamen

⁶¹⁶ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/10105, Peter Conelly, AB, HMS *Winchester*.

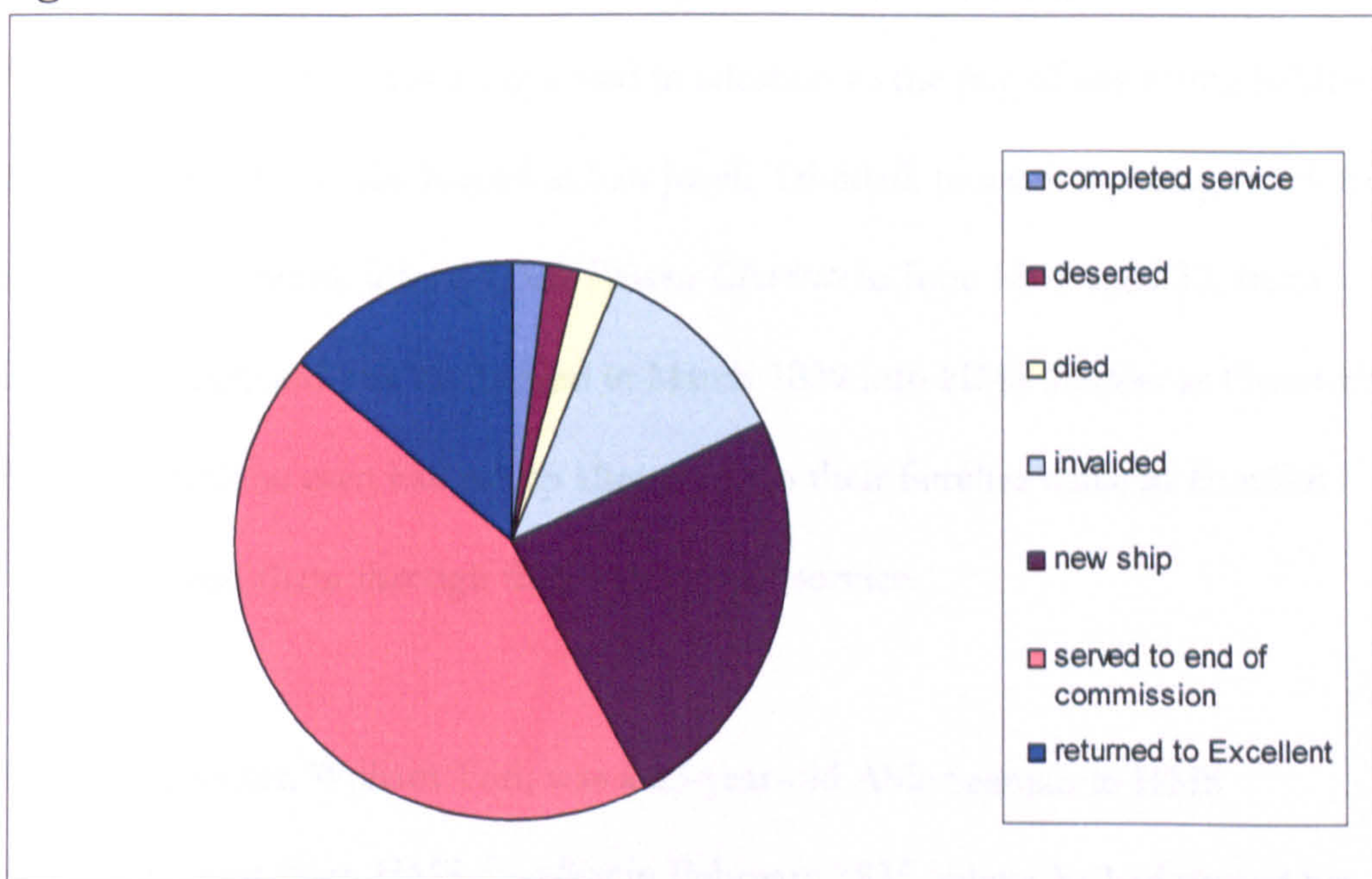
⁶¹⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7486.

⁶¹⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9628.

Gunners only formed a small part of the whole sample of adult sailors, 1.47 percent. They benefited, however, from the new provision of training by the Admiralty, and the desire to retain the men who had experienced it. They were paid an extra two shillings a month for the first five years, increasing to four shillings in the second five years and five in the third five years.

As discussed in chapter 3 (Careers and Training), in this sample there were fifty Seamen Gunners and other men trained in HMS *Excellent* (rated as AB Seaman Gunner, or as Gunner's Crew or Mate). Figure 7.2 shows their various destinations as a proportion of the group, and the high retention rate for these men, with 34 of them working to the end of the commission or going to another ship.

Figure 7.2: Destinations of men trained on HMS *Excellent*



Six of the men were invalided, one died and one deserted during the commissions included in the sample. Joseph Urquhart, Gunner's Mate in HMS *Albatross* from June 1842 to March 1844, was discharged into HMS *Imaum* to await a passage home, 'having completed 10 Years continuous service'.⁶¹⁹ Twenty-two men stayed on board their ship until the end of its commission, rather than being discharged directly into another ship.

Twelve Seaman Gunners were transferred into another ship before the end of the commission, three on promotion, and seven returned to HMS *Excellent*, either for further training or to act as trainers themselves. These included, for example, Joseph Phillips, who joined HMS *Acorn* in March 1839 from *Excellent* as AB (Seaman Gunner). He was shortly promoted to Captain of the Afterguard, then Captain's Coxswain in July 1839 and Gunner's Mate in November 1840, earning £2 2s a month in the latter two ratings, plus at least two shillings a month as a Seaman Gunner (this was always paid in addition to the pay of any rating held).⁶²⁰ In May 1843 he was discharged at San Josef, Trinidad, to await a passage back to *Excellent*. John Smith joined HMS *Princess Charlotte* in June 1837 aged 32, from HMS *Excellent*, and was discharged in March 1839 into HMS *Scorpion* as Gunner's Mate. Both these men had set up allotments to their families while in *Excellent*, and continued them through their subsequent service.

The one deserter, William Turl, was a 25-year-old Able Seaman in HMS *Rattlesnake*, sent from HMS *Excellent* in February 1835, where he had passed his

⁶¹⁹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7486, Joseph Urquhart, Ship's Company no. 64.

⁶²⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 7/911, p.73.

Seaman Gunner examination two days before.⁶²¹ He deserted in Sydney in August 1837. He does not appear to have returned to the service, or at least to have applied for any pension subsequently, as he does not appear in the service records. It was *Rattlesnake*'s last call at Sydney on that voyage, however, so he would have been unable to rejoin his ship even if he had wanted to. One other Seaman Gunner, Richard Jones in HMS *Actaeon*, was fined £1 twice for straggling, but returned to the ship and served until she was paid off, receiving a 'good' certificate.⁶²²

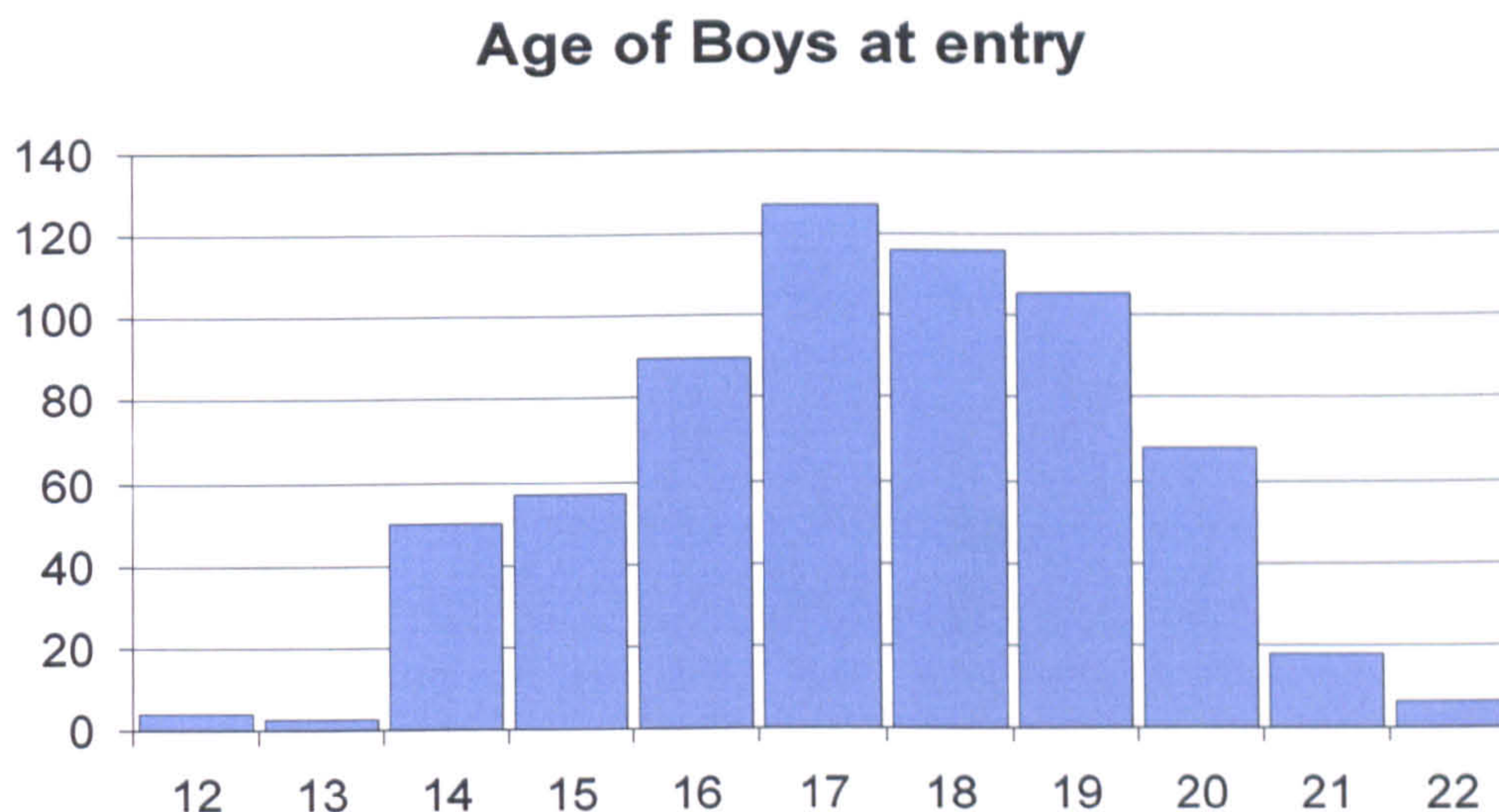
Boys were also expected to stay in the Navy for a fixed period, so that it could benefit from having trained them. Those aged up to 17 were normally taken on as Second Class Boys, to be promoted to First Class at 17 or 18, those aged 17 or 18 when they joined were normally rated First Class. They were taken on for seven years, although if they joined at 14, as some did, and went into the Ship's Company at 20, this only allowed for a year of service as an adult. Certainly the 1859 Manning Commission, as previously discussed, believed this to be a serious problem in the Navy after the introduction of continuous service.⁶²³ However, as Figure 7.3 shows, 49 percent of first entry Boys were joining at 18 or more, 68 percent at 17 or more, so the Navy could expect at least five years' adult service from most of these.

⁶²¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9625-9, William Turl, Ship's Company no. 75.

⁶²² TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8612-8614, Richard Jones, Ship's Company no. 61.

⁶²³ See above, chapter 2, p.98.

Figure 7.3: Age of Boys at entry



There are a few instances in the sample of men being discharged having served their time after joining as Boys. Joseph Harris, for example, joined HMS *Skipjack* as an Able Seaman in March 1831, aged 20, with previous service in HMS *Winchester*.⁶²⁴ Unless he had only been in *Winchester* for a very short period, he would have served in her as a Boy, since 20 was the age for being given an adult rating. Having been disgraced to Ordinary and restored to AB, then promoted to Boatswain's Mate in January 1834, he was discharged on 9 June 1834 'from service, on order and request having completed his time', which suggests he had joined the Navy aged about 17 or 18. HMS *Skipjack* was at Port Royal, Jamaica, at the time, and discharged two other men, Hugh McNolly and John Taylor, at the same time and for the same reason. They were entitled to their passage back to England, if they wanted it, though only Hugh McNolly has that listed against his name in the muster book.

⁶²⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9878, Joseph Harris, Ship's Company no.99.

In the whole sample, 43 men are listed as discharged having completed their service:

Table 7.1: Discharged having completed service

From:

Alecto	2
Skipjack	29
Castor	5
Albatross	1
Lapwing	6
Total	43

HMS *Skipjack* has by far the largest number of such discharges, reflecting its extremely long commission from 1829 to 1841. These include James Devonport, AB, from Gosport, who joined in June 1837 from HMS *Melville*, and was discharged with a good certificate in December 1838.⁶²⁵ Henry Ward AB, also from Gosport and recruited from HMS *Melville*, was discharged, 'very good', at the same time.⁶²⁶ Hugh McClean, AB, born in the Congo and recruited in 1834 in Belize with previous service in HMS *Vernon*, was discharged in January 1837.⁶²⁷ The period of time they had signed up for is not indicated. It is clear, however, that Martin Henry Nelson of Hanover, recruited in Jamaica in August 1835 as his first entry into the service, and discharged in October 1838 'having completed his

⁶²⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9878-85, HMS *Skipjack* muster books, James Devonport, Ship's Company no. 242.

⁶²⁶ HMS *Skipjack*, Henry Ward, Ship's Company no. 240.

⁶²⁷ HMS *Skipjack*, Hugh McClean, Ship's Company no. 168.

period of servitude', had only signed on for three years.⁶²⁸ This was a normal period of time for a whole commission, so three-year commitments would not have made much difference to those joining the Navy. The two men discharged from HMS *Alecto*, William Kingsford as Quarter Master and Richard Purver or Purves as Boatswain's Mate then AB, had completed five years service.⁶²⁹ This was the time suggested by a Manning Bill in 1835 as the maximum anyone could be expected to serve in the Navy without the option of leaving.⁶³⁰

There were also a few men who volunteered for general service with the fleet, or to transfer to another ship. For example, Richard Jones, AB in *Skipjack*, was discharged in October 1837 'for general service'. As his certificate was 'indifferent', Lieutenant Robinson, in command at the time, may have been happy to lose him.⁶³¹ Several men volunteered for general service from HMS *Princess Charlotte* when she left the Mediterranean station in June 1841. Edward Marshall was a Seaman Gunner, who could have returned to Portsmouth and been assigned to another ship there, but volunteered instead to remain on the station and was discharged into HMS *Stromboli*. He had been a First Entry into the Navy, brought out to join HMS *Princess Charlotte* in April 1839. Michael Collins and Walter Kell, First Class Boys, and therefore under contract to stay with the Navy for their seven years, were both discharged into HMS *Ceylon*, and another Michael Collins, also a First Class Boy, went into HMS *Daphne*. John Mackenzie, at that point Ordinary Seaman, though he had previously been rated AB and Carpenter's

⁶²⁸ HMS *Skipjack*, Martin Henry Nelson, Ship's Company no. 198.

⁶²⁹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7491, HMS *Alecto* muster books, William Kingsford Ship's Company no. 48, Richard Purves Ship's Company no. 36.

⁶³⁰ 1835 (48) III.507 (original version), 1835 (320) III.517 (amended by Cttee), mf 38.25.

⁶³¹ HMS *Skipjack*, Richard Jones, Ship's Company no. 234.

Crew, joined HMS *Ceylon* as well. Three others were sent to HMS *Hydra*, and Henry Wills, a Second Class Boy, to HMS *Talbot* 'to await a vacancy'. All received 'good' certificates.⁶³² The majority of men, however, as mentioned above, returned with the ship to Portsmouth to be discharged.

Desertion

For those who wanted to leave their ship, but who were neither useless nor could persuade their commanding officer to discharge them, desertion was the only way for them to break their contract. They would lose all their unpaid wages, and if caught could be subject to punishment, but for some this was clearly worth it.

But not all those marked as 'Run' in the muster books had in fact left the Navy altogether or necessarily wanted to. Some had simply overstayed their leave, with no intention of leaving the Navy, and returned shortly afterwards. Alexander Dickson, for example, was listed as having run from HMS *Winchester* in April 1839 in Chatham, but then re-entered a few days later.⁶³³ His subsequent service record was excellent and he applied for a pension in October 1848 having 14 years and five months service.⁶³⁴ An instance of temporary desertion would not affect that. Other men were rather more determined to leave altogether. John Kemp deserted from HMS *Rattlesnake*, and on rejoining the ship in June 1836 he was fined £3. He ran again in Sydney in December 1836, and did not return to

⁶³² TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9552, HMS *Princess Charlotte* muster book.

⁶³³ HMS *Winchester* muster book, TNA: PRO: ADM 37/10102, Alexander Dickson, Ship's Company no.38.

⁶³⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 29/42/103.

the ship that time, though *Rattlesnake* did not make her final visit to Sydney until May 1837.⁶³⁵

Although desertion was potentially a court martial offence, it was not treated as such during the period after 1815, except when warrant or other officers deserted. Men who returned or were recovered were fined or flogged on board, as discussed above in chapter 4 (Discipline and Crime). Overall, 17.4 percent of the whole sample deserted at some point of the commission, falling to 16.7 percent if those who were recovered onto that ship are excluded. Some of these would still have been stragglers rather than deserters, and might have rejoined the Navy at a later date. In the Navy in the 1860s there was a more serious desertion problem, with 14 percent of recruits deserting within the first year. Walton argues, however, that this was partly caused by the problems in establishing the new system of continuous service, and that desertion rates fell again in the later part of the century.⁶³⁶ Certainly for the Navy of the 1830s and 1840s it was a nuisance rather than an extreme problem, and the punishments awarded reflect that. The harshest punishment for desertion in the period was given to a Royal Marine, not a sailor. Private Joseph McCormack of the Fourth Company of Royal Marines in Deptford was sentenced to 14 years' transportation in 1844 for 'desertion and losing or designedly making away with articles of dress'.⁶³⁷ Desertion by officers was also taken very seriously. Assistant Engineer William Belyse was imprisoned for six months in 1855 for deserting from HMS *Malacca*, and Lt George Graham imprisoned for 12 months and dismissed the service for deserting HMS *Childers*.

⁶³⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9628, HMS *Rattlesnake* muster books, Ship's Company no.26.

⁶³⁶ Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy', p.158.

⁶³⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103.

Straggling

For those men who overstayed their leave, a straggling fine could be charged. Twenty men in the sample have straggling fines recorded against their names, and there were probably many more, as not all the muster books have full information in this column. Some fines were as low as the 12s charged to John Thompson, who was also disgraced from Gunner's Mate to AB for straggling from HMS *Comet* in July 1841. Three men who deserted from HMS *Rattlesnake* in 1836 and 1837 were charged £3 against their wages when they rejoined, four £1 and another four 10s. Jacob Stratton, Gunner's Mate in HMS *Castor* was fined £1 twice for straggling in April and May 1841, and reduced to AB, but was discharged to HMS *Fair Rosamund* on promotion later that month. Others have no straggling fines listed, but were clearly overstaying their leave rather than trying to go permanently. For example Samuel Hill of Plymouth, First Class Boy in HMS *Wolf*, deserted on 3 April 1845 in Calcutta, and was listed as rejoining the Navy on 4 May, returning to his ship on 22 May via HMS *Fox*.⁶³⁸ Stragglers might of course have other problems. John Coleman, Ordinary Seaman in HMS *Skipjack*, deserted in Belize in January 1834 and re-entered the ship less than a month later. He was rated AB in December 1835, but by March 1837 had been discharged with disgrace.⁶³⁹ In one case, James Courlett, Captain of the Forecastle in HMS *Albatross*, was listed as having run from the ship in Grenada on 6 May

⁶³⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/9357, Boys First Class no.3.

⁶³⁹ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9882, HMS *Skipjack*, Ship's Company no.160.

1843. A note in the 'For what reason' column adds that he is also discharged dead, 'as per notice from magistrate dated 9 May 1843'.⁶⁴⁰

Desertion from duty was clearly more serious than from leave, but even then men might return to their service. John Tugwell AB, HMS *Ardent*, deserted from duty in Rio de Janiero on 20th February 1842, but re-entered the Navy via HMS *Isis* on 24 February, arriving back on board *Ardent* on 14th April. At the end of the commission he received a 'good' certificate.⁶⁴¹ Six men in the sample returned to their ship after deserting from duty, and only one is described as having been 'apprehended', Francis Collins, Ordinary Seaman in HMS *Skipjack*. He too stayed on board for the rest of the commission, and was discharged for general service at the end.⁶⁴² For a warrant officer to be even temporarily absent from duty was more serious and might result in a temporary discharge. William Babb, Carpenter in HMS *Spartan*, was dismissed his ship in October 1842 and reduced to a third class warrant officer for being absent from duty without leave and getting drunk.⁶⁴³

Permanent desertion

Like John Kemp, other men appear to have been more determined to leave their ship permanently. Alexander Holmes, serving in HMS *Winchester*, as Seamen's Schoolmaster, deserted in Halifax on 26 June 1839, but was re-entered as an Able

⁶⁴⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7486, Ship's Company no.56.

⁶⁴¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7543, HMS *Ardent*, Ship's Company no.27.

⁶⁴² TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9882, HMS *Skipjack*, Ship's Company no.239.

⁶⁴³ TNA: PRO: ADM 13/103.

Seaman on 31 August 1840, when *Winchester* returned to Halifax for the second time since he had run. On 3 October 1841, however, he deserted in Halifax again, and was not recovered.⁶⁴⁴ David McIntyre AB from Liverpool, a first entry in HMS *Raven* in 1839, first ran in Greenock in June that year, returning to the Navy in October, then ran again from leave in Portsmouth on 26th December. James Harman, a First Class Boy from HMS *Ardent*, deserted from duty in Rio de Janiero in February 1842, returned on 14th April in HMS *Isis* and then deserted again from duty in Rio on 3 May 1843.⁶⁴⁵ He had gone missing with another sailor, James Tugwell, and they returned together, but Tugwell then remained on board and served to the end of the commission to receive a 'good' certificate.⁶⁴⁶

Only 33 of the 807 deserters in the sample returned to the ships from which they had run, but in only 313 cases of the 807 is there any detail about their desertion in the muster books. Where the information is given, 69 are listed as having run 'from duty', compared to 184 from leave. Thirty-three men ran from a boat, and 16 from the ship they were serving on, including one from a prize and one who had been lent to HMS *Ariadne*, and one who 'swam from the vessel'. Eight men deserted the *Princess Charlotte* when the 'ship [was] about to sail'. One man was in fact dead, and one deserted from the dockyard. Overall, where an explanation is given, 129 men appear to have deserted from the ship or from duty at the time, 41 percent, compared to the 59 percent overstaying their leave.

⁶⁴⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/10102, Alexander Holmes, Ship's Company no.237.

⁶⁴⁵ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7543, Boys First Class no.5, no.11.

⁶⁴⁶ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7543, Ship's Company no.27.

Patterns of desertion

Examining the country of origin of deserters, just as the largest group of sailors were English-born, so were the majority of deserters. On the Leeward Islands station from 1784-1812, Byrn found that 14 percent of deserters were of non-UK origin, but for the sample studied here it was only about 6 percent.⁶⁴⁷ This is partly because the proportion of UK-born sailors had increased, but it is also interesting to look at the desertion rate for the different countries of origin. Looking at the larger groups, if we take the rate of 16.5 percent of all English-born men deserting as a norm, since they are the largest group, the rate for Scottish men is 32 percent, significantly higher than this. The Irish and Welsh, at 17.5 and 19 percent respectively, are close to the norm. Looked at in relation to the proportion of all groups in the overall sample, English-born men made up 73 percent of deserters and 77 percent of all sailors. African-born men, by contrast, made up 2 percent of the total sample but included no deserters.⁶⁴⁸ The table below gives the figures for each country from which deserters came, and the overall sample proportions of each country of birth.

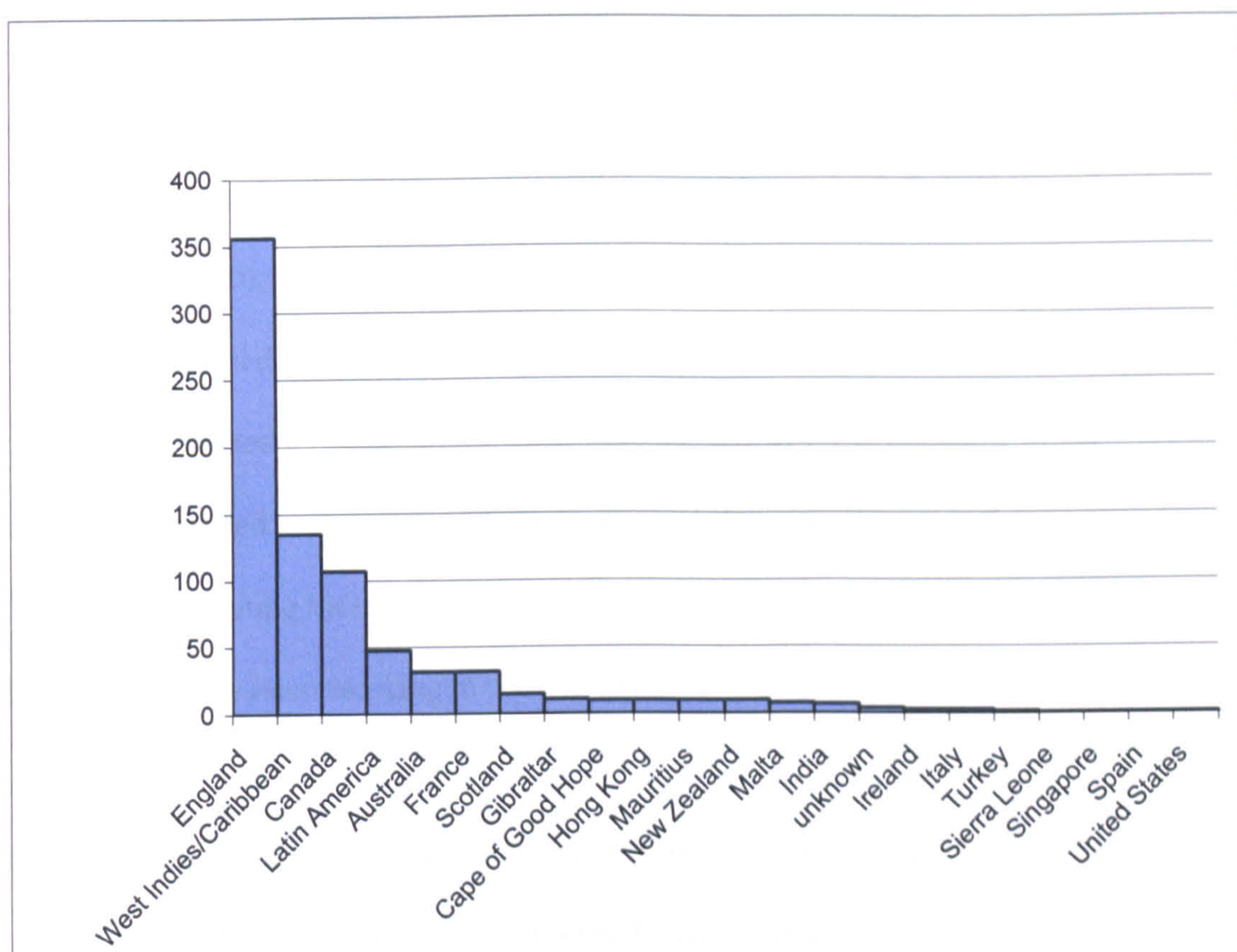
⁶⁴⁷ Byrn, *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy*, p.156.

⁶⁴⁸ The majority of these were the Kroomen, recruited and discharged locally on the West African station. As they worked in ships which were fighting the slave traders, they may have had an incentive not to desert for fear of being taken as slaves themselves. However, they were also employed for their knowledge of the coast and to do inshore work, so would have had plenty of opportunities to desert if they wished.

Table 7.2: Deserters: country of birth

	No.	% of total deserters	% of total sample from country	% of country of birth who deserted
England	587	72.74	77.01	16.44
Scotland	90	11.15	6.00	32.37
Ireland	63	7.81	7.76	17.50
Wales	16	1.98	1.79	19.28
N. America	14	1.73	1.08	28.00
W. Indies	10	1.24	1.04	20.83
Channel Islands	9	1.12	0.71	27.27
Isle of Man	4	0.50	0.26	33.33
Germany	3	0.37	0.30	27.27
none given	3	0.37	0.24	21.43
Hanover	1	0.12	0.09	25.00
India	1	0.12	0.13	16.67
At sea	1	0.12	0.24	9.09
Italy	1	0.12	0.06	16.67
Norway	1	0.12	0.06	33.33
Spain	1	0.12	0.04	50.00
Sweden	1	0.12	0.06	33.33
Isle de France	1	0.12	0.02	100.00
TOTAL	807	100.00	100.00	

Figure 7.4: Place of desertion⁶⁴⁹



As Figure 7.4 shows, the majority of desertions were in England. Ships on the West Africa station, for example, experienced very little desertion. None of the Kroomen deserted, as discussed above, and only one member of a ship's company. He was James Mitchell, Ordinary Seaman, who disappeared on Sherboro, an island off Sierra Leone, from HMS *Albatross*, which was on anti-

⁶⁴⁹ In most cases the place of desertion is listed in the muster books. In a few cases where it is not, the place has been assigned place based on the muster location for the relevant date from the lists kept in each muster book, except where this information is not available (page or relevant book missing).

slave trade duty at the time. He was aged 20, from Falmouth but recruited in Halifax, and he did not return to the ship.⁶⁵⁰

Of the English-born men there were significant numbers who left their ships in Canada (107 men), Australia (30 men) and Jamaica (83 men). Sixteen of the 90 Scots who deserted also did so in Canada, as did eleven Irishmen. Forty of all those who deserted in Jamaica, however, were serving in HMS *Skipjack*, which was commissioned at Bermuda and spent most of the commission in the Caribbean, recruiting locally. Those men, therefore, even if born in the British Isles, had already been working in the Caribbean and may have had local ties.

Individual ships occasionally had a serious problem in certain places. HMS *Alecto* lost 28 men in Marseilles in the early 1840s. Twenty-one were English, six Irish, four Scottish and one Italian. Six returned, of whom four paid fines of up to £4 1s 9d 'incurred in Marseilles prison'. Two of those who had been in prison subsequently deserted or overstayed their leave in Marseilles again. One of them still came back: Christopher Gallagher, a stoker from Dublin, ran in Marseilles in February 1840, returned to the ship in September, was charged £4 1s 9d for prison expenses, ran again in April 1841 and returned a month later. He then remained to the end of the commission in April 1843 and received a 'good' certificate.⁶⁵¹ Another deserter, John Randolph AB, returned less successfully. Born in Italy, he was 45 when he joined *Alecto* in 1841 with previous service in HMS *Acheron*, but deserted in April 1842. He was re-entered on the books in

⁶⁵⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7486, HMS *Albatross*, Ship's Company no.40.

⁶⁵¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7491, Ship's Company nos. 25, 56.

August 1844 after being on the supernumerary list, but then discharged by court martial on 24th December 1844 and mulcted of six months' pay.⁶⁵²

In both the Caribbean and France there were plenty of opportunities for those did leave permanently, whether that was their original intention or not, to join merchant ships. The same was true of Canada or Australia, but it is also possible that some of those who deserted there were considering emigration rather than simply looking for a better ship. The 30 men who deserted in Australia included 23 Englishmen, four Scots, one Irishman and one Welshman. Only one returned to his ship: John Keating AB, from Sussex, serving in HMS *Rattlesnake*. He was marked Run in Sydney in January 1837, and was back on the ship's books by 11th April the same year. In August he was discharged into HMS *Buffalo* as part complement before *Rattlesnake* sailed for home.⁶⁵³ Six of the 30 deserters had allotments set up to send money home to their families. These included Charles Ideson from Yorkshire and Richard Cooper from Durham, both serving in HMS *Alligator*, who were both listed as married in the description book.⁶⁵⁴ The others, whether or not they had families, had no financial ties to anyone at home. Some men apparently did emigrate despite family ties. In evidence to the Manning Commission of 1859 Captain Gambier mentioned a merchant seaman 'who had quite left his family, and had gone to Australia' so they were forced to apply for poor relief.⁶⁵⁵ Midshipman Comber, in his diary of his time on board HMS *Herald*, mentioned various men who deserted from the ship when they were in Australia.

⁶⁵² His court martial is not listed in any of the Admiralty indexes for the period, which mainly ignore those below petty officer, so his precise offence is not known.

⁶⁵³ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9627, HMS *Rattlesnake*.

⁶⁵⁴ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8649, HMS *Alligator*.

⁶⁵⁵ Royal Commission on Manning the Navy 1859, p.266.

Five left the boat when watering on 29 May 1839 in King George's Sound 'and are supposed to have secreted themselves among the settlers. We have sent a party of Marines after them.' When the ship sailed on Friday 31 May, there had been seven deserters in all,

Accordingly we hove to in the Sound and sent Lieut[enant] Fisher with a party in search of them, Ourselves making sail for Two People Bay, a snug little hole where we anchored alongside an American whaler.

Lieutenant Fisher 'had no luck' and instead a settler, Smythe, 'who married a native woman & lived 6 yrs in the bush with the natives' was offered £2 a head bounty if the deserters were recovered. Smythe and Fisher brought back all the deserters on 3 June.⁶⁵⁶ This strongly suggests that the men intended to leave *Herald* permanently, which Comber considered an unhappy ship.

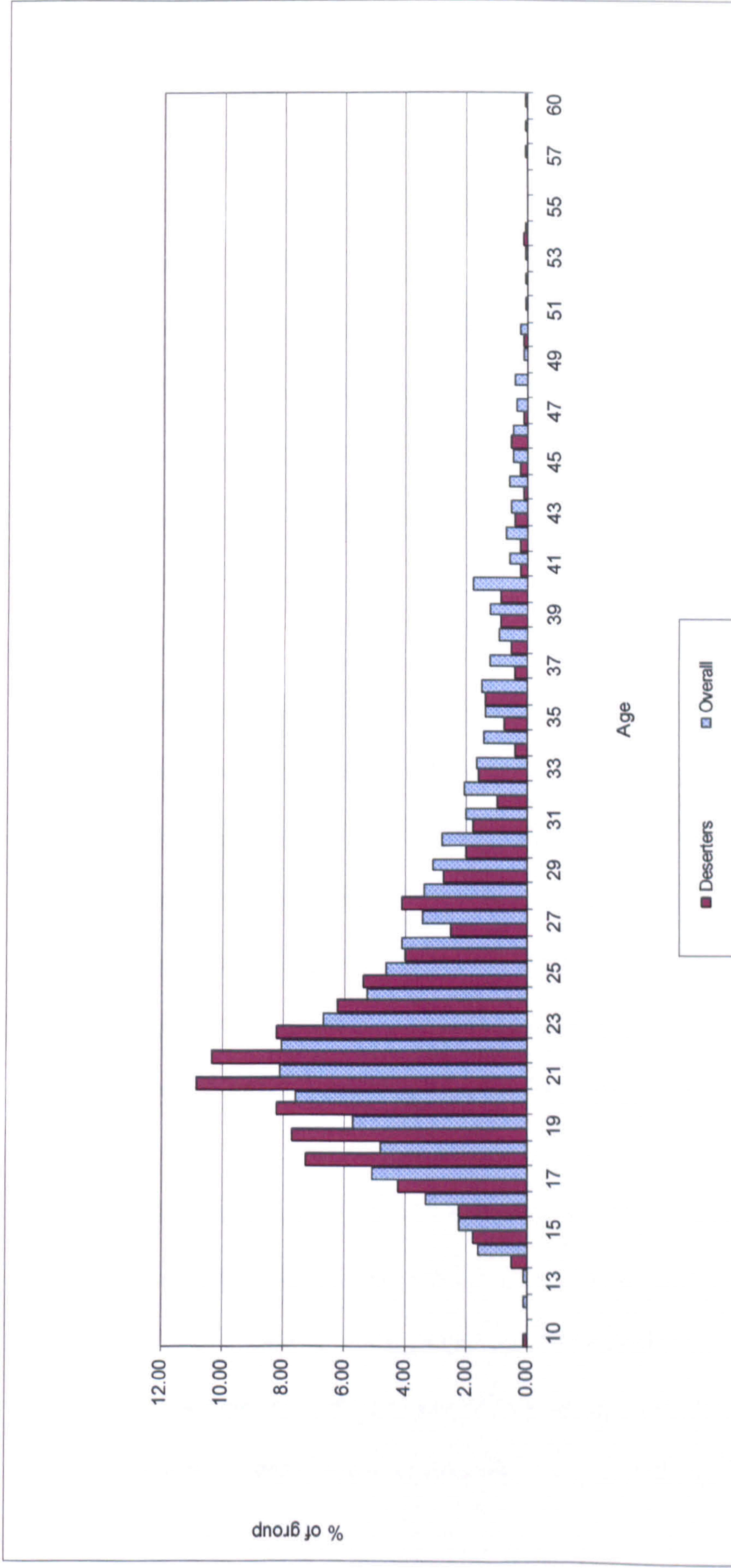
Age at desertion

Byrn, in his study of the Leeward Islands, argued that 'desertion was generally a phenomenon engaged in by the young', with over 82 percent of absconders aged under 30.⁶⁵⁷ However, as the figure below shows, deserters could come from any group. This compares the age profile of deserters as a percentage by age of the total group of deserters, with the age profile of all those in the sample. It shows that men in their early twenties were slightly more likely to desert than those in their late twenties or thirties, but those in the younger age group are the largest group in the sample in any case.

⁶⁵⁶ Comber, *Tour of Duty*, pp.81-2.

⁶⁵⁷ Byrn, p.155.

Figure 7.5: Age range of deserters compared to overall sample



Timing of desertion

There were men who joined a ship and deserted shortly afterwards. Early in a commission sailors would not have much to lose in wages by desertion, especially if there were slops already charged against their name. The 1859 report on manning the Navy argued that there was a temptation for men to join, acquire clothes on credit, and then leave and sell their clothes. They suggested free clothes should be issued to sailors, as to soldiers, but as a uniform so they could not be sold.⁶⁵⁸

Some men did desert within a few days of joining. One was William Oates, a First Class Boy who joined HMS *Acorn* on 27th April 1841 and was marked 'R' on 9th May in Devonport, where he had been recruited, from leave. The ship was still in Devonport on 19 May when three more men were listed as having deserted, so there had been plenty of time for Oates to return, had he wished, before the ship sailed for Cape Town.⁶⁵⁹ However, no clothes had been charged against his name, so perhaps he had simply changed his mind about joining the Navy.

The most useful distinction, for those ships which served overseas, is between those who deserted before the ship sailed, and those who deserted later. For example, the *Princess Charlotte*, commissioned at Portsmouth from February to July 1837, lost all but four of her 45 deserters before the ship sailed. Eight of these were in the last two weeks, including three men who had joined in February and

⁶⁵⁸ *Royal Commission on Manning the Navy* 1859 Session I [2469] VI.1 (mf 64.40-45), pp. x-xi.

⁶⁵⁹ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7443, HMS *Acorn*.

March as well as the five who had only joined in May or June. Of the 41 who deserted in Portsmouth, twelve did not have any slops charged against their name. John Barker AB, who joined on 2 March, deserted on 15 April owing the largest amount for clothes, £1 15 6s, but this is still less than the six weeks' wages he was owed by then. Similarly, Thomas Turner worked for two months as Cooper's Crew before he ran, with £1 10s 6d charged against his name. The only two who served very briefly but charged a considerable amount for slops were George Clarke AB aged 39 and William Lucas Ordinary, aged 21, who both joined on 11 April and had deserted by 19 April, owing £1 7s 9d each. George Clarke may have been a serial deserter, as a subsequent note in the muster book says that he ran from *Cockatrice* in June 1838. However, James Morriss, Ordinary, who ran from *Princess Charlotte* on 1 July 1837, having been on board since 1 March, and subsequently ran from HMS *Daphne* in December 1838, owed no money to the Navy. Clarke and Lucas may have subsequently sold their clothes and been the gainers, but in general it seems far more likely that men deserted because they had changed their minds about the ship, or about going overseas. Remarkably, during the rest of her four years' commission in the Mediterranean, only four more men deserted the *Princess Charlotte*.⁶⁶⁰

Other ships show a different pattern. HMS *Rattlesnake*, commissioned in Portsmouth and Plymouth from December 1834 to April 1835, lost nine men before the ship sailed. A further 15 deserted during the rest of the commission including eight in Sydney. Two of the Sydney deserters, Charles Ronett and John

⁶⁶⁰ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9552, HMS *Princess Charlotte*.

Keating, had been recruited there, but were English-born. Joseph Dunn, a first entrant at age 23, was recruited in Hobart Town in August 1836 and ran in Sydney less than a month later, and was also English, born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.⁶⁶¹ HMS *Skipjack*, commissioned in Bermuda in 1829, had the largest number of desertions of any ship in the sample, at 167. However, she also had the longest time in commission, until 1 June 1841 when she was wrecked, and 344 men served in her. Fifty of the deserters had had less than three months on board, but that still leaves the majority deserting when they had already earned more in wages than they could have benefited from anything else. Neither was it necessarily a case of men new to the Navy discovering they did not like it; one deserter from *Skipjack*, Daniel Brown, had previous service in HMS *Medina* listed when he joined at the start of 1835; he deserted in July.⁶⁶²

Discharged sick or dead

As discussed in chapter 6 on disease and sickness, life in the Navy could be a dangerous profession, and 176 men in the sample died during the commission under examination, 3.8 percent. This is a death rate of approximately 12.63 per 1000 per year, considerably higher than the overall rate for the general population of UK men aged 20-39, which was 9.25 per 1000 per year.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9625.

⁶⁶² TNA: PRO: ADM 37/9881. His description certificate is pasted into the muster book, which states that at age 22 he had worked ten years at sea and could take the helm and lead.

⁶⁶³ Hinde, *England's Population*, p.197.

At death, allotments to families were suspended. The widows, dependent children or dependent mothers of men killed in action (only eight men in this sample) were entitled to claim a year's wages, the Royal Bounty. In 1814 Greenwich Hospital took over paying pensions to the widows of warrant officers, sailors and dockyard workers killed on service, not just in action. For the families of men who died after the end of their service, however, there was no such entitlement. John Ford, for example, served in the Navy until 1862, when he was invalided home from Halifax with a fractured femur. He had been in the Navy since at least 1845, when he was writing to his future wife Sarah from HMS *Superb*.⁶⁶⁴ He was recommended for a Boatswain's warrant in 1851, but appears only to have served as Boatswain's Mate, as he was doing in HMS *Janus* in 1852.⁶⁶⁵ He was invalided from that ship after being wounded in fighting with pirates, but returned to sea and was invalided again from HMS *Melpomene* in 1862, where he had been serving as Quartermaster, after his leg was broken while he was on leave.⁶⁶⁶ He died in 1872, and when his widow, Sarah Jane, applied for assistance, the Admiralty wrote back that she was ineligible for Greenwich Hospital Widows' Gratuity because her husband was not 'Slain, Killed or Drowned' in the service of the Crown.⁶⁶⁷

Permanently disabled or old sailors could apply for pensions or grants from Greenwich Hospital to help support them, and still allow them to live outside the

⁶⁶⁴ RNM: 353/85 (13) John Ford to Sarah Evans, 13 July 1845.

⁶⁶⁵ RNM: 353/85 (24) 3 November 1851.

⁶⁶⁶ RNM: 353/85 (35) copy of Testimonial from Richard Powell, Commander, HM Ship *Janus*. Gibraltar, 6 April 1852; (36) Certificate from surgeon, RH Hospital at Halifax, 17th July 1862.

⁶⁶⁷ RNM: 353/85 (30) Admiralty letter 21st June 1872 to Sarah Jane Ford

Hospital with their families. Families were not admitted to the Hospital itself, though the pensioners who lived there could choose to take a cash allowance and eat with their families if they lived locally. Families were also entitled to claim any residues of pay owed to a sailor who had died. This might not always amount to as much as they had hoped. Sarah Ford's brother was also a sailor, and died in January 1855 when serving as Carpenter's Crew in HMS *Arctusa*, with her husband. She applied to the Admiralty to administer her late brother's effects, and received £34 10s 2d as the balance of wages and tool money owed to him since 30 September 1851. She claimed that her brother had told her husband 'a day or two before he was killed, that he expected to receive between Sixty and Seventy Pounds.' Her brother was well known to shipmates as 'a very steady, and particularly careful, Young Man' and there had been no allotment for 18 months because of his mother's death. She 'respectfully requests' an Admiralty revision. Scribbled on the letter are the Pay Office calculations, showing that he had received monthly allowance payments of £19.13.8½, paid an allotment to his mother of £21.9s, and spent £2.8 on tobacco and 10s on soap. Deducted from his total pay of £100 1s 8d, this left the £34 she had already received.⁶⁶⁸

For men who had progressed to warrant officer status, both they and their families were better off after the end of their service. For example Robert McKenzie, who became a Boatswain in 1832 at the age of 39, was entitled to a pension on retiring from the service. He left the Royal Navy in March 1848 with 32 years service. His pension was £60 a year, which could be collected from the

⁶⁶⁸ RNM: 353/85 (39), Letter from Sarah Ford to the Admiralty.

Pay Office in London or from the dockyards at Deptford, Woolwich, Pembroke or Chatham.⁶⁶⁹ It could be paid elsewhere through a collector of Customs or Excise or through a Commissariat Officer abroad. The McKenzies, however, lived in Chatham and collected the pension there. Robert also continued to work, now for merchant ships, serving aboard *Indiana*, for example, in the winter of 1852-3.⁶⁷⁰ On Robert's death in 1863, his wife Emma was entitled to the arrears of his pension under his will, which came to £11 13s 4d and to receive a widow's pension of £25 a year.⁶⁷¹ When she died herself in 1894, she did not leave a will so her daughters were the only people entitled to the arrears of her pension, and £1 13s 4d was paid to her daughter Sarah.⁶⁷² Sarah, like her mother, had married a sailor; William Simpson, Sailmaker, in 1855.

Ordinary sailors without length of service were not entitled to any further remuneration. Looking back as he wrote his memoir, presumably many years after he had left the Royal Navy, Edward Hargreaves commented that

I returned of Liberty on the 12th of August 1862 And joined the cornwalice Line of Battel ship Laing in Hull Has coast guard ship...

He had wanted to join the coast guard and had put his name down to do so, but the Captain of *Cornwallis* would not release him, he wanted three petty officers and would not allow Hargreaves to go. Instead, Hargreaves purchased his discharge from the Royal Navy, even though his memoir suggests he later

⁶⁶⁹ RNM: 1982/1333 (4), Robert McKenzie, Pensioners Certificate (Warrant Officers and Cooks), Portsmouth 1 April 1848.

⁶⁷⁰ RNM: 627/86 (4) Certificate of discharge, merchant service

⁶⁷¹ RNM: 120/87 (8), Certificate dated 13 May 1863, Inspector of Seamen's Wills.

⁶⁷² RNM: 627/86 (16) Letter 15 December 1894 from Inspector of Seamen's Wills; (18) Solemn Declaration of death of Emma McKenzie, 23 November 1894.

regretted it, 'it was the worst thing that I ever did'.⁶⁷³ The manuscript breaks off there at the end of the notebook, but he was probably about to reflect that had he stayed until 1877 he would have been entitled to a pension. Having purchased his discharge, although he was serving under the new continuous service system, he was in the same position as any sailor before 1853 who had only worked for the Royal Navy for a few years. It seems likely that one of the reasons Hargreaves wanted to join the coast guard was that he had been overseas for most of seven years, in the Baltic and China, with no home leave, and now preferred to remain in home waters. In some of the few letters which survive, sailors talk of their longing to be home, to see their families, or because, as John Ford wrote to his fiancée in 1848, 'My Dear I have had A very rough Cruize this last and very Cold one'.⁶⁷⁴ This did not mean they would not return to the Royal Navy after a break.

When they did so, they would need to show their certificate of previous service. These were issued to sailors when they were discharged from a ship, either during or at the end of a commission. It would detail the ratings he had held on the ship, the dates of his service, and give a general comment on his performance. He was expected to retain this to show to any future recruiting officer on another Royal Navy ship. Figure 7.6 shows the range of certificates given. These are not always recorded in the muster books, particularly those issued at the end of a commission, but the information is given for 2,929 of the men in the sample. In some cases commanding officers provided a detailed description, such as:

⁶⁷³ Hargreaves, 'seven years in the navy'.

⁶⁷⁴ 353/85 (20) John Ford to Sarah Evans, HMS *Superb*, 14th December 1848.

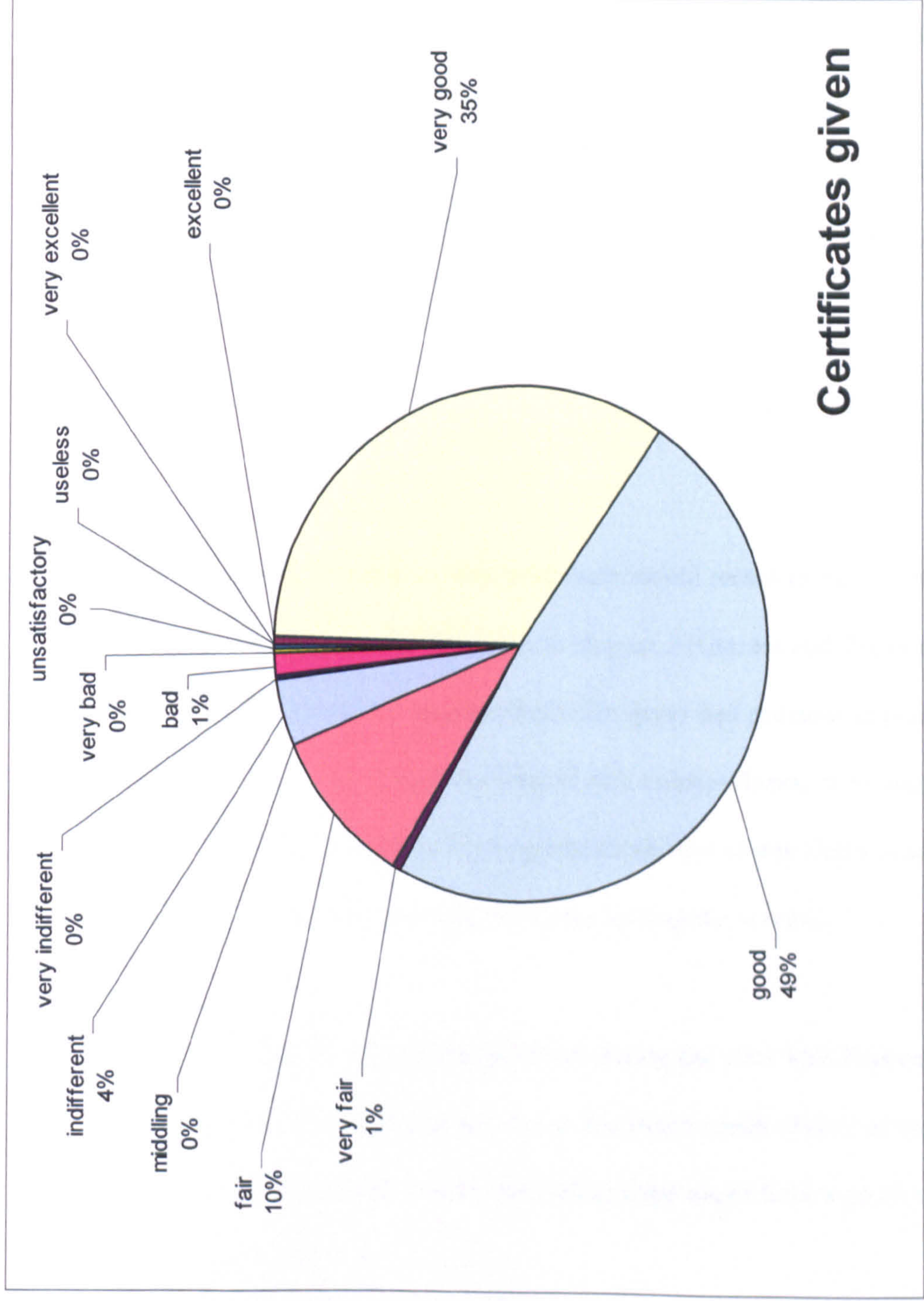
'an excellent character and a good workman',⁶⁷⁵ for example, or 'an abominable bad character'.⁶⁷⁶ Joseph Pedlar, First Class Boy on board HMS *Wolf* in 1843, was given a certificate to say he was 'good as far as in him lies'.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵ John McDonald AB and Joseph Richardson Caulker were both given this reference from HMS *Acorn*. It is worth noting that McDonald had been marked Run for overstaying his leave a year earlier. TNA: PRO 38/7443.

⁶⁷⁶ Henry Bickford, Second Class Boy in HMS *Castor*, sent home in 1847 after a year and a half's service. TNA: PRO: ADM 38/7771.

⁶⁷⁷ TNA: PRO: ADM 38/9357, Joseph Pedlar, Boys First Class no.9.

Figure 7.6 Certificates given



Overall, nearly 83 percent of the men were rated good or better. It was a crude system of appraisal, but since it was for the use of future officers recruiting sailors, there is no reason to suppose that it was inaccurately generous. It is also clear that many of the men did keep their certificates safely, as where the description books survive they are used to list all previous service in the Royal Navy. In HMS *Alligator*, 17 of the 44 men with previous service were able to show certificates so that all their previous ships could be listed. Some had a long list, such as Patrick Finnan of Dublin, who had served in HMS *Diana*, *Bloodhound*, *Minden*, *Rainbow*, *Hyperion*, *Gagnes*, *Britannia*, and *Melville*.⁶⁷⁸

Conclusion

The certificate system is a reminder that many men would return to join another Royal Navy ship in the future. As discussed in chapter 3 (Careers and Training), 67 percent of all the men recruited into the Ship's Company had previous experience on at least one Royal Navy ship. Those discharged with serious illness, or in disgrace or useless, were unlikely to return, but for a significant section of any ship's company, leaving the ship, even by desertion, did not mean leaving the service.

Desertion had of course been a serious problem during the wars with France, with the need to keep such a large fleet at sea, but in the much smaller Navy of the 1830s and 1840s it was a far less serious issue. Individual ships might have a problem with

⁶⁷⁸ TNA: PRO: ADM 37/8649, HMS *Alligator*, description book, Ship's Company no.67.

desertion, and captains were still prepared to seek out deserters, but it was no longer a threat to the efficient running of the Navy. Desertion had not disappeared from the Royal Navy with the coming of peace in 1815 and the end of enforced service. In a system which did not allow men to terminate their contract any other way, it would be impossible to eradicate altogether, and some ships had particular problems. In addition, there would always be some men who overstayed their leave, voluntarily or otherwise. Nonetheless, it was not normally treated as a very serious crime, and in some cases might be ignored. The captain of HMS *Herald*, as described in Comber's account quoted above, made an effort to recover some men who deserted in Australia. However, in December 1839, when Comber 'Had the misfortune to lose one of our men who deserted from my boat, as he was a useless character the Captain did not take the trouble to send after him.'⁶⁷⁹ Desertion and retaining men to serve on its ships was no longer the Navy's most difficult problem.

⁶⁷⁹ Comber, *Tour of Duty*, p.107.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Life for the seamen of the Royal Navy improved after the end of the wars with France in 1815. The immediate changes in 1815 were the end of compulsory service and mass mobilisation, and the return to the system of men volunteering for individual commissions. Impressment may have been accepted by some sailors as necessary in wartime, but the lack of leave was deeply resented, especially when men were turned over directly from one ship to another at the end of a commission.⁶⁸⁰ As Starkey has discussed, the maritime labour market was able to supply the needs of war partly by forcing increased productivity from sailors, for example by severely reducing their time on shore.⁶⁸¹ With peace, seamen were able to reassert some control over their lives.

Their choices were of course limited by what ships were recruiting, and by the alternatives open to them in the merchant service or elsewhere, but those choices were nonetheless real. They could choose whether or not to serve in a Royal Navy ship at all. When they did choose the Navy, sailors could decide on a ship in which, for example, they thought the officers were good, or they had shipmates, or could obtain a petty officer's position. At the end of a commission they could take as much time as they wished before deciding whether to volunteer again. From the Admiralty's

⁶⁸⁰ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p.499.

⁶⁸¹ Starkey, 'War and the Market for Seafarers in Britain', pp.525-6.

point of view this was an inefficient system, and for the men it meant employment was not guaranteed. But the freedom it offered was important to many sailors, and did not prevent them regarding themselves as Royal Navy men and returning regularly to naval employment.

The coming of peace in 1815 saw the Royal Navy shrink nearly to a seventh of its former size, employing 19,000 men in 1818 rather than the 145,000 needed in 1815. Although it gradually increased in size again from 1820-50, there were still only 20 first-rate ships in commission in 1850, compared to 13 in 1821. The shift towards steam vessels also reduced crew sizes, so that in 1850 the Navy still only required 32,000 sailors to crew all its ships to their official complement, though this did represent a doubling in size since 1818. This meant that it was able to recruit enough men for its ships without compulsion, and it did, from a volunteer pool of labour. The professional standards of the sailors may not have been any higher than the best of those serving before 1815 (and of course many of those men continued to serve in peacetime), but they were monitored more closely by their officers and the Admiralty. Most importantly, men who were considered useless could be turned away or discharged from a ship by their captain, so the professional standards of those on board could be kept up.

Most captains and lieutenants made an effort to offer training to both the men and boys serving in their ships, and to assess them for promotion individually. Boys were taken on between the ages of 14 and 19 for training, and ships were able to take as many as their complements allowed. They served at least seven years with the Navy, and though not all stayed on as adults, many did. On some ships, the post of

Seamen's Schoolmaster was filled, and the opportunity given for men to learn to read and write. Literacy was essential to progress to warrant rank. Each man was given a certificate at the end of a commission, and many retained these and brought them when they volunteered again, to verify their previous service and experience, as the description books show. Those who reached petty officer status were dependent on their officers to recognise their worth, and were most disadvantaged by the lack of continuous service, since they had no right to be taken on at the same rating in another ship. Nonetheless, previous experience was recognised when recruiting, and some men would wait until they could obtain a berth at a suitable rating.

This study has shown that men were being recruited from the merchant service and retained in the Royal Navy throughout the period between the end of the wars and the introduction of continuous service in 1853. There was no shortage of skilled men during this period. Lewis argued that it was only with the introduction of the continuous service contracts 'when "the Bluejacket", whom we know and respect today, began to exist as a professional naval rating in his own right' came into being. This is not borne out by the evidence.⁶⁸² Again, the image of the 'degenerate, despicable [and] immoral' men which Rasor argued was the contemporary view of sailors before the introduction of continuous service is not reflected in reality.⁶⁸³ Those who joined the Navy were or became professional and competent sailors, and their behaviour was in general good.

⁶⁸² Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, p.35.

⁶⁸³ Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy*, p.16.

The system of recruitment was, however, slow and inefficient. Some ships took much longer to build up a full complement than others, whether because the officers or destination were unpopular or because they were in port when fewer sailors were available.⁶⁸⁴ For men who had been rated as petty officers, continually leaving and rejoining the Navy meant that they could not rely on being appointed at the same grade. With the parliamentary campaign against the Navigation Laws, and their final repeal in 1849, the automatic assumption that the merchant service would always provide a source of trained sailors for the Royal Navy ended. Instead the Navy would at least partly train its own men. The move in this direction, however, had been under way for some time, and the arguments in Parliament over the Acts rarely stressed the role of the merchant service in supplying the Royal Navy with men.⁶⁸⁵ HMS *Excellent* had been established in 1832 to train Seamen Gunners, who were expected to serve for at least five years, and given financial incentives to do so. Volunteers could already sign on for a fixed period of time rather than for a ship's commission, or agree to be transferred directly to another ship or make themselves available for general service. The sample of men studied here shows that some did take this opportunity, in an early version of continuous service.

The pay on offer to sailors was also acceptable compared to the alternatives in the merchant service or on the land. The mutinies of 1797 had led to the first pay increase for sailors of the Royal Navy since 1686, and this was followed by a second increase in 1806. Peacetime of course allowed very few opportunities for prize money, but this had never been evenly distributed and most sailors never benefited

⁶⁸⁴ See chapter 2, above, 'Raising a complement', p.42.

⁶⁸⁵ Sarah Palmer, *Navigation Laws*, p.77.

from it. In 1824 basic pay rose again, and there were further adjustments to sailors' pay during the period, as increments for good conduct were introduced in 1849, worth up to six shillings a month on top of the basic Able Seaman's pay.⁶⁸⁶ Seamen Gunners received up to seven shillings on top of their ordinary pay if they stayed in the Navy for up to 15 years, and their training also helped some to continue their careers as warrant officers by becoming Gunners.⁶⁸⁷ Rates which had not previously attracted additional pay, like the captain of the foretop, were recognised with extra money. The new steam ships also provided a new rating, that of Stoker, which was paid at a higher rate than Able Seaman, reflecting the unpleasantness of the work. Since steam vessels still used sail whenever possible, to conserve coal, and large steam ships were not built until the development of the screw propeller in the 1840s, sailing skills remained extremely important to the Navy. The Navy recruited primarily in the south of England, which was a depressed area with low wages compared to northern England, experiencing the expansion of Manchester, Liverpool and other industrial cities. When the 1859 Royal Commission on Manning the Navy took evidence from experienced sailors, they talked about 'too much drill' and 'nonsense' in Royal Navy ships putting off merchant sailors, and some believed that they were given more food on merchant ships, but none cited pay as a reason not to join.⁶⁸⁸

The Royal Navy in the period 1815 to 1853 was already developing and continuing some of the aspects of the 'corporation' discussed by Walton in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was becoming 'more bureaucratic, more systematic', and even 'organising different branches of knowledge and personnel', as with the Seamen

⁶⁸⁶ TNA: PRO: ADM 7/911, p.70.

⁶⁸⁷ See chapter 6, above, 'Seamen Gunners', p.107

⁶⁸⁸ See chapter 2, above, 'Merchant versus monarch', p.51.

Gunners.⁶⁸⁹ It had not reached the levels that he describes, but continuous service was not a sudden alteration in the nature of the Navy. Through the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, there was already a core of professional sailors who regarded themselves as Royal Navy men and returned to Royal Navy ships again and again. The Admiralty had also been working to increase this loyalty, with the training offered to Seamen Gunners but also with the system of up to three good conduct badges available to any sailor.

When the new continuous service contracts came in, it was possible to buy oneself out of the contract, effectively with the extra money given to those who signed up for the Navy rather than a ship. This point was made by the Royal Commission of 1859 to some of the men who gave evidence about disliking continuous service as interfering with their liberty to choose a ship. These men at the same time prided themselves on their professional skills and worried that continuous service might mean some boys or men who were not good enough were kept in the Navy because it would be harder to turn them away. Continuous service represented a move towards greater efficiency in manning ships. It was part of the Admiralty's extension of control over all aspects of the Royal Navy, rather than a necessary move to recruit enough skilled sailors.

During the French wars, the Royal Navy recruited men from all over the world, and from every possible port at home. With the end of the wars, the largest numbers of men were recruited from southern England, in particular Hampshire, Devon,

⁶⁸⁹ Walton, 'Social History of the Royal Navy', p.340.

Cornwall and London. English-born men made up just over three-quarters of the workforce. The final quarter, however, came from 28 other countries. The anti-slave trade patrols meant that ships on the West African station recruited local men, who might make up 15 percent of the crew. These Kroomen were rated and treated separately for pay, and their conditions of service altered for the worse in 1843, when their pay was fixed according to the size of their group, rather than their individual skill. However, the existence of the anti-slave trade patrols did provide them with employment opportunities that had not been available before. Other black sailors were recruited into the Ship's Company in the normal way and rated according to their skills. Lewis loosely argued that after 1815 all sailors were the sons of sailors, but the evidence shows that although many were, the Royal Navy was also recruiting men not from sailing backgrounds, or 'brought up to the sea', and men from foreign ports.⁶⁹⁰ The Royal Navy remained, therefore, a very diverse organisation, and almost anyone with the appropriate skills could be accepted into a crew.

While at sea, the dangers to sailors' health changed during this period. The various estimates of death rates among sailors suggest that the overall level did not alter very much after the end of the wars, since even in wartime very few deaths were attributable to enemy action. Sailors' mortality rate in the 1830s and 1840s was higher than that, for example, of agricultural labourers, by about three deaths per thousand per year.⁶⁹¹ It was, however, comparable to or better than, for example, that of miners or of casual workers in inns and hotels. Some diseases and infections were being brought under control during this period. Naval surgeons learned how to treat and

⁶⁹⁰ Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, pp.32-33.

⁶⁹¹ See chapter 6, above, p.174.

prevent malaria with quinine, and smallpox was reduced in the whole population with variolation and vaccination campaigns. However, cholera arrived in the UK in 1832, and ships, with their crowded conditions, could be as susceptible as any London street. While sailors benefited from free health care for malaria, the treatments for conditions like cholera made it worse.

The Royal Navy continued to be deployed globally, although in much smaller numbers, so men could still be away from home for three years at a time, occasionally longer, and be exposed to health risks from weather, disease or occasional fighting. The most tedious form of service, however, close blockade of foreign ports, was no longer required. The introduction of steam ships also changed health patterns. Frequent stops for coaling meant that scurvy was less likely, as regular fresh food was available, but contemporaries worried that Stokers would be made ill by the hot conditions they had to work in. Steam ships were also much dirtier than sailing ships, as they had to carry large amounts of coal, but did not include any washing facilities. Since most were combined steam/sail in this period, the risks of sailing, including falling from aloft, did not change. The Royal Navy, however, continued to take the health of sailors seriously, and make efforts to spread good practice among naval surgeons, and sailors on many ships benefited from health care which was as good as any that might be available to them on land.

Discipline regimes became more benign, too, after the French wars. Traditional forms of punishment such as starting had already been outlawed before 1815. Although flogging remained legal until 1871, corporal punishment was declining. The institution of punishment returns in 1811 allowed the Admiralty to take a much closer interest in

individual captain's disciplinary regimes than had been possible before. Captains who were thought to flog too much could find themselves without a ship, or even brought to a court-martial for cruelty. It became very unusual for any man to be subjected to repeated flogging; those who were considered useless or unfit for service were usually discharged from the ship. Even captains who the Admiralty considered to flog too much, such as Captain Stopford in HMS *Amazon*, rarely beat the same man more than once or twice. Pressure was put on them to use alternative methods of punishment, such as disrating a petty officer. In fact, flogging was regarded by sailors, if it was not overused, as an acceptable method of punishment, and preferable to ones regarded as humiliating, such as wearing a wooden log marked 'noisy'.⁶⁹²

There was almost no mutiny in the Royal Navy throughout this period, although there was occasional industrial unrest among seamen in the merchant fleet, in the north-east especially. Some men were tried for individual mutinous behaviour, and there were a few more general incidents, but all were caused by small groups getting drunk, and over very minor issues of behaviour. This was partly because senior officers were reluctant to classify some behaviour as mutiny, indicating that they did not regard it as a serious problem that needed to be dealt with severely, except in individual cases.⁶⁹³

Alcohol continued to be a disciplinary problem for both officers and men throughout this period, and the cause of many other offences. Efforts were made to reduce the amount of spirits given to the men in both 1825 and 1850, but drink continued to be

⁶⁹² See chapter 4, above, p.129.

⁶⁹³ See chapter 4, above, p.139, Admiral Parker's actions in the Mediterranean in 1846.

used as currency on board ship, as it had been in the eighteenth century. Having a seaman's grog additionally watered or temporarily stopped was a common punishment, but the corollary of this was the general assumption that the other men were entitled to their spirits ration. Giving an additional issue of spirits as an occasional reward only reinforced this. That both men and officers, on arriving in port, would normally use their leave to get drunk was accepted throughout the service.

Desertion could still be a problem for some ships on overseas service, for example in Australia, but in general was treated as a minor problem unless aggravated by another offence. Men were fined for straggling, and sometimes flogged, but only warrant officers were taken to court martial for desertion. It was no longer a serious threat to the efficient working of the Navy, and in some cases deserters might not be actively sought if the man in question was a poor member of the crew. Men who returned from desertion, even desertion from duty, could still be considered valuable members of the crew if they were skilled, and some were given 'good' certificates of conduct at the end of the commission.

Seamen also retained connections to their home communities. Some took advantage of the cheap post to write home, or to have a shipmate write for them. Many used the allotment system to send money home, to wives and children or to parents. Life at sea was mainly for young men, the majority being in their twenties, but they were not rootless. They formed connections with one another and one another's families and friends. In places such as Portsmouth, local efforts were also being made to provide services for seamen on leave or between commissions, such as cheap lodgings, and

the option of transferring their money to another town. Some religious groups worked with sailors ashore, and made efforts to provide alternatives to pubs for their entertainment. With peacetime, although sailors could still be away for a few years, there were more opportunities for leave to visit their homes. Separation remained a painful and inevitable aspect of many sailors' lives, and that of their families, but conditions had been eased from those of wartime. It seems clear from the ships studied that men were more likely to volunteer for overseas service in their twenties, then change to a ship on the home station with better opportunities for leave as they grew older and may have married and had a family. Peacetime service, and lower-scale mobilisation even when there was fighting, for example in the Chinese wars, gave them the chance to make this choice.

The Royal Navy had already become a smaller organisation and many sailors strongly identified with it. Compulsory service was not necessary, though it was still believed that it would be essential in a large-scale war, and the Admiralty never gave up the power to press men in those circumstances. Indeed, had mobilisation on the scale of the French wars ever been needed again, compulsory service would have been required, and the merchant service would have had to provide many of the men. But since the Royal Navy never fought on that scale during the nineteenth century, its new smaller workforce was enough to supply the ships in commission. This workforce experienced working conditions which offered more opportunities for promotion and pay rises. The opportunity to progress from the lower deck to commissioned officer disappeared, but since this was only ever a possibility for a handful of men in wartime conditions, the new promotion prospects were probably a better exchange.

The Royal Navy also benefited in this period from the depressed state of the economy in southern England. Had it been trying to recruit sailors from Liverpool, for example, there might well have been difficulty in persuading enough men to join. In the south, by contrast, the Navy offered a reasonable wage and conditions compared to working on the land, which was the main alternative option outside London. The life might be a little more dangerous, but it provided a decent living and a service which men were happy to join, and to which they often had or developed family and friendship ties.

The professional sailors who crewed the ships after 1815 were in many cases the same men who had done so during the war. At the same time, the roots of the new technical naval careers described by Walton can be found as steam was introduced to the Navy and more small ships were used on service around the world. For the men who served on them, life had definitely improved compared to that available to them or their counterparts in 1800, and the Royal Navy could offer them a more rewarding and interesting career. The introduction of continuous service contracts reflected as well as initiated changes in the way sailors worked and saw themselves and their employer. This period should no longer be seen as one when an old sailing Navy of reluctant sailors and necessarily brutal officers required centralised reform to transform it into an organisation of skilled and efficient men, as Lewis and Rasor suggested.⁶⁹⁴ The 'professional naval rating' that Lewis argued came into being in 1853 already existed by that time. It was this core of professional sailors that allowed

⁶⁹⁴ Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, p.32.

the Royal Navy to fulfil its duties around the world as well as to develop and use new technology. The changes in working conditions of the mid-nineteenth century provided better for men who already saw the Navy as their main employer and had long and successful careers within it.

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Abbreviations:

ADM: Admiralty records held at the National Archives, Public Record Office.

BL: British Library

NMM: National Maritime Museum

RNM: Royal Naval Museum

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Appendix 1: Instructions for Allotments

Instructions on allotments (taken from printed instructions in muster book for HMS *Raven*, TNA: PRO: ADM 38/8841, 1 July-30 September 1843):

15. Allotments: - On the first fitting out of a Ship, no Declaration of Allotment is to be made out, until the Ship is nearly ready for Sea, or until the Seaman has belonged to her for three Months; and in every Case, regard is to be paid to the Amount of Charges incurred, and the Commencement of the Allotment, is to be regulated accordingly, so as to prevent his being in debt at the expiration of the first six Months. Men desirous of Allotting to a Wife or Child, are to be strictly questioned as to their having been lawfully married; and the Place where, and Time when married; and the Christian Name of the Child, and when and where baptized, are to be stated in the Declaration; in which, also, the Names of the Men are to be inserted in numerical Order, with their Number on the Ship's Book. Those Persons, only, who are borne as part of the Complement, or as Supernumeraries for Wages, by Order, are to be permitted to allot. When Men join, great care is to be taken to ascertain whether they have Allotments in force, and if so, they are not to make a new Declaration unless they are entitled to a higher rate of Allotment, in which case, a Notation of their having an Allotment in force, is to be stated in the Declaration List. Care is also to be taken that all Men having Allotments in force, have a Notation to that effect made against their Names in the Muster Books. All Allotments are to commence on the first of a Month; and immediate notice is to be given of Men Discharged, Transferred to other Ships, Dead, Discharged to Sick Quarters, or Run, who have Allotments in force.`

Appendix 2: Details of Ships in Sample

Ship	Dates of commission	Main location
HMS <i>Acorn</i>	29 January 1839 - 5 October 1843	Cape of Good Hope and Coast of Africa
HMS <i>Actaeon</i>	24 November 1834 - 21 March 1838	Mediterranean and South America
HMS <i>Aetna</i>	8 February 1839 - 25 April 1842	Home waters
HMS <i>Albatross</i>	11 May 1842 - 9 July 1846	North America and West Indies
HMS <i>Alecto</i>	26 October 1839 - 24 April 1843	Mediterranean, mainly Malta
HMS <i>Alligator</i>	20 July 1837 - 13 February 1842	Australia and China
HMS <i>Ardent</i>	1 August 1841 - 20 October 1845	South America and Sierra Leone
HMS <i>Caledonia</i>	27 October 1840 - 30 March 1842	Devonport and Dublin
HMS <i>Castor</i>	29 April 1843 - November 1847	China and New Zealand
HMS <i>Comet</i>	1 July 1837 - 22 November 1841	Spain, Home waters
HMS <i>Espoir</i>	January 1834 - September 1837	Between Falmouth and Lisbon
HM Steam Surveying Vessel <i>Fearless</i>	1 January 1841 - December 1842	Home waters
HM Steam Surveying Vessel <i>Fearless</i>	7 January 1843 - 31 July 1845	Home waters
HMS <i>Lapwing</i>	19 July 1837 - 7 December 1841	Packet service
HMS <i>Mastiff</i>	4 April 1836 - 18 January 1840	Orkney Islands
HMS <i>Princess Charlotte</i>	11 February 1837 - 30 July 1841	Mediterranean
HMS <i>Rattlesnake</i>	29 December 1834 - 17 December 1838	India, Australia, New Zealand
HMS <i>Raven</i>	9 May 1839 - 13 December 1844	Home waters
HMS <i>Skipjack</i>	March 1827 - 1 June 1841	West Indies
HM Steam Vessel <i>Virago</i>	25 May 1843 - 16 November 1847	Mediterranean
HMS <i>Wasp</i>	24 October 1837 - 12 May 1842	Mediterranean
HMS <i>Winchester</i>	21 March 1839 - 4 March 1845	North America and West Indies, Cape of Good Hope
HMS <i>Wolf</i>	15 June 1842 - 18 August 1847	China

HMS Acorn

Rate: Sloop, 16 guns

Complement: Men 96, Boys 24, Marines

20 Total 120

Commission: Began wages 29th Jan 1839, victualling 29th Feb 1839. Paid off 5th

October 1843. Served Cape of Good Hope and Coast of Africa station

Initial commissioning: Achieved 71.67% of complement after 48 days

commissioning (Devonport)

Total of 225 Ship's Company, Boys, Kroomen and African lads served on board during the commission.

Commander John Adams (throughout commission)

Muster books: ADM 38/7443 whole commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	150	66.67
Africa	40	17.78
Ireland	11	4.89
Scotland	7	3.11
N. America	4	1.78
Wales	3	1.33
St Helena	3	1.33
W. Indies	2	0.89
Sweden	1	0.44
Malta	1	0.44
Germany	1	0.44
Channel Islands	1	0.44
Australia	1	0.44
TOTAL	225	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Dorset	1	0.44	0.67
Essex	1	0.44	0.67
Herefordshire	1	0.44	0.67
Somerset	1	0.44	0.67
Suffolk	1	0.44	0.67
Yorkshire	1	0.44	0.67
Durham	2	0.89	1.33
Isle of Wight	2	0.89	1.33
Norfolk	3	1.33	2.00
Surrey	3	1.33	2.00
Sussex	3	1.33	2.00
Gloucestershire	4	1.78	2.67
Kent	7	3.11	4.67
Lancashire	10	4.44	6.67
London	11	4.89	7.33
Hampshire	15	6.67	10.00
Cornwall	22	9.78	14.67
Devon	62	27.56	41.33
TOTAL	150	66.67	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	23
As percentage of crew	10.22
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	5
This as % of all desertions	21.74
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	18
This as % of all desertions	78.26
Desertions overseas	16
This as % of all desertions	69.57
Deserters with previous service	14
This as % of all desertions	60.87

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	25.60
Standard deviation:	5.87

HMS Actaeon

Rate: 26 guns

Complement: Initially 90 men, 25 boys and 25 marines (total of 140) increased to 175 23rd Dec. 1834, reduced to 160 8th April 1836.

Commission: Began Wages and Victualling 24 November 1834. Paid off 21 March 1838. Served in the Mediterranean and South America.

Initial commissioning: Achieved 117.39% of complement after 117 days initial commissioning (Portsmouth)

Total of 165 men and boys served during commission.

Captain: Lord Edward Russell throughout commission

Muster books: ADM 37/8612-8614

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
Channel Islands	1	0.61
Germany	1	0.61
N. America	1	0.61
W. Indies	1	0.61
Wales	6	3.64
Scotland	8	4.85
Ireland	8	4.85
England	139	84.24
TOTAL	165	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Hampshire	75	45.45	53.96
London	15	9.09	10.79
Devon	14	8.48	10.07
Kent	8	4.85	5.76
Cornwall	6	3.64	4.32
Sussex	5	3.03	3.60
Essex	4	2.42	2.88
Yorkshire	2	1.21	1.44
Isle of Wight	2	1.21	1.44
Dorset	2	1.21	1.44
Derbyshire	2	1.21	1.44
Somerset	1	0.61	0.72
Norfolk	1	0.61	0.72
Northumberland	1	0.61	0.72
Lancashire	1	0.61	0.72
TOTAL	139	84.24	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	22
As percentage of crew	13.25
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	2
This as % of all desertions	9.09
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	20
This as % of all desertions	90.91
Desertions overseas	19
This as % of all desertions	86.36
Deserters with previous service	19.00
This as % of all desertions	86.36

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	28.25
Standard deviation:	5.59

HMS *Aetna*

Rate: 10-gun Brig

Complement: 42 men and Boys, 8

Marines.

Commission: Began Wages and Victualling 8th February 1839. Paid off 25th April 1842. Served in home waters.

Initial commissioning: Achieved 102.38% of complement after 75 days initial commissioning (Portsmouth).

Total of 73 men and boys served during commission.

Lieutenant & Commander: John Willson

Muster books: ADM 37/8619-8622

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	57	78.08
Ireland	7	9.59
Scotland	5	6.85
Wales	1	1.37
W. Indies	1	1.37
N. America	1	1.37
Heligoland	1	1.37
TOTAL	73	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Hampshire	13	17.81	22.81
Kent	7	9.59	12.28
Sussex	7	9.59	12.28
Devon	6	8.22	10.53
London	6	8.22	10.53
Lancashire	3	4.11	5.26
Isle of Wight	2	2.74	3.51
Gloucestershire	2	2.74	3.51
Essex	2	2.74	3.51
Dorset	2	2.74	3.51
Lincolnshire	1	1.37	1.75
Yorkshire	1	1.37	1.75
Norfolk	1	1.37	1.75
Surrey	1	1.37	1.75
Wiltshire	1	1.37	1.75
Durham	1	1.37	1.75
Leicestershire	1	1.37	1.75
TOTAL	57	78.08	100.00

Desertions

Total desertions	34
As percentage of crew	46.58
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	10
This as % of all desertions	29.41
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	24
This as % of all desertions	70.59
Desertions overseas	N/A
This as % of all desertions	N/A
Deserters with previous service	12
This as % of all desertions	35.29

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys) 26.89

Standard deviation: 6.71

HMS *Albatross*

Rate: 16 gun sloop

Complement: 90 men, 25 Boys, 25

Marines

Commission: Began wages and victualling
11th May 1842. Paid off 9th July 1846.

Served in North American and West
Indies.

Initial commissioning: Achieved 91.3% of
complement after 63 days initial
commissioning (Portsmouth).

Commander: Reginald Yorke

Muster books ADM 38/7486:

Total of 163 men and boys served on
board during the commission.

*Country of birth: all those listed in muster
book*

Country born	No.	%
England	135	82.82
Ireland	7	4.29
W. Indies	4	2.45
Scotland	4	2.45
N. America	4	2.45
Isle of Man	3	1.84
Channel Islands	3	1.84
Wales	1	0.61
Malta	1	0.61
Isle de France	1	0.61
TOTAL	163	100

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Hampshire	61	37.42	45.19
London	16	9.82	11.85
Devon	11	6.75	8.15
Dorset	9	5.52	6.67
Sussex	7	4.29	5.19
Lancashire	6	3.68	4.44
Kent	5	3.07	3.70
Cornwall	4	2.45	2.96
Isle of Wight	3	1.84	2.22
Norfolk	2	1.23	1.48
Wiltshire	2	1.23	1.48
Berkshire	1	0.61	0.74
Buckinghamshire	1	0.61	0.74
Cumberland	1	0.61	0.74
Derbyshire	1	0.61	0.74
Durham	1	0.61	0.74
Essex	1	0.61	0.74
Lincolnshire	1	0.61	0.74
Somerset	1	0.61	0.74
Surrey	1	0.61	0.74
TOTAL	135	82.82	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	28
As percentage of crew	17.18
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	7
This as % of all desertions	25.00
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	21
This as % of all desertions	75.00
Desertions overseas	25
This as % of all desertions	89.29
Deserters with previous service	17
This as % of all desertions	60.71

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	26.88
Standard deviation:	7.37

HMS *Alecto*

Rate: Steam vessel

Complement: 54 men and boys, 7 Marines

Commission: Commissioned: 26 October 1839. Paid off: 24 April 1843. Served in Mediterranean, mainly Malta.

Lieutenant & Commander: William

Hoseason

Muster books: ADM 38/7491

Initial commissioning: 75.93% of complement in 41 days (Portsmouth)

Total of 115 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	81	70.43
Ireland	11	9.57
Malta	7	6.09
Scotland	7	6.09
Wales	3	2.61
N. America	2	1.74
Germany	1	0.87
Holland	1	0.87
Isle of Man	1	0.87
Italy	1	0.87
TOTAL	115	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Devon	17	14.78	20.99
London	16	13.91	19.75
Kent	12	10.43	14.81
Hampshire	9	7.83	11.11
Cornwall	7	6.09	8.64
Somerset	3	2.61	3.70
Yorkshire	3	2.61	3.70
Gloucestershire	2	1.74	2.47
Lancashire	2	1.74	2.47
Suffolk	2	1.74	2.47
Cumberland	1	0.87	1.23
Dorset	1	0.87	1.23
Essex	1	0.87	1.23
Middlesex	1	0.87	1.23
Norfolk	1	0.87	1.23
Northumberland	1	0.87	1.23
Sussex	1	0.87	1.23
Wiltshire	1	0.87	1.23
TOTAL	81	70.43	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	32
As percentage of crew	27.83
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	9
This as % of all desertions	28.13
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	23
This as % of all desertions	71.88
Desertions overseas	31
This as % of all desertions	96.88
Deserters with previous service	11
This as % of all desertions	34.38

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	26.15
Standard deviation:	7.30

HMS Alligator

Rate: 16-gun sloop

Complement: 120 men and boys

Commission: Commissioned: 20th July 1837. Paid off: 13 February 1842.

Served in Australia and China.

Captain: Sir Gordon Bremer

Muster books: ADM 37/8649

Initial commissioning: 82.5% of complement in 71 days (Portsmouth)

Total of 274 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
Heligoland	1	0.36
Isle of Man	1	0.36
W. Indies	1	0.36
At sea	2	0.73
N. America	4	1.46
Wales	4	1.46
Channel Islands	5	1.82
none given	6	2.19
Ireland	15	5.47
Scotland	21	7.66
England	214	78.10
TOTAL	274	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Hampshire	59	21.53	27.57
Devon	48	17.52	22.43
London	30	10.95	14.02
Cornwall	18	6.57	8.41
Kent	12	4.38	5.61
Lancashire	6	2.19	2.80
Norfolk	7	2.55	3.27
Northumberland	4	1.46	1.87
Durham	3	1.09	1.40
Surrey	3	1.09	1.40
Somerset	3	1.09	1.40
Gloucestershire	3	1.09	1.40
Wiltshire	2	0.73	0.93
Warwickshire	2	0.73	0.93
Essex	2	0.73	0.93
Isle of Wight	1	0.36	0.47
Cumberland	1	0.36	0.47
Dorset	1	0.36	0.47
Sussex	1	0.36	0.47
Lincolnshire	1	0.36	0.47
Isle of Man	1	0.36	0.47
Cheshire	1	0.36	0.47
Yorkshire	1	0.36	0.47
Sunderland	1	0.36	0.47
Suffolk	1	0.36	0.47
Nottinghamshire	1	0.36	0.47
Herefordshire	1	0.36	0.47
TOTAL	214	78.10	100.00

Age profile

Mean age (excl. Boys)	27.25
Standard deviation:	6.60

Desertions

Total desertions	
As percentage of crew	23.64
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	36
This as % of all desertions	55.38
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	29
This as % of all desertions	44.62
Desertions overseas	26
This as % of all desertions	40.00
Deserters with previous service	25
This as % of all desertions	38.46

HMS *Ardent*

Rate: Steam sloop

Complement: 124 (inc. 20 Marines), rising to 145 5th June 1841

Commission: Began Wages and Victualling 1st August 1841. Paid off 20th October 1845. Served in South America and Sierra Leone.

Initial commissioning: 91.35% of complement in 62 days (Chatham)

Captain: John Russell

Muster books: ADM 38/7543

Total of 192 Ship's Company, Boys, and Kroomen served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	114	59.38
Africa	51	26.56
Ireland	11	5.73
Scotland	9	4.69
Channel Islands	2	1.04
Wales	2	1.04
At sea	1	0.52
India	1	0.52
Spain	1	0.52
TOTAL	192	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Kent	35	18.23	30.70
London	19	9.90	16.67
Devon	13	6.77	11.40
Hampshire	6	3.13	5.26
Sussex	6	3.13	5.26
Surrey	5	2.60	4.39
Cornwall	4	2.08	3.51
Essex	3	1.56	2.63
Lancashire	3	1.56	2.63
Somerset	3	1.56	2.63
Berkshire	2	1.04	1.75
Leicestershire	2	1.04	1.75
Middlesex	2	1.04	1.75
Cambridgeshire	1	0.52	0.88
Cheshire	1	0.52	0.88
Dorset	1	0.52	0.88
Durham	1	0.52	0.88
Gloucestershire	1	0.52	0.88
Northumberland	1	0.52	0.88
Shropshire	1	0.52	0.88
Suffolk	1	0.52	0.88
Warwickshire	1	0.52	0.88
Wiltshire	1	0.52	0.88
Worcestershire	1	0.52	0.88
TOTAL	114	59.38	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	20
As percentage of crew	10.42
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	10
This as % of all desertions	50.00
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	10
This as % of all desertions	50.00
Desertions overseas	10
This as % of all desertions	50.00
Deserters with previous service	15
This as % of all desertions	75.00

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	25.05
Standard deviation:	6.24

HMS *Caledonia*

Rate: Third

Complement: 135 men and boys
(including 125 Marines) and 30 for
Tender

Commission: Began wages 27th October
1840. Paid off 30th March 1842.

Receiving ship, Devonport and Dublin.

Initial commissioning: 66.67% of
complement in 61 days (Devonport)

Captain Henry Eden

Muster books: ADM 37/8821-25

Total of 194 Ship's Company and Boys
served on board during the
commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in *muster
book*

Country born	No.	%
England	165	85.05
Ireland	13	6.70
Scotland	7	3.61
Wales	4	2.06
Channel Islands	2	1.03
N. America	2	1.03
Italy	1	0.52
TOTAL	194	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Devon	73	37.63	44.24
Cornwall	44	22.68	26.67
Kent	7	3.61	4.24
London	6	3.09	3.64
Gloucestershire	5	2.58	3.03
Hampshire	5	2.58	3.03
Somerset	4	2.06	2.42
Northumberland	3	1.55	1.82
Sussex	3	1.55	1.82
Lancashire	2	1.03	1.21
Surrey	2	1.03	1.21
Yorkshire	2	1.03	1.21
Bedfordshire	1	0.52	0.61
Durham	1	0.52	0.61
Essex	1	0.52	0.61
Leicestershire	1	0.52	0.61
Middlesex	1	0.52	0.61
Norfolk	1	0.52	0.61
Suffolk	1	0.52	0.61
Warwickshire	1	0.52	0.61
Worcestershire	1	0.52	0.61
TOTAL	165	85.05	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	23
As percentage of crew	11.98
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	10
This as % of all desertions	43.48
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	13
This as % of all desertions	56.52
Desertions overseas	N/A
This as % of all desertions	N/A
Deserters with previous service	14
This as % of all desertions	60.87

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	34.08
Standard deviation:	10.39

HMS *Castor*

Rate: 36 guns

Complement: 310 men and boys, 50

Marines

Commission: Began wages 29th April 1843, victualling 1st May 1843. Paid off November 1847: Served in China and New Zealand.

Captain Charles Graham

Muster books: ADM38/406-414

Initial commissioning: 90.32% of complement in 90 days commissioning (Chatham)

Total of 404 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	329	81.44
Ireland	33	8.17
Scotland	27	6.68
Wales	5	1.24
N. America	2	0.50
W. Indies	2	0.50
Channel Islands	1	0.25
Corfu	1	0.25
Gibraltar	1	0.25
Hanover	1	0.25
St Helena	1	0.25
Sweden	1	0.25
TOTAL	404	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Devon	76	18.86	23.10
London	70	17.37	21.28
Kent	60	14.89	18.24
Cornwall	36	8.93	10.94
Hampshire	23	5.71	6.99
Lancashire	11	2.73	3.34
Gloucestershire	6	1.49	1.82
Essex	5	1.24	1.52
Surrey	5	1.24	1.52
Norfolk	4	0.99	1.22
Somerset	4	0.99	1.22
Sussex	4	0.99	1.22
Yorkshire	4	0.99	1.22
Cambridgeshire	2	0.50	0.61
Cumberland	2	0.50	0.61
Isle of Wight	2	0.50	0.61
Lincolnshire	2	0.50	0.61
Middlesex	2	0.50	0.61
Northamptonshire	2	0.50	0.61
Northumberland	2	0.50	0.61
Nottinghamshire	2	0.50	0.61
Dorset	1	0.25	0.30
Durham	1	0.25	0.30
Rutland	1	0.25	0.30
Suffolk	1	0.25	0.30
Wiltshire	1	0.25	0.30
TOTAL	329	81.64	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	38
As percentage of crew	9.36
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	12
This as % of all desertions	31.58
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	26
This as % of all desertions	68.42
Desertions overseas	26
This as % of all desertions	68.42
Deserters with previous service	19
This as % of all desertions	50.00

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	26.55
Standard deviation:	5.98

HMS Comet

Rate Steam vessel

Complement: 5 Boys, 3 Engineer Boys, 10 Stokers and 12 men.

Commission: Began Wages & Victualling 1st July 1837. Paid off: 22nd November 1841. Served off coast of Spain, then in home waters.

Lieutenant & Commander: George T Gordon to June 1840, then F Chevallier Syer

Muster books: ADM 37/8906-8908

Initial commissioning: 73/33% of complement in 89 days commissioning (Plymouth)

Total of 68 Ship's Company, Stokers and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	57	83.82
Scotland	5	7.35
Germany	2	2.94
France	1	1.47
Ireland	1	1.47
N. America	1	1.47
Wales	1	1.47
TOTAL	68	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
London	28	40.58	47.46
Devon	14	20.29	23.73
Cornwall	4	5.80	6.78
Kent	4	5.80	6.78
Hampshire	2	2.90	3.39
Yorkshire	1	1.45	1.69
Warwickshire	1	1.45	1.69
Sussex	1	1.45	1.69
Somerset	1	1.45	1.69
Essex	1	1.45	1.69
TOTAL	57	82.61	96.61

Desertions

Total desertions	8
As percentage of crew	11.59
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	4
This as % of all desertions	50.00
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	4
This as % of all desertions	50.00
Desertions overseas	-
This as % of all desertions	-
Deserters with previous service	3
This as % of all desertions	37.5

Age profile

Mean age (excl. Boys)	27.02
Standard Deviation:	6.15

HMS *Espoir*

Rate: 10-gun brig

Complement: 44 men & Boys, 8 Marines

Commission: January 1834 to September 1837. Served between Falmouth & Lisbon.

Lt Commander: Charles W Riley

Muster books: ADM 37/9067-70

Initial commissioning:

Total of 88 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	69	78.41
Ireland	9	10.23
Scotland	3	3.41
Wales	3	3.41
Channel Islands	2	2.27
France	1	1.14
W. Indies	1	1.14
TOTAL	88	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Cornwall	27	30.68	39.13
Devon	16	18.18	23.19
Hampshire	11	12.50	15.94
London	5	5.68	7.25
Kent	2	2.27	2.90
Lancashire	2	2.27	2.90
Somerset	2	2.27	2.90
Durham	1	1.14	1.45
Gloucestershire	1	1.14	1.45
Sussex	1	1.14	1.45
Yorkshire	1	1.14	1.45
TOTAL	69	78.41	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	27
As percentage of crew	30.68
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	8
This as % of all desertions	29.63
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	19
This as % of all desertions	70.37
Desertions overseas	N/A
This as % of all desertions	N/A
Deserters with previous service	15
This as % of all desertions	55.56

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	28.93
Standard deviation:	7.35

HM Steam Surveying Vessel

Fearless (commission 1)

Rate: Sloop

Complement: 27, then from January 1842

27 Men, 5 Boys, no Marines

Commission: 1st January 1841 to

December 1842. Surveying mainly in

home waters (Harwich, Ramsgate, Boulogne, Leith).

Captain Surveyor Frederick Bullock

Muster books: ADM 38/739

Initial commissioning: 56.25% of complement in 136 days (Harwich).

Total of 49 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	47	95.92
Ireland	2	4.08
TOTAL	49	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Kent	17	34.69	36.17
London	17	34.69	36.17
Cornwall	3	6.12	6.38
Yorkshire	3	6.12	6.38
Hampshire	2	4.08	4.26
Devon	1	2.04	2.13
Essex	1	2.04	2.13
Norfolk	1	2.04	2.13
Suffolk	1	2.04	2.13
Sussex	1	2.04	2.13
TOTAL	47	95.92	100

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	13
As percentage of crew	26.53
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	5
This as % of all desertions	38.46
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	8
This as % of all desertions	61.54
Desertions overseas	N/A
This as % of all desertions	N/A
Deserters with previous service	9
This as % of all desertions	69.23

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	29.14
Standard deviation:	9.56

HM Steam Surveying Vessel

Fearless (commission 2)

Rate: Sloop

Complement: 36 Men and 4 Boys (37 Men and 4 Boys from January 1844), no Marines

Commission: 7th January 1843 to 31st July 1845. Served in home waters (Portsmouth, Southampton, Weymouth, London, Cowes).

Commander W L Sheringham

Muster books: ADM 38/740-741

Initial commissioning: 75% of complement recruited after 57 days (Portsmouth).

Total of 38 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	36	94.74
Channel Islands	1	2.63
N. America	1	2.63
TOTAL	38	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Hampshire	28	73.68	77.78
Kent	2	5.26	5.56
Berkshire	1	2.63	2.78
Devon	1	2.63	2.78
Dorset	1	2.63	2.78
Middlesex	1	2.63	2.78
Sunderland	1	2.63	2.78
Yorkshire	1	2.63	2.78
TOTAL	36	94.74	100.00

Desertion rate:

There were no desertions recorded from this commission.

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys) 30
Standard deviation: 7.99

HMS *Lapwing*

Rate: packet

Complement: 27 Men, 6 Boys

Commission: Began wages & victualling 19th July 1837. Paid off 7th December 1841. Served between Falmouth and Barbados, Rio, Havana and Halifax.

Lieut & Commander Francis R Coghlan, , Coghlan to 6th June 1841, superseded by John Douglas to 8th July 1841, superseded by Frederick Drew to end commission.

Muster books: ADM 37/9278-80

Initial commissioning: 81.82% of complement after 91 days (Chatham).

Total of 104 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	89	85.58
Ireland	9	8.65
Wales	2	1.92
Channel Islands	2	1.92
Scotland	1	0.96
Norway	1	0.96
TOTAL	104	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Cornwall	59	56.73	66.29
Kent	7	6.73	7.87
Devon	6	5.77	6.74
London	6	5.77	6.74
Durham	2	1.92	2.25
Hampshire	2	1.92	2.25
Lancashire	2	1.92	2.25
Dorset	1	0.96	1.12
Isle of Wight	1	0.96	1.12
Lincolnshire	1	0.96	1.12
Middlesex	1	0.96	1.12
Essex	1	0.96	1.12
TOTAL	89	85.58	100.00

Desertion rate

Total desertions	52
As percentage of crew	50.00
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	9
This as % of all desertions	17.31
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	43
This as % of all desertions	82.69
Desertions overseas	11
This as % of all desertions	21.15
Deserters with previous service	22
This as % of all desertions	42.31

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	25.21
Standard deviation:	6.09

HMS Mastiff

Rate: Surveying vessel

Complement: 42 Men and 2 Second Class Boys to 16 April 1836 then 39 Men and 7 Boys (no Marines)

Commission: Began Wages and Victualling 4th April 1836. Paid off 18th January 1840. Served in Orkney Islands.

Master and Commander George Thomas

Muster books: ADM 37/9337-9

Initial commissioning: 72.73% of complement in 20 days (Chatham)

Total of 80 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	68	85.00
Scotland	9	11.25
Ireland	2	2.50
W. Indies	1	1.25
TOTAL	80	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Kent	29	36.25	42.65
London	26	32.50	38.24
Devon	3	3.75	4.41
Essex	2	2.50	2.94
Hampshire	2	2.50	2.94
Suffolk	2	2.50	2.94
Cambridgeshire	1	1.25	1.47
Cumberland	1	1.25	1.47
Lancashire	1	1.25	1.47
Yorkshire	1	1.25	1.47
TOTAL	68	85.00	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	15
As percentage of crew	18.75
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	3
This as % of all desertions	20.00
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	12
This as % of all desertions	80.00
Desertions overseas	N/A
This as % of all desertions	N/A
Deserters with previous service	3
This as % of all desertions	20.00

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	29.18
Standard deviation:	8.09

HMS *Princess Charlotte*

Rate: First Rate

Complement: 460 men, 90 boys, 165

Marines

Commission: Began Wages and

Victualling 11th February 1837. Paid off 30th July 1841. Served in Mediterranean, flagship.

Captain Arthur Fanshawe

Muster books: ADM 37/9535, 9552

Initial commission: 81.64% of complement in 120 days (Portsmouth)

Total of 773 Ship's Company and Boys served on board during the commission

Country of origin: Ship's Company & Boys

Country born	No.	%
England	591	76.46
Ireland	99	12.81
Scotland	46	5.95
Wales	15	1.94
Germany	5	0.65
Malta	4	0.52
N. America	3	0.39
W. Indies	3	0.39
Channel Islands	2	0.26
Africa	1	0.13
At sea	1	0.13
Gibraltar	1	0.13
India	1	0.13
Sandwich Islands	1	0.13
TOTAL	773	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Hampshire	188	24.32	31.81
London	86	11.13	14.55
Devon	78	10.09	13.20
Kent	45	5.82	7.61
Sussex	31	4.01	5.25
Lancashire	21	2.72	3.55
Isle of Wight	20	2.59	3.38
Cornwall	19	2.46	3.21
Yorkshire	11	1.42	1.86
Norfolk	10	1.29	1.69
Northumberland	9	1.16	1.52
Durham	8	1.03	1.35
Somerset	8	1.03	1.35
Lincolnshire	7	0.91	1.18
Cheshire	6	0.78	1.02
Dorset	6	0.78	1.02

Essex	6	0.78	1.02
Suffolk	6	0.78	1.02
Gloucestershire	5	0.65	0.85
Cumberland	4	0.52	0.68
Surrey	3	0.39	0.51
Wiltshire	3	0.39	0.51
Berkshire	2	0.26	0.34
Middlesex	2	0.26	0.34
Bedfordshire	1	0.13	0.17
Herefordshire	1	0.13	0.17
Isle of Man	1	0.13	0.17
Nottinghamshire	1	0.13	0.17
Oxfordshire	1	0.13	0.17
Shropshire	1	0.13	0.17
Staffordshire	1	0.13	0.17
TOTAL	591	76.46	100.00

For those born in Ireland, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of Irish crew
Cork	53	6.82	53.54
Dublin	10	1.29	10.10
Waterford	6	0.77	6.06
Wexford	6	0.77	6.06
Antrim	4	0.51	4.04
Galway	3	0.39	3.03
Kerry	3	0.39	3.03
Donegal	2	0.26	2.02
Limerick	2	0.26	2.02
Mayo	2	0.26	2.02
Tipperary	2	0.26	2.02
Armagh	1	0.13	1.01
Bantry	1	0.13	1.01
Fermanagh	1	0.13	1.01
King's County	1	0.13	1.01
Meath	1	0.13	1.01
none given	1	0.13	1.01
TOTAL	99	12.74	100.00

Desertions

Total desertions	45
As percentage of crew	5.82
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	39
This as % of all desertions	86.67
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	6
This as % of all desertions	16.22
Desertions overseas	4
This as % of all desertions	8.89
Deserters with previous service	25
This as % of all desertions	55.56

Age profile

Mean age (excl. Boys)	28.32
Standard deviation	6.88

HMS *Rattlesnake*

Rate: 28 guns

Complement: 100 men, 35 Boys, 25

Marines

Commission: Began wages & victualling
29th December 1834. Paid off 17th

December 1838. Travelled to Rio de
Janiero, Simon's Bay, Trincomalee,
Bombay, Goa, Madras, Sydney and
New Zealand.

Captain: William Hobson

Muster books: ADM 37/9625-29

Initial commission: 83.95% of complement
in 85 days (Portsmouth)

Total of 181 men and boys served
during the course of the commission.

Country of origin: Ship's Company & Boys

Country born	No.	%
England	156	86.19
Scotland	9	4.97
Ireland	5	2.76
Wales	3	1.66
At sea	2	1.10
Ceylon	2	1.10
Germany	1	0.55
Isle of Man	1	0.55
Malta	1	0.55
N. America	1	0.55
TOTAL	181	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Hampshire	56	30.94	35.90
London	24	13.26	15.38
Devon	19	10.50	12.18
Kent	11	6.08	7.05
Sussex	8	4.42	5.13
Lancashire	7	3.87	4.49
Northumberland	6	3.31	3.85
Cornwall	5	2.76	3.21
Yorkshire	4	2.21	2.56
Cumberland	2	1.10	1.28
Dorset	2	1.10	1.28
Essex	2	1.10	1.28
Isle of Wight	2	1.10	1.28
Lincolnshire	2	1.10	1.28
Buckinghamshire	1	0.55	0.64
Gloucestershire	1	0.55	0.64
Leicestershire	1	0.55	0.64
Somerset	1	0.55	0.64
Staffordshire	1	0.55	0.64
Wiltshire	1	0.55	0.64
TOTAL	156	86.19	100.00

Age profile

Mean age (excl. Boys)

Standard deviation

Mean age 29.03

Standard deviation 6.94

Desertions

Total desertions 23

As percentage of crew 10.55

Desertions within 3 months of arrival 11

This as % of all desertions 47.83

Desertions after 3 months of arrival 12

This as % of all desertions 52.17

Desertions overseas 14

This as % of all desertions 60.87

Deserters with previous service 19

This as % of all desertions 82.61

HMS *Raven*

Rate: Cutter

Complement: 35 men and boys, 5 Marines

Commission: Began wages 9th May 1839.

Paid off 13th December 1844. Served in home waters (Liverpool, Ireland, Scotland, Plymouth, Sheerness).

Lieut & Commander D R B Mapleton, invalided 16th June 1841, then J P Roepel, superseded 5th March 1842 by James W L Sheils, discharged sick 27th January 1844, John Stephen to end commission.

Muster books: ADM38/1548, 1549, 1550

Initial commissioning: 45.71% of complement in 102 days (Sheerness).

Total of 119 men and Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	83	69.75
Ireland	13	10.92
Scotland	11	9.24
Wales	6	5.04
W. Indies	2	1.68
At sea	1	0.84
Channel Islands	1	0.84
N. America	1	0.84
none given	1	0.84
TOTAL	119	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
London	17	14.29	20.48
Hampshire	16	13.45	19.28
Kent	11	9.24	13.25
Devon	8	6.72	9.64
Cornwall	4	3.36	4.82
Northumberland	4	3.36	4.82
Sussex	3	2.52	3.61
Yorkshire	3	2.52	3.61
Dorset	2	1.68	2.41
Essex	2	1.68	2.41
Gloucestershire	2	1.68	2.41
Lancashire	2	1.68	2.41
Lincolnshire	2	1.68	2.41
Cumberland	1	0.84	1.20
Isle of Wight	1	0.84	1.20
Nottingham	1	0.84	1.20
Somerset	1	0.84	1.20
Suffolk	1	0.84	1.20
Surrey	1	0.84	1.20
Warwickshire	1	0.84	1.20
TOTAL	83	69.75	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	39
As percentage of crew	32.77
Desertions within 3 months of appearance	22
This as % of all desertions	56.41
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	17
This as % of all desertions	43.59
Desertions overseas	-
This as % of all desertions	-
Deserters with previous service	10
This as % of all desertions	25.64

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	27.31
Standard deviation:	8.28

HMS Skipjack

Rate: Schooner, 5 guns

Complement: 39 men and 4 Boys. From July 1840, 26 men, 8 boys, 6 Marines.

Commission: Began wages and victualling March 1827. Ship lost 1st June 1841.

West Indies

Commander/Captain

Muster books: ADM37/9878-9885

Initial commissioning: 69.77% of complement recruited in 161 days (Bermuda)

Total of 344 Ship's Company & Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	214	62.21
Scotland	46	13.37
Ireland	28	8.14
W. Indies	17	4.94
N. America	12	3.49
Wales	9	2.62
Channel Islands	4	1.16
Hanover	3	0.87
Isle of Man	3	0.87
none given	2	0.58
Africa	1	0.29
at sea	1	0.29
Denmark	1	0.29
France	1	0.29
India	1	0.29
Norway	1	0.29
TOTAL	344	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
London	45	13.08	21.03
Devon	26	7.56	12.15
Hampshire	26	7.56	12.15
Kent	21	6.10	9.81
Lancashire	21	6.10	9.81
Cornwall	11	3.20	5.14
Cumberland	9	2.62	4.21
Yorkshire	9	2.62	4.21
Norfolk	8	2.33	3.74
Durham	6	1.74	2.80
Northumberland	5	1.45	2.34
Dorset	3	0.87	1.40
Essex	3	0.87	1.40
Gloucestershire	3	0.87	1.40
Suffolk	3	0.87	1.40
Sussex	3	0.87	1.40
Cheshire	2	0.58	0.93
Isle of Wight	2	0.58	0.93
Lincolnshire	2	0.58	0.93
Berkshire	1	0.29	0.47
Cambridgeshire	1	0.29	0.47
Oxfordshire	1	0.29	0.47
Sunderland	1	0.29	0.47
Surrey	1	0.29	0.47
unknown	1	0.29	0.47
TOTAL	214	62.21	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	161
As percentage of crew	46.80
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	47
This as % of all desertions	29.19
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	114
This as % of all desertions	70.81
Desertions overseas	161
This as % of all desertions	100
Deserters with previous service	69
This as % of all desertions	42.86

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	26.76
Standard deviation:	6.83

HM Steam Vessel *Virago*

Rate: 6-gun sloop

Complement: 124 men & Boys, 22

Marines

Commission: Began wages 25th May 1843.

Paid off: 16 November 1847. Served on Mediterranean station.

Commander George G Otway to 22nd

June 1846, superseded by John Lunn to end commission.

Muster books: ADM 38/9281

Initial commissioning: 83.06% of complement recruited in 117 days (Chatham)

Total of 153 Ship's Company & Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	124	81.05
Ireland	13	8.50
Malta	6	3.92
Scotland	4	2.61
Wales	2	1.31
Africa	1	0.65
Channel Islands	1	0.65
Isle of Man	1	0.65
Spain	1	0.65
TOTAL	153	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Kent	31	20.26	25.00
Devon	19	12.42	15.32
Hampshire	16	10.46	12.90
London	15	9.80	12.10
Cornwall	4	2.61	3.23
Dorset	4	2.61	3.23
Sussex	4	2.61	3.23
Derbyshire	3	1.96	2.42
Essex	3	1.96	2.42
Lancashire	3	1.96	2.42
Norfolk	3	1.96	2.42
Surrey	3	1.96	2.42
Middlesex	2	1.31	1.61
Northumberland	2	1.31	1.61
Nottinghamshire	2	1.31	1.61
Somerset	2	1.31	1.61
Suffolk	2	1.31	1.61
Bedfordshire	1	0.65	0.81
Berkshire	1	0.65	0.81
Durham	1	0.65	0.81
Lincolnshire	1	0.65	0.81
Wiltshire	1	0.65	0.81
Yorkshire	1	0.65	0.81
TOTAL	124	81.05	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	15
As percentage of crew	9.80
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	15
This as % of all desertions	100.00
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	0
This as % of all desertions	0.00
Desertions overseas	N/A
This as % of all desertions	N/A
Deserters with previous service	5
This as % of all desertions	33.33

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	28.59
Standard deviation:	6.82

HMS Wasp

Rate: Sloop

Complement: 90 men and Boys, 20

Marines

Commission: Began Wages and Victualling 24th October 1837. Paid off 12 May 1842. Served on Mediterranean station.

Commander Dudley Pelham to 10th May 1840, superseded by request, George Mansel to 24th December 1840, promoted, William Glanvill to 6th January 1841, superseded by Hon Henry A Murray until ship paid off.

Muster books: ADM 37/10082-85

Initial commissioning: 82.22% of complement in 89 days (Portsmouth)

Total of 142 Ship's Company & Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	110	77.46
Malta	8	5.63
Ireland	7	4.93
Scotland	6	4.23
Wales	3	2.11
Channel Islands	2	1.41
Germany	2	1.41
N. America	2	1.41
Gibraltar	1	0.70
Norway	1	0.70
TOTAL	142	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Hampshire	44	30.99	40.00
London	12	8.45	10.91
Devon	11	7.75	10.00
Kent	9	6.34	8.18
Isle of Wight	8	5.63	7.27
Lancashire	4	2.82	3.64
Yorkshire	4	2.82	3.64
Cornwall	3	2.11	2.73
Sussex	3	2.11	2.73
Cumberland	2	1.41	1.82
Oxfordshire	2	1.41	1.82
Bedfordshire	1	0.70	0.91
Durham	1	0.70	0.91
Essex	1	0.70	0.91
Gloucestershire	1	0.70	0.91
Northumberland	1	0.70	0.91
Surrey	1	0.70	0.91
Warwickshire	1	0.70	0.91
Wiltshire	1	0.70	0.91
TOTAL	110	77.46	100.00

Desertion rate:

Total desertions	18
As percentage of crew	12.68
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	6
This as % of all desertions	33.33
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	12
This as % of all desertions	66.67
Desertions overseas	14
This as % of all desertions	77.78
Deserters with previous service	4
This as % of all desertions	22.22

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	28.95
Standard deviation:	8.30

HMS Winchester

Rate: Fourth.

Complement: 395 men, boys & Marines

Commission: Began wages 21st March 1839. Paid off 4th March 1845. Served in North America and the West Indies (1839-41) then on the Cape of Good Hope (to end 1844) before returning to Portsmouth.

Captain John Parker to 19th August 1841 (takes command of *Vesta*); J M Carter to end commission

Muster books: ADM37/10107

Initial commissioning 77.91% of complement recruited in 123 days (Chatham, Gillingham).

Total of 544 Ship's Company & Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	415	76.29
Scotland	47	8.64
Ireland	40	7.35
W. Indies	13	2.39
Wales	9	1.65
N. America	7	1.29
at sea	2	0.37
none given	2	0.37
Channel Islands	1	0.18
E. Indies	1	0.18
France	1	0.18
Germany	1	0.18
Holland	1	0.18
India	1	0.18
Isle of Man	1	0.18
Italy	1	0.18
Sweden	1	0.18
TOTAL	544	100.00

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys) 26.38
Standard deviation: 6.85

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Kent	98	18.01	23.61
London	76	13.97	18.31
Hampshire	60	11.03	14.46
Devon	37	6.80	8.92
Lancashire	15	2.76	3.61
Cornwall	14	2.57	3.37
Essex	11	2.02	2.65
Sussex	11	2.02	2.65
Yorkshire	10	1.84	2.41
Durham	8	1.47	1.93
Norfolk	8	1.47	1.93
Gloucestershire	7	1.29	1.69
Isle of Wight	7	1.29	1.69
Dorset	6	1.10	1.45
Suffolk	6	1.10	1.45
Surrey	6	1.10	1.45
Cambridgeshire	5	0.92	1.20
Berkshire	4	0.74	0.96
Cheshire	4	0.74	0.96
Cumberland	4	0.74	0.96
Somerset	3	0.55	0.72
Bedfordshire	2	0.37	0.48
Lincolnshire	2	0.37	0.48
Northumberland	2	0.37	0.48
Huntingdonshire	1	0.18	0.24
Middlesex	1	0.18	0.24
Northampton	1	0.18	0.24
Nottingham	1	0.18	0.24
Shropshire	1	0.18	0.24
Staffordshire	1	0.18	0.24
Warwickshire	1	0.18	0.24
Westmoreland	1	0.18	0.24
Wiltshire	1	0.18	0.24
TOTAL	415	76.29	100.00

Desertions

Total desertions	73
As percentage of crew	13.42
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	29
This as % of all desertions	39.73
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	44
This as % of all desertions	60.27
Desertions overseas	48
This as % of all desertions	65.75
Deserters with previous service	29
This as % of all desertions	39.73

HMS Wolf

Rate: Sloop

Complement: 120 men and boys, 20

Marines

Commission: Began wages & victualling 15th June 1842,. Paid off 18th August 1847. Served on China station.

Commander Courtney O Hayes, to 13th June 1843 (*Driver*); Arthur Vyner, to 27th August 1844 (invalided), James T Caldwell (Acting) to 17th October 1845 (*Agincourt*); James A Gordon, to 6th January 1847 (DD); L G Heath (Acting) to 17th March 1847 (superseded); N Vansittart, to end commission.

Muster books: ADM 38/9357

Initial commissioning 80/83% of complement in 61 days (Devonport).

Total of Ship's Company & Boys served on board during the commission.

Country of birth: all those listed in muster book

Country born	No.	%
England	129	86.00
Ireland	7	4.67
Scotland	4	2.67
Channel Islands	2	1.33
India	2	1.33
N. America	2	1.33
Wales	2	1.33
At sea	1	0.67
Isle of Man	1	0.67
TOTAL	150	100.00

For those born in England, county of birth

County born	No.	% of whole crew	% of English crew
Devon	49	32.67	37.98
Cornwall	25	16.67	19.38
Hampshire	15	10.00	11.63
London	10	6.67	7.75
Norfolk	5	3.33	3.88
Somerset	5	3.33	3.88
Lancashire	3	2.00	2.33
Essex	2	1.33	1.55
Gloucestershire	3	2.00	2.33
Kent	2	1.33	1.55
Yorkshire	2	1.33	1.55
Cumberland	1	0.67	0.78
Dorset	1	0.67	0.78
Hertfordshire	1	0.67	0.78
Middlesex	1	0.67	0.78
Northamptonshire	1	0.67	0.78
Northumberland	1	0.67	0.78
Oxfordshire	1	0.67	0.78
Worcestershire	1	0.67	0.78
TOTAL	129	86.00	100.00

Desertions

Total desertions	11
As percentage of crew	7.28
Desertions within 3 months of arrival	6
This as % of all desertions	54.55
Desertions after 3 months of arrival	5
This as % of all desertions	45.45
Desertions overseas	6
This as % of all desertions	54.55
Deserters with previous service	5
This as % of all desertions	45.45

Age profile:

Mean age (excl. Boys)	26.36
Standard deviation:	6.31