“Our Proudest Heritage”:
Masculinity, Nostalgia, and the Sailing Navy on Display, 1820-1920

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Dedication

Dedicated to my sister, Jillian, who, by virtue of being my twin, has been somewhat unwittingly subjected to a lifetime of my enthusiasm for whatever I undertake, and yet has followed and joined in the research for this project not only willingly but enthusiastically.

Acknowledgements

This project has been almost a decade in the making. The idea of studying the Royal Navy as a cultural symbol sprang from work I conducted, and conversations I had with faculty and graduate students, while completing my bachelor's degree at the University of New Hampshire. I cannot submit this dissertation, then, without acknowledging my debt to the UNH history department, and particularly professors Jan Golinski, Nicoletta Gullace, and Jessica Lepler, all of whom provided unbounded support in my undergraduate work and were the first to encourage me to apply to continue my research in a PhD program.

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encouraged me to think of new ways to expand my work and draw previously unseen connections. Finally, thank you to Michael, Johnny, Andrea, Sam, Andreas, Nathan, Lauren and everyone else who made all of the afternoon conversations in the office or the "Café Histoire" a welcome and always memorable diversion from long days of teaching, researching and writing.

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Over the course of my research, I had the pleasure of spending several months in the UK, both for research and for conferences. There is nothing quite like conducting research in settings that are integral to the story one hopes to tell, and I had the good fortune to work at the same sites that, in the nineteenth century, formed the basis of my dissertation's case studies. Thank you, then, to the staff of Royal Museums Greenwich, including the Royal Hospital and Greenwich Park; to Clare Hunt, curator for the HMS *Trincomalee*; and the staff of the National Maritime Museum, which houses the figurehead and stern ornament of the HMS *Implacable*. I also must acknowledge Suzanne Heywood, archivist at the Teesside University special collections, which houses

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Abstract of Dissertation

"Our Proudest Heritage":
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Through the nineteenth century, Britain experienced an extended period of naval anxiety. At the close of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the nation was secure in its position as the preeminent naval power in Europe, having concluded a century-long series of French wars, and having specifically confirmed its naval supremacy at Trafalgar in 1805. There was no question in the early decades of the century that "Britannia ruled the waves," but as the decades wore on, British popular culture could not say for certain whether the navy would *look* as glorious while demonstrating its power, nor whether steam-powered vessels created a capacity for heroism.

The nineteenth century has been studied as a nostalgic time in British history, when the nation looked to its real and imagined past for a sense of shared identity. Nostalgia was present in the land-based mythology of "merrie England," and in an emerging national interest in historic places. This study examines how nostalgia was present in British conceptions of the navy as well. As the Royal Navy transitioned from sail to steam, the popular press expressed an increasing worry that the technologically-advanced fleet of the present may not be as heroic as the sailing fleet that had secured dominion of the waves, and that sailors of the present may be stripped of their chance for glory.

Britain expressed its concern for the navy's image through newspapers, popular magazines, literature, and prints, and also began to put its navy on display in new ways.

Through exhibitions, galleries, and the preservation of sailing ships as floating monuments, representation of the navy in the public sphere created a narrative that overwrote modern realities with a glorified past. The sailing navy, in its commemorated form, became a symbol of Britain's national character, and its sailors were portrayed as embodiments of British masculinity, morality, work ethic and patriotism. By looking to the naval past, displays argued, the nation could find something ancient in its character that could maintain Britain's worth in a modern century. In the relatively peaceful early decades, the navy of the past provided a convenient framework to promote proper British conduct in daily life. From the relatively peaceful early decades, through the naval scares of the 1880s and 1890s and even through the First World War, the sailors of the historical navy came to be marketed as ideal role models for British boys. While nineteenth-century displays and representations of the Royal Navy hinged on the understanding that it was the modern fleet that protected the nation's empire and maintained its position in the world, it was the navy of the past that embodied Britain's self-image.

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Introduction

For much of the nineteenth century, two versions of the Royal Navy vied for centrality in the British national imagination. There was the real, modern navy, powered increasingly by steam and built increasingly of iron and steel, which protected the empire but mostly performed its duties quietly. And there was the historic navy, built of British oak and resplendent under sail, surrounded by romanticism representing the most glorious days in Britain's history. There was no question for most of the century that Britain still "ruled the waves," but there was a sense, in the popular imagination, that something had been lost with the transition from sail to steam and from war to peace.

Britain's navy had attained supremacy at sea over the long eighteenth century, reaching its full height in the engagements of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The navy was instrumental to Britain's success in war, and its identity at home, for the duration of those wars, but it was the victory against the combined French and Spanish fleets Trafalgar in 1805, ten years before the wars' end, that came to symbolize the height of naval glory.[1] Trafalgar was not the end of naval engagements, but following the wars the *memory* of Trafalgar produced in popular British culture a sense of discontinuity: no more great and celebrated naval battles, and no new heroes to match the victory's architect, Admiral Lord Nelson. Nelson died at Trafalgar, thereafter to be celebrated as the romanticized hero who expired when both his nation's and his own purpose had been achieved. He thus did not live to see any of the changes in the fleet, as

[1] For the instrumental role of the navy in the Napoleonic Wars following Trafalgar, see James Davey, *In Nelson's Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

other veterans did, and it was perhaps because of his absence in the post-war world that the break between the past and modern navy could appear, in memory, so complete.

This perceived lack of continuity was a source of anxiety for post-war Britain, as the years progressed and the nation grappled with its own sense of its naval prowess. Faced with fewer opportunities to prove its martial prowess in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the navy began its transition from sail to steam without proving to the people whether it could meet their standards of heroism if faced with another war. Trafalgar had signaled a moment when the British national character was on display: public celebrations, monuments, and romantic narratives in the press displayed Lord Nelson as the ideal hero, representing a courageous, patriotic, and determined sort of Britishness around which the nation could unify. But while this "victory culture" (a term coined by Timothy Jenks) that surrounded Nelson and Trafalgar served a vital purpose in wartime, nothing on its scale could not be maintained in a time of peace.[2]

This study asks what came after the decline of victory culture. It looks to popular culture and forms of public display to explore the ways nineteenth-century Britain reconciled its naval past with its naval present. In peacetime, commemoration of the sailing navy did not disappear entirely, but took on a nostalgic character. As the navy changed in appearance, eventually to the point that it no longer resembled the navy that won the nation's most famous battles, popular culture began overwriting the naval reality with a glorification of the naval past. Authors, artists, and designers of naval exhibits attempted to draw lines of continuity between past and present, suggesting that there was a sense of national identity that remained constant, regardless of the appearance of

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[2] Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy 1793-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

technology, or the absence of war. At sites of display, such as at Greenwich hospital, or in cases where sailing ships were preserved as museums, the sense of moral continuity, if not aesthetic continuity, was especially important. The navy and its history became an outlet for discussing masculinity, the virtue of work, class, and empire, replacing the navy's symbolism of military might with one of personal character.

The study of naval commemoration is a growing field, inspired in part by episodes of commemoration in Britain today. On the occasion of the Trafalgar bicentennial, a wave of timely scholarship focused on naval commemoration (and particularly commemoration of Nelson himself) in and around 1805. After 200 years of celebration, these studies asked why it was that Nelson's popularity had endured even through two centuries of naval, imperial, and political change. Some authors sought to find an answer in the man himself, studying his character and charisma, his outstanding feats of courage or his raw skill as an officer—the basis of a cult of personality.[3] Others suggested that the nation came to love Nelson, and remained enamored with him because he was relatable on a human level, a flawed hero who was often insecure or physically ill, but who made up for his shortcomings with sheer determination, a "thirst for glory," and ability to be "direct and approachable" not only as an officer but as a man.[4] What a society or nation calls heroism, however, does not beget hero-worship of its own accord. Veneration, rather, is culturally constructed according to the needs of the historical moment. Valuable work by Holger Hoock, Colin White, Kate Williams, and others has examined how Nelson's

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[3] Andrew Lambert, *Nelson: Britannia's God of War* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004); John Sudgen, *Nelson: A Dream of Glory, 1758-1797* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).
[4] N.A.M Rodger, "Nelson and the British Navy: Seamanship, Leadership, Originality," in *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy*, ed. David Cannadine (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 28.

image was created and promoted throughout the nineteenth century through memorabilia, monuments, biographies, prints, pamphlets, and other publicly viewable mediums.[5]

Such hero-worship and public displays of veneration surrounding the French Wars (1793-1815), often served a political or social purpose. Naval victories, and the heroic captains and admirals behind them, were promoted to all levels of society, through outlets ranging from cheap mementos and broadside ballads, to magazines and biographies, to commemorative china or other house wares. Individuals certainly had their own motivations for desiring commemorative goods and written pieces, but public commemoration could also be altered from the official level to promote ideas of national unity. Monuments, general illuminations or officially declared days of "thanksgiving" for naval victories made naval patriotism a publicly sanctioned affair, and widely accessible. This "victory culture," however, did not appear fully formed out of the experience of the wars themselves, but grew out of a longer tradition. Kathleen Wilson has demonstrated how Britain's identity as a growing imperial and sea-going power was solidified in the eighteenth century, with the notion that Britons were an "island race," a people whose very makeup was suited to not only navigate but to conquer the seas. Naval heroes could thus serve as symbols of the nation in its entirety; if all Britons were inherently connected with the sea, then naval heroes were the epitome of Britishness. Politicians in the eighteenth century had used heroes like Admiral Edward Vernon to suggest their idea of what an ideal British patriot should be, demonstrating the malleability of the naval hero

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[5] Colin White, "'His dirge our groans—his monument our praise': Official and Popular Commemoration of Nelson in 1805-6," in *History, Commemoration, and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805-2005*, ed. Holger Hoock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-48; White, "Nelson Apotheosised: The Creation of the Nelson Legend," in Cannadine, ed., *Admiral Lord Nelson*, 93-114; Holger Hoock, "Nelson Entombed: The Military and Naval Pantheon in St Paul's Cathedral," in Cannadine, ed., *Admiral Lord Nelson*, 115-43.

by ascribing Tory values to his character, and even commissioning authors to promote these connections through the popular press.[6] Nelson, likewise, became a symbol of the ideal patriot for the early nineteenth century, shown as masculine, independent, and devoted to his country. His victories, namely the Nile (1789) and Copenhagen (1801) were commemorated with all the printed and artistic trappings of victory culture, along with performances, concerts, and even fashion accessories—British women took to wearing gold anchor jewelry in his honor.[7] By 1805, the name of Nelson was virtually synonymous with the Royal Navy. Even after Trafalgar, commemoration came to represent nationhood, as the carefully-constructed pageantry of Nelson's state funeral displayed soldiers and sailors from all three kingdoms, as Lawrence Brockliss, John Cardwell and Michael Moss have noted, for the first time since the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland in 1800.[8]

Victory culture, as symbolized specifically by public veneration of Nelson, served a national, patriotic purpose during the wars, while the navy's strength was tested. But after the wars, once Nelson and Trafalgar were seen to have secured Britain's "right" to the seas for a century to come, the navy's image faced new challenges. Andrew Lambert has suggested that interest in Nelson and the navy itself flagged during the middle of the nineteenth century, as European wars (with the exception of the Crimean War) did not involve Britain on a large scale, and imperial wars were distant; this detachment from

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[6] Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2006); Wilson, "Rule Britannia: Admiral Vernon and the Imperial Imagination," in Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 140-65; Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England," *Journal of British Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 1989): 223-24.
[7] Kate Williams, "Nelson and Women: Marketing, Representations and the Female Consumer," in Cannadine, ed., *Admiral Lord Nelson*, 67-89.
[8] Laurence Brockliss, John Cardwell and Michael Moss, "Nelson's Grand National Obsequies," *English Historical Review* CXXI, no.490 (2006): 162-82.

nearby war, he argues, made hero-worship unnecessary.[9] It was not until the *late* nineteenth century, Lambert suggests, that anything resembling the victory culture of the early century was revived. Work by Jan Rüger supports this latter claim, citing the grand fleet reviews and naval displays of the 1880s and 1890s as part of a naval revival.[10] It is certain that the "navalism" of the late nineteenth century—the naval arms race and subsequent national celebration of the fleet that followed from competition with Germany and Russia—put the navy on display to a degree that Britain simply had had no previous incentive for. But while the grand spectacle of the early nineteenth century may have waned, it would be false to suggest that interest in the navy waned entirely along with it. The navy's *image*, however, was more contested. Margarette Lincoln has examined how the navy struggled to maintain its reputation after the wars: a service that had lived on the glories of battles against the French necessarily had difficulty justifying its reputation when there was no new glorious object to achieve, except in foreign wars, and when officers were stagnating on half-pay instead of making names for themselves. Lincoln does suggest that the navy recovered some of its glory through Arctic exploration, which will be examined in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, but exploration was hardly enough to carry the entire navy's name through the century.

Two recent studies have sought to fill some of the gaps between the days of Nelson and the days of navalism, by examining not the perception of glorious officers, but of common sailors. As Mary Conley points out in the introduction to *From Jack Tar to Union Jack*, it has been decades since Jesse Lemisch "issued an entreaty to historians to

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[9] Lambert, *Nelson*, 345.
[10] Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

'do better than these [Jack Tar] stereotypes'," when discussing sailors instead of great men, but much still remains in the field of unpacking those stereotypes. Through a series of case studies, Conley's work examines how the British public conception of sailors changed over the nineteenth century, arguing that while Nelson's men were originally perceived as "jolly Jack Tars," the common sailors of the late Victorian and Edwardian navies were actively portrayed as ideal specimens of manhood and citizenship. Building on Lemisch, Conley asks historians to *acknowledge* stereotypes, examine where they originated and how they were used, and to understand them within the historical context wherein they were employed.[11]

Isaac Land also answers the call, examining in *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor* the specific stereotypes of Jack Tar that circulated in the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth centuries, and which posed challenges to the ways in which Britons perceived the real sailors among them. Land finds that Jack Tar as a stereotype experienced moments of popularity and disdain; thanks to patriotic wartime imagery, Jack Tar transitioned at the cusp of the eighteenth century from a "roguish, vaguely foreign, and not entirely trustworthy" character to a patriotic, hardworking man who represented a respectable, if humble, ideal.[12] By the mid-nineteenth century, Land argues, Britain became nostalgic for Jack Tar and the patriotism and glory he symbolized. In the face of industry and the steam navy, the skilled and very human Jack Tar dealing (to

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[11] Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 25 (July 1968): 371-407.
[12] Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 158.

paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan in 1879), "a knock-down blow" to the French enemy with his "energetic fist" was perhaps more appealing and certainly more romantic.[13]

Land suggests that by the 1850s, it was the mythologized sailors of Nelson's day who were cast as the ideal British citizens and patriots, rather than the sailors of the cold and impersonal modern era. Mary Conley, conversely, suggests that *contemporary* sailors throughout the century experienced a continuous, if fragmentary, rise to respectability. By the end of the century, with the rise of navalism, and with increased imperial anxieties renewing the publicity of naval celebrations, Conley argues that the modern sailor, protecting the nation and the empire with superior technology, was the perfect symbol of strength and manhood, perfectly suited for the needs of the era.[14] It is possible, however, for nostalgia and modern pride to exist in tandem: naval publications like the magazine *Bluejacket,* for example, aimed understandably to promote the image of modern men, whereas, Land argues, the mid-century romanticization of Jack Tar often came from civilian sources. Land and Conley's studies often deal with different decades (Land focuses mostly on the first half of the century, whereas Conley deals with the second), but Conley suggests one way in which they work together. In 1900, she notes, *Bluejacket* wrote that modern sailors were just as courageous as the men of Nelson's day, and thus represented a line of continuity with Britain's glorious past, but were superior because of improved education that allowed them to better understand "the value of the service he was performing for the country."[15]

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[13] W. S. Gilbert, *H.M.S. Pinafore and Six Other Savoy Operas* (New York: Dolphin Books, 1961), 79.
[14] Conley, *Jack Tar,* 5.
[15] Ibid., 195.

Noting the simultaneous possibilities of nostalgia and modern pride, it is useful to consider Land's concept of "framing," which demonstrates that naval representations were malleable, and that sailors and non-sailors alike were able to consciously shift the ways in which British seamen were perceived. Land's historical lens is purposefully at odds with Linda Colley's argument of how national identity was "forged," since in terms of naval identity, Britain's self-conception was not created and carried through the century unchanging, but rather was always in flux.[16] Attempts at "forging" certainly occurred in the naval patriotism of the nineteenth century—especially in the late, "navalist" decades, when the government and the navy itself sought to shape sailors' image through events like the great 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition (which will appear in Chapters 3 and 4). However, these episodes were simply individual iterations of a larger trend, wherein the navy appeared *on display* throughout the century, through both official and humbler outlets.

This study focuses on several cases wherein the navy was put on display, framed and romanticized by external forces. In cases of exhibition, including the development of galleries and efforts to preserve wooden ships, Britain acknowledged its modern naval reality, but celebrated memories or echoes of Nelson's navy above all. With no outlet comparable to that of the French wars in which the navy could prove itself, Britain often conceived of the navy as what it *had been*, rather than what it currently was. For much of the nineteenth century, naval display was thus primarily nostalgic, looking upon the navy of the past and portraying its men as the very ideal of Britishness—courageous, patriotic, masculine, and devoted to duty. War had framed these ideals within the image of Jack

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[16] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Tar, as Isaac Land has shown, and Jack Tar remained a powerful cultural symbol even through peacetime. Literature, biographies, and works of art solidified these images, originally glorifying officers as ideal British men, but eventually celebrating the humble masculinity and citizenship of common sailors as well.

The display of Nelson's navy aimed to teach moral lessons, and particularly through the century came to be directed towards boys, instructing them in appropriately British codes of behavior, depending on the needs of the day. In the middle of the century, literary and visual culture promoted sailors not only as courageous and patriotic, but hard working, Christian, fond of their families and their homes, and entirely dedicated to what was right and honorable. The routine of naval discipline provided a convenient parallel for moral uprightness among Britons at home, so that these working-class men became exemplars for middle-class values. At the end of the century, exhibitions depicted Nelson's sailors as symbols of imperial manliness, representative of the "zeal" with which British boys should honor their nation and its empire, encouraging boys to be fiercely proud of the navy, or even to join the service themselves. At times, exhibits and biographies depicted historical sailors as inspirational figures for British women and girls as well, reminding citizens that whether or not they were allowed to join the navy on the basis of gender, it was the duty of all to take pride in the naval heritage that was the birthright of an island people, and do their utmost to uphold the good name of the fleet.

The fascination with Nelson's navy, in an era where naval technology rapidly diverged from the age of sail, was in part an effect of a larger trend of nostalgia and fascination with national heritage. As Peter Mandler as well as Martin Wiener have shown, Victorian Britain was increasingly enamored with what Mandler calls the "Olden

Time," an amalgamated imagined past that incorporated everything from a mythical version of the middle ages to the eighteenth century, and which supposedly represented the origins of a national character.[17] Industrialization, and the growth of cities at the expense of the countryside, Wiener argues, helped to inspire a longing in popular culture for an older, more romantic-looking time. But the Olden Time was not only emblematic of a quainter, simpler, era: artistic and literary deployments of an imagined past could be seen as "a protest against modernity," but also "attempted to address a number of contemporary dilemmas."[18] Examining Victorian uses of medieval myths, Stephanie Barczewski has demonstrated how these romanticized depictions served social and political purposes. The Olden Time could remind Britons of a supposed collective past wherein contemporary concerns of class, religion, or other communal divisions were non-existent, "displaying the past as a mirror" for a potential, more harmonious future.[19]

The navy was not immune from Olden Time imagery. Britain was under no illusions as to the importance of the modern fleet to its national security and international prestige, but the image of the modern navy simply did not mesh with Victorian popular sensibilities. The Olden Time supposedly embodied the origins of the British national character, and so likewise did the "old navy" (to borrow a later phrase from Rudyard Kipling) come to represent the very basis of Britain's moral and patriotic spirit.[20] Britain looked to Nelson's navy as the true spirit of the fleet, preferring the historic imagery and suggesting that, whatever the shortcomings and aesthetic failings of modern technology,

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[17] Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Martin Wiener, *Victorian Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[18] Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.
[19] Ibid., 46.
[20] Rudyard Kipling, *Sea Warfare* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1916), 73.

Britain could still maintain its maritime supremacy as long as the *men* embodied the "spirit of Nelson."

Chapter 1 of this study will set the context for nineteenth-century commemoration of the old navy, exploring how images of the sailing navy developed from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth, alongside the development of Olden Time nostalgia. The Romantic movement in art and literature, in addition to the growth of the historic preservation movement, provide a background for later exhibition and preservation of naval "relics." The following chapters provide case studies for this display of the old navy, beginning with Greenwich Hospital in Chapter 2. Founded as a home for wounded or elderly sailors in the seventeenth century, Greenwich became also a museum in the nineteenth, with the opening of a naval gallery in the Painted Hall. In this context, however, the naval pensioners residing at Greenwich were viewed as living relics in their own right, providing a tangible connection to Nelson's victories, in which some of these men served. Between the 1820s and the 1840s, the image of the Greenwich pensioner transitioned from one of an aging version of Jack Tar—an uncouth social outsider, out of his element on land—to a naval hero, and an example for British children to look up to. Chapter 3 deals with one of the challenges to the navy's image in the post-war decades, in the form of Sir John Franklin's lost Arctic expedition. Arctic explorers had become the celebrities of the day, providing an outlet for naval heroism in a time of peace, but when Franklin's two ships and 128 men disappeared in 1845, Britain was faced with the challenge of creating a heroic narrative from scanty evidence. This chapter follows the search for "Franklin relics" through the 1850s, and the stories of British courage, endurance, and character that were forged from scattered artifacts and Inuit oral

testimony. Whatever gruesome details surfaced about the expedition's end, careful display and creative interpretation of material evidence allowed Britain to cast Franklin's men as naval heroes, and the true inheritors of Nelson's glory.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the display of two ships at the end of the century, in some of Britain's first attempts to display historic vessels as museums, or otherwise as sites of historic instruction. The first ship, HMS *Foudroyant*, became a national phenomenon when, during the height of the navalist arms race, the Admiralty sold the vessel to a German ship breaking firm. The *Foudroyant*, which had served as Nelson's flagship in the Mediterranean, and was one of the last surviving vessels of the French wars, inspired widespread outcry in the press, and through the efforts of several influential Britons was repurchased from Germany and towed back to England. Converted into a floating museum, the *Foudroyant* became an "object-lesson" in morality for British boys, presuming to instruct them in old forms of masculinity, using Nelson's sailors as paragons of conduct. As the nation prepared for what seemed like the inevitable onset of European war, the *Foudroyant* became a case study for how naval heritage could instruct the youth of Britain in modern naval patriotism. Chapter 5, finally, examines two successors to the *Foudroyant:* the *Trincomalee* and the *Implacable*, both of which were preserved as a unique sort of training vessel in the years before and after the First World War. The conditions under which these sailing vessels were displayed demonstrated a changing outlook on the use of naval heritage at the turn of the century. Although the war itself signaled a clear break between past and present, in the way that naval warfare was conducted, the *Trincomalee* and *Implacable* were indicative of a last effort to use Nelson's sailors as role models for British boys—suggesting that, while the martial

realities of the modern world bore no similarity to the days of Nelson, the old navy could still be the basis for moral instruction, in shaping the character of young British citizens.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate the enduring popularity of the historical sailor as a representation of British national values. Previous works have included individual chapters examining instances of naval and maritime display—Isaac Land has touched on displays at Greenwich Hospital and examined the depiction of sailors at the 1851 Great Exhibition, Margarette Lincoln and Jan Rüger have focused on ship launches and fleet reviews, and Huw Lewis-Jones as well as Rüger have written on the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition—but no study yet follows the larger narrative of naval display over the course of the nineteenth century.[21] Seeking to connect this narrative, this dissertation focuses on the *material* display of naval history, from temporary exhibitions to galleries, museums, and preserved vessels. Through the lenses of such exhibitions, the sailors of Nelson's day became not only romanticized figures on display, but figures that had the potential to be framed as embodiments of a supposedly enduring national character. Displays focused on different aspects of this character at different times, dependent on the contemporary concerns of the day, but the historical sailor proved malleable, and able to reflect whatever morals and characteristics served a modern purpose. Naval displays thus became sites for the production of heritage myths—suggesting that naval history was a past in which *all* Britons could partake, which informed Britain's place in the modern world, and which held important lessons for behavior in the present.

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[21] Land, *War;* Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy;* Rüger, *Great Naval Game*; Huw Lewis-Jones, *Imagining the Arctic: Heroism, Spectacle, and Polar Exploration* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017).

Chapter 1

The Old Navy and the Olden Time

"We have now a steam navy, Nelson," spoke the ghost of Lord Wellington, a character in a pamphlet series of 1853. "The engineer has superseded the Admiral; the engine and boiler take the place of the wooden walls."[1] This dialogue, imagined to have been overheard in the crypt of Saint Paul's between the heroes of Trafalgar and Waterloo, was among the first conversations in what would become a forty-two part series of social commentary, with the imagined input of two of the most recognizable figures in recent British history. The content was mostly political, but the lines regarding the navy reflected one of the great anxieties of the day. By the 1853, the navy's transition from sail to steam was only partial (having progressed slowly over the past three decades), but its effects were visible enough to be jarring. It was almost half a century since Britain's naval supremacy had been cemented at Trafalgar, and while Wellington had lived through the next four decades, thus providing a convenient voice to explain all that had occurred in those years, Nelson, of course, had not. His public memory, like the memory of all that the sailing navy stood for, was forever framed by October 1805, and still formed the basis on which Britain understood its fleet.

Fifty years after Trafalgar, Britain could easily call itself the foremost naval power in the world. An almost continuous series of wars through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had secured that place for the nation, but the navy had not been

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[1] *A Voice from the Tomb: A Dialogue Between Nelson and Wellington Overheard At Saint Paul's, First Part* (London: M. A. Pattie, 1853), 8.

given reason to assert or prove itself on a large scale since.[2] Celebration of Lord Nelson's heroism had been a national affair in the early nineteenth century, and his memory was still venerated in the 1850s, but the associated images of naval glory that flourished in the national imagination were quickly becoming dated. When Britain looked to the "steam navy," it saw a group of vessels that looked increasingly different from the ones in which supremacy had been won. When the pamphlet series *A Voice From the Tomb* showed Nelson's ghost being shocked at the transformation of the fleet, it spoke to a national concern that steam would make men less heroic, and that sailors would be unable to showcase the skill for which they had become known. In the absence of modern glory, Britain looked to the days of Nelson as a better time, and one that could be interpreted to teach lessons to the present. Accordingly, Nelson and Wellington in their ghostly printed forms reached a hopeful consensus that as long as Britain remembered Nelson, and endeavored to emulate his character, then "Britannia will still rule the waves."[3]

Nineteenth-century Britain's fascination with its glorious naval past can be seen as part of a larger trend of nostalgia that took root in British culture at the same time. Britain had, at least since the eighteenth century, been fascinated with its long maritime history, and sought to draw comparisons between past and present. In wartime, Britain could always draw parallels between one glorious event and another. But in perceived peacetime, or more accurately in a time when Britain's imperial wars were generally distant and land-based, Britain was forced to confront its identity from another, more social angle. Several scholars have demonstrated the connection between nostalgia,

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[2] Jon Horsfield, *The Art of Leadership in War: The Royal Navy from the Age of Nelson to the End of World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 93.

[3] *A Voice from the Tomb, First Part*, 8.

identity, and social commentary: Stephanie Barczewski and Mark Girouard, in particular, have shown how myths of medieval England could be used to demonstrate "proper" British behavior, and comment on modern political issues.[4] Martin Wiener and Peter Mandler have likewise shown how romanticization of the past created the ideal of a better "Olden Time," inhabited by hardworking, proudly British people who could be upheld as model citizens.[5] Although unaddressed in these studies, romanticization of the navy played a similar role in nineteenth-century identity. By looking to the memory of Nelson, and eventually to the memory of his sailors, Britain created images of idealized men, who were at once symbolic of a more glorious past and indicative of what Britain could still become. In an era of both naval and political uncertainty, the image of Nelson and his sailors became one that could be adapted to confront modern concerns, and could eventually be used to suggest that British glory had never been lost at all.

Creating a Naval Identity of Heritage

The confidence that Britannia rules the waves had been centuries in the making. By the turn of the nineteenth century, it had been over two hundred years since Richard Hakluyt had written his *Principall Navigations*, claiming that British right to the sea dated back to the mythical days of King Arthur.[6] Since then, Britons could find a multitude of sources claiming to trace the origins of naval supremacy back to Hakluyt's

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[4] Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Mark Girouard, *Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).
[5] Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Martin Wiener, *Victorian Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[6] Mary C. Fuller, "Arthur and Amazons: Editing the Fabulous in Hakluyt's Principal Navigations," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 41, no. 1 (2011): 173-89.

contemporary Francis Drake, and his formidable, piratical yet patriotic Sea Dogs who wrested the title as rulers of the sea from the tyrannical Spanish Catholics. Seamanship, these romanticized naval histories claimed, was carried in British blood, bestowed by the Romans and Vikings who had come by sea to transplant their cultures and reshape British lineages.[7] It was the force of the sea in British veins that reportedly made the nation what it was, and destined it for national and imperial greatness. When British blood was carried across the waves by British sea power, it could be transplanted, making other regions British by its very nature.[8]

It was easy, of course, for a nation already confident in its naval might, to find such parallels in the extensive seagoing history inherent to an island nation. However, such national pride in the navy, and the belief that naval dominance was somehow part of Britain's destiny since time immemorial, was not immemorial itself. Naval patriotism in Britain, and the creation of the "island race" identity, arose largely in the eighteenth century as part of a larger process of identity-building.[9] Linda Colley sees this era as one in which a sense of "Britishness" was "forged" from above, and her main tenets of British identity often tie in with naval themes; helped in part by Royal pageantry and nationally-declared days of Thanksgiving, spread by an expanding press and the growth of a mass culture, Britishness in the years before Victoria was defined by the military might of an

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[7] The use of Drake as the paragon of English naval power can be traced even to the late seventeenth century. See C. S. Knighton, "A Century On: Pepys and the Elizabethan Navy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* vol. 6, no.14 (2004): 141-51; and N. A. M. Rodger, "Queen Elizabeth and the Myth of Sea-Power in English History," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (2004): 153-74.
[8] Cynthia Fansler Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), 42.
[9] Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2006).

island standing alone against the rest of the world, united by a shared distrust of Catholicism and a shared French enemy.[10]

There were occasions on which the government did attempt, as per Colley's argument, to "forge" a naval identity that the public could buy into, namely through the declaration of national days of thanksgiving for naval victories. But the celebration and interpretation of naval power was negotiated closer to home, through what Timothy Jenks calls "victory culture:" members of the public engaged with naval celebration on variable terms, at the local level. While Jenks focuses on the years 1797-1815, victory culture was present in the eighteenth century as well. Towns engaged in celebration with general illuminations, and merry-making in taverns or in the streets—a situation that, predictably, could easily turn into something more riotous and organic than a controlled period of veneration.[11] In these periods of thanksgiving, it was the great men of naval victories who were celebrated as the orchestrators of Britain's glory. Admirals became household names, honored in popular ballads, extolled in the press, and depicted in prints as well as on ceramics and home goods.[12] Between public celebration and the distribution of commemorative media, thus, Britons of all classes could be drawn into a national sense of naval identity.

Heroes were contemporary, but the corresponding identity of heroism was drawn on historical and even nostalgic parallels as well, suggesting that recent victories were just one more feather in the cap of continuous naval heritage. Sources proclaimed historical parallels without any real attention to evidence: after his victory at Porto Bello,

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[10] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
[11] Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England," *Journal of British Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 1989): 213.
[12] Ibid., 204.

for example, Admiral Vernon was said to be just as bold and fearless as Francis Drake, although the two men hardly resembled each other in any other respect.[13] Mythmaking needed no basis in historical reality to be effective. Rather, the creation of naval heroism relied on a conceit that Britain's greatness rested on something ancient within its place and its people, which could always draw a line of continuity between the past and present. This glorification of ancient heritage formed the basis of one of the most iconic representations of naval power in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century psyche. The phrase, "Britannia rules the waves," itself became popular in reference to Vernon, when "Rule, Britannia!" was written for a 1740 performance about King Alfred the Great, in which the singular connection was drawn between Vernon and Anglo-Saxon seafarers.[14]

Through the long eighteenth century, which was characterized by almost continuous naval warfare with France, the sea and Britain's supposedly blood-borne connection to it became ingrained in a growing notion of national heritage. In 1796, William Cobbett displayed this sentiment when he described a country person's patriotism and love of the navy:

> I had heard talk of the glorious deeds of our admirals and sailors, of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and of all those memorable combats, that good true Englishmen never fail to relate to their children about a hundred times a year. The brave Rodney's victories over our natural enemies, the French and Spaniards, had

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[13] Ibid., 206.
[14] Alyson McLamore, "'Britannia Rule the Waves': Maritime Music and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *The Sea in the British Musical Imagination*, ed. Eric Saylor and Christopher M. Scheer (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2005): 28.

long been the theme of our praise . . . The sailors were my countrymen; the fleet belonged to my country, and surely I had a part in it, and in all its honours.[15]

Describing what he recalled from his own childhood, Cobbett explained how eighteenth-century Britons were encouraged to think of themselves as the inheritors of a great legacy. Drawing connections between the Elizabethan navy's defeat of the Armada, and Rodney's eighteenth-century defeats of the French, such a narrative suggested that Britons had always been linked to the sea, no matter the era. This link was supposed to be true even in the interior of the country, where although people may have grown up never even seeing the ocean, they could still feel as part of an "imagined community" of naval pride.[16] Cobbett was not alone in his observations; earlier in the century, the Porto Bello celebrations had spread much beyond the major urban centers, and one newspaper reported that in Essex "a couple of lonesome Cottages on a heath . . . had clubb'd together for a few Bushes and a heap of Fern to make a Bonfire to [Vernon's] memory."[17] Far from the metropolitan designs of a grand general illumination, such humble, local demonstrations showed how the patriotic symbolism of the navy had a broad reach.

Nelson, Sailors, and Victory Culture

If Britain had created a lineage of naval heritage, the nation seemed to have found the very pinnacle of that lineage during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars,

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[15] William Cobbett, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, quoted in Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy 1793-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.
[16] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).
[17] *London Evening Post,* November 13, 1740, quoted in Jordan and Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes," 204.

in the form of Admiral Horatio Nelson. By the turn of the century, Nelson's actions had earned him that most noble of comparisons in the narratives of eighteenth-century heroism, in being compared to Sir Francis Drake. The *Annual Register* for 1798 proclaimed the Battle of the Nile "the most signal [victory] that had graced the British navy since the days of the Spanish armada."[18] Nelson's public image became one uniquely suited for arguments of national unity during the war years—unlike admirals like Vernon, he tended to avoid party politics, and thus during his lifetime could not easily be marketed as a prop for one party's policies, or as a foil to another's. His popularity created an easy outlet for victory culture and public celebration, famously gathering a following from people of all classes, and attracting crowds whenever he appeared in public. His history of resilience (having endured malaria, partial blindness, and the loss of one arm in the service) and charismatic stubbornness (having secured a victory at Copenhagen by ignoring an order to disengage, pretending that his blind eye prevented him from seeing the signal) made him susceptible to all sorts of grand and easily sensationalized narratives in the press.

While eighteenth-century hero-worship surrounding other admirals had been widespread, the celebration of Nelson morphed into a truly national phenomenon. Bringing Nelson and the navy into the home and into the imaginations of people of all classes, victory culture in the early nineteenth century was a major enterprise, both culturally and economically. The public reaction to Nelson's victories went beyond the ceramics and prints associated with the likes of Vernon; Nelson became synonymous

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[18] *The Annual Register or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1798* (London: T. Burton, 1800), 149.

with the Royal Navy itself, and the marketplace was flooded with opportunities for Britons to show support for both the hero and the service. Commemorative medals, drink ware, ceramics, pocket-watches, cameos, portrait prints, and other souvenirs were available at a variety of costs. Britons could experience tributes to the navy in the artistic sphere—battle scenes and portraits were marketed as both fine art and low-grade prints, concerts were dedicated to naval victories, entire musical scores were dedicated to Nelson, and both fashionable and common theaters staged tableaux and grand commemorative pieces on stage.[19] The most striking development, though, was the practice of wearing naval patriotism on one's body. Women took to wearing anchor-themed accessories in a trend inspired by Nelson's fashionable mistress, Lady Emma Hamilton, who wrote in 1798 that her "dress from head to foot is alla Nelson . . . my shawl is Blue with gold anchors all over. My earrings are Nelson's anchors; in short we are be-Nelsoned all over."[20] Specific victories inspired fashion accessories as well; after the Battle of the Nile, Egyptian-inspired fabrics, jewelry and headgear became popular, to the point that one political cartoon parodied the trend with a woman in a mummy-inspired gown and a man dressed as a crocodile.[21] In some cases, such as fanciful Egyptian hats, patriotic naval fashion was the reserve of the upper crust. However, women of humbler means could still afford an anchor pendant. An anonymous Scottish 1790s painting shows a middling shopkeeper wearing such a necklace, likely in keeping

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[19] Colin White, "'His dirge our groans – his monument our praise': Official and Popular Commemoration of Nelson in 1805-6," in *History, Commemoration, and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar*, *1805-2005*, ed. Holger Hoock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-48.
[20] Kate Williams, "Nelson and Women: Marketing, Representations and the Female Consumer," in *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy,* ed. David Cannadine (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 70; Edgar Vernon, *Nelson: Love and Fame* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 285.
[21] William Holland, "Dresses a la Nile respectfully dedicated to the Fashion Mongers of the Day," hand-colored etching, October 24, 1798, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK.

with the contemporary trend.[22] Naval patriotism, then, had spread to such an extent that neither class nor gender restricted participation.

As with many heroes, Nelson's image proved particularly useful in death. His five-day state funeral, conducted on a scale that was almost unprecedented for a non-royal figure, presented a deliberate vision of harmony between the four British kingdoms. In January 1806, three months after Nelson's sacrificial victory at Trafalgar, this was the first naval display of its size since the 1800 Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland. Although Britain's relationship to Ireland had always been one of imperial conquest, the state still aimed to create an image wherein the kingdoms could find common ground in a shared hero, and a shared enemy (the latter was of course wishful thinking by design, hoping that through Nelson, Ireland would find more affinity with Britain than their co-religionists in France). Soldiers and sailors from Scotland and Ireland were present among the ranks in the funeral procession, sending the state-sanctioned message that a shared military destiny could overcome regional religious differences between Presbyterians, Catholics, and Anglicans within the nation.[23] Some hoped that the event would inspire a unity of patriotism across class boundaries, as well. One well-to-do observer at the funeral remarked how "touching" it was to see and hear "the silence of that immense Mob" of mingling classes from her window as the procession moved by, remarking that everyone, regardless of class, removed their hats out of respect for the passing funeral car.[24] Perhaps recalling the national thanksgiving days that had turned to political rioting in the middle of the previous century, such

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[22] *A Glasgow Shopkeeper*, c. 1790-1800, oil on board, People's Palace Museum, Glasgow, UK.
[23] Laurence Brockliss, John Cardwell, and Michael Moss, "Nelson's Grand National Obsequies," *The English Historical Review* 121, no. 490 (2006): 162-82.
[24] Letter from Lady Bressborough, quoted in White, "His Dirge our Groans," 37.

observations revealed pride, if not also shock, in the fact that Nelson's memory had the power to unite rich and poor alike in communal mourning, all classes equally moved by the spirit of the occasion.

Nelson's funeral employed his memory as a tool to promote patriotism to the masses, but the heroic image had the power to shape public perception of what the navy *was*, and what naval heroism meant in a contemporary context. Nelson's funeral did not merely suggest that all three kingdoms of the union shared a political and military enemy, but that all three kingdoms shared a navy, and shared sailors. Following the argument that exporting British blood by sea could make an imperial region truly British, participation in the navy was something that could make men from England, Scotland, or Ireland qualify equally as Britons. On previous occasions, and on days not specifically marked by ceremony or celebration, sailors generally had been seen as outsiders—vulgar working men who did not fit in polite society. But when seen to be affected by the spirit of the illustrious dead, as well, sailors on this occasion became living symbols of British glory. The fresh memory of Trafalgar showed, one newspaper announced, "to the whole World that an Hero and a British Seaman are synonymous Terms."[25] This had a double meaning: first, that Nelson was at heart a sailor, a man of action, skill and duty, and not merely a man in uniform who was promoted through patronage or other less glorious means; but also, it signified that low ranking men, common sailors, could be heroes under the right circumstances.

At the end of the funeral procession, when Nelson's coffin was lowered into the crypt at Saint Paul's, a cohort of the flagship *Victory*'s sailors had been expected to fold

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[25] Letter from the town of Exeter, republished in *The London Gazette*, November 19, 1805.

the ship's colors and place it in the tomb as a final token of respect. However, in one of the most famous incidents of the day, those sailors (who had been "repeatedly and almost continually cheered" by the crowd during the procession) instead tore the flag into pieces to keep for themselves as memorials of their commander. This gesture, which could easily have been taken as disrespectful in another circumstance, was instead framed as a touching parable of loyal men unwilling to let their hero go—a metaphor, seemingly, for the country itself. Jane Codrington, the wife of one of the captains present at Trafalgar, remarked upon the incident that although so many of the displays at the funeral had been reflections of "the Herald's Office," that gesture "was Nelson" himself.[26] Criticizing the state's pomp and political pandering, but clearly still buying into mass-produced patriotic feeling, she thus equated the daring and devoted act of flag-tearing to the characteristics that had become associated with Nelson throughout his career: boldness, audacity, a little bit of recklessness, but most of all duty. While Nelson was a man perceived to have died out of duty to his country—his signal at Trafalgar has often been repeated to make that point—sailors did their duty to their commanding officer, and thus served the nation. In that instance, the hero became the nation personified, and those who showed reverence to him were believed to be true patriots.

The elevation of sailors to the position of heroes during Trafalgar commemoration was a notable departure from previous representations. As Isaac Land has explained, sailors at the beginning of the nineteenth century were generally categorized as Jack Tars, members of a class of social outsiders. Jack was a rowdy, vulgar, and drunken sort, immediately discernable by his characteristic sea slang, sea grime, and sea legs. Sailors'

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[26] White, "His Dirge our Groans," 36.

walk, speech patterns, tattoos and vernacular, tar-covered clothing set them apart, and invited suspicion from the larger part of society.[27] But while Jack on land was seen as disreputable, the perception of Nelson's sailors was in a state of flux. During the 1790s, William Pitt had commissioned the poet and playwright Charles Dibdin to write patriotic songs about sailors, and often about sailors at sea, where they could be portrayed not as morally degenerate, but as hardworking, patriotic men doing their duty and protecting the nation. The Jack of song, supported by popular prints, often appeared to be devoted to his family and to his chosen sweetheart, was fiercely loyal to his country and appropriately detested the French, and was endlessly willing to face danger and bodily harm.[28] With these warlike but mostly relatable stereotypes in mind, it is little wonder that the sailors at Nelson's funeral could easily be imagined to somehow resemble their more respectable commander.

The funeral signaled a possible future, wherein ordinary British men, common sailors, could be considered heroic. This future would come, later in the century, and will be examined later in this study, but for the time being, Jack was only acceptable within certain frames of display. State-sanctioned mourning allowed sailors to be displayed as *part of* the national pageantry, but otherwise they were not expected to take part in it. "Refined visitors" to post-Trafalgar exhibitions were even appalled that a sailor might make his appearance at such a place, complaining that, "sailors in their jackets with their doxies on their arms, now elbow the first people of rank at these spectacles with the

[27] Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism*, *and the British Sailor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[28] Land, *War,* 96.

utmost familiarity,"[29] as if they had mistaken their place or overestimated the intentions of wartime depictions that showed them in a positive light. Sailors were not expected or even often able to participate in public mourning rituals such as visiting Nelson's tomb at St. Paul's, despite the fact that it had been sailors who had laid the hero in that very place. In an action that earned it much criticism, the cathedral charged an entry fee to view the tomb, and thus restricted the number and the social class of individuals who could participate in this display of grief. A cartoon from 1806 depicted a dejected-looking sailor standing next to "poor Jack's monument," comprised of a sea chest, two kegs of grog "in memory of [Nelson's] noble spirit," two swords, Nelson's own hat, and a figure of "an Englishman's heart" hung with black crepe. While the artist, William Holland, clearly stereotyped Jack Tar's gruff appearance and character in all the typical ways of his time, he also clearly critiqued the double standard of calling a sailor a hero when it was useful, and excluding him from the national conversation afterwards.[30] Sailors, it seemed, were good symbolic patriots only when they were anonymous faces that served to reflect state-approved morals. It was the "spirit of Nelson" that they supposedly embodied that mattered, and in cases when that spirit could not be actively displayed, they ceased to be heroic.

Post-War Anxieties

Trafalgar cemented Britain's position as the predominant naval power in Europe for the remainder of the Napoleonic Wars, and, as time would show, for the remainder of

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[29] Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 6.
[30] William Holland, *The Sailor's Monument to the Memory of Lord Nelson*, hand-colored etching, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

the nineteenth century. Nelson's image remained useful as a patriotic symbol for the duration of the wars, although the major engagements of the next ten years were primarily fought on land. Newspapers reveal Nelson memorabilia still being sold through 1815, panoramic and other exhibitions still commemorating Trafalgar, and biographies celebrating Nelson's life continually being printed. Nelson was upheld as an example for patriotic boys to imitate: when Robert Southey published his enduring *Life of Nelson* in 1813, he wrote that the admiral's legacy was "at [that] hour inspiring thousands of the youth of England."[31]

But when the wars were concluded, and Britain found itself once more at peace, with enemy of over a century vanquished, seemingly permanently, the nation was faced with a question of how to define itself in a new century. Margarette Lincoln has examined the navy's own "post-war blues," noting that "with fewer pressing martial preoccupations," the navy "was slowly and painfully forced to adjust to a different, more commercial world."[32] Lincoln shows how this sparked an immediate wave of somewhat nostalgic commemoration, with "images of seamen and warships" appearing to "sell a range of goods from children's books to sheet music."[33] In contrast with the overt hero-worship of wartime commemorative representations, post-war commemoration relied on sweeping images of the past, rather than only the glorification of individual heroes. Just as eighteenth century Britain looked to the days of Queen Elizabeth as the most glorious era of naval history, and a central period in national heritage, Britain in the nineteenth

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[31] Robert Southey, *The Life of Horatio Lord Nelson,* ed. Edwin L. Miller (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 297.
[32] Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy,* 185.
[33] Ibid.

century began looking to the eighteenth century, and to the days of Nelson as a perceived better time.

This naval nostalgia took root surprisingly quickly, for various reasons ranging from post-war depression to the rise of steam technology (which will be examined further in Chapters 2 and 3). It is worthwhile, however, to look at another form of heritage-making that was on the rise in the nineteenth century. Beyond idolizing individual heroes of the past, British popular culture found reason to revere the tangible reminders of the world their ancestors inhabited. If Britain could supposedly trace its naval lineage back to the days of the Tudors, or even to the legendary King Arthur, then they could also trace their very character as Britons to those days. In a cultural movement that fed into such diverse outlets as the historic preservation movement, and the Romantic movement in art and literature, Britain became fascinated with seemingly everything that was ancient about the nation: ancient ruins, ancient myths, country houses, and the very countryside itself. In studying the nineteenth-century popularity of Robin Hood and King Arthur myths, Stephanie Barczewski explains that myth served as a protest against modern realities, but also served to present *alternatives* to a modern world that provoked anxiety.[34]

Chief among Britain's anxieties were industrialization and the rapid progress of technology. In naval terms, technology meant the advent of steam navigation, and perhaps, frighteningly, the debasement of the British navy's traditional skill at handling sail.[35] In civilian, often middle-class terms, industrialization meant the growth of cities,

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[34] Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity,* 27.
[35] Behrman, *Victorian Myths,* 19, 49.

and the "dark, Satanic mills" that threatened "England's green and pleasant land."[36] These worries influenced a widespread nostalgia for what Peter Mandler has deemed the "Olden Time," a period generally encompassing the medieval through Tudor and early Stuart eras, which was otherwise referred to as "merrie England."[37] This amalgamation of myth and history was marketed to Britons of all social standings, most romantically in the works of such poets as Tennyson, and in the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, but also on a more humble level through working-class magazines, and Joseph Nash's lithographs of "outlandish revels" in crowded medieval halls.[38] In addition to being aesthetically pleasing for being pre-industrial, the Olden Time provided an alternative to contemporary social concerns: notably, the pre-industrial past was portrayed as a more egalitarian and carefree age. Supposedly, Britain's most pleasant time had been one wherein there were "free and frank relations between the classes," and when landholders dealt directly with the appeals and needs of the common folk.[39] This was particularly poignant in the era of reform agitation, drawing a sharp distinction between the lords of the imagined egalitarian past, and the peers of the nineteenth century.

In the mid-eighteenth century, when admirals had been the heroes of the day, hero-worship had sometimes been employed as an occasion for political protest. The Vernon celebrations, in particular, resulted in "mob" action: Vernon was touted as an anti-Walpole figurehead, and when members of government were seen to *not* embody the heroic ideal that Vernon stood for, a celebration could turn into an effigy-burning or other

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[36] William Blake, "Jerusalem," quoted in context in Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 6, 83.
[37] Mandler, *Fall and Rise,* 50.
[38] Ibid.*,* 33, 52.
[39] Ibid., 50.

protest.[40] Likewise, when Olden Time imagery was on the rise, symbolically historical places could become targets. In 1831, for example, the Duke of Newcastle failed to support the reform bill that would expand the franchise, and thus failed to live up to the romanticized idea that a landowner should be the protector of egalitarianism. Accordingly, he faced the wrath of a mob that set fire to his Nottingham estate.[41] The Duke's mansion had stood on the former site of Nottingham castle, of Robin Hood fame, and the symbolism of this Olden Time connection (wherein the common people punish the local official who has threatened their rights) could not have been lost on the public.[42]

The Olden Time and the time of Nelson did not overlap, but the nineteenth-century press did begin to look on both eras with similar degrees of nostalgia. If Britain saw the imagined medieval past as a time where class relations were less fraught with tensions, and used historical myths to suggest alternatives to modern political and social concerns, the nation also used Nelson as an example of a better time. While in life Nelson had avoided party politics, in death he became a prop for both liberal and conservative politics. Contributing to the uses of history in the reform debates, one pro-reform pamphlet included copies of the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights "with explanatory notes," suggesting Britain's ancient legacy of representation, but also suggested that Nelson could serve as a pro-reform symbol. "England expects every man to do his duty," the author explained, echoing Nelson's famous signal at Trafalgar, and concluded

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[40] Jordan and Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes," 213.
[41] Mandler, *Fall and Rise,* 39.
[42] For the uses of Robin Hood as a popular hero in relation to nineteenth-century social tensions, see Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, 11–80.

therefore that the support of reform was the "duty" of "every Englishman who loves his Constitution and his Country."[43]

The days of Nelson proved useful for conservative arguments, which maintained that the politics of those days were part of a long tradition that had made Britain a great nation, and suggested that Nelson, a product of that long tradition, would distrust any deviation from the established pattern. In the pamphlet series *A Voice from the Tomb,* Wellington informs Nelson of everything that had occurred in England since his death, including the Poor Law, the Reform Bill, and Catholic emancipation. Nelson reacts strongly to the suggestion of Catholics sitting in Parliament, fearing for the nation's continued greatness, and moralizing that Britain had always been "so great, because she was so Protestant."[44] Nelson sympathizes with Wellington for having been forced to endure an administration so keen on disregarding Britain's religious heritage, and joins him in condemning Whigs for forgetting national values. However, Nelson is not a complete traditionalist, but rather suggests that modern conservatives better understand the needs of the people than their immediate forebears. Wellington explains a recent split between the Tories over the issue of the Corn Laws, saying that the "old Tory party" would not forgive him for joining Peel in repealing them, but Nelson praises his dedication and even his courage for defending the people's rights against the opposition. "No wonder the people sing out for Reform," Nelson declares. "Whatever is taxed, for heaven's sake don't tax the bread of the poor."[45]

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[43] Anon., "An Address to the People of England on the Absolute Necessity for Reform in Parliament," advertised in *Times,* May 8, 1809.
[44] *A Voice From the Tomb. Third Part,* 7.
[45] *A Voice From the Tomb. Fourth Part,* 1.

Nelson and Sailors as Role Models

As decades of peace allowed for deeper consideration of social issues at home, British nostalgia also allowed for a reconsideration of the origins of national morals. Moral lessons could often be found in representations of the Olden Time, at least politically, but in a growing trend, naval biographies also presented character lessons to a Victorian audience. Nelson was among the most famous figures to have his life recorded and sensationalized for moral purposes, of course, but the abundance of his biographies (or, more romantically, "Lives of Nelson") was part of a larger genre of "naval hagiography."[46] Changing from the purely political and patriotic use of admirals in the eighteenth century, naval officers of the past and present were useful in the Victorian era when framed as archetypes of a new type of masculinity, or examples of respectable, middle-class behavior.

In the earlier decades, biographies had stressed courage and general fearlessness as the best qualities to be sought in naval officers, sometimes using fantastic anecdotes of dubious origins to make their points. Biographers like Robert Southey, for example, wanted to show that Nelson had been destined for greatness from a young age, and told a tale of how, as a boy, he had taken a bet from his schoolmates to steal pears from a notoriously wrathful headmaster's orchard. Supposedly, the headmaster was so shocked that anyone would try such a thing against someone of his cultivated fearsome reputation, that instead of punishing the boy, he praised him for taking the bet without fear. Another story, popularized by Southey and later commemorated in a painting, told how Nelson went on an arctic expedition in his teenage years, and gained respect by fighting off a

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[46] C. I. Hamilton, "Naval Hagiography and the Victorian Hero," *The Historical Journal* 23, no. 2 (June 1980): 381-98.

polar bear, not with bullets, but with the butt end of a musket.[47] Written originally near the end of the Napoleonic wars, Southey's specific intention was to offer a patriotic guide for young Britons. Presenting Nelson as a reckless but undoubtedly brave young man, such stories made strategic sense when marketed to a generation growing up in wartime. Making Nelson relatable, before making him glorious, suggested to young readers that they too ought to serve their nation in some way, and might even be destined for greatness if they emulated the bold character of their national hero.

By the middle decades, however, Victorian masculinity in biographies was much more complex, and certainly geared towards peacetime readers who might not have cause to join the service. The ideal middle-class man was still patriotic and exhibited a sense of duty, but he was also a devout Christian, devoted to his family, and displayed more open sensibility or emotion than was previously expected of men. The idea of the self-made man was also on the rise, in part popularized by the new liberalism of writers like Samuel Smiles, who urged that a man's greatness was determined by his own dedication, and not hindered by humble beginnings.[48] Nelson could easily be characterized, in this liberal mindset, as both religious and a self-made man, having the humble background of a parish minister's son. He entered the navy through family connections, but biographies stressed that his real success came through his own daring and charisma. Smiles himself used Nelson as one of his examples of "character and conduct," suggesting that he had earned his title through purely his own merit and even such qualities as punctuality—repeating a popular but dubious anecdote, Smiles claimed that Nelson once said, "I owe

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[47] Robert Southey, *The Life of Horatio Lord Nelson,* ed. Edwin L. Miller (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896).
[48] Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: W. Partrige & Co., 1859).

all my success in life to having been always a quarter of an hour before my time."[49] In religion, Nelson in reality may not have been excessively devout, but it was always remembered that he was the son of a clergyman, that one of the phrases reported to be his dying words was "God and my country," and that he wrote a prayer for the navy and his country on the morning of Trafalgar. Publishers reprinted the latter in varying contexts for decades, generally claiming to show Nelson's raw devotion on the morning he correctly feared that he would die. In at least one case, they were even reminded that Nelson might have been the ultimate Christian symbol, having sacrificed his life to save the people, in a heavy-handed comparison to the "higher Hero."[50] Through these illustrations of character and religion, Nelson was conceived of as the ideal image for a middle-class man to emulate, and the ideal role model to inspire a workingman to better his position.

Nelson's image, in death, was malleable enough to serve a variety of social purposes, but he was not the only figure who proved useful in heroic narratives. As decades past, the sailors of Nelson's day were portrayed increasingly as heroes in their own right. If observers of Nelson's funeral had (albeit temporarily) declared that a sailor and a hero were synonymous terms, that sentiment reappeared over the first half of the century. The sailor's image was still contested, as will be examined in the case of Greenwich in Chapter 2, but nineteenth-century sources did begin increasingly to depict sailors as a sort of noble workingman. This transformation echoed a specific Olden Time trope: as Britain grew suspicious of industrialization, and worried what machinery might

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[49] Ibid., 144, 199.
[50] [Cosmo Gordon Lang], *Nelson a Flaming Fire: A Sermon Preached by the Right Rev. The Lord Bishop of Stepney, at The Nelson Centennial Service* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1905), 9, 13.

do to the morality of British citizens, cultural outlets looked to the supposedly-unchanging working people of the countryside as a depiction of pure British character. While middle-class readers may not have honestly wished to give up their comforts for a life of hard work and rustic "simplicity," they did romanticize such a life, with countryside guidebooks extolling country folk as honest and devoted to their crafts, casting them as quintessentially British in their attachment to their land and their homes.[51] The countryside (a place supposedly ancient and unchanging) provided an alternative to rapid modernization, and a comforting image of a uniquely British character that was still to be found in spite of changes elsewhere.

If the laboring country man was a symbol of pure Britishness, reassuringly steadfast in his resistance to change, and humble in preferring his ancient land to any other, the British sailor was a convenient parallel. Descriptions referred to sailors as habitually honest, unpretentious and hardworking. Some of this was an outgrowth of earlier Dibdin-type imagery, and dealt with the dichotomy of the sailor on shore versus the sailor at sea, but when analyzing this contrast, accounts seemed to suggest that the good qualities outweighed the unsavory. A character study of "The British Sailor" from 1841, for example, disdains seamen's habits concerning money and women on shore, but otherwise praises their "chivalry of character and . . . lofty bearing." In calling sailors chivalrous, commending their devotion to their sovereign and nation, the author already appeals to popularly nostalgic imagery, but the study casts the sailor as inherently historic in other ways. The author describes the sailor's "handsome countenance," "deportment" and "firmness and decision" that turned the sailor into a "sculpted hero," and proudly

[51] Mandler, *Rise and Fall*, 147.

notes that it is the navy itself that has shaped this character into such a paragon of modern masculinity.[52] But while the young sailor is depicted as the modern ideal, wearing his hair youthfully curled, he eventually wishes that it were fashionable to wear a queued "pigtail"—to mimic the appearance of a sailor in Nelson's day, rather than in the 1840s, but one still deemed essential to defining the "mariner of England."[53] He is thus the ideal of a modern British workingman, and the model of a modern British sailor, but at heart feels connected with a long line of glorified Jack Tars. This imagined sailor is not entirely respectable, but gains respectability through continued service, as he comes more and more to embody "all that is manly, generous, and brave."[54]

Unlike the heroes of naval hagiography, sailors thus described were not intended as a complete role model for readers, but they did represent some socially-useful characteristics. Towards the middle of the century, sailors, and particularly Nelson's veterans, appeared in print as perfect idols for British boys—not because their entire personalities were anything to be emulated, but because they personified something that was considered to be the national spirit. The press began to depict sailors, whether in character studies or in real life, as men who mellowed as they aged, and although always rough around the edges, still demonstrated courage, strength, firmness of purpose, and as always, an unyielding sense of duty. These were characteristics to be praised in any British citizen, and accordingly print descriptions of veterans (particularly veterans who lived at Greenwich Hospital as pensioners) *encouraged* boys to admire them, as if they

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[52] Edward Howard, "The British Sailor," in *The Heads of the People* (London: Robert Tyas, 1841), 343.
[53] Ibid., 340.
[54] Ibid., 341.

were "something far beyond Lord Nelson," who might as well have defeated the French single-handedly, on the basis of their determination and charisma.[55]

In Search of the Spirit of Nelson

Just as the popularity of the Olden Time led Britons to seek reminders of an ancient, or at least more pleasant past, the nation also began to look for evidence that echoes of the days of Nelson were still among them. As the advance of naval technology led commentators to wonder if the "pride of the seaman . . . has been abased," depictions of sailors began to suggest, in hopeful terms, that even if time passed and steam replaced sail, the essential British *spirit* of a sailor would remain the same. This language was revived in times of military need, often with either purposeful or accidentally exaggerated comparisons. The Crimean War sparked some interest in modern sailors, but it was images of the historical navy that prevailed: in Parliament, Earl Carnarvon maintained that the navy was "manned by crews amongst whom the spirit of . . . Nelson yet survives," and that the nation would "make a second race of heroes equal to the past."[56] In forty years of peace, such an argument maintained, Britain had changed in appearance but not in nature, and could achieve glory at sea under combined steam and sail power, just as it had under full sail. So strongly did Britain conflate its contemporary strength with the success of the former wars, that Lord Raglan sometimes misspoke and referred to the Russian enemy as "the French."[57] By the 1880s, it was still a Russian menace that inspired comparisons to the old navy, but in the form of a naval arms race, rather than

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[55] "Greenwich Fair," *Illustrated London News*, April 22, 1843.
[56] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates,* 3rd ser., vol. 130 (1854), col. 7-17.
[57] N. Gash, "After Waterloo: British Society and the Legacy of the Napoleonic Wars," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* vol. 28, no. 1 (1978): 146.

direct warfare. In the midst of this naval scare, the *Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* published a full spread depicting men preparing for war, while Nelson's ghost looked over them proclaiming that "ENGLAND EXPECTS EVERY MAN TO DO HIS DUTY." The caption read, "THE SPIRIT OF NELSON ANIMATES OUR JACK TARS," but the reference to Jack was more nostalgic than descriptive. These men, laying mines, launching torpedoes, and practicing the guns on the HMS *Excellent*, looked nothing like the early tars, but were shown as strong, bearded examples of Victorian athletic masculinity.[58] The contrast was jarring, between these brawny men with their modern armaments and modern diving gear, and the slight-framed, very eighteenth-century figure of Nelson, whose severe profile was backed by sailing ships. But the suggestion was clear; although modern heroes do not look as resplendent as those of the past, the brave sailors of the present were partaking in the same glory as their forebears. Most jarringly, but most revealing of where Victorian Britain believed the spirit of Nelson to reside, it was now the sailors themselves, not a specific, high-ranking hero, who earned the nation's glory.

John Horsfield has remarked that the Royal Navy of the nineteenth century "lived off the reputation of battles long ago," and the public "appeared to take it at its own inflated self-assessment."[59] It is true that British nostalgia, and veneration of the navy, combined to create an image of national glory that was based on historical imagery. But there was more at work than simply taking the navy at its word. The navy's image was sometimes shaped from above, from government or by the navy itself, but as the above examples

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[58] *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times,* May 2, 1885.
[59] Horsfield, 96.

suggest, that image was often contested, if not created entirely, by the press in the public sphere. Britain was anxious to prove that the days of Nelson had not been lost entirely, and to prove that as long as a *spirit* of Nelson endured, then no change in society or technology could threaten Britain's greatness. It was often *civilians* as well as officials, who looked to be reassured by what they found. The British public looked to tangible reminders of the navy's glorious past—whether in the form of sailing ships, artifacts, veterans, or anecdotes of heroism, and launched concerted efforts to represent and preserve that past. It is this nostalgic display of the navy's past, conceived with an effort to confront the issues of the present, which forms the basis of the following four chapters.

Chapter 2

Battered Hulks:

Greenwich Hospital, and Naval Pensioners as Living Relics, 1820-1845

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, a Greenwich pensioner was a character whom perhaps few people ever met, but many would say they knew. He appeared to be everywhere in the national imagination, represented in songs, literature, newspaper anecdotes, and popular prints. His reputation, however, was always in flux. On the one hand, he was considered to be simply an older version of Jack Tar ashore, who followed naturally from that rowdy popular stock character of the Royal Navy. But at the same time he was often a veteran of the recent French wars, possibly a living connection to Lord Nelson's victories. He was at once an echo of old, well-known tropes, and also a possible symbol of newfound national greatness. Society thus did not quite know what to think of him, and it was a matter of debate how such a man, forged in war as he was, was to fit into a nation that was now at peace.

The Greenwich pensioner was a person framed by limits, both of space and character, of others' making. Dwelling, on merit of either age or injury, within the gated boundaries of Greenwich Hospital on the outskirts of London, he was set apart from larger society, existing in a place to which he supposedly belonged by his very nature.[1] Viewed by the British public, pensioners were seen as enigmas, men forced by circumstance to live out of their element (on land, rather than at sea), and who simply did

[1] Greenwich Hospital provided pensions to both "out-pensioners," who lived anywhere in Britain, and "in-pensioners," who lived on site at the Hospital. The popular stock character was an in-pensioner, however, so when art or literature referred to a "Greenwich Pensioner," they were referring to an in-pensioner. For the sake of staying true to the source material, I likewise use "Greenwich Pensioner" to refer to in-pensioners, unless otherwise specified.

not seem to belong anywhere but among others like themselves. The pensioner's separation meant that popular culture could depict him in almost any way it wished, to whatever ends the era or audience demanded. During the French wars, and in the decades immediately following, he was primarily an object of curiosity. In a country that found itself with a sudden influx of veterans, the Pensioner was a reminder of all that Britain had achieved, but also of the uncertainties that lay ahead. Pensioners were not a new-formed group—Greenwich Hospital had been providing housing and pensions since the seventeenth century—but the sudden visibility of their numbers caused contention as to their respectability, and whether these men who had fought Britain's battles at sea were truly representative of British men as a whole.

Scholars have studied Greenwich pensioners in passing, examining the catalogues of their injuries, or the conditions of their lives at the Hospital. Such studies explain how these men lived, but not, at length, how they were perceived in society. Isaac Land has noted that by the 1850s, Greenwich was considered to be a depressing place, where aging veterans seemed to wander the halls with no indication of the men they had once been.[2] But in the previous decades, from around 1820 through 1845, the Greenwich pensioner was a cultural symbol, and a case study for Britain's changing view of its sailors and its naval past.

Britain thus attempted to make sense of the Greenwich pensioner at the same time it tried to make sense of its own place in the post-war world. Through the 1820s and into the 1830s, pensioners often appeared as Jack Tar-type caricatures, but they also served as convenient political or social symbols. As members of a laboring class, they

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[2] Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 149-53.

made convenient characters through which to discuss the needs of the nation's poor, or to speculate on how morals like national duty or Christian piety could be demonstrated by the lower classes of society. As aging men who had been forced to contemplate their own mortality, they also were transformed into characters who were supposedly representative of *all* Britons: men whose hardships represented the journey of the Christian soul, and who demonstrated a resolve with which all men should face life's trials. By the 1830s, pensioners had not quite achieved social *respectability*, but a national consensus was emerging that veterans were worthy at least of some degree of national respect. Not only was their military service increasingly praised as the force that had preserved Britain's power at sea for a new century, but authors also began to praise their humble and supposedly "honest" nature that symbolized the "true" spirit of the nation. And by the 1840s, a final transformation occurred. As the French wars faded out of recent experience and into the realm of memory, Britain was faced with the question of how its navy would continue to prove itself in the new century. Although the Navy turned to imperial missions and expeditions of exploration (as will be discussed in Chapter 3), there was a growing fear that the Britain of modern day was no longer the Britain of Nelson's day. In this atmosphere, pensioners became sought-after figures, a small and dwindling group of men who could provide a link to Nelson's navy, whose stories were now worth hearing. Greenwich became a site of memory, storytelling, and display, where the British public could visit and even speak with pensioners. Their rough and sturdy image, once considered undesirable, became a symbol of Britain's indomitable spirit, and a heartening reminder of the idea that Britons had the sea in their veins. They became naval heroes of a sort—humble heroes who represented an older and perhaps more glorious time, and

whose characteristics of patriotism and hard work were now worthy of recognition, and even emulation.

Stock Characters

Anyone in Britain in the early nineteenth century, regardless of social class, would likely have been able to identify a pensioner by sight. His trademark blue suit and tricorne hat were his most easily recognizable attributes, often described in writing or circulated in print. But the popular press molded his image in such a way that it was not only his physical appearance, but also his behavior that was expected to be distinctive. Up to the 1820s, one of the most popular depictions of a Greenwich Pensioner was the eponymous character of a song by Charles Dibdin, which appeared as a broadside accompanied by an iconic drawing by Isaac Cruikshank.[3] Dibdin was a well-known musician and writer during his peak at the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century, and his pieces were composed to serve a political and social purpose. Prime Minister William Pitt commissioned Dibdin specifically to write songs about sailors for popular circulation, with the intention of promoting naval patriotism during the French wars. His songs aimed to make Jack Tar respectable, depicting sailors not as society's undesirables—but as honest, loyal, and profoundly dedicated to doing their duty.[4] But as much as Dibdin made sailors look like they exhibited the best of British character while at sea, and completely denied any disreputable imagery, he and his emulators did not deny the stereotype that sailors were prone to wild expressions of mirth and general

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[3] Isaac Cruikshank, *The Greenwich Pensioner*, 1791, hand-colored etching, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.
[4] Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 96.

carousing while on shore. The Greenwich pensioner, fundamentally a sailor although committed to the land, was no exception.

Dibdin's song, "The Greenwich Pensioner," originally published in 1791, features a veteran explaining the dangers he faced during his days at sea. He had chosen a sailor's life for all the honorable reasons a wartime audience could want, including a sense of national duty and a need to provide for his "stranded" family, but his naval career ended when he lost a limb in battle. His tale is not one of woe, however; he claims that he is generally content with his lot in life, and praises King George for "saving" him by giving him a home at Greenwich. He is even fairly nonchalant about his disability, quipping that although "My precious limb was lopped off / I, when they eased my pain, / Thank'd God I was not popped off."[5] Cruikshank's corresponding print completed the image of pensioners as men who would happily make the best of their situations. The drawing shows a tavern room with several old pensioners gambling, smoking, and drinking, along with a younger sailor who has lost both arms. The narrator in the foreground looks rather jovial, holding both a tankard of ale and a pipe, and is proudly displaying his wooden leg as evidence of his story.[6]

This idea of what a pensioner was—a veteran with a missing limb, or perhaps an eye, who was known for his good humor as well as his love of ale and tobacco—dominated popular understanding of Nelson's veterans for decades. There was a sort of fascinated voyeurism to the trope, allowing British society to remark on the "shattered" or "grotesque" bodies of men who had served at sea, counting physical differences as evidence of the sailor's strangeness. A person might remark on how these men had been

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[5] Isaac Cruikshank, *Greenwich Pensioner.*
[6] Ibid.

willing to put themselves on the line for Britain's defense (their bodies were proof), but would still expect that since they were sailors, they would still be naturally joyful when they returned home, no matter what they experienced. The image was replicated time and again with no initial attempt to individualize veterans' experiences. Although amputation was not a requirement for admission to Greenwich Hospital, it seemed a requirement for popular imagery, and was repeated almost to absurdity. Robert Cruikshank produced an outlandish sequel to his father's drawing, with a print depicting a man with a wooden leg, a hook in the place of one hand, and an eye patch, who is managing to drink, smoke, and dance all at once.[7]

Although a war wound was integral to the Greenwich Pensioner's public image, his war heroism was more contested. When presenting these men as stock characters, print and visual sources questioned the extent of pensioners' merits, whether they had served with Nelson or not. Observers might be interested to see their "battered" bodies from a distance, but at close range their bodies were thought to simply get in the way. Pensioners had a reputation of being dreadfully out of place in any location but their home at Greenwich, and particularly in London. Anecdotes showed them as staring in awe at the bustle of the city around them, impeding travel on the streets by standing in the middle of the road in confusion, or even causing carriage accidents by crossing the street at the wrong time. When they did manage to successfully navigate the city, possibly to visit a family member, the stereotype of drinking and gambling followed them.[8]

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[7] Robert Cruikshank, "The Greenwich Pensioner," *The Gentleman's Pocket Magazine* (London: Joseph Robins, 1829), 152.
[8] Ibid., 153.

The press may have had difficulty finding redeeming characteristics in pensioners who happened to venture into wider society, but one thing that may have compensated for their more unsavory characteristics was the fact that pensioners supposedly did not know how things worked on land, and thus could be presented as humorous characters. A pensioner was "a sort of stranded marine animal" who was dreadfully out of place.[9] He may as well be a "hippopotamus in a gentleman's park," or a "sea-gull in a canary's cage."[10] He referred to everything in nautical terms, and mistook common phrases as having nautical meanings. The phrase "Canvassing for a situation," one source claimed, made a pensioner think of "running with all sails set for a station at Aboukir. He has the advantage of our economists as to the "Standard of Value," knowing it to be the British ensign. Finally . . . [ask] him for the meaning of "Georgius Rex," and he will answer without hesitation, "The wrecks of the *Royal George*."[11]

With comic generalizations like this available, individual *real* pensioners rarely made it to the papers. If they did, it was generally not for anything positive. At worst, the term "a Greenwich pensioner" appeared in a report followed by a description of a crime committed by such a man; and at best it appeared in a description of something potentially amusing that a pensioner had done. If a pensioner appeared before the London or Greenwich authorities, and behaved in a typical sailor's fashion, or engaged in potentially amusing or shocking sea-talk, the papers were happy to report it. Violence was generally thought to be a standard negative trait common to sailors, but in certain contexts the public press seems to have found it entertaining. In one case, a pensioner

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[9] *Derby Mercury,* December 23, 1829, reprinted from *Hood's Comic Annual.*
[10] *Hull Packet,* Oct 17, 1826; Robert Cruikshank, "Greenwich Pensioner," 157.
[11] *Derby Mercury*, December 23, 1829.

who remained anonymous appeared before the magistrates in Bow Street, London, because he had kicked up a row at the Admiralty building. The man had lost his Greenwich lodgings and pension because he had been absent without leave from the Hospital from some time, and he had since petitioned in vain to be reinstated. He had gone to the Admiralty to petition that he had "served thirty years like a good seaman, and had received many a wound in defence of his country . . . and he would not go vagabonding about the streets without a copper," but his rowdiness upon being denied was of great interest to the council and to its reporters. The papers also took delight in reporting the headstrong antics of the "Old Tar" in front of the magistrates, to whom he announced that he would go right back to the Admiralty as soon as he was at liberty. When the magistrates told him that he was at his own peril, and would be taken to prison if he repeated his earlier actions, his nonchalantly replied, "I don't know what you mean by peril." Reportedly going through the expected sailor's motions of "turning his quid in his mouth," "clapping on his old hat," and "placing his hands in his trowsers' pockets," he then declared, "Here goes; I am off for the Admiralty."[12]

The Greenwich pensioner in the decades immediately following the wars, then, was a social outsider, just as he had been in his younger days. His otherness may have been either comic or disturbing, depending on the observer and the context, but the consensus was clear: he did not belong in common society with non-sailors. If the wartime belief had been that sailors were true British patriots at sea—embodying courage, duty, and masculine virtue—but rakes and scoundrels on land, the solution then would seem to be to keep sailors at sea, or at least to use depictions of their supposed sea-

[12] *Morning Post,* September 8, 1826.

character to distract from their land-character. But in peacetime, with no new glorious deeds to report, what was there to do, to keep the former men of Nelson's navy from tarnishing the navy's good name? Greenwich, luckily, provided an answer. Greenwich could not provide a home for every sailor forced ashore by the end of the wars, but it did kept a number of sailors notably separate from society, and suggested that it might indeed be possible to transform them into something more acceptable, or at least amusing. Its fame meant that those sailors did not disappear completely; they were just now in a position to be framed by a carefully constructed environment. Wearing uniforms, housed in "wards" with names that sounded like those of navy ships, maintaining a hierarchy and subscribing to a code of discipline, life at Greenwich was supposed to mimic shipboard life. Within such an environment, pensioners could be perhaps viewed in their best context, the next best thing to keeping sailors at sea. Greenwich was supposed to be a happy medium between land and sea, providing a lifestyle that was familiar and preferred by its inhabitants. This was, of course, supposed to be for the benefit of the veterans themselves, but could also be seen as a benefit to the rest of society, who would much prefer to see sailors in a light where they had a positive reputation, than to see them causing potential havoc about the town.

Ancient Mariners

Viewed in the turn-of-the-century sense as a social outsider, forced onto shore and consequently out of place when seen around town, the Greenwich pensioner had been both a comic figure and a person to be possibly wary of. But viewed *within* his own territory, within the gates of Greenwich Hospital or in the adjacent Park, he had the

potential to be something quite different. For the romantically inclined, in an era when art and literature were preoccupied with the existential and the sublime, the pensioner as he appeared in his shore-bound state was the perfect metaphor for the human condition. The wounded and aging veteran, so reduced from former days when he had participated in some of the nation's most celebrated victories at sea, could be seen as a fitting representation of how any person would be cut down by time, remembering the days of their "prime" but becoming more aware of the grimmer reality of mortality.

Images of the sea had traditionally been associated with the human journey through life in a religious sense. Life's trials could be said to be akin to storms at sea, and God was supposed to provide the tempest-tossed soul with a safe harbor. Sailors in particular were expected to use the language of the sea to talk about God, death, and the afterlife: Dibdin made great use of this stereotype in "Tom Bowling," supposedly an elegy from a ship's crew to a popular sailor who has "gone aloft." The song's narrator hopes that Tom will "find pleasant weather, / When He, who all commands, / Shall give, to call life's crew together, / The word to pipe all hands."[13] Literature frequently employed nautical metaphors for life and death for civilians as well; Alfred, Lord Tennyson would later write perhaps the most famous Victorian example, with "Crossing the Bar" ("Twilight and evening bell, / And after that the dark! / And may there be no sadness of farewell, / When I embark")[14]. But in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the best-known allegory to employ a sailor as a symbol for the human soul was possibly Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

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[13] *Poor Tom Bowling,* 1794, mezzotint, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.
[14] Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Poetical Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, vol. 2 (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1885), 687.

The title figure of Coleridge's 1797 epic is a medieval sailor, doomed to eternal life because he committed the crime of shooting an albatross while at sea. He had encountered the horrors of Antarctic ice, met with a ship captained by death itself, watched all his shipmates die around him, and was only returned to shore when the reanimated corpses of his crew steered him home. Now, at the time of the poem's narration, the sailor is still doomed to wander the earth in search of salvation—he is a soul in search of forgiveness, having sinned in life and hoping that he can repent and one day be granted peace after death. For now, he does not truly belong anywhere, and will eagerly tell his story to anyone he can compel to listen. The poem drew on traditional religious imagery, and was interspersed with the Gothic and Romantic imagery that was popular at the time, but also relied on contemporary ideas of what a veteran sailor was like. The mariner, returned to shore, is a man out of place, who behaves erratically and is shocking to meet outside of his "natural" element (in the poem, the mariner appears out of nowhere to confront and delay a man on his way to a friend's wedding). Not belonging to society but forced to wander through it, his identity is maintained only through reliving his past, and constantly repeating his thrilling tales to the public.[15]

Greenwich pensioners were not expected to wander in order to tell their stories, but the very telling of tales, or simply the possession of a melancholy aspect that *suggested* he had moving tales to tell, became increasingly a part of the pensioner stereotype. In the attempt to romanticize pensioners, it was not uncommon for

[15] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge,* vol. 2 (London: William Pickering, 1828), 3-38.

newspapers to adopt the phrase "Ancient Mariner" to describe them.[16] Although not all pensioners were very old, by any means, the older inhabitants of Greenwich were considered the most fascinating, and the universal themes they supposedly represented made depictions of them marketable throughout the nation. An early depiction in this picturesque vein appeared in Liverpool poet Thomas Noble's five-canto poem *Blackheath*, wherein an "aged seaman" sits "pensively beneath yon solitary elm" of Greenwich Park's One Tree Hill, as much an integral part of the scenery as any natural feature. The pensioner's gaze is fixed on the Thames, where he sees the ship in which he fought as a younger man, 'on whose deck he often joined the shout / Of battle and victory; she, whose sides / Enclosed the field of all his manly force." Noble retells the glories of both the vessel and the man, for both have met a similar fate. The veteran recalls how his beloved vessel once "spread / Her crowded sails, and, on the dastard foe, / Bore down Britannia's thunder," and the memory causes him both to smile and to weep, because the ship is now "A shattered burden," destined to be broken up, much as he is an old and broken man facing his own end.[17] This description, written during the wars but published after Britain's last major naval engagement at Trafalgar, differed from the standard cartoons of pensioners. The veteran may have resembled any image that Dibdin and Cruikshank had presented to the nation—the poem even details how he lost an arm aboard the vessel in question—but he is something more relatable than a dancing, smoking or drinking Jack Tar.

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[16] *Saturday Night,* vol. 1 (London: Hodgson and Company, 1824), 52; *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, vol. 46, September–December 1844 (London: Henry Colburn), 331.
[17] Thomas Noble, *Blackheath: A Poem in Five Cantos* (London: H.K. Causton, 1808), 68-69. The section in question was reprinted as its own poem, "The Greenwich Pensioner," and appeared in *The Derby Mercury,* October 24, 1821.

Interest in the romanticism of the Greenwich pensioner extended north as well. In *Stories of the Study*, Scottish novelist John Galt included in his reminiscence a meeting with a very old pensioner, a Scotsman himself, who had lost both arms while at sea. Being so impressed by the literary possibilities of such a character, Galt imagined a sensational life history for him, rather than recording his real narrative. The story imagines a poor orphan boy, sent to join a merchant vessel with nothing but a Bible. Hoping that God will look out for him, he volunteers to join the Royal Navy in the place of another boy when their ship encounters a press gang. He at first learns the "natural" mirth of sailors, when he loses an arm and his messmates teach him to joke about his "fin," reminding him that many good officers have done their duty with one arm. But he soon loses his other arm in another action, and learns instead the melancholy of his situation, wondering why Providence has made him "destined to be a hulk." Galt's story, praised by critics as both a good memory of the past and an appropriately moving tale of "life's hopes extinguished early in life," in some ways acknowledges that pensioners are limited by stereotypes. The narrator himself *tries* to fit the public image of a pensioner, trying to sing popular sea-songs to keep his spirits up. Upon being rowed to his new home at Greenwich, he reportedly tried to sing Dibdin's "Poor Jack," a tune that suggests that despite everything, Providence is always looking out for sailors' welfare. The tragic contrast between the song and the narrator's reality is obvious, and yet he attempts to mold himself to the popular image of what he has become. Galt's nameless character, by contrast to Cruikshank's drawing of the drunk, armless man that accompanied Dibdin's

"Greenwich Pensioner," is a tragic figure, reminding the reader of the unpredictability of life's trials, and the fragility of the human body.[18]

These types of depictions did not represent a trope that completely replaced Cruikshank-type imagery, but a new way of thinking about pensioners that existed in tandem with older stereotypes. Sometimes they appeared in the same work, such as in the *Gentleman's Pocket Magazine's* character study of "The Greenwich Pensioner," which appeared in 1829 accompanied by Robert Cruikshank's caricature. The illustration shows a man defined both by his disability and his good cheer. But the written piece conveys a much more sympathetic figure, perhaps deliberately calling the image into question. Like the Ancient Mariner, the figure in this description is an "enigma" who exists outside the normal course of life, but he exists not because he has a sin to atone for, but because providence favors him. He exists in spite of nature: "nature knows not what to make of him," the description went, "He hath been suspended, like a school-boy's bob cherry, a hundred times over the chaps of death, and yet still been snatched away by the hand of providence."[19] Such a person, other writers agreed, might be a shocking sight, a "strange composition of battered humanity and blue serge," sometimes "almost awful to contemplate."[20] Some visitors thought Greenwich to be downright depressing for this reason, but the more philosophically inclined declared it to be a school "for the study of humanity."[21] Although sailors had not been traditionally considered a type of person worth emulating, the setting of Greenwich turned the veteran into an object-lesson in this sense. Not seen as an individual but as a living metaphor, the pensioner provided the

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[18] John Galt, *Stories of the Study*, vol. 2 (London: Cochrane and M'Crone, 1833), 264-88.
[19] Robert Cruikshank, "Greenwich Pensioner," 154.
[20] Ibid., 153; Edward Howard, "The Greenwich Pensioner," in *The Heads of the People* (London: Robert Tyas, 1841), 349.
[21] Howard, "Greenwich Pensioner," 349.

civilian observer with a theoretical lesson on "how to bear suffering."[22] If a sailor could persevere through the horrors of war and bodily injury, such a lesson claimed, then any person safe on shore should be able to overcome their own trials.[23] By being able, supposedly, to exist both as a melancholy figure and a symbol of good cheer, pensioners came to be called "philosophers" or "masters of the humanities." A pensioner might be pensive, reflecting on his age and misfortunes, at one moment, but he would just as soon turn around and counter such sorrow by promoting happiness among his friends, "continually doing his utmost to make them merry."[24]

Seeing pensioners as thoughtful or emotional figures, who were such good comrades as to look after each other's well-being by trying to spread good cheer, humanized them in a way that cartoons certainly did not. By the late 1820s, if pensioners were still bizarre and a bit grotesque in the eyes of the public, writers encouraged their readers to look at these men not just as physical curiosities, but Britons to be grateful for. This might still be presented with an absurd sense of humor. The author who called pensioners "seagulls in canaries' cages" asked readers to look on the standard pensioners' disabilities and consider "that if it had not been for his leg, the cannon-ball might have scattered us in our tea parlour; the bullet which deprived him of his orb of vision, might have stricken *Our Village* from our hand, whilst ensconced in our study . . . instead of which, hemmed round by such walls of stout and honest flesh, we have lived securely, participating in every peaceful and domestic comfort, and neither heard the roar of the

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Robert Cruikshank, "Greenwich Pensioner," 154.
[24] Lt. Hatchway, R.N. [pseud.], *The Greenwich Pensioners* (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), 59.

cannon nor seen its smoke."[25] The comparison was meant to be amusingly jarring, suggesting facetiously that the horrors of war were akin to the destruction of middle-class pleasures, but the implication was honestly meant: were it not for sailors who sacrificed their bodies, Britain might have suffered invasion. Pensioners may be rough around the edges, these descriptions concluded, and so could not mix well with society, but in character they remain the courageous and self-sacrificing men that Britain had celebrated in wartime, and so in peacetime they deserved at least some gratitude.

The Trial of Dennis Collins and Question of Pensioners' Welfare

As Britain came to think of Greenwich pensioners as men who deserved the nation's appreciation, it might have been expected that there would be an increased interest in their welfare. This, however, was not the case. Isaac Land has argued that while the nineteenth century public was eager to hear sea stories from pensioners, literature's tendency to portray them as unwaveringly patriotic, hardworking and unselfish, "had the effect of postponing any serious national debate about sailors' rights—or indeed of making sailors who issued any serious political demands appear selfish and unmanly."[26] Depictions of Greenwich as a place where pensioners were made as comfortable and at-home as possible had the same detracting effect. While the newspapers reported an alarming number of suicides at Greenwich, often the effect of despair when a pensioner found himself without the means to provide for his family, the reports never seem to have considered the underlying problem. Clearly, observers were ready to think of pensioners as being a little sad at times about their past, but were not

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[25] Robert Cruikshank, "Greenwich Pensioner," 157-58
[26] Land, *War,* 115.

able to process the idea that they could be distraught by their current circumstances. Reports were likewise unable to find much more than curiosity in cases where men decided to leave Greenwich, needing to find work and a better source of income than their pension could provide.[27]

In the rare cases when the public *did* notice that pensioners were displeased with their situation in life, it quickly turned into a questioning of why they weren't living up to the nation's expectations of what an ideal Briton should be. N.A.M Rodger has warned modern historians against using the navy as "a blank screen onto which to project a favorite plot"—i.e. using the navy as a microcosm to examine a larger social issue—but in the nineteenth century, that is exactly what public media did.[28] Sailors became the props for explaining what made a British man a *proper* man, whether it was patriotism, duty, selflessness, courage, worldly experience, Christianity, political beliefs (whatever any given author believed those were), or anything else. Some commentators went so far as to appeal directly to pensioners, telling them that since they were so visible at Greenwich, they ought to consciously emulate the Dibdin-esque stereotypes that the public wanted. An 1806 pamphlet described the popular sentiment that pensioners should present a pleasant Christian metaphor, of men "on the shore of eternity," and announced what a shame it was that in contrast to this expectation, so many "brave seamen" were so unmoved by their surroundings as to spend their days in drunkenness.[29] The author was perhaps overly optimistic in hoping that sailors could provide icons for temperance, but the pamphlet does suggest how attached commentators were to the idea that pensioners

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[27] Land, *War,* 151; *Caledonian Mercury,* July 23, 1836.
[28] N. A. M. Rodger, "Mutiny or Subversion? Spithead and the Nore," in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective,* ed. Thomas Bartlett et al (Dublin: Four Courts, 2003), 564.
[29] *The Greenwich Pensioner: Being an Earnest and Affectionate Address* (London: W. Nicholson, 1806), 4-5.

should be symbolic characters, rather than flawed humans. Later observers noted that some pensioners were irritated by the level of imposed religiosity at Greenwich, and suggested that this was part of the reason behind the problems of drunkenness and violence; besides the chapel and the library pensioners could find nothing else to do but drink and gamble! But these were only brief digressions in writings that generally praised the Hospital, not extensive plans describing what "diversions" the Hospital could be providing to make life better for its inhabitants.[30] There is some evidence that pensioners did find this disconnect between reality and public perception frustrating; Land describes how characters in *Greenwich Hospital* (written by an actual pensioner under the pseudonym of The Old Sailor) complain that the country seems to forget about them. Alick M'Alabaster, a character in *The Greenwich Pensioners,* likewise complains that he often feels bored and confined, and says that money is short, but seems fearful that someone will hear him complain, knowing that he is expected to take it with a stiff upper lip.[31]

The perception of sailors' complaints as "unmanly" may have kept some pensioners, like the fictional Alick, from voicing their concerns too loudly. But some were forced to advocate for themselves, sometimes in extreme terms, and in the case of one man, named Dennis Collins, the public was forced to listen. Collins was not alone in being a pensioner in desperate circumstances, whose appearance in the papers arose from being brought to trial, but the manner in which he had expressed his desperation was both unprecedented and understandably shocking. The cause of his distress was that he had been turned out of Greenwich, and lost his pension, in penalty for disorderly conduct. He

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[30] Howard, "Greenwich Pensioner," 353.
[31] Land, *War,* 115; Hatchway, *Greenwich Pensioners,* 162.

had petitioned, like the unnamed sailor who had made a scene at the Admiralty back in 1826, to be readmitted, but to no avail. Like his predecessor, he felt that no man who had served his country as he did should be living on the street, and finding himself with no resources he declared that he may "as well be shot or hanged as remain in such a state."[32] He turned his protest into a public spectacle, by making his way to the Ascot races, waiting for the Royal party to make an appearance at their stand, and throwing two stones at King William IV.

Occurring in tumultuous 1832, this event set off a firestorm in British newspapers. Within a week, papers from all corners of the United Kingdom and Ireland were reporting on the event, which they called a "cowardly" or "murderous" attack, tantamount to high treason. The outcry morphed into a discussion of the great political issue of the day, Parliamentary Reform, with papers claiming that reform debates had radicalized the public.[33] The timing was convenient for such arguments, as papers could also point to a recent attack on the Duke of Wellington as he drove through London.[34] Parliament had passed the Reform Act for the benefit of the people, commentators claimed, and yet now "the people" could not be satisfied and so were attacking people who had voted against reform. Dennis Collins, then, was part of a supposed mob of poor Britons who threatened their superiors. The major newspapers quickly assumed that if Collins had access to a deadlier weapon, he would certainly have used it, and hoped that

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[32] *Morning Chronicle,* June 20, 1832.
[33] Ibid.; *Morning Post,* June 30, 1832.
[34] Publications to mention these attacks on June 23, 1832 included: *Bristol Mercury*; *Lancaster Gazette; Hampshire Advertiser; Royal Cornwall Gazette; Sheffield Independent; Essex Standard; Leicester Chronicle;* and [London] *Examiner.*

among their readers there "was not a man in the kingdom," of any class, "who would not risk his life to prevent a repetition" of the deed.[35]

Interestingly, however, the discussion did not turn to a disparagement of sailors in general. Collins was not referred to as "Jack," as sailors brought in to criminal trials sometimes were, and his violence was not equated with any inherent character of sailors, as in the old stereotype. Instead, newspapers implied, his conduct was beneath the good name of Britain's sons of the waves. Collins was called "unmanly," "unprincipled," disloyal, "cowardly"—all the very opposites of what sailors were described to be at their best.[36] One paper even suggested he was more comparable to an imposter than a true British sailor; the *Morning Chronicle* declared that he reminded the editors more of "those wandering mendicants who, in the tattered garbs of sailors, are constantly imposing on the credulity of the public." Even Collins's wooden leg, the trademark of a "real" Greenwich pensioner, did not gain him any sympathy, but instead added to the description of a shabby imposter, being "of the most rude construction."[37]

By contrast to Collins, depicted as everything a sailor, and thereby any good Briton, should not be, the papers had the convenient example of Captain George Smith, the man who apprehended Collins at Ascot. Smith was a captain of the Royal Navy, who had had a good view of the Royal stand when the stones were thrown, and was able to determine from whence they came. Running to get a hold of the perpetrator, he was able to secure Collins before he could throw a third stone.[38] Smith seemed to have all the good qualities that Collins lacked, highlighting Collins's behavior was an individual failings,

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[35] *Morning Chronicle,* June 20, 1832; *Lancaster Gazette,* June 23, 1832.
[36] *Morning Chronicle,* June 20, 1832 and June 23, 1832; *Lancaster Gazette* June 23, 1832.
[37] *Morning Chronicle,* June 20, 1832; *Hampshire Advertiser* June 23, 1832.
[38] *Morning Chronicle,* June 20, 1832.

not the failings of Navy men as a whole. The papers made much of what Smith had done for his sovereign and his nation, and he was praised for being fiercely loyal and quick-thinking under pressure. It would be easy to suggest that the contrast between Collins and Smith was a matter of officers versus common seamen, but the real issue was not rank or status, but personal character. One paper noted specifically that Smith's rank of captain, which was "only recently" achieved, was due to his "own merit," not his social class or bureaucratic favoritism.[39] The news did not report on much of Collins's history at sea, other than listing the ships he served in (there was no mention of any battles he had seen, or how he lost his leg), but the London press managed to get hold of Smith's most sensational action. He had, the *Morning Chronicle* claimed, "steered the *Undaunted*, with Bonaparte on board, on his way to Elba."[40] It appears, however, that the paper may have confused two different George Smiths in its attempt to make a hero. It is unclear which one was at Ascot, but the post-captain George Smith who received his promotion in 1832, on the merit of his improvements in gunnery practice, was never in the *Undaunted*. The George Smith who *was* in that ship did not command it, but was only appointed to captain the ship's boat that carried Bonaparte ashore by his war hero uncle, Admiral Sir Sidney Smith, and so it would be difficult to argue that his success had no official influences. He had also been a post-captain for four years by 1832.[41] But whether they had the correct Smith or not, the implication was that a man like Smith was the proper type who exemplified the Navy ideal. The best of the navy should be represented by gentlemanly behavior, worthy character, and the avoidance of radical politics.

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[39] *Morning Chronicle,* June 28, 1832.
[40] Ibid.
[41] John Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography* Vol. 3, Part 2 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1832) 52; Vol. 4, Part 2 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1835), 481-82.

Thus, the British navy became a stand-in for a national discussion on politics and the supposed national character. Smith was the perfect prop for the conservative emphasis on loyalty and duty in the face of reform's menace. Who better to represent loyalty and protection of the monarch than a naval officer, who had perhaps personally brought Bonaparte into exile, after all? Collins, however, as a common sailor who had *also* served his country, was a figure who proved useful in illustrating liberal or even radical opinions. The radical paper *The Poor Man's Guardian* called him "ruffianly," but almost seemed to suggest he had done a necessary thing that no other man had dared do. His actions, along with the recent attack on the Duke of Wellington, "were little incidents highly necessary at *just* this time, "loyalty, royalty," &c. being rather at a discount." "Alas! poor John Bull," the paper lamented, "how art thou gulled," implying that patriotism was too often equated with blind loyalty instead of a true concern for the people's needs.[42] Other papers, although they explicitly stated that they did not condone what Collins had done, likewise suggested that Tory commentators were only using him as a prop to scare people about the dangers of reform. The Scottish *Caledonian Mercury* lampooned conservative MP Robert Peel for his comments on the matter. Peel had blamed radical MP Joseph Hume for encouraging civil unrest, since Hume believed there would come a time when "an appeal to physical force would not only be excusable but justifiable." The *Mercury* stood with its countryman Hume, suggesting it was ridiculous to think that a conversation in Parliament could have "met the eye of the expelled and starving Greenwich pensioner," and stating more importantly that Britain was a country whose monarchy was supposed to function with the consent of the people. Although

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[42] *The Poor Man's Guardian,* June 23, 1832.

careful not to say that Collins's violence was justifiable, the paper argued that his grievance *was* understandable, and if Peel was arguing that the pensioner ought to be blindly loyal even when his country had failed him, then Peel was veering dangerously close to suggesting that government need not represent the needs of the public.[43]

As the initial outrage faded, and Britain had more time to consider what had really happened, a few more liberal-to-radical voices joined the discussion. By July and August a few commentators were tired of the uproar, and said that it was "Much Ado About Nothing," or looked "very like making a mountain out of a mole-hill."[44] Collins was a desperate man, they said, driven by unredressed grievances and injustice, who had been "reduced to a state bordering on starvation."[45] He may have been driven to what they called madness, but perhaps, these commentators said, the public should consider that Collins was guilty only of assault, not of any real attempt to murder.

The Examiner was one of only a few papers to truly consider Collins a sympathetic character, who had illustrated an important point—that Britain ought to do better for its sailors, to whom the nation owed its security. *The Examiner* had been defending Collins from the beginning, suggesting, contrary to the popular narrative, that he had not disgraced the good name of sailors, but had been driven to extremes by failures of Greenwich and the Admiralty. Sailors were "not celebrated for their refinement," a contributor wrote, resurrecting the spirit of Jack Tar, and so certainly they were bound to quarrel or be disorderly at some point, even if they did live at Greenwich. But that should not damn them. Collins was a "seaman of the longest and most

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[43] *Caledonian Mercury,* June 25, 1832.
[44] *Liverpool Mercury,* July 6, 1832; [London] *Examiner,* August 26, 1832.
[45] Ibid.

distinguished service," and so should be forgiven for the rough habits he learned at sea. For Greenwich to punish him for "interrupting the ward-keeper, and having words with the boatswain's mate" in any way other than temporarily stopping his grog or shortening his allowance, or perhaps confining him for a short time, was excessive. To expel "an old cripple, whose . . . life has passed in the hard service of his country," and sentence him to starvation and likely arrest on the streets was "barbarous."[46] As Collins had said himself, he had not struck an officer at Greenwich, or committed any great crime there, and so the Hospital's governor had no right to take away the pension that was due to him.[47] By August, the *Examiner* was livid, declaring that "greater farce than the trial of Dennis Collins for High Treason was never enacted." The whole thing was just an establishment attempt to drum up a public "exhibition of unreasonable zeal for loyalty," all at public expense. The public had been tricked into exaggerating the radical power of one discouraged veteran, for Britain would truly be a weak nation if "four ounces of flint are sufficient . . . to demolish a system that has stood the shocks of centuries . . . and a disabled Greenwich pensioner might . . . by one jerk of his hand have Americanized England!"[48]

These arguments for sailors' rights, published in *The Examiner* and frequently mirrored in *The True Sun* were anonymous, but at least some of them were quite possibly written by Charles Dickens, who even in his early years was a great advocate for the welfare of the poor and believed in the good reputation of British sailors.[49] Some of these

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[46] [London] *Examiner,* June 24, 1832.
[47] *Morning Chronicle,* June 28, 1832.
[48] *True Sun,* August 23, 1832, quoted in [London] *Examiner,* August 26 1832.
[49] Charles Dickens was a reporter for the *True Sun* from its inception in March 1832. His work also appeared in the *Examiner* throughout the 1830s, although not by name until 1836. See Michael Slater,

viewpoints, whether published by the *Examiner*, *Sun*, or any other source, appear to have made an impact. At Collins's final trial, Mr. Carrington of the defense council adopted similar language; Collins may have thrown a stone in desperation, but was that really high treason, and not common assault? The jury, however, was not so easily swayed, and the court sentenced Collins to death, by the old English punishment of hanging, beheading, and dismemberment.[50]

But the whole affair did not end without one more public display of the supposed worth of sailors. When *The Examiner* argued that the trial had been a political showpiece, designed only to display the King's mercy in the end, the writer was not necessarily wrong.[51] Mr. Carrington had stated at Collins's trial that he could not believe "that his Majesty himself was anxious for the punishment of the unfortunate prisoner. No; that was contrary to the generally-received impression of the character of the profession of which he had for so long a time been a distinguished member."[52] Carrington was referring to William's reputation as the "Sailor King," who had been a Royal Navy officer and friend to Lord Nelson, and had been depicted in cartoons as "A True British Tar."[53] The trial had thus far shown "the coldness of the Statesman," but Carrington suspected it would end with a display of "the generosity of the sailor."

After the Trial, Dennis Collins dropped out of the news as quickly as he had appeared. William did in fact commute the death sentence, and instead sentenced Collins to transportation to Van Diemen's Land. There were some murmurings in the papers, but

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Charles Dickens (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and Paul Schlicke, *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[50] *Morning Chronicle,* August 23, 1832.

[51] [London] *Examiner,* August 26, 1832.

[52] *Morning Chronicle,* August 23, 1832.

[53] James Gillray, *A True British Tar,* 1795, hand-colored etching, National Maritime Museum.

no conspicuous celebration of the King's mercy, and the commotion was over. There was not even much long-term vilification of Collins as a notorious criminal or traitor; his afterlife in the public eye consisted of a figure at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, and even there his associated caption seemed like a half-hearted description of a radicalized rogue, next to the more sensational assassins and figures of the French Reign of Terror, among whom he appeared.[54] The trial of Dennis Collins did not necessarily change many Britons' minds about whether the country was doing enough for its sailors—there were no large-scale campaigns that followed about improving the conditions at Greenwich, or increasing pensions—but it did represent an emerging national consensus that pensioners could be deserving of sympathy on an individual basis. Collins had not convinced Britain that sailors were dangerous or too rowdy for normal society; instead the worst that could be said of sailors in general was that their habits were rough, but because of the importance of their profession they should be forgiven for their unrefined behavior. He may have appeared at first to contradict society's desire to show pensioners as men with a good sense of morals, but on the other hand he could be seen as a man standing up for his fellow sailors against injustice. He knew what was due him by British law, and strongly held his conviction that sailors ought to be able to support themselves. Unlike the imposter "sailors" who had made Britons in earlier days hesitant to help a veteran in need, Collins made observers consider that if sailors were simply given the support they deserved, none would be driven to such extreme actions as his own.

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[54] *Biographical and Descriptive Sketches of the Distinguished Characters Which Compose the Unrivalled Exhibition of Madame Tussaud and Sons* (London, 1842), 38.

Gentlemen of the Old School

Outside society's interaction with Greenwich increased remarkably in the 1830s and 1840s, as steam transport expanded on the Thames, and rail connected Greenwich to the city of London. Each year Greenwich's spring fair attracted larger crowds than the last, and the Hospital itself began planning expansions to its riverside terrace, for the enjoyment of visitors. This, perhaps, was more the cause of any improved reputation surrounding pensioners, than any consideration for the plight of Dennis Collins. Greenwich, its park, and the adjoining green space of Blackheath, had been the destination of day-trippers or "holiday people" for decades. It was considered a pleasant escape from the city, but in the nineteenth century it took on nostalgic connotations as well. In the early decades of the century, when writers like John Ruskin were extolling the worth of ancient sites, and artists like Joseph Nash were creating images of the "Olden Time" for popular circulation, Greenwich seemed to fit all the requirements of a place one could visit to experience "Old England." Greenwich was not a total escape from modernity, but it seemed like a peaceful retreat into something more historical, where the scenery and the inhabitants seemed to exist as counter-examples to the rapid pace of progress.

Although most of Greenwich's famous architecture dated to the seventeenth century, guidebooks almost universally began the visitor's journey with memories of Tudor England, when the town was the setting of one of Henry VIII's royal palaces. These books described the celebrations held by both Henry and his daughter Elizabeth I. They recounted Henry's Christmas feast, where everything seemed made of silk, velvet,

or gold—and about the "rejoicings" and tournaments hosted by Elizabeth.[55] Greenwich appeared to be the model of Merrie England, where monarchs displayed great wealth, but still the common folk supposedly turned out to celebrate in close proximity to, if not alongside, their betters. The idea of this "free and frank communication between the classes," as Peter Mandler has called it, was revived annually at Greenwich Fair, held both on Easter and Whitsun. The fair was a cross between a carnival and a circus, but another main attraction was the opportunity to have picnics and sports in Greenwich Park, which a member of the royal family opened every fair season as a gesture of goodwill to the public.[56] Some moralists complained that the fair was frequented only by servants and the lower sorts of London, worrying that it was therefore a breeding-ground for drunkenness and other vices, but other observers hoped that it would be an opportunity for the classes to think better of each other. *The Morning Post*, one of London's leading papers, thought that "It would be a treat to the straight-laced gentry, cold philosophers, and Malthusians, who preach up mortification of the senses, and decry the amusements of the working classes to pay a visit to Greenwich, and witness the happy faces of all who congregate together, determined to be pleased."[57] The radical *Northern Liberator* gave a (possibly fictitious) account of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and an entourage of nobles going to the fair and taking part in the traditional jollification of rolling down One Tree Hill, just as the working classes did.[58] At Greenwich Park, visitors could look upon such physical reminders of the past as Queen Elizabeth's Oak, where the

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[55] William Shoberl, *A Summer's Day at Greenwich* (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), 40.
[56] In the period covered here, Princess Sophia Mathilde was the Ranger of Greenwich Park. Although opponents every year petitioned to have the fair cancelled on moral grounds, she "ordered the park gates to be thrown open to the public for their amusement, and to be observed hereafter so long as the fair continues to exist." See *Morning Post,* May 16, 1826.
[57] *Morning Post,* June 5, 1838.
[58] *Northern Liberator,* June 20, 1840.

queen supposedly once held a picnic with her ladies-in-waiting. But mixed with the immovable relics of history were *living* reminders of the past: the Greenwich pensioners themselves.

Pensioners, of course, had always been present at Greenwich fair, whether acting as pilots to conduct people ashore, selling refreshments at one of the market stalls, asking visitors to spare a penny with a call of "Remember Poor Jack!" or just going about their own business around town.[59] But by the 1830s, they were reported as a feature that visitors would want to especially seek out. Accounts remarked on how easy it was to encounter a living link to past glories while at Greenwich. One might even go to buy an orange and find it sold by "some of the old tars who, in former days, 'braved the battle and the breeze,' with a Nelson and a Howe."[60] Pensioners now were seemingly to be found all about the town on fair days, offering to share both their own stories and stories of Greenwich itself, for a price. Perhaps capitalizing on their newfound popularity, pensioners acted as impromptu tour guides, showing visitors the Royal observatory, assisting them in using a telescope to survey the view of London from Greenwich Park, or showing them around the Hospital itself. Writing as "Boz" for the *Evening Chronicle*, Charles Dickens remarked on how visitors would hang onto any word a pensioner had to say about something sensational within the town, or anything to be seen through the telescope. "For the moderate charge of a penny," he wrote, the pensioners would exhibit the mast-house, the Thames, and shipping, the place where the men used to hang in chains, and other interesting sights." Visitors would even ask them to find any obscure building in the town they could think of, presumably for the novelty of having a veteran

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[59] *Morning Chronicle,* June 10, 1824.
[60] *London Dispatch and People's Political and Social Reformer,* June 10, 1838.

sailor instruct them in the use of a navigational instrument, and for the fun of probing the depths of their knowledge.

While visitors suggested that pensioners were "most obliging" in becoming tour guides, and it is likely that no pensioner could complain about obtaining some extra coins to supplement their allowance, their role as interpreters had the perhaps unintended side effect of turning the men into exhibit objects themselves. Greenwich's popularity spilled over from the fair and into the rest of the spring and summer, as visitors came more frequently by train or steamboat to see the Hospital and the Park, as well as to visit the recently-opened gallery of naval art in the Painted Hall. While there, visitors hoped to encounter pensioners, not only to hear their stories, but also to *see* them and study them, as if they were objects on display within an authentic setting. Pensioners found themselves on display within their own quarters, as visitors could look inside the "cabins" where each man stayed. Descriptions remarked on how these rooms were tidy and Spartan, reflecting sailors' habits learned at sea, but among a pensioner's possessions were expected to be portraits of famous commanders (notably Lord Nelson) or images of ships and battles in which each man had fought. Whether this was really true of *every* man's room was irrelevant; the implication was that visitors *expected* uniformity, hoping that any pensioner they met would be equally able to provide a connection to something glorious or heroic. Guidebooks featured "veteran bluejackets" who seemed to disappear and reappear at the visitor's convenience, ready to explain paintings of famous battles in

the Painted Hall, and providing exciting context of exactly where they had been on that glorious day.[61]

Visitors were then expected to consider the pensioner as he stood before them, and everything he signified. "Look at the antique dress, the blue coat, and three-cornered cocked hat of this 'auncient marinere!'" instructed the 1840 guidebook, *A Summer's Day at Greenwich*. "You might fancy that the being of another time stood before you. No longer a son of the Ocean, no longer excited by the perils of 'the wide, wide sea,' by the gathering tempest, or the 'broil of battle,' he now takes a pride in recounting the 'story of his life' to any one who is disposed to listen to his narration." This was still, in part, explicitly the same sort of romanticization of the sailor that had been developing since the beginning of the century. But, the past was not now some melancholy remembrance of danger and hardship, but a glorious time that veterans were supposedly excited to recall. And these men weren't just old sailors; they had finally achieved status as *heroes*. The guidebook's pensioner's eyes would gleam "with honest pride" as he recounted some "gallant exploits in which *his ship* has been engaged, of the admirals, or other officers, under whom *he* has served. He unfolds many a trait of British heroism that occurred on the 'glorious first of June,' 1794, at the Nile, or at Trafalgar."[62] Such men as could remember the naval battles of the Napoleonic Wars were becoming scarcer, authors recognized, and that made meeting with them infinitely more appealing. The fact that they dressed in an old-fashioned manner (even though the pensioners' uniform was still quite unlike the fashion of Nelson's day), heightened the illusion that visitors had entered

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[61] See, for example, *The visitor's guide to the sights of London: including the national exhibitions of Greenwich Hospital,Woolwich Arsenal,etc*. (London: W. Strange, 1844).
[62] Shoberl, *Summer's Day,* 107.

realm wherein the past was still accessible, and added to their somewhat mythologized status.

But how did pensioners think of their status as relics on display? The expectation that pensioners all should be able to tell of glorious events in which they had part was described, to slightly comical effect, in "Lt. Hatchway's" *The Greenwich Pensioners*. The book's supposed account of conversations happening within one of the wards has pensioners constantly trying to best each other with their abilities to "spin a yarn" about their histories at sea. One man was at the Battle of the Nile, and tries his hardest to tell his account in the most authentic sailor-type way possible. He calls the French ship *Généreux* the "Jinnyroo," since he can't stand to "speak like a Frenchman" while he is a good Englishman who can "speak my own mother tongue."[63] Another man recounts how he joined the *Victory* just as it was docked in Portsmouth before Trafalgar, since he knew he could not go wrong in following Nelson. Rather than just telling the popular stories of the battle, however, he tells humorous tales of Nelson and Hardy, illustrating their reputation as good-natured leaders who inspired camaraderie among their men, who in turn would follow them anywhere.

The pensioners in Hatchway's book tell stories among themselves as people who have shared a common life, with familiar albeit varying experiences; but they also acknowledge and sometimes laugh about how they must take their tales outside the Hospital as well. A pensioner whose nickname among friends is "Fat Jack" (because he is remarkably slender) amuses his peers for an entire chapter by recounting the outlandish stories that he tells to visitors in the park. He tells two young men, for example, that he

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[63] Hatchway, *Greenwich Pensioners,* vol. 1, 68.

once saw a whale 200 yards long that ate a ship's boat containing five men, and he himself was lucky to escape. The listeners are aghast that this beast must have been larger than the leviathan in the story of Jonah, and they at first sense that they are being duped, but then (to Jack's great amusement) seem to decide that it would be wrong to call out someone so respectable as a sailor. Jack leads them on in this illusion that a sailor must always be honest' when the men suggest that something he says *can't* be true, he begins to leave them, saying that "If so be as you're wiser nor me in such matters, why, good day," and the men apologize and run after him.[64] They fawningly observe that "you sailors are wonderful men, to be sure!" and ask all the predictable questions: whether Jack was ever with Nelson, how many men he had killed in battle, how grueling life at sea must be, and so on. In a way, Jack tells the visitors just what they want to hear; in fact, he claims that he once saved Nelson's life himself! Hatchway's pensioners, although they are fictional characters who exist in a book to amuse outsiders, nonetheless poke fun at such eager and gullible visitors. The author, who claims to have interviewed many pensioners himself, seems then to suggest that pensioners knew full well how they were on display and expected to be a stereotype, but they navigated those stereotypes to their own benefit, finding humor in them.

The Worthy Working Poor

In addition to living in an ancient setting, and looking old-fashioned themselves, pensioners were increasingly considered an old-fashioned type of character. Although their clothing did not look *as* outdated as the seventeenth-century setting in which they

[64] Ibid., vol. 3, 131-39.

lived, pensioners had the image of being distinctly pre-industrial, especially when compared with the smoky view of London that was visible from One Tree Hill. The British public was certainly not universally nostalgic for the sailing navy—it would be decades before steam-powered vessels filled the majority of the navy's berths—but by the 1830s there was already the sense of impending change. Many observers considered themselves quite progressive and praised new technology, but that did not stop them from wondering if Britain would ever see the likes of these pre-mechanical sailors again. The book of British character sketches, *Heads of the People* noted that one could easily get a Greenwich pensioner riled up by mentioning steamboats: the pensioner would say that steam was ruining all seamanship in Britain. Speaking in the parlance of a Jack Tar, this generic pensioner would reminisce: "While things was as they was, d'ye see? we bluejackets had it all our own way. . . And so Belzebub grew spiteful." The devil could not abide Britain's power, the pensioner says, and so the devil "clap[ped] wheels on the ships' sides . . . and thus ruins, d'ye see? the out-and-out blue water English sailor forever . . . I never hears one of those varmint steamers a-sputtering, fizzing, and hissing, but I thinks I hears the devil a saying, 'Ah, Jack, you villain, I've done ye at last!'"[65]

Isaac Land has noted that sailors in the late eighteenth century fit into a national search for "noble savages" within Britain: rough sorts of people who did not fit the refinement of modern society but still symbolized something about the inherent character of the nation. Land compares the Dibdin-esque Jack Tar character to the imagery that Robert Burns created around the rural Scottish farmer, of a person who is simple, yet proud. Within the Olden-Time construct at Greenwich, however, as these now-aging

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[65] Howard, "Greenwich Pensioner," 351-52.

sailors appeared to be part of a disappearing way of life, their image was not one of noble savagery at all, but one of respectability. They were still considered to be a group who were unlike other Britons, or sometimes even a "race" of their own. But, if the Olden Time rested on ideas of "free and frank communication between the classes," there was now an idea that there was something respectable about belonging to the lower side of that supposed pre-industrial class dynamic. A man was not a "noble savage" to be viewed with curiosity just because he dressed differently or lived in simple quarters, but someone who is to be valued for the role he plays in supporting society. Greenwich pensioners, despite their actual social rank, became gentlemen "of the old school, if you like," but "gentlem[e]n nonetheless."[66]

In this view, "gentleman" referred to a sort of learned character. Pensioners had become men who had learned values, or philosophies of life, through their long experiences in the world. Even though they might have been rowdy in their younger days, they had matured into supposedly wise old men, and the labor they had provided was a source of their worthiness. Robert Burns still was a convenient illustrator for these points, and Hatchway chose to open his account of life in the Greenwich wards with Burns's celebration of the workingman:

> What tho' on hamely fare we dine,
> Wear hoddin grey, and a' that;
> Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
> A man's a man for a' that.
> For a' that, and a ' that,
> Their tinsel show, and a' that;
> The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
> Is king o' men for a' that.

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[66] Howard, "Greenwich Pensioner," 348.

In the context of Greenwich, Hatchway's point is clear: pensioners may dress simply (and alike), and their food and lodgings are simple as they had been while at sea, but they are nonetheless true British *men*.[67] *Heads of the People* exclaimed that the title of "Greenwich Pensioner" meant so much more than simply being an aged ex-sailor: it conjured a "thrice-glorious association of images . . . of well-tried worth, bravery, and all that dignifies humanity!"[68] They had done their duty, and earned their status as respectable men through their honest, self-sacrificing labor.

These changes in public perception of pensioners' character were mirrored by changes in their stereotypical appearance. Land has suggested how early artists like Thomas Rowlandson (and arguably the Cruikshanks, at times) echoed the idea of the "noble savage" in their depictions of sailors with ruddy, exaggerated faces; and early depictions of pensioners were no exception.[69] But while the stock character of the immediate post-Napoleonic years may have been "grotesque" in such a manner, by the 1830s and into the 1840s, depictions became more varied, and many reflected the new respectability of pensioners as wise old "gentlemen." The "noble savage" gave way to the noble laborer. Even the depictions of their disabilities changed. Although the pensioner with a wooden leg was still a familiar character in prints and paintings, his leg was no longer frequently displayed in a prominent or deliberately shocking manner, and he appeared among other pensioners who noticeably lacked obvious injuries. Although it was clearly acknowledged that a sailor might very well lose a limb at sea, he very well might *not*; and what really mattered was not that a pensioner was a man who had put his

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[67] Hatchway, *Greenwich Pensioners,* 51.
[68] Howard, "Greenwich Pensioner," 348.
[69] Land, *War*, 82.

body on the line for his country, but that he was a man of a certain character that his country needed. His strength, not his frailty, was his key descriptor; pensioners mirrored Britain's "wooden walls" themselves, so that even if war had "trimmed off their branches," they were still, "like British oak, sound at the core."[70] What mattered the most, in these later depictions, was a pensioner's bearing, his countenance and his expression.

Much was made of their weather-beaten, yet sturdy faces that had once been handsome. To those who subscribed to the Victorian idea of phrenology, a well-formed face or even a certain shaped skull signified a well-formed character. While Hatchway's book depicted pensioners "in all their colours," from the sober to the troublesome, the author spent a great deal of time describing men whose physical form reflected their masculinity. He reflected on "Tim Stuart," whose face, despite the loss of one eye "has been tolerably good-looking," and whose "skull [was] as finely shaped as the warmest disciple of Gall and Spurzheim would desire." Another man represented how physical appearance could mirror the ideal British character: this pensioner, who "would have suited well as a model for a sculptor, or painter, of a Telamonian Ajax" had a countenance that was "full of good nature . . . His voice was of the deepest bass, and his actions, conversation, and good servitude, marked him down as a genuine British sailor of the old school." These depictions were not limited to the written word, but were reflected in John Burnet's 1837 painting of pensioners celebrating Trafalgar Day. Burnet's subjects are based on studies of real pensioners whose portraits he sketched in 1832, and are mostly kindly-looking old men with chiseled features, who would look

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[70] Howard, "Greenwich Pensioner," 348.

more like pleasant old grandfathers than sailors if it were not for their uniforms, and the evidence of one man's wooden leg. The pensioners are drinking and smoking pipes, but that is not their only vocation; their main activity seems to be telling stories to some awestruck women and children, making sure that their past is not forgotten. The title of the painting, *Greenwich Hospital and Naval Heroes*, clearly states the esteem in which viewers were supposed to hold these men.[71]

Humble Heroes

By 1840, a Greenwich pensioner was still a man out of place in society; nothing could overcome the unique, somewhat gritty image of a sailor forced ashore. But, while in the early years of peacetime the pensioner's roughness made him one of society's undesirables, the same characteristics gave him a new sort of working-class respectability in later decades. Some of this change can likely be attributed simply to the advancement of age; society was never going to consider elderly men as much a threat as men in youth or middle-age. However, there was a growing sense that these men were part of a nineteenth-century Greatest Generation, and it was only a matter of time before "the race who in the late long, and eventful war, fought our country's battles, and shed their best blood in its defence, will have disappeared entirely from earth."[72] In referring to pensioners as a race of men unto themselves, this sort of description emphasized the idea that sailors while sailors were in many ways unlike other Britons, yet they embodied characteristics that any Briton should admire or even emulate. They were reminders of

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[71] Royal Museums Greenwich holds a watercolor rendering of this painting. Stephen Denning after John Burnet, c. 1837, *Greenwich Hospital and Naval Heroes,* watercolor, National Maritime Museum.
[72] Hatchway, *The Greenwich Pensioners,* vi.

the old idea that Britons constituted an "island race," a nation of people whose existence was wrapped up in their geographical connection with the sea, and whose heritage was one of sea-going empire.[73] They were living relics, and perhaps the last of their kind; for whatever reason, be it lasting peace with the French, or the advent of steam propulsion, there was an anxiety that future generations of sailors may not ever live up to the deeds of their Nelsonian forebears. Thus it was that Britain determined that *something* must be preserved of these men, before they were no more. They could not be preserved like the naval scenes and portraits in the Painted Hall, but there was something "authentic" about their character, and the stories they could tell, that made them worthy of remembering.

As members of the old navy, pensioners now embodied the spirit that lay at the very heart of Britain's heritage. They were forged at sea, and the sea remained with them for the entirety of their existence. They were seen as simple-living, humble in their habits and yet proud in their spirit; like the working classes of the countryside, they were the backbone that had supported the nation. In some ways this was a return to Dibdin's portrayal of sailors as "plain, manly, honest, and patriotic," but simplicity did not make a pensioner a "noble savage." The idea of a noble savage had been a trope marketed to middle-class and wealthier Britons, as a way to think of what they themselves might have been in a state of nature, before the construction of a civil society. Those who still fit the mold of a noble savage, like the Irish or the highland Scots, were of course expected to one day accept British culture and become "civilized" themselves.[74] Depictions of Greenwich pensioners, however, no longer expressed any suggestion that these men

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[73] See Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[74] See Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland," in *The Invention of Tradition,* ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15-42.

should improve themselves or become more properly British in any way. They were *already* the embodiment of Britishness, albeit a down-to-earth sort of Britishness, with no pretensions or affectations. The issue was not one of savagery versus civilization, but one of social class. Pensioners were paragons of working-class respectability, a sort of person who was simple and yet had an important role in supporting their country, who was not a gentleman but who had a worthiness in his own station.

The supposed authentic simplicity of pensioners became such a beloved part of their image, that artists could be lampooned for failing to honor that rough-yet-noble character. In 1843, celebrated singer Henry Phillips presented a sort of musical lecture at the Store Street Music Hall in London, wherein he alternated between singing popular ballads and describing the national history that those songs represented. This specific lecture, written by another man named Peake, was full of potential for nostalgic national pride, including songs and histories of such national icons Robin Hood and Queen Elizabeth's sea dogs, and the entire first half was dedicated to sea-songs by Dibdin. But such was the desire for "authentic" representations of "real" Britain, that reviewers complained that Phillips' way of using his classical training to sing popular songs failed to capture the real spirit of the people. Popular (what we would call "folk") music should not be altered into some sort of high-brow performance, the reviewers suggested, and in putting on "musical pretensions," Phillips had obscured any real feeling or meaning in the songs. He had particularly failed to capture the "melancholy" that reviewers, and reportedly the disappointed audiences, expected to hear in Dibdin's "Greenwich Pensioner." Music that was simple, quaint, reminiscent of countryside or historical life had a quality all its own; if a real sailor were to sing "The Greenwich Pensioner," any

Briton who heard him could be "moved to tears."[75] Worst of all, the *Morning Post* reported, Phillips had destroyed any real *national* pride that should be felt along with the songs of Dibdin: "What care we for a *legato* style and *sostenuto* flights? The melody in its natural state—the words with their John Bull signification—a combination speaking to the heart finds its way even to ears the most polite."[76]

Through the 1840s, visitors continued to come to Greenwich to meet with pensioners, in hopes of experiencing this folk spirit, and its "John Bull signification" for themselves. In some of the last years of the Greenwich Fair (which was shut down permanently in 1853), the *Illustrated London News* ran articles describing some of the resident veterans, and the ways in which the fair-going public interacted with them. The paper explained, in particular, how pensioners had acquired the ability to not only amuse but to inspire the youth of Britain. While it was still acknowledged that any story one might hear from an "ancient mariner" at Greenwich was bound to be exaggerated, exaggeration now served a patriotic purpose. Children, supposedly, both loved and admired these "gallant tars," and would hang on every word of their "ingeniously framed" stories "with that enthusiastic credence which only little boys can exhibit."[77] To young boys at the fair, these men were heroes entire, "who could have put Buonaparte in [their] pocket with the greatest ease."[78] It was not expected that *every* boy who visited Greenwich would leave wanting to join the Royal Navy, but it was certainly part of the stereotype that pensioners' stories were intended to encourage a love and longing for the sea.

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[75] *Morning Chronicle,* December 29, 1843.
[76] *Morning Post,* December 29, 1843.
[77] *Illustrated London News,* April 22, 1843 *(*"gallant tars"); April 13, 1844 ("ingeniously…")
[78] *Illustrated London News,* April 22, 1843.

Among those who could not be convinced to join the service, Greenwich was still expected to foster a sense of pride and love for Britain's naval heritage. The *Illustrated London News* was forthright in describing how pensioners filled the same role as monuments or exhibitions in teaching lessons of character or patriotism: pensioners were "living memorials," "the last relics of an ancient race," and their injuries and prosthetic limbs were "monuments all." The men themselves were no longer simply Tars but "gallant heroes," reminders of Britain's "naval fame, that stands pre-eminent." When the paper printed biographies of seven Trafalgar veterans in 1844, it was not only to "rescue humbler, though not less brave individuals, from obscurity," but to encourage the belief that while the old navy's ships and men may be disappearing, something of the old spirit remained. As exemplars of the British "island race," pensioners (as stock characters and in reality) were uniquely suited to illustrate the patriotic narrative of Britain's rise to naval predominance. Echoing the stereotypical pensioner's mantra, the *Illustrated London News* declared that while England may mourn the advent of iron and steam vessels, the navy was still the force that "whether floating with triumphant supremacy in the presence of an enemy, or bearing beneath its influences peace and good-will to all the nations of the earth," would preserve Britain as "Mistress of Nations—the Queen of the Sea."[79]

[79] *Illustrated London News*, April 13, 1844.

Chapter 3

"Because They Are Dead:"

Imagining a Heroic Narrative of Franklin's Lost Expedition

In the early part of the nineteenth century, British pride in the navy thrived on "victory culture."[1] In wartime, public celebration of naval victories was standard practice, marked by general illuminations, theatrical and musical performances, and the widespread sale of commemorative memorabilia. Biographies of officers, and accounts of battles, were widely published and read, either as monographs or as excerpts in newspapers. Such celebratory saturation of the public sphere fed naval patriotism during the French wars; but while victory culture was a product of conflict, it did not disappear in peacetime. Victory culture transitioned easily into a culture of commemoration, and the nation happily displayed its pride in the navy not only through galleries like Greenwich's painted hall, but through such other forms as panoramas, public monuments, theatrics, and the continued publication of memoirs and biographies. The lingering memory of the French wars lent a triumphal air to Britain's faith in its navy; for the first decades of the century, exhibitions and accounts of battles simply lent credit to an ingrained pride in what the navy had recently achieved. Living memory, and living veterans, provided ample evidence of Britain's supremacy at sea.

But if naval patriotism thrived on victory culture, so did victory culture thrive on visible achievements. In the absence of battles, or of new grand narratives, the navy's image faced a dilemma. The fact that Britannia ruled the waves in wartime had been

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[1] Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy 1793-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14.

made eminently clear, but how could the navy *continue* to prove its worth in a time of peace? The navy's challenge was not only ideological, but also logistical. The end of the wars had forced sailors and officers ashore, and many were left struggling for postings. In the case of common sailors, this raised the specter of social discontent—men who had fought both on land and on sea participated in the post-war riots that sprang from economic depression and lack of opportunity.[2] Officers, meanwhile, found themselves in "straightened circumstances," stagnating on half-pay with little hope of promotion, and equally little chance of adding new laurels to the navy's record.[3] Nothing could employ men to the same degree as a war, but as early as the late 1810s the Admiralty proposed a partial solution, in the form of the polar Discovery Service. The navy thus turned to exploration, as Margarette Lincoln has shown, as a direct attempt to bolster its own image.[4] If the Royal Navy had proved itself the preeminent martial force at sea many times over, perhaps it could now assert its leading role in the pursuits of science and exploration.

The notion of exploration in the nineteenth century was largely imperial in nature; if Britain were to prove itself uniquely suited to spread its influence around the globe, then sending British men into previously "undiscovered" territories was designed to boost the nation's image. The more inhospitable the climate of a region was to unacclimated Europeans, the better suited it was to be exploited as a symbol of national might. Spaces like the poles and the African interior became, as Ellen Boucher has explained, "crucial ground on which British technological, civilizational, and racial mastery was to be

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[2] *Times*, January 30, 1817.
[3] Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 189.
[4] Ibid., 195.

tested."[5] In the early decades of the century, Britain had no real intentions of establishing permanent colonies in such regions, but rather intended to seek glory by becoming the first European nation to chart or navigate them. Thus, when the navy began sending Discovery Service missions to the polar regions, and to the Arctic in particular, the endeavor was one of international competition. The goals of Arctic exploration were many: to chart the earth's magnetic field, to reach the pole, to chart Arctic lands and perhaps discover the fabled open polar sea, and, most critically, to discover the long-sought Northwest Passage.

It was the Northwest Passage, among all of these goals, which captured the public imagination. Not only did the Passage have an air of romance about it, having been rumored to exist for centuries as a potential sea route to China, but Sir John Barrow, second secretary of the Admiralty, succeeded in framing it as a region wherein Britain's honor was at stake. Having defeated the French enemy, the nation now faced a new, Russian menace. While the practicality of using an ice-choked waterway as a trade route was, like permanent colonization of the region, virtually non-existent (given that the short Arctic thaws would render navigation a multi-year ordeal), reports of Russian attempts on the passage from the west coast sparked official ire. It would not do to have the Passage discovered by any other nation than Britain—Britannia must rule the waves in all cases, even when the waves had turned to ice.

The British public eagerly followed news of Arctic missions, and many elements of wartime victory culture were turned to polar purposes. Theaters staged productions with Arctic themes. Memoirs of Arctic expeditions became best-sellers. Print shops

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[5] Ellen Boucher, "Arctic Mysteries and Imperial Ambitions: The Hunt for Sir John Franklin and the Victorian Culture of Survival," *The Journal of Modern History* 90 (March 2018): 47.

produced romanticized images of discovery ships under full sail, deftly navigating through treacherous icebergs.[6] Panoramic exhibitions re-created the scenery, claiming to realistically draw visitors into the very heart of recent discoveries that they otherwise could only experience in print. In what Doug Wilkinson has named "Arctic Fever," explorers became the popular heroes of the day, joining ranks with the famous victors of great battles.[7] The Arctic was framed as a battlefield in its own right, whereupon brave and "intrepid" men faced a natural enemy, and endured constant threats from hostile weather, besetment by ice, and long seasons of darkness.

"Arctic Fever" reached a peak in 1845, with the departure of Sir John Franklin's final expedition in search of the Northwest Passage. By that year, British exploration had already filled in the eastern and western charts of a proposed passage, and only a relatively narrow section in the center of the map remained uncharted. The expedition was touted as one that could not fail, designed in every way to showcase the best of Britain's previous achievements. The expedition's ships, *Erebus* and *Terror,* were already famous in the annals of polar history, as the ships in which Captains James Ross and Francis Crozier had reached furthest south in 1842. And as former bomb vessels (*Terror* had seen service in the late wars), strengthened as icebreakers and now outfitted with locomotive engines, the ships were the strongest and most powerful yet employed by the Discovery Service. The expedition commander likewise inspired widespread confidence; one contemporary declared that "the name of Franklin alone is a national

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[6] Janice Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008)*;* Russell Potter, *Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818-1875* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007). For an example of a sensationalized polar print, see William Westall, "Iceberg in Baffin Bay," 1821, steel engraving, John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island.
[7] Doug Wilkinson, *Arctic Fever: The Search for the Northwest Passage* (Toronto: Clark, Irwin and Co., 1971).

guarantee" of success.[8] Franklin was one of Nelson's own, having served at both Copenhagen and Trafalgar as a boy. But in addition to invoking memories of Britain's greatest naval victories, he was likewise a seasoned explorer, and a living symbol of British endurance. In reference to his thrilling and widely-read account of hardship and survival on an 1819 Arctic charting mission, he had earned the awe-inspiring name of "The Man Who Ate His Boots."[9] When the *Illustrated London News* announced the expedition's departure on May 24, 1845, explaining all the "novelties" of the ships' outfitting and provisioning, and listing the achievements of the "gallant Commander . . . who has already taken a share in three Expeditions to the North," readers could not be blamed for assuming that whatever challenges the Arctic posed, Franklin and his innovative ships would make their way through.[10]

The men of *Erebus* and *Terror* sent their last letters home from the Whalefish Islands, off the coast of Greenland, in the middle of July—two months after their initial departure from the English port of Greenhithe.[11] It was no secret to the recipients of these letters that the crews expected to be away for over a year, if not longer, and the public in general knew from newspaper reports that the expedition would be a "prolonged" one.[12] But as one year gave way to two, and then three, anticipation gave way to anxiety. It was not unheard of for an Arctic mission to abandon one of its ships, or to lose several of its men, but never in recent history had an expedition been lost entirely. The total

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[8] Russell Potter, *Finding Franklin: The Untold Story of a 165-Year Search* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2016), 7.
[9] Andrew Lambert, *The Gates of Hell: Sir John Franklin's Tragic Quest for the Northwest Passage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 33.
[10] "Departure of the "Erebus" and "Terror" on the Arctic Expedition, *Illustrated London News*, May 24, 1845.
[11] Lambert, *Gates of Hell,* 161.
[12] "Departure," *Illustrated London News,* May 24, 1845.

disappearance of 129 naval men and two vessels was inconceivable. Britain sent its first search mission in 1848, expecting to find that the ships had been beset by ice and the men trapped. But the search vessels, aptly named *Enterprise* and *Investigator,* returned empty-handed, having found no men, nor any sign of the ships, nor any object at all.

In the years that followed, the question of what had become of Franklin's men seized public imagination. Arctic Fever transitioned into a national obsession with the lost expedition, the fate of which was a constant topic of speculation in newspapers, literary magazines, prints, and even the occasional theatrical performance.[13] While Franklin and his missing men became household names, Lady Jane Franklin, wife of the absent explorer, became a national celebrity. Ceaselessly petitioning the Admiralty to send one search mission after another, she refused for years to give up faith in the search until the nation was certain that it had made every possible attempt at rescue. As searchers sailed and returned with little to no information, explaining the fate of Franklin became an exercise in national mythmaking, wherein public imagination formed a narrative of courage out of extremely scanty evidence. Stephanie Barczewski has categorized this imaginative narrative-building as a case of "heroic failure," suggesting that a grand narrative served to mask what would otherwise become national shame.[14] The Franklin search was increasingly framed as a national duty; even if it were increasingly likely that all the men had perished, the nation must have an explanation of what had happened. Britain must be able to say, for certain, what its navy had achieved.

The Franklin expedition, and the ensuing search, provided a national context for discussing its navy's heroic ideal. Even the heroic actions of dead men, framed similarly

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[13] See Cavell, *Connected Narrative;* Potter, *Arctic Spectacles.*
[14] Stephanie Barczewski, *Heroic Failure and the British* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 59-84.

to war casualties who had given their lives for their country, must be showcased for the public to see. Death, and the slow rate at which evidence came to light, in fact provided a conveniently clean slate on which to write a story of courage, and to even cast the lost men as role models for British men. Some variants of the Franklin myth smacked of "heroic failure"—namely, in the belief that the expedition had managed to chart, or at least traverse, the missing part of the Northwest Passage before they died. But the larger story was not simply one of overwriting a likely navigational failure with an imagined narrative of success. Relying on the oral reports of Inuit witnesses who had encountered the expedition, and eventually on scattered objects collected by searchers, Britain constructed a narrative that was not primarily one of scientific or navigational achievement, but one of manly conduct. Biographers, poets and novelists began imagining the expedition's last days, maintaining that the men must have maintained such ideal British values as duty, discipline, camaraderie, and faith to the very end. Expedition artifacts, brought back to Britain by searchers, were displayed as "relics" in museums, encouraging the public to visualize these men as the very models of British character.

Likened to the heroic sailors of Nelson's navy, the men of Franklin's lost expedition became integral to Britain's conception of naval heroism. Not only did the missing explorers come to represent the supposed endurance of British manhood in far parts of the world, but the Franklin search became equally symbolic of heroism among others. Framed as "the knight errantry of our day," the "intrepid" men who traveled to the

Arctic were a testament to something ancient and enduring in British character.[15] But the search made heroes at home as well, allowing for a gendered discussion of heroism that included both men and women. Providing a civilian parallel to the "zeal" of explorers and sailors, Lady Jane Franklin's enduring support for search missions became a symbol of domestic naval patriotism, demonstrating that women as well as men could emulate the ideal British spirit as exemplified by the navy itself. The narrative-building and commemoration that surrounded the fate of Franklin thus formed a discussion of two types of Victorian naval heroism: that of the naval man, whose firmness of character exported Britishness abroad, and that of the patriotic citizen, whether man or woman, who sought to glorify the navy's achievements and uphold its good name.

Heroics and Failures

Although the Franklin search had begun in earnest in 1848, it was not until six years later that a searcher discovered any evidence that could be considered conclusive. And the discovery, when it came, was entirely unexpected. On October 22, 1854, John Rae of the Hudson's Bay Company arrived at Woolwich, returning early from an Arctic surveying mission bearing shocking news. Rae had not been actively seeking evidence of Franklin: while he had been involved in previous searches, his mission in 1854 had been purely scientific, recording previously uncharted areas of Arctic coastline. But like many Britons he had come to believe that the Franklin search was the noblest Arctic mission of his day, and his curiosity about the missing expedition must have always lingered in the

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[15] "Arctic Enterprise," *Spectator*, February 1850, quoted in Janice Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative: Arctic Exploration in British Print Culture, 1818-1860* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 167.

back of his mind. When he happened to cross paths with an Inuit hunting party, the leader of whom was wearing a naval officer's gold hat band, Rae could not dismiss the opportunity to inquire if the man or his community had knowledge of the crews of *Erebus* and *Terror.* Rae's own mission was well on its way to completing a map that could identify a Northwest Passage, but he decided that solving the mystery of Franklin's men was more important than solving the mystery of the Passage for which they had likely died. Therefore, abandoning his original purpose, he interviewed this man and other members of his community, purchased artifacts (including the hat band) from them, and, as the newspapers put it, "hurried home to satisfy the public anxiety as to the fate of the long-lost expedition."[16]

In bringing Inuit testimony home to England, with artifacts to support their narrative, Rae stumbled into sudden, if controversial, fame. Rae's informants had recalled that four years previously in the spring, a group of about forty white men had passed through, hauling boats on sledges southward over the island that was known to Britons as King William Land. Although none of the white men could speak the Inuit language well enough to make themselves understood, they were able to communicate through gestures. The Inuit understood their improvised sign language to mean that the white men's ships had been crushed by ice, forcing them to evacuate and travel on foot. But the most immediate cause of their distress had been obvious without words. The *Erebus* and *Terror* had been equipped with three years' provisions, which Franklin had confidently stated would last five if rationed strictly, and supplemented by hunting. By 1850, the provisions would have certainly been depleted, and accordingly the Inuit observers had

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[16] *Times,* October 23, 1854.

noted that the forty men "except one officer looked thin." None of them were seen alive, at least by the original observers, again, but later in the same year Inuit discovered two ghostly camps, which together contained the bodies (some buried, some in tents, and some laying out in the open) of about thirty-five men.[17]

Rae presented this story to the Admiralty promptly upon his return, along details of where the camps were believed to be located (Rae had not visited them himself), and descriptions of the objects that had been found there (navigational instruments, silverware, watches, and hunting equipment). Rae also suggested that his evidence meant that there were no survivors—indeed, some of the men had suffered "a fate as terrible as the imagination can conceive . . . From the mutilated state of many of the corpses and the contents of the kettles, it is evident that our wretched countrymen had been driven to the last resource—cannibalism—as a means of prolonging existence."[18] Rae seems not to have intended this latter statement to have made public news immediately, as it does not appear in his own letter to the *Times*, which simply stated that Franklin's men died of starvation, and lists the articles that Rae purchased from the Inuit.[19] However, the Admiralty forwarded the full report to the newspaper, and it was available for the public to read on the morning of October 23, 1854. The statement about "the last resource" has been among the most-quoted passages from the report, and historians have often credited that sentence as the catalyst for general British outrage—supposedly, the public was unwilling to accept the notion that brave British sailors would ever make meals of their comrades, rather than choosing a more noble death by outright starvation. Certainly,

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[17] "The Arctic Expedition," *Times,* October 23, 1854.
[18] Ibid.
[19] John Rae to the editor*, Times*, October 23, 1854.

Lady Franklin refused to believe it, and her friend Charles Dickens made a concerted effort to discredit Rae's report, using his periodical *Household Words* as a vehicle to tear down Rae's reputation.[20] A few shocked editorials also appeared in middle-class periodicals, but a comprehensive study of British newspapers suggests that Dickens was perhaps drumming up more controversy than had existed immediately upon Rae's return. Public clamor following the initial report demonstrated widespread anxiety that British honor was at stake, but for other reasons than the suggestion that members of the Royal Navy might be cannibals.

Newspapers, in fact, quite readily published the report verbatim, and did not shy away from including gruesome details. Many even added additional excerpts from Rae's journal and other letters, hoping to present as full a story as possible. Some simply printed all of these sources without comment, but when editors did add their own introductions, or opinion pieces, they were generally sympathetic. Papers called on readers to honor their "poor," "unfortunate" countrymen, who had suffered the worst fate imaginable: dying alone of starvation, supposedly believing that their nation had forgotten about them. The dead men were cast as "gallant," "intrepid," and "brave," just as former Arctic explorers had been, despite the fact that they may never have reached their goal. The press thus made it clear that there was no honor lost among the officers and men of the Royal Navy. They were immediately labeled as heroes, because they had known the risks of Arctic exploration, and had nonetheless been prepared to lay down their lives to advance both navigational science and British glory. Reports likened their service to military duty, putting them on par with the soldiers and sailors who were then

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[20] Dickens's response, under the title "The Lost Arctic Voyagers," was published in two parts, in *Household Words* on December 2, 1854, and December 9, 1854.

engaged in the Crimean War: "To the roll-call of perished heroes," the *Examiner* reported, "to the lists, now daily swelling with noble names, of brave men battling against fearful odds and dying in the performance of their duty, are to be added the names of the Arctic voyagers."[21] But despite the credit that Arctic service lent to the British name, the honor of Franklin's men had not been matched in other quarters.

If Jane Franklin had already convinced the British public that the Admiralty was not doing enough to find her husband, Rae's report only strengthened the argument. The Admiralty had sent the report straight to their preferred conservative news outlet, the *Times,* much to the chagrin of other papers that received it indirectly and believed the Admiralty was trying to control the tone under which the news would appear.[22] Indeed, the Admiralty had already indicated its belief that Franklin's men were dead earlier the same year, by announcing that the crews of *Erebus* and *Terror* would be removed from their active service lists.[23] Echoing the same viewpoint, the *Times* seemed more than happy to use Rae's findings to declare that the search for Franklin was at an end. The editors had no doubt that Franklin's men were heroes, even waxing poetic about their "courage and endurance," and declaring "All honour to their memories!" But at the same time, the editors reported that they had "had quite enough of great Arctic Expeditions . . . [which] have invariably resulted in disappointment and disaster," and tried to put the matter at rest by suggesting that "surely, we may in fairness say that we did all we could"

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[21] Excerpt from the *Examiner* reprinted in the *Bristol Mercury,* November 4, 1854. For a deeper examination of the connections between Arctic exploration and military service, see Jen Hill, "National Bodies: Robert Southey's Life of Nelson and John Franklin's Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* vol. 61, no. 4 (March 2007): 417-48.
[22] *The Standard,* October 24, 1854, reprinted with the disparaging title "The Admiralty Again" from *The Morning Chronicle.*
[23] *Fraser's Magazine,* vol. 49 (London: Savill and Edwards, 1854), 663.

for the "noble-hearted men" of the expedition.[24] Trying to divert blame away from the Admiralty, the paper even attempted to create scapegoat in the form of Sir James Clark Ross, saying that if *his* expedition of 1848-49 had continued on its track, instead of returning too quickly to England, they might have found survivors.

This "case closed" attitude did not sit well with many responders. The overwhelming attitude in the press, through the rest of October and November 1854, was that the Admiralty had certainly *not* done all it could. When papers reported the tale of starvation and cannibalism, they were not disgusted with Franklin's men, but with the Admiralty for dragging its feet and thus allowing the calamity to occur. The "melancholy" and tragic truth was, the papers realized, that according to the Inuit testimony, survivors had been sledging across King William Land well into 1849 or 1850. The search expeditions of James Ross and Joseph Renée Bellot had in fact, it seemed "been within a few miles of the spot to which our unfortunate countrymen had struggled on in their desperate march."[25] It is possible that Ross would have arrived at that location too early (1849) to meet any survivors, and Bellot was certainly too late (1853), but the potential of these close calls was certainly unsettling. Although comments like these were not specifically intended to shame Ross himself (he had been instructed to look in the wrong place, they determined, and so was not to blame), they did suggest that if the Admiralty had funded earlier and more extensive searches, at least some men may have been rescued. If they had not been so strict in confining most searches to the north,

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[24] *Times,* October 24, 1854.

[25] This comment, and the longer article it came from, appeared in both the *Dundee Courier* and *Bury and Norwich Post* on October 25, 1854, and was reprinted in several other papers over the next few days, including the *Bradford Observer,* October 27; *Hull Packet* and *Newcastle Courant*, October 27; *Bristol Mercury*, *Preston Guardian*, *Lancaster Gazette*, and *Isle of Wight Observer,* October 28.

and instead have sent more men south, they may also have stood a better chance of finding survivors.[26] This was the news that was the most shocking about Rae's report: not that the expedition had ended in starvation and cannibalism, but that the disaster was supposedly orchestrated by Admiralty incompetence.[27]

The reaction to Rae's news was not, then, a simple matter of representing a "heroic failure." A canon of heroic tales claiming to explain the expedition's demise certainly did develop, as will be discussed later, but the matter of who had failed and who was a hero was more complicated. Contemporary newspapers often called the expedition a disaster or a tragedy, but not a complete failure. Even the editors of the *Times*, who would seemingly have been pleased to never hear the word "Arctic" again, could only go so far as to say that the mission was a "disappointment," and had been too risky. Writers did not blame the men of the expedition for anything that had gone wrong: the Admiralty had failed to do all that it could to protect them. In short, it was not the navy that had failed the nation, but the nation that had failed the navy. Something had to be done to make up for this shocking neglect of British sailors, and according to a popular argument the only thing to do was to send more men to the Arctic, and prove that the nation was still worthy of its naval, Arctic laurels.

A Need for More Heroes

To justify a new expedition that would seek new evidence, there needed to be a consensus that Rae's story was insufficient, or even outright wrong. Dickens may have been overstating public opinion when he suggested that Rae had slandered the Navy's

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[26] *Daily News,* October 24, 1854.
[27] For more press reactions to the Admiralty's apparent failure, see Cavell, *Connected Narrative,* 205.

good name, but he did demonstrate two other forms of objection that were more common among others who doubted the Inuit narrative. Although numerous newspaper editorials praised Rae, saying that his previous Arctic experience had proved his merit, they were not always sure that he had recorded a true story, either because they held racist ideas about Inuit ability (or inability) to tell the truth, or because they could not accept that the story proved that *every* expedition member had died. Many agreed that Rae's information was undoubtedly the "best that could be procured" given the circumstances, but doubted if the information was not distorted when it was "more than second-hand . . . from Esquimaux, who had it from other ignorant savages."[28] Worse, one article claimed, since "even educated men can distort the truth, and work up incomplete oral communications into adventurous romances," the story might be even more garbled "among men of a limited range of ideas and an imperfectly developed language."[29] Dickens, always ready to take an argument to the extreme, concluded that the Inuit would lie with impunity, and had in his belief murdered Franklin's men and stolen their possessions.[30] This theory of murder and theft was not Dickens's own creation, though—several articles, including a letter from the brother of one of *Terror*'s officers, came to the same conclusion by pointing out what they saw as "inconsistencies" in the story. Why would a party of men struggling for survival have been hauling boats full of "unnecessary" silverware and china?[31] If ammunition and weapons were plentiful at the

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[28] *Globe*, reprinted in *Leicester Chronicle,* October 28, 1854.
[29] *Examiner*, reprinted in *Bristol Mercury,* November 4, 1854.
[30] Dickens, "The Lost Arctic Voyagers," *Household Words*, December 9, 1854, 361-65.
[31] E.J.H. to the Editor of the *Times*, dated October 26, *Times* October 30, 1854. The author was Rev. E.J. Hornby, whose brother Frederick John Hornby was a mate on *Terror*.

camp, how did the men starve when they could hunt?[32] Worst of all, how could British men—intrepid British sailors, at that—die where the Inuit could survive?[33]

Rae and his supporters did their best to defend his account, attesting to the good intentions of Inuit witnesses and arguing that nothing in the narrative was so ridiculous as to be implausible. Rae was himself skeptical of the "stress . . . laid on the moral character and the admirable discipline of the crews of Sir John Franklin's ships," feeling that one could not "place much dependence on the obedience and good conduct of . . . comparatively uneducated seamen."[34] Rae may have personally believed that Inuit accounts were no insult to sailors' honor because he doubted that sailors were honorable to begin with. But he was aware of the heroic image that surrounded sailors in the broader popular imagination, and thus structured his initial defense in a way that explained or pardoned any controversial elements. For those critics who were distracted by the thought of British men wasting energy by dragging silverware and "useless" pieces of plate across the ice, the defense contended that these things could not account for more than "4lb. or 5lb. at the utmost, and would not appear much when divided among 40 persons," and in any case, men could not be faulted for wanting to hold onto a few mementos of a ship they would never seen again.[35] Rae's supporters reminded readers of the telescopes, hunting gear, cold-weather clothing, and scientific instruments that also appeared in Inuit testimony, speaking to the rational choices the men must have made in deciding which objects were necessary for the twin goals of survival and

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[32] "C." to the *Daily News*, *Daily News* October 28, 1854.
[33] E.J.H. to the Editor of *Times*. Victorian attitudes toward Arctic exploration and the belief that British men could survive in any environment are explored further in Ellen Boucher, "Arctic Mysteries and Imperial Ambitions: The Hunt for Sir John Franklin and the Victorian Culture of Survival," *The Journal of Modern History* 90 (March 2018): 40-75.
[34] John Rae, "Doctor Rae's Report," *Household Words*, December 30, 1854, 458.
[35] *Times,* October 31, 1854; *Bristol Mercury,* November 4, 1854.

scientific duty.[36] To the argument that British men should be too skilled hunters to succumb to starvation and cannibalism, Rae personally attested that the expedition had had the misfortune of becoming trapped in a location where game was notoriously scarce and could not support them once their stores ran out: in that same region Rae's own party, "all practiced sport-men, picked men, and in full strength and training," had shot "one deer only and a few partridges" in the span of fifty-six days. Franklin's men had not, then, died in a location where Inuit could survive, but a location where no one could survive for an extended period. It was not due to any personal failing, then, that they perished under such circumstances, but a matter of extreme ill fortune. And in such a case, Rae argued, it was the place of men comfortable at home to judge what other men would do in cases of extreme want. [37]

Rae's rebuttal seemed rational on the surface, but his hesitancy to buy into the narrative that Franklin's crews were every one of them heroes was a cause of public disappointment. He did not lose his reputation as a revered explorer—in the following years he traveled within Britain and abroad, giving lectures about the artifacts he had collected, and achieved particular fame in his native Scotland—but his public letters, rather than making him sound rational, led critics to denounce his character as self-serving. As Janice Cavell demonstrates, his defense of the Inuit narrative sounded increasingly like a defense of only himself, and critics saw him as an Admiralty puppet, especially when he formally presented the artifacts to the Admiralty, instead of returning them to the families of their original owners.[38]

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[36] *Bristol Mercury,* November 4, 1854.
[37] Rae, "Report," 457-59.
[38] Cavell, *Connected Narrative,* 218.

Rae's public blunders, along with perceived insufficiencies in his account, added fuel to the fire of public interest in sending a new search expedition. Many articles that had responded to Rae's account mourned the men mentioned therein, but refused to believe that Inuit testimony had accounted for every man of the expedition. The account had only mentioned a sledge party of about forty men, and then only thirty-five dead bodies. What had happened to the remaining five, responders asked, and what about the other eighty or so men who had not been reported either dead or alive?[39] With no evidence one way or the other, optimists could theorize that even though they would have long since run out of British provisions, these men could still be living among the Inuit. Even the indignant Reverend Hornby, brother of *Terror'*s Frederick Hornby, who had so upbraided Rae for believing the word of native people, announced that while he had "long given up all expectation of seeing [his] brother again in this world," he did not believe that that Rae's account should be used to dash the hopes of other bereaved families.[40] The objects that Rae had presented to the nation were not enough: someone would have to return to the Arctic, and if they could not find men, they would need to present *more* objects to the nation, to piece a story together. Rae had given tantalizing evidence in showing that Franklin's men had brought books with them on their sledge journey. Undoubtedly, many believed, the logbooks of the ships had been among the cargo, and these objects alone were enough to justify an expedition.[41]

Surprising none of its critics, however, the Admiralty would not be persuaded to fund this mission. Fully committed to the Crimean War and reluctant to send British

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[39] *The Spectator*, reprinted in *Bristol Mercury,* November 4, 1854.
[40] E.J.H. to the Editor of the Times, *Times,* October 30, 1854.
[41] *Morning Post,* December 11, 1856.

sailors to risk their lives anywhere else, official sentiments were echoed in the *Times*: "why . . . should we risk living men for the sake of dead men, or serviceable ships for the sake of mere skeletons of ships?"[42] In the opinion of the editors, exploration had proved too risky, and found it "gratifying . . . that the Government have not yet committed themselves to this frantic scheme." Another mission, they said, would be akin to "a party of gentlemen [choosing] to sail a brig to the centre of the Atlantic and there agree to scuttle her"—no one could stop them if they wanted to do such a thing, but it was not the government's place to support a venture that would leave blood on their hands. Any expedition that chose to follow in the fate of "poor Franklin" would have to be manned by volunteers, ready to "prove that they do not shrink from the perils to which they would expose others."[43]

But as the *Times* incredulously admitted, the search for Franklin had become a matter of national honor. Although that paper believed there was nothing left to prove, saying that Britain had already "done more than any nation in the world has ever done . . . from a tenderness of the feelings of those who have mourned for the crews of the Erebus and Terror" and thus "satisfied the exigencies of national honour," the matter was not so easily settled in all quarters.[44] Even in Parliament there were arguments, lasting for several years after Rae's report: in 1857, Charles Napier insisted that there "was no evidence even now that some of the [men] were not pining away in those lonely regions still, hoping and praying that their intrepid countrymen would not abandon them to their

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[42] *Times*, reprinted in *Liverpool Mercury,* February 4, 1856.
[43] Ibid.; *Times*, reprinted in *Hampshire Telegraph,* November 29, 1856.
[44] *Times,* reprinted in *Glasgow Herald,* December 5, 1856.

fate."[45] The debate in government seemed to be divided along naval, rather than political lines, with liberal Napier and conservative William Whiteside both supporting an expedition, and Admirals Berkeley and Walcott (liberal and conservative, respectively) advising against one. In the majority vote, the government believed the best way to protect the honor of the Navy was to keep sailors out of the Arctic, so as not to "renew the miserable spectacle of British seamen perishing of hunger."[46]

The more alarmist counterargument, however, was one of national honor. Encouraged by Lady Jane Franklin, wife of the absent explorer, privately-funded American expeditions had begun plying the Arctic in search of new evidence. It would look ill for Britain's reputation if the nation were to abandon the search, now that the mystery of the lost expedition had gained international interest. The Arctic was becoming a battleground of character, where nations, navies and sailors could prove their merit, and if Britain did not win this battle, then it seemed that the United States would. As one critic lamented, "the Americans are now so bravely doing our work for us."[47] Aid from America was one thing, but the prospect of survivors being rescued by American sailors, while Britain kept its sailors at home, was quite another. Reporting the parliamentary proceedings, the *Morning Post* explained that if Britain allowed private initiatives to take sole action in the Arctic, the world would conclude that "Englishmen were not as they used to be," that rather than being courageous and possessing a dauntless navy, the country "now allowed a little danger to deter them from pursuing a meritorious object."[48]

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[45] Commons Sitting of February 24, 1857, as summarized in *Morning Post,* February 25, 185. See also *House of Commons Hansard Sessional Papers*, Third Series, Volume 144 (1857), col. 1290-91.
[46] *House of Commons Hansard Sessional Papers*, Third Series, Volume 144 (1857), col. 1276-92.
[47] *Morning Chronicle,* March 12, 1861.
[48] *Morning Post,* February 25, 1857.

Domestic Heroism

Debating the possibility of a new search in Parliament, William Whiteside had worried about the optics of hesitation. While the government and the Admiralty dragged their feet, private citizens were taking action, calling into question where it was that the true spirit of the nation lay. Specifically, Whiteside worried that an expedition funded by Lady Jane Franklin herself might succeed in finding survivors. Were that to happen, it would prove the exact point that Lady Franklin's involvement had been implying for years: that the establishment was not doing enough for the men of its navy, and thus the duty of patriotism had fallen to the people.[49]

But while Lady Franklin looked like a threat to the government, she was something else entirely to the public eye. Ever since 1847 she had been something of a national celebrity, having petitioned the Admiralty directly on the point that after two winters in the Arctic, it was high time that the nation send a rescue mission after Sir John and his crews. Her efforts had implicated the Admiralty's hesitation even then: they maintained that it was still too early for worry, and could only been convinced to post a reward for any Arctic-going vessels (namely, whalers) who could provide information about the expedition's whereabouts.[50] Although the Admiralty did eventually send numerous search vessels to the Arctic, starting in 1848, Lady Franklin's fame as a self-sacrificing British subject was already on the rise. In a gesture that was soon acclaimed by the popular broadside ballad "Lady Franklin's Lament," she supplemented the

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[49] *House of Commons Hansard Sessional Papers*, Third Series, Volume 144 (1857), col. 1277-78.
[50] Erika Elce, ed., *As affecting the Fate of My Absent Husband: Selected Letters of Lady Franklin Concerning the Search for the Lost Franklin Expedition, 1848-1860* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2009), 66.

Admiralty's already-substantial reward offerings with her own money.[51] Convinced that official missions did not leave frequently enough or search widely enough, she financed several vessels herself, and even encouraged privately-funded American vessels to join in the effort.

On the surface, her efforts could be explained to a Victorian audience as the devotion of a bereaved woman, and the press did often cast her as the very model of a British wife. She was, however, much more than the ideal of British womanhood. After Rae, when the Admiralty failed to match the perceived heroism of Franklin's men with a new heroic mission of their own, Britain looked to the public sphere to find a new heroic figure, and found one in Lady Jane Franklin.

In many ways, Lady Jane was the very opposite of what a well-to-do British woman was expected to be. She had not married until she was in her thirties, and never had children of her own, nor shown any interest in being a mother. She was one of the most well traveled women of her day, and hardly the type to remain in the home.[52] During 1837-43, while Sir John had been appointed as lieutenant governor of the colony of Van Diemen's Land, she actively engaged herself in local improvements, and took a keen interest in politics. She was notoriously outspoken, and in Van Diemen's Land this characteristic did not serve her well: for her supposed "meddling" in political matters, she was derided as "a man in petticoats," at the expense of her husband's masculinity.[53]

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[51] "Lady Franklin's Lament," broadside ballad, c. 1850, Bodleian Ballads Online, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[52] Alison Alexander, *The Ambitions of Jane Franklin: Victorian Lady Adventurer* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013).
[53] Kari Herbert, *Polar Wives: The Remarkable Women behind the World's Most Daring Explorers* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012), 143.

In Britain, engaging in the climate of "Arctic Fever," however, Lady Franklin's character was not challenged by public opinion, but praised. She certainly did not refrain from "meddling," and in what was certainly a theatrical move she took up residence across from the Admiralty headquarters. The public came to refer to her apartments as "The Battery," owing to the frequent petitions she sent from its location to the target across the way.[54] She became, to the national imagination, the woman who took up a nation's duty as her own work. Supporters of continued search efforts constantly invoked her name, praising her dedication and asking that Britain emulate her spirit in not backing down until every expedition member was accounted for.

The heroism of the devoted citizen was now as important to the Franklin story as the noble character of the expedition members, and Lady Franklin embodied this ideal patriotic heroism. Papers began praising the "heroism of her character," and speaking of her in the same terms as the missing men.[55] They praised her courage, her devotion to doing her duty by her country, and her "noble-minded" spirit. They specifically began praising her "zeal," a term long used in describing naval officers, but usually not commended in women.[56] By 1854, she had already funded four separate expeditions, and now newspapers followed her efforts as she purchased and worked to outfit yet another vessel, a steam-yacht called *Fox*, awestruck that she was spending the majority of her private fortune to do so.

Her efforts were still sometimes referred to as a particularly womanly duty, or born of a woman's will, but she became the model of a new sort of female hero—one

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[54] Elce, *As Affecting the Fate*, 161.
[55] *Morning Post*, February 25, 1857.
[56] *Hampshire Telegraph,* November 29, 1856; *Morning Post,* February 25, 1857.

who was dedicated to her nation and its navy. What she showed was "devotion unparalleled," and a willingness to sacrifice her own well-being to save the memories, if not the lives, of men who had sacrificed much themselves.[57] Captain Francis Leopold McClintock, the veteran Arctic explorer who volunteered to command the *Fox* on its search mission, noted that Lady Franklin was "indeed the Sailor's Friend."[58] McClintock's immediate meaning was that Lady Franklin had helped outfit the *Fox* with supplies, being "so deeply interested in everything related to their comfort," but his sentiments spoke to something broader. McClintock and the crew that were undertaking Lady Franklin's mission understood as well as any British citizen that Jane had become a symbolic figure, a hero for the nation who would both look out for sailors' immediate needs, and do her utmost to promote the public image of the service to which those men belonged.

And for her commitment to upholding the Navy's good name, some were ready not only to call her not only a sailor's friend, but to compare her to a sailor herself. Her well-traveled history had always invited such comparisons, albeit humorously: reportedly, when she was first engaged to Sir John, an acquaintance had asked her if she would in fact be accompanying John on his next expedition, and her brother-in-law asked if she "had succeeded in meeting Captain F. in the Arctic" in the first place.[59] But during the search, her imagined willingness to go to sea on dangerous missions became an integral part of her heroic image. Reportedly, she had offered to go with Richardson and Rae on their 1848 overland search, and the idea of Lady Franklin traveling to the Arctic

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[57] *The Standard,* June 22, 1857.
[58] Willingham Franklin Rawnsley, *The Life, Diaries, and Correspondence of Jane Lady Franklin* (London: Erskine Macdonald, 1923), 106.
[59] Rawnsley, *Life, Diaries, and Correspondence,* 62, 65.

was no longer humorous, but courageous and demonstrative of a heroic character. In one version of "Lady Franklin's Lament," she is imagined to implore her absent husband: "where dost thou dwell? / What part of the Frozen Sea? . . . With my goodly Ship in motion . . . For thee I'd bear away."[60]

Similar themes of Lady Franklin's heroism appear in an 1856 epic poem narrating Arctic history, which was published in anticipation of the voyage of the *Fox*. Although the poem was of dubious quality, published for an audience consumed by "Arctic Fever" rather than for literary critics, it seems that Lady Franklin approved of its content—if the author is to be believed for saying that he had her permission in dedicating the poem to her. The author suggested that her endurance was just as noble as the endurance of Arctic explorers, admiring "her patience, perseverance, and fortitude, under trials unexampled in the annals of her country."[61] Like the earlier ballads, the poem seized on the idea that Lady Franklin would "brave / The fatal North, though in despair to save" her husband and his men, even suggesting that she was just as courageous as the men themselves in knowing that she might "attain the fatal limit,—and there die!"[62] Lady Franklin of course never did sail to the Arctic, but her enduring sense of hope helped to create a heroic narrative in the absence of concrete evidence, and the poem suggested that this made her just as heroic as any explorer. The poet was inclined to believe Rae that Franklin's men were likely all dead under horrific circumstances, saying that the tales were "To wildly strange for fancy to create," but still praised Lady Franklin for wanting to improve or alter the narrative. "Sad, yet unshrinking from [her] task severe," she would therefore

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[60] "Lady Franklin's Lament," broadside ballad, c. 1852, Broadside Ballads Online, Bodleian Library.
[61] Chandos Hoskyns Abrahall, *Arctic Enterprise: A Poem in Seven Parts* (London: Hope & Co., 1856), dedication page.
[62] Ibid., 108.

dedicate her life to the search, so that the nation might "trace the fading lineaments of Time," or construct stories by reading deep into any artifacts that search missions might find. [63] For this dedication, and her efforts to preserve the heroic image of British naval men, Lady Franklin was "Steadfast beyond [her] sex . . . great above [her] peers." Far from her early days of being criticized as a woman who tried to act as a man, she now was considered to be at least a man's equal, "More honour'd," even, "than the mightiest kings!"[64]

Creating Evidence and Displaying a Narrative

Even as the press struggled to piece together a narrative of the Franklin expedition in print, and waited on new search expeditions to provide new details, the presence of such "Franklin relics" in Britain posed their own challenges in story-telling. "Relics of Franklin" had been integral to constructing public understanding of the missing expedition for several years before Rae brought home the first large collection of such objects. Often these were dead ends or false leads, amounting to bits of wood, or "glass orbs" reported to have appeared in Russia. But sometimes they did provide concrete information, such as the remnants of ships' stores that were found along with three marked graves on Beechey Island, attesting to the expedition's 1845-46 winter camp in that location.[65]

Without much physical evidence in the early search years, interest in the fate of the missing expedition was kept alive in the public eye through the guesswork of printed

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[63] Ibid., 9
[64] Ibid., 107-10.
[65] *Manchester Times*, July 20, 1853; *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, September 20, 1851.

stories, or derivative imagery of panoramic exhibitions. As Russell Potter explains, these early exhibitions were created as a testament to British endurance and the possibility of survival. They drew not only on Franklin's own brush with death on the 1819 Coppermine expedition, but also on the 1828 Northwest Passage expedition of John and James Ross, who had been stranded and spent four winters in the Arctic, resorting in the end to a desperate northbound sledge journey in hopes that they may be discovered and rescued by the whaling fleet.[66] By 1832, many Britons had assumed that the Ross expedition had ended in disaster: even the captain of the whaling vessel *Isabella,* who rescued them by sheer coincidence, failed to immediately believe their identity, and assured John Ross to his face that he had been dead for two years.[67] But if Franklin had returned from the disastrous Coppermine expedition in 1822, and if the Rosses had been saved in 1832, these exhibits suggested that it was eminently reasonable to place hope in the current search. Instead of despairing of the men's fates, exhibits looked to accounts of other expeditions to imagine what the intrepid explorers must be experiencing, and what scientific discoveries they might be making. The implied lesson was that through British naval discipline and the use of British cold-weather gear, survival was possible, even if it required (as it had for Franklin in 1821) eating one's own boots.

Such exhibits had drawn on the notion of the sublime. Part of "Arctic Fever" was a fascination with the raw power of nature, and man's plucky battle against something much bigger than himself.[68] But upon Rae's return, the narrative needed to change, and acknowledge the darkest side of the sublime: the fact that humans may in fact be

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[66] Potter, *Arctic Spectacles.*
[67] John Ross, *Narrative of a Second Voyage in Search of a North-West Passage* (London: A. W. Webster, 1835), 720.
[68] Jen Hill, *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

conquered by their surroundings. This could not be a heroism of survival, then, but a heroism of a more philosophical kind. Survival of the body was overwritten by survival of the British spirit. Franklin's men were lauded as heroes because, according to speculation, they maintained good British character to the end. Whatever Rae may have personally thought about the character of the British seaman, the artifacts he brought home became part of an object-based account that believed that character was an honorable one. Officers and sailors alike were depicted as men on a noble quest, and although they became lost, unable to expect the help of their country, they nonetheless upheld that country's honor through their conduct.

What resulted was a canon of approved heroic vignettes, developed organically through public consensus. Although Rae's account was widely deemed to be insufficient, the very fact that he had come across British sailors' personal effects in Inuit households was proof that something terrible had happened, and the essence of his testimony had to be accepted as true. Fringe theories about Inuit violence and murder would not do as the basis of a heroic narrative, but a story of starvation could be tragically heroic, with enough imaginative embellishment.[69] Even Dickens, fringe-theorist-in-chief, could not deny that Britain had a duty to turn Rae's testimony into a something that could supplement mourning with a sense of pride. Whatever his prejudices about the source of the information, Dickens clearly took Rae's report as proof that the expedition was no more, and had none of Lady Franklin's optimism that there was even one survivor: he believed that Britain should praise and seek out proof of the men's heroism, "because

[69] Starvation became the generally accepted cause of death. Although the initial reports of cannibalism had only truly offended a vocal few, it was doubtlessly an uncomfortable detail, and so story-crafters made peace with it by simply ignoring it.

they are dead . . . Because no Franklin can come back, to write the honest story of their woes and resignation." Without a survivor to speak, the story had to be constructed from "the book [Franklin] has left us," the evidence and the skeletons that "lie scattered on those wastes of snow." Essentially announcing, albeit poetically, that Britain had to construct an elaborate fiction, he argued that Franklin's men were just as "defenceless against the remembrance of coming generations" as they had been against the sublime landscape that had overcome them. Thus it was Britain's duty to emulate the "firmness" that the expedition's sailors themselves had supposedly embodied, and protect their reputation by celebrating their "fortitude, their lofty sense of duty, their courage, and their religion."[70]

Seemingly in agreement with Dickens's sentiment on narrative-crafting, artists, biographers, and newspaper editors, columnists, and letter-writers focused on certain episodes in Rae's account, or created stories for individual artifacts, through which they could assure themselves that Franklin's men had, even while weakened by their sledge journey, maintained order, cared for their comrades, and kept social norms present in the desolate landscape by giving the dead Christian burials.[71] Dickens was speaking metaphorically when he said that Britain would have to draw its story from the book that Franklin left for them, but one of the first artifacts to catch public attention was, in fact, a book. A dog-eared religious text, the *Student's Manual*, was one of the objects that Rae purchased from the Inuit, and it became a useful piece of evidence for authors who wished to portray the crew of *Erebus* and *Terror* as Christian heroes.

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[70] Dickens, "The Lost Arctic Voyagers," *Household Words*, December 9, 1854, 392.
[71] *Wrexham and Denby Journal,* October 28, 1854; James Parsons, *Reflections on the Mysterious Fate of Sir John Franklin* (London: J. F. Hope, 1857), 109.

Religious piety was an attribute that frequently appeared in what C. I. Hamilton calls "naval hagiographies"—biographies that were often heavy-handed in turning officers into ideal examples of British moral conduct.[72] Franklin was in reality a deeply religious man, and had a reputation of giving shipboard sermons that sailors praised as more enjoyable than any they had heard in a church; thus biographers did not need to exaggerate when they used this characteristic as an example of what supposedly made Franklin the very model of an English officer, and an ideal gentleman. That he was a veteran of Trafalgar, and of previous Arctic expeditions, certainly lent credit to his martial skill and leadership abilities, but it was his naval experiences *combined* with his character and faith that supposedly made him the perfect hero. Inspired by Rae's report, combined with the earlier discovery of three graves at Beechey Island, Northumberland, author James Parsons determined that Franklin's "character stood all but alone in zeal, bold daring, and in enterprise, for a man to retain at the advanced age of sixty all the boldness and energy of youth, singularly blended with the lofty qualities of religion, is a combination rarely found in one individual; with a mind that had overcome the greatest of difficulties, was a heart as generous as it was brave."[73] One of Rae's relics, a dog-eared "Student's Manual" of religious texts, served as a particular illustration, since the owner had heavily parked a page that contained an affirmation of a man unafraid to die, because "God has said to me fear not, when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee." Parsons imagined that this passage, which was appropriately complete with nautical imagery, was "studied by one whose worldly position was hopeless." Parsons

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[72] C. I. Hamilton, "Naval Hagiography and the Victorian Hero," *The Historical Journal* vol. 23, no. 2 (June 1980): 381-98.
[73] Parsons, *Reflections on the Mysterious Fate,* 110.

and other authors reflected on how Franklin's "Christian tenderness" and hope for the afterlife must have inspired his men, from the funerals at Beechey Island (over which Franklin himself would have presided), through the overland journey on which the men brought their religious texts, to the last moments when "the feeble spirits of the exhausted party sunk into silence."[74]

In a morbid twist on the old trope of using sailors as symbols of the soul's journey, the imagined faith of Franklin's men became a lesson on how Britons should bear life's trials and acknowledge their own mortality. Writers turned the Franklin story into one where readers could find personal connections: the *Bristol Mercury* in October 1854 addressed both the trials of Franklin's men and the mourning of those left at home, by printing Charles Mackay's poem "The Enquiry" between two articles on Rae's testimony. The poem, although written earlier as a spiritual piece, provided imagery appropriate to the arctic context, as the narrator searches for a place where mortals could be free from grief and toil, and directs his question to the moon, the "winged winds," and the "mighty deep." All these forces of nature reply in a resounding "No!" and the narrator learns that there is no "island far away . . . Where sorry never lives and friendship never dies"—a place that would have provided a pleasant contrast to the Arctic islands where sorrow and death prevailed.[75] Although the *Mercury*'s middle-class readers did not physically experience the trials of the Arctic Ocean, the ice and the storms, and the seasons of endless darkness, the use of such images in the poem suggested that there was something innately British about facing tempests, real or metaphorical, with Christian resolve. Used as a eulogy, "The Enquiry" addressed the mourning public with an appeal

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[74] Ibid.
[75] *Bristol Mercury,* November 4, 1854.

to their own hope for happiness after death, and concluded that Franklin's men, like the narrator in the poem, must have eventually taken comfort in the belief that despite their trials on earth, they would find peace in heaven.

Beyond religious faith, imaginatively reconstructed narratives suggested that Franklin's men were admirable in retaining faith in tradition and routine, and in the motivating power of a fondly-remembered home. Death had given a level of anonymity and equality to the men, allowing a story wherein every individual could be supposed to be equally heroic: if all that remained were skeletons, and sometimes even less than that, it was often impossible to determine which bodies belonged to officers, and which had been men of lower rank. This became more apparent as later searchers, particularly McClintock and his lieutenant William Hobson, determined the locations of numerous campsites and graves. In certain cases, scraps of cloth, or a telescope placed in a grave could suggest that someone may have been an officer, but often all that remained were skulls and scattered bones. Unable to ascertain who had hauled the sledges, who had used the hunting rifles found in camp, who had buried the dead, who had cared for the sick, or who had died last, any sign of perseverance or determination to survive on the long march south could be attributed to virtually any and all of the men who appeared on the *Erebus* or *Terror*'s muster rolls.[76]

The nation's growing collection of Franklin artifacts became a subject of wonder for the British public. Highly-attended exhibits appeared in London at the Royal Polytechnic Institution and the Royal United Service Institution, and at Greenwich

[76] The only men initially known *not* to have been among the sledge teams were John Torrington, William Braine, and John Hartnell, whose marked graves, dated 1846, had been found on Beechey Island in 1850. Later, in 1859, William Hobson discovered a note in a cairn at Victory Point, King William Island, that revealed that Sir John Franklin and lieutenant Graham Gore, as well as nineteen others whose names were not given, had also died before the sledge journey began.

Hospital in the Painted Hall. Initially, these were not formal museum exhibits, being set up quickly and in convenient locations to satiate public curiosity. As such, space was limited, and the Royal United Service Institution was compelled to allow entry only by advance ticket sales. Not deterred, though, hopeful visitors submitted their names in such hurry that tickets quickly sold out, and people resorted to waiting-lists for their chance to inspect the revered "relics."[77] Despite the seemingly religious connotation of the term "relics," artifacts found in the early search years had not often been described as sacred remains of deceased idols; recalling the rescue of the temporarily-lost Ross expedition, Britain had been reluctant to think that Franklin's men had in fact died.[78] "Relics" had originally been a term interchangeable with "objects" or "specimens," employed for the sake of linguistic variety. It was only when artifacts moved out of the printed page and into glass cases on display that they took on a supernatural aura. Placed at Greenwich in an evocative location, next to "the coat in which Lord Nelson received his death wound at Trafalgar," the personal effects of Franklin's men appeared to evoke the spirits of naval martyrs.[79] Arctic explorers had been referred to as the "Nelsons of discovery," for their courage and perseverance, even before the Franklin expedition disappeared, but death had raised the significance of this metaphor to a new height.[80] Observers chose examples of these "noble relics" to create stories around the missing men, and illustrate the "energy and perseverance of the British seaman."[81]

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[77] *Morning Post,* November 2, 1859; *Examiner,* November 19, 1859.
[78] Gillian Hutchinson suggests that it was McClintock who called the objects relics and endowed them with spiritual significance, but the term was clearly in use much earlier. See Gillian Hutchinson, *John Franklin's Erebus and Terror Expedition: Lost and Found* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 136.
[79] *Essex Standard,* June 22, 1855.
[80] Cavell, *Connected Narrative*, 117-40.
[81] *The Standard,* September 24, 1859.

Announcing the opening of an exhibit at the Royal United Service Institute, a widely-printed article explained, in quite imaginative detail, some of these "simple, weather-worn fragments of what once belonged to the brave and true men who, within the desolation of the Arctic Circle, had sustained so well the character and honour of their country."[82] The author expected that visitors would be moved to observe how the explorers supposedly maintained patriotic spirit during their suffering, by calling attention to a tattered piece of a ship's ensign, which "must have fluttered sadly, but still proudly, from the mast" of one of the ships on "many cheerless days," and was later carried by the remains of the crew on their sledge journey. The object most worth seeing, however, was reportedly "the remains of a silk necktie," which invoked the story of a man who died "some miles distant from the main track of the poor pilgrims." The story was meant to be shocking (involving a "ghastly skeleton," discovered alone), but also endearing, since the neckerchief had been arranged in a bow know "as carefully and elaborately tied as if the poor wearer had been making a wedding toilette." This description certainly required some stretch of the imagination—the fabric, still in the collections of the National Maritime Museum, is so tattered as to preclude any real judgment of its neatness—but was written so as to suggest that such was the determination of this man, that he maintained his neat and familiar habits of British naval dress to the day he died, alone in the ice.[83] There was some speculation that the man had

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[82] *Daily News,* October 17, 1859; *Glasgow Herald,* October 18, 1859; *Belfast News-Letter* October, 19, 1859; *Ipswitch Journal* and *North Wales Chronicle,* October 22, 1859.

[83] Neckerchief, silk, before 1845, object number AAA2116, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. See also Garth Walpole, *Relics of The Franklin Expedition* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2017), 178. It is tempting to presume that the object's current condition is a result of mishandling, but a sketch from the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891 shows it looking very much as it does now. See *Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891: The Illustrated Handbook and Souvenir* (London: Pall Mall Gazette, 1891), 7.

been one of the ships' stewards, judging by the remains of his clothing and the style of the neckerchief, but the story was intended to suggest a level of devotion to home and tradition that was presumed to be present and admirable in all of the crew.

Variations on such stories of determination persisted for decades, sometimes based on the tale of the presumed steward, sometimes derived from Inuit accounts, and embellished by artifacts discovered by searchers. Authors were fascinated by the men who "fell down and died as they walked along," choosing not to lay down and wait in despair for their demise, but pushing forward until the very moment that life left them. Irish poet Edmund Falconer commemorated such a man in "The Last of the Crew," inspired by the account of an Inuit woman who saw a person she presumed to be the last survivor, "a big, strong man . . . [who] after wandering to and fro for a long time, he sat down upon the beach, and bending his head upon his hands and knees, without once looking up, so died." At least one Franklin scholar has suggested that the woman may have witnessed the death of the above-mentioned steward himself, but for Falconer rank did not matter.[84] Rather than believing that the man died entirely in misery, Falconer suggested that it was love of home and country that had sustained the man for so long and gave him comfort at the end—a fitting and sympathetic last scene for a "poor, way-worn mariner," one reviewer claimed. The anonymous sailor could have been anyone, of any social class or rank, but Falconer imagined he had all the good qualities that had traditionally made the British sailor a celebrated example of national spirit. In the imagined narrative of the poem, he had been "The hardiest and most hopeful," when the expedition's predicament began, and had volunteered to lead his own group of men

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[84] Walpole, *Relics,* 150-51.

across the ice. He was the cheerful and devoted friend that the sailor of popular imagination was supposed to be: like Dibdin's celebrated Tom Bowling, he "often sung out to cheer the crew," and was a person that dying men confided in, hoping he would bring their personal belongings and messages home.

While the reader could infer with some satisfaction that those personal belongings *had* made it home in the form of "relics," there was the sad contrast of the gallant British sailor dying alone. Not all was tragedy, though: although Falconer's sailor, having been a loyal friend, now had no one left to hear his last thoughts, he did not curse the country that had never come to his aid. Instead he ended his days in peace, thinking of "England's dewy skies," of " a murmuring rill, / The humming of a busy bee, / The clack perchance of some old mill, / 'A ploughboy whistling o'er the lea.'" With this ending, the poem drew on imagery of "merrie England," with the sailor imagining a home that was defined by its pleasant and ancient countryside. There was no way of knowing if the real, mysterious sailor of the original story was a person who had grown up in the country or the city, but by using this appeal to tradition, Falconer creating a socially comforting image of the enduring power of British national identity. If sailors were said to maintain traditional codes of behavior, and to be motivated by a traditional image of home—one that was supposedly the same as it always had been—then it was an easy step to claim that the Navy was still honorable and worthy of national praise, the same as *it* always had been. In this way, the expedition had not been a "heroic failure," nor seen as a failure at all. Its success was measured not by survival, nor how far west the ships reached, but on how well the men proved themselves worthy as the descendants of Nelson's navy.

Lady Franklin and the *Fox*

When McClintock and the *Fox* returned triumphantly in 1859, bringing those relics that would soon be displayed for an astonished crowd, they brought with them another object that stood out above all the rest. For a decade, Franklin search expeditions had placed their hope in finding paper records or logbooks, hoping to supplement oral testimony with a written word that would carry more weight with a European audience. Although those missions had proved instrumental in mapping the Arctic regions and filling in the map, all had been disappointed in their primary goal—especially upon hearing that since books held no value to Inuit communities except as fuel or playthings for children, it was likely that any useful sources had been destroyed. The fate of Franklin could be interpreted through only silent artifacts, William Hobson, a lieutenant serving under McClintock, discovered a single note that had been rolled in a canister and deposited in a cairn at Victory Point.[85] To this day, the Victory Point Note remains the only known written account of the Franklin expedition, and on the day McClintock presented it to the nation, its effect was staggering. The record did not reveal much about the *very* end of the expedition, but did suggest a timeline. It was in truth two messages on one admiralty-supplied form paper, the first of which listed the ships' coordinates as of May 1847, referred to the previous winter's camp at Beechey Island, and recorded that the state of the expedition was at that point "all well." Less than a year later, in April 1848, the note had been amended, with more desperate news. The ships had been "beset" by ice for over two years, after which the crews had abandoned their vessels. The unrelenting ice was not their only nemesis however: as of the day of the amendment, Sir

[85] Hutchinson, *Lost and Found,* 133.

John Franklin had been dead for ten months, and of the original ships' complements of 129 men, 105 remained. The expedition's last known survival plan, recorded and signed on the Victory Point Note by the then-commanding officers, Captains Francis Crozier and James Fitzjames, was to travel over land in sledge parties southward toward Canada's Back River.[86]

In many ways, the Victory Point Note only confirmed what many already had expected. Rae's account of a ship crushed by ice, abandonment, overland struggle, and death by starvation was unquestionably true, verified by McClintock's relics and the sites where he had found them. However, what the note did offer was a date: "Sir John Franklin died on the 11th June 1847." This would have been immediate comfort to Lady Franklin, proving that her husband had died early enough to be spared the horrible demise that awaited the majority of the crews. Mournful authors could claim that their "brave veteran" at least died a "happy death," likely aboard his own ship.[87] But perhaps most importantly, a written record of death, carrying more weight with the British public than Inuit testimony ever had, allowed Franklin's heroic arc to evolve into a full apotheosis story. If his death had been "happy," it was also timely, and biographers determined that he had exited the world "like another Moses . . . when his work was accomplished."[88]

His "work," of course, was discovering the Northwest Passage, or as the more appropriate case would seem, bringing his crews to a position from whence *they* could discover it. There was no concrete evidence that he had lived to see the passage mapped,

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[86] Ibid., 138.
[87] *Daily News,* October 17, 1859.
[88] Captain Sherard Osborn, *The Career, Last Voyage, and Fate of Captain Sir John Franklin* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1860), 73.

if indeed it had been mapped at all. But the most hopeful could imagine that during the years that *Erebus* and *Terror* had been frozen in, the ships had sent out surveying parties on foot, as was standard on scientific missions, and that those missions might have determined what the later Franklin searchers did: that King William Land was in fact an island, and the strait that separated it from North America's Adelaide Peninsula was one of the final pieces in the puzzle of the Northwest Passage. Although they could not pin down *when* it had happened, nearly every tribute to Franklin that appeared after McClintock's return was certain that good British men had truly discovered the passage. The most common, gruesomely romantic interpretation was that if the men had not yet discovered it before they abandoned their ships, they did come to realize the significance of their route as they desperately walked south along the coast of King William Land. They had left a trail of graves and camps behind them, hinting at the route they had taken, and McClintock had concluded that at least some of them must have noticed in their final days that they were traversing land and seeing water (albeit frozen) that was the connection between the east and west parts of the known Arctic map. Their supposed discoveries became immortalized in an often-repeated phrase, that would eventually be inscribed in the exhibit of Franklin relics at Greenwich Hospital: "they forged the last link with their lives."[89]

Lady Franklin's private enterprise had thus "proved" to Britain that Franklin and his men were heroes, with a force of European authority that no Inuit testimony had ever held over a British mind. The mission was entirely lost—a fact that was clear to most now, twelve years after the expedition's departure—but nothing about it was a failure to

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[89] *The Graphic,* July 25, 1896.

the nation. The men had died as they walked along, yes, but not before they had seen their duty done. Something, supposedly, had kept them going, maintaining order and British perseverance, until they had completed that which they had set out to do.

With their deaths now all but confirmed, Franklin's men were commemorated not only as Britain's intrepid countrymen, but as something more ancient and integral to British identity. Not only were they the ideal stock of British sailors, but their courage and devotion was "worthy of the knights of old."[90] Depicting heroes as "chivalrous," comparable to the knights of Camelot, was an established trope in Victorian hagiography, and it required no stretch of the Victorian imagination to determine that "Brave Sir John Franklin" was a man who deserved his knighthood in the most traditional way possible.[91] Not only was he like Moses in dying when his work was completed, but he was an Arthurian hero, sacrificing everything for a quest that concerned the honor of his kingdom.

Comparing Franklin and his crews to Arthur and the knights of the Round Table was, it seems, born of a sarcastic remark. The *Times*, with its usual cutting attitude toward Arctic exploration, was happy to report on McClintock's return with an exasperated sigh of relief that "lives of brave sailors were not uselessly sacrificed" in a mission that had seemed hopeless from the beginning. The editors were clearly not fond of Lady Franklin, whom they determined had been engaged in a fruitless mythmaking mission: in reference to the Victory Point Note's confirmation of Franklin's death, they declared that "Alas! there can be no longer those sad wailings from an imaginary Tintagel

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[90] *The Graphic,* May 25, 1895.
[91] Ibid. For the use of chivalry, and the King Arthur legend as a trope of Victorian heroism, see Stephanie Barczewski*, Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Mark Girouard, *Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

to persuade the credulous that an Arthur still lives." Through its criticism, however, the *Times* revealed its understanding of the sort of praise that was growing elsewhere. Soon countless biographies and shorter tributes were calling the expedition a "gallant band," crusaders who sacrificed their lives in search of an Arctic holy grail, and successors to England's most ancient heroes. Authors began referring to Arctic exploration itself as one of Britain's most ancient duties, placing it alongside global seapower as one of the birthrights of an island nation. Ambitious chroniclers tried to show how Britain had had designs on the frozen north since the days of King Alfred, and that the British claim to the Arctic was thereby said to be as old as England itself, or even older.[92] One lecturer went so far as to suggest that the nation's claim was even so ancient as to be outside the established realm of time: "according to tradition," exploration in that region went back to "the mythical days of King Arthur, for there had never been a time in which the great mystery of the far north did not exercise a fascination upon the minds of men."[93] The heroism of Franklin's men was, in another author's words, equal to these old tales of heroics, and their struggles and successes "should be household words by every English fire-side."[94]

Lady Franklin was not left out of this new mythology; in fact, her role in Arctic missions, and especially the voyage of the *Fox* elevated her to absolute equal status with her husband, his men, and the men who searched for them. While the *Times* felt that Lady Jane had cut a bad figure as a supposedly distressed noblewoman, waiting for her noble

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[92] *Birmingham Daily Post,* January 3, 1881; Annette E. McClintock, *The Story of the Franklin Search Illustrative of the Franklin Relics Brought Together and Exhibited in the Royal Naval Exhibition* (London: Samuel Sidders, 1891), 3.
[93] *Birmingham Daily Post,* January 3, 1881. An article in this paper describes a lecture given by J. Thackeray Bunce at the Midland Institute.
[94] Osborn, *Career, Last Voyage,and Fate*, 24.

band of knights to come home, the broader reaction in the press was that Lady Franklin's devotion made her the "noble wife to a noble man."[95] And she certainly was no damsel in distress—overall, her public image was one that cast her as a mythological type of hero as well. She had already been publicly cast in the same terms as sailors and naval heroes, and so when it was determined that the men of the Franklin expedition had been chivalric, noble, or gallant, it only made sense that Jane's image would follow suit. Some depictions clung to the notion that she was a uniquely feminine hero—comparing her to classical figures like Penelope or Lucretia who inspired men to take action.[96] "Not one of the latter," the *Glasgow Herald* reported, "did excel Lady Franklin in her love, her Christian duty, her energy, her patient submission under harrowing suspense . . . and . . . bodily suffering."[97] Just as frequently, however, tributes cast Lady Franklin as just as Arthurian as her husband had been—she was a *commander* of men, who had "gathered around herself a band of men, who served her with most loyal devotion, and laboured in the cause, both at home, and in the perilous fields of Arctic search."[98] Reports delighted in the fact that she had given instructions to Captain McClintock—instructions that, unlike any Admiralty orders, had directed him to search in a location that actually proved fruitful—suggesting that she was just as much in command of the mission as McClintock had been.[99] Numerous reports called her chivalrous, and years later, when she died, a

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[95] Frederick Whymper, *The Heroes of the Arctic and Their Adventures* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889), 295.
[96] *Leisure Hour Monthly Library* vol. 8 (1859), 816; *Glasgow Herald* March 6, 1860.
[97] *Glasgow Herald,* March 6, 1860.
[98] McClintock, *The Story of the Franklin Search*, 1891.
[99] John Tillotson, *Adventures in the Ice* (London: Virtue, 1869), 257.

tribute reported that she had "sought for the missing ships in heart and spirit as passionately as the pilgrim knights of old sought for the Holy Grail."[100]

Recognition of Lady Franklin as an Arctic hero, equal to any male hero in that realm, became semi-official in June of 1860, when the Royal Geographical Society presented her with their Founder's Medal at their annual meeting. She was the first woman ever to receive that honor. The Society was sure to clarify that the medal was not given only *in memoriam* for her husband's achievements, but for her own. She devoted twelve years of her life to what they called a "glorious object"—funding Arctic exploration with her own money, demonstrating "self-sacrificing perseverance," until the fate of Franklin was discovered and the Arctic map incidentally filled in. She was honored alongside Captain, newly become Sir, Francis Leopold McClintock, and was even hinted to be *more* worthy of the honor than he. The Royal Geographical Society did not need to compare her heroism to a man's in order to show her worth; in fact, in a statement that evoked cheers from all assembled, the society declared that McClintock, in receiving a medal for his service, "will doubtless rejoice in known that he is on this occasion the recipient of the same honor as that which is adjudged to the noble-minded widow of Franklin."[101] The Society was on untrodden ground, suggesting that a man ought to be proud to be judged as heroic as a woman, but the declaration spoke volumes about the value placed on a private citizen who loved and assisted the Navy. Within twelve years, Lady Franklin had gone from being the woman who tried too hard to act

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[100] Reportedly from the *Daily Telegraph*, unknown date, 1875, recounted in Rawnsley, *Life, Diaries, and Correspondence,* 190.
[101] *Ipswitch Journal,* June 2, 1860.

like a man, to being the woman whom all Britons, men included, were supposed to look up to.

Nostalgia and Recollections of Franklin at the End of the Century

During the Franklin search, Arctic heroes (whether they were Franklin's men, Lady Franklin, or the Franklin searchers) came to be seen as reminders of Britain's most ancient qualities, harkening back to an imagined better time. The Franklin story had the ability to build layers of nostalgia upon each other: one biography imagined that a young John Franklin had hurried off to join Nelson's navy because in "those good old times" England was "in a fervor of nautical enthusiasm," and the author hoped that the tales of Arctic heroism would be told in every British household, inspiring the youth to emulate Franklin just as he had sought to emulate Nelson.[102] But as the years went on, some writers began to argue that the search years were *themselves* a better time. This trend to nostalgia was not very long in the making; not even 25 years had passed since McClintock's expedition, when the *Leeds Mercury's* Thomas Wemyss Reid published his fond childhood memories of the era. Under the pseudonym "A Rambling Philosopher," he recalled that the search for not just the Northwest Passage, but for traces of Franklin, had been "a kind of religion, a new crusade." British men had been more heroic in those days, he believed, not least because they had a "safety-valve for their courage and high spirits" that the later decades of the nineteenth century did not provide. He scoffed at modern men who would "fling themselves into the rapids below Niagara or to attempt foolhardy balloon trips across the sea in order to prove that they possessed a full share of

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[102] Osborn, *Career, Last Voyage, and Fate,* 24.

animal courage," calling these feats "madcap tricks" that would have been held in contempt by the brave men who had screwed their courage to the sticking place of Arctic exploration.[103] The danger of the Arctic had, perhaps counter-intuitively, produced a sense of daring and adventure among "thousands upon thousands" of British boys who tirelessly read about the heroism of "Arctic crusaders," and dreamed of going to the "land of long darkness" themselves. Most of those boys had of course grown up to lead very average lives, but Reid believed they had known what "real grit" was, and he both pitied and feared for the character of a generation that did not have a similar cause that might produce such a depth of emotion or sense of duty to their country.

"Arctic Fever" had died down since 1859, but perceived as men of another time, the old Arctic heroes remained celebrities. Northern England and Scotland in particular never forgot that so many thrilling expeditions had left from their ports, and northern newspapers followed the lives and doings of explorers like Rae, McClure, and McClintock with particular interest. Interviews with Arctic veterans held some appeal, offering the opportunity to collect an oral history of the search years, and also to ask these aging men about their opinions on new discoveries. By the time that news traveled across the Atlantic, of discoveries made by American explorers Hall and Schwatka, the heroic Franklin narrative was firmly in place and interviewers could ask questions they would not have dared to before, without any fear of damaging any reputations. A younger generation was eager to hear from McClintock if, after many years had past, he would finally give any indication that he had personally seen evidence of cannibalism among his discoveries; but for his part, he remained committed to telling the story just as his sponsor

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[103] *Leeds Mercury,* September 22, 1883.

would have wanted, and said he could "neither confirm nor deny the story, but [was] strongly disinclined to receive it."[104]

The enduring celebrity of Arctic explorers, combined with fears that a lack of heroic outlet had created a crisis in masculinity, led some to believe that Britain would serve itself well to make another attempt on the Northwest Passage. The passage was no longer sought out as a viable trade route, and nor did it hold as much mystery as it once had. Thanks to the Franklin search, the Arctic map was filled in, and the narrative settled that the first men to discover the route of the passage had indeed been British. The first person who could claim to have traversed the entire passage, although partially by walking over frozen water, was also a Briton, Robert McClure. But when Lady Franklin funded one more mission in 1875, there was still one "first" yet to achieve. Taking the preparations for the patriotically-but-dully-named British Arctic Expedition as a sign that an "old spirit" of exploration was renewed in the nation, optimists hoped that "British keels [would] be the first to plow through that open polar sea," traversing the passage entirely by sail and steam.[105] Only the most enthusiastic of those optimists could believe that any new mission would yield much more in the way of Franklin relics, but it was no stretch to revive the old belief that the conquest of the passage would be "expected worthily to uphold the reputation of our navy," both by calling to mind the heroism of the past, and seeking to have it emulated in the present.[106]

There was another cause for which the memory of Franklin proved instructive, which became apparent in the later decades of the century. The conquest of the passage

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[104] *Reynold's Newspaper,* October 17, 1880.
[105] W. H. Davenport Adams, *Recent Polar Voyages* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1880), 213.
[106] Ibid.; *Aberdeen Journal,* September 30, 1880.

was, as it long had been, a noble goal for a country whose navy was not heavily engaged elsewhere: a substitute arena for glory when the nation was not at war. From the 1870s through the turn of the century, Britain did not face the reality of European war, but constantly faced the threat of it. As a naval arms race developed first against Russia, and later against Germany, Britain found itself in a position to consider how it might fare in a new war at sea. What would such a war look like, and what could Britain expect from its men? With the exception of the Crimean War, which evoked few romantic memories, Britain had not engaged in large-scale naval warfare since the age of sail, and the notion of Britannia ruling the waves was still firmly tied to the glory of Nelson. Although the Royal Navy of the late nineteenth century was constructed of steam, steel and iron, the British public could only conceive of future naval glory by believing that the sailors still possessed the spirit of Nelson's men—as will be discussed further in later chapters. But Britain had other names to promote in the cause of naval heroism, and in efforts to create role models that could teach a new generation what an ideal Briton should be in a time of crisis, the name of Franklin was just as useful as that of Nelson.

The 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition was a case in point: a sprawling display of naval history and technology that was designed with the explicit purpose of overwhelming the visitor with the conviction that the nation's welfare depended absolutely on its navy. No one could fail to get the intended message, but neither could they miss the intended order in which they were supposed to explore the galleries.[107] In a building set up so that one had to pass through each gallery to get to the next, the very

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[107] *Royal Naval Exhibition 1891: The Official Handbook and Souvenir,* 4. The exhibition's mission statement was inscribed above the main entrance: "It is on the Navy, under the good Providence of God, that our wealth, prosperity, and peace depend."

first installation the visitor would see was not a testament to modern naval technology or prowess, and, curiously, neither did it have anything to do with the glory of Nelson. The first gallery, complete with a giant iceberg, a full sized cairn, and a wax reproduction of a sledge team, was the Franklin Gallery, dedicated to centuries of British polar exploration. The installation design drew in some ways on the earlier genre of Arctic panoramas, but some alteration: for example, a visitor could go *inside* the "iceberg," and see within it images of "Arctic exploration ships nipped in ice."[108]

The exhibit as a whole was meant to tell the Franklin story as an extended narrative of heroism, depicting not only the exploits of Franklin's men but of the search parties that went out for decades after. Relics such as tools, watches, a portable stove, a medicine chest, book, and the famous steward's neck cloth were displayed in glass cases as they had been in previous exhibits, but were accompanied by life-size tableaux of search parties with their full accompaniment of Arctic gear, hauling sledges and camping in tents. The juxtaposition of such scanty relics with such detailed wax models and scenery was meant to evoke not only the tragedy but the mystery of piecing the story together, and yet the exhibition handbook went to great lengths to describe the value of each "stray relic." These things, not examined individually but taken together, were an "imperishable record of the heroism and endurance," a testament to sailors who had been "English in heart and in limb, Strong with the strength of the race to command, to obey, and endure."[109]

The objects on display could supposedly teach the youth of Britain, both boys and girls, how they should prepare themselves for the world in which they were coming of

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[108] *The Graphic,* May 16, 1891.
[109] *Royal Naval Exhibition 1891: The Official Handbook and Souvenir,* 6.

age. In a booklet sold to accompany the exhibit, Annette McClintock presented "The Story of the Franklin Search" to "the younger generation arising among us that they may realise more and more that they spring of a heroic race, and that they in turn are expected to do their duty."[110] As the wife of the celebrated Arctic hero Francis Leopold McClintock, Annette McClintock may have felt some degree of kinship with Jane Franklin. Writing the exhibition booklet was certainly a project that echoed Lady Franklin's dedication to story-crafting. By writing it, Annette McClintock was taking an active role in shaping both the story and the message that the public was supposed to retain after seeing the Franklin artifacts. Her narrative would be one that promoted more than one type of heroism: when she wrote about "courage, discipline, and devotion to duty," she was not only talking about "strong men" and their "acts of daring," but about a "woman's faithful love" that encouraged those men's acts.[111] Therefore, it was not only young boys who stood to learn from the exhibition by thinking of how they may one day be called upon to serve their country (perhaps by becoming sailors themselves), but young women, who were encouraged to realize how they could serve their country at home. While Franklin's heroic band of men represented the ideal of British manliness, Lady Franklin was called the ideal role model for British womanhood: such a woman would have the courage to believe in victory when hope seemed gone, the patriotism to help her country through words and actions, and the duty to revere and uphold the good image not just of her husband, but of her nation and navy.

This was in many ways a continuation of the lesson that had been attached to the relics since their discovery, but the perceived value of the relics seemed, if anything, to

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[110] McClintock, *Story of the Franklin Search,* 3.
[111] Ibid.

have increased since the 1850s. When they first returned to England, Rae and McClintock's artifacts had seemed to be evidence that Franklin's men had been as glorious in their duties as explorers, and as the discoverers of the Northwest Passage, as the Navy ever had been in battle. But by 1891, the relics had the potential to be "worth *more* than the glory of scientific discovery, more even than the winning of battles."[112] Duty, heroism, and order were qualities that made Franklin's men worth remembering, this argument implied, but what made the Franklin story so enduring and so worthy of a prominent place in the exhibition, was the fact that there were any tangible remains at all. Battles could produce stories, memories, art or written accounts, but without artifacts, lacked any physical connection that could bring a visitor into almost bodily contact with the glorious dead. Scientific discovery was the same; many expeditions after Franklin had made geographic discoveries, and several vied for the claim to traversing the Northwest Passage, but what did they leave behind to bring their story to life? The expeditions of Rae, McClintock, or McClure could be represented in wax figures, but paradoxically, from beyond the grave, the Franklin expedition *lived* through its relics. And for this reason, they had a particular ability to tell a story or teach a lesson. An average visitor could neither go to the Arctic nor meet the dead, but they conjure up ghosts of the expedition by sharing a space with objects that had once shared space with Arctic heroes.[113]

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[112] Ibid.
[113] See Heather Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance: Ghosts of the Franklin Expedition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Chapter 4

Displaying the Wooden Walls of Old England:

HMS *Foudroyant*, 1892-1897

In June 1897, a "tragic figure" appeared on the shore at Blackpool, Lancashire, on the northwest coast of England. A sailing ship, over 100 years old, lay on its side, battered and marked with graffiti. The vessel was the HMS *Foudroyant,* a third-rate of 80 guns, which had until recently been sailing between British ports as a museum and monument dedicated to its onetime flag admiral, Horatio Lord Nelson. Now, after a historic gale, the wrecked vessel was overrun with curious crowds, looters, and individuals armed with axes in hopes of making souvenirs of bits of the ship's timber. One daring businessman had snuck upon the wreck in the night, attempting to capitalize on the ship's heroic fame, and painted a bastardization of Nelson's most famous signal on the hull, "England Expects that Every Man Will Do his Duty and Take Beecham's Pills."[1] So much was the damage that the *Foudroyant*'s exasperated owner and exhibit director wrote to the London *Times*, declaring that if this was how England treated its relics of past naval heroism, the nation should then refrain from such "displays of cheap and showy patriotism" as the annual decoration of Trafalgar Square on October 21.[2]

But how did this strange sight, an antique ship, restored, wrecked, and then defaced on the shore of a tourist town, come to be? The *Foudroyant*'s very exhibition as a museum ship in itself was unusual, as it appears to have been the first British line-of-battle ship exhibited as a floating museum. The SS *Great Eastern* was a familiar show

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[1] *Times,* August 2, 1897.
[2] *Times,* August 28, 1897.

ship and floating music hall, and the prison ship *Success* appeared under the guise of an Australian convict ship as an exhibition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[3] But, years before the restoration of the *Victory*, a warship-turned-museum was something new. The exhibition of one of Lord Nelson's historic flagships was appropriately timed, as the Trafalgar centennial was approaching. But the story of the *Foudroyant* reflects more than a commemoration of a battle's 100-year anniversary.

The late nineteenth century was a time of increased public anxiety about naval matters, as Britain faced a series of war scares, and found itself engaged in naval arms races against increasingly-imperialistic Russia and Germany. The technological advances of this era, and the grand naval displays and fleet reviews that accompanied them, have been well documented as indications of increased pride in the modern fleet.[4] However, the nostalgic characteristics of naval celebration in this era have been given less attention. Victorian Britain was increasingly concerned with the things people considered to be their national heritage, questioning the future of historic places and using glorified memories of the past to pass value judgments on the present. By the turn of the century, Britain was *also* forced to question whether its steel, iron, and steam navy could live up to the glorious legends of the sailing navy of past generations. In this climate of anxiety, the *Foudroyant* represented an attempt to use the past as a teaching tool for promoting supposedly traditional values to young Britons, particularly boys. More than a commemorative monument to Lord Nelson, its restoration reflected a contemporary dialogue on how to define patriotism, masculinity, and heritage at the turn of the century, and its exhibition was an explicit attempt to groom modern boys in perceived old-time

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[3] *Mariner's Mirror* 1, no. 9 (September 1911): 254 and vol. 1, no. 10 (October 1911): 318.
[4] Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

values. The ship was intended to be a space where young Britons could learn about traditional skills and masculine traits, and to learn about a heritage-based form of patriotism, in a time when patriotism and heritage were thought to never have been more important.

Lighting German Fires

The *Foudroyant* made an unexpected entrance onto the public stage in 1892, when its name appeared on a list of vessels that the Admiralty intended to sell for scrap. The ship was not alone in its fate; in the 1890s, war with Germany seemed imminent, and the admiralty reported that between 1892 and 1893 it had no fewer than 20 "obsolete vessels" that needed to be cleared away to make space for more modern ships.[5] Some obsolete vessels were decidedly beyond repair, while others like the *Foudroyant* had been serving dockside purposes as training schools. But, in view of the great naval improvements quickly progressing in Germany, modernity was the rule of the day, and even functioning school ships made it to the proverbial chopping block if they were deemed unhelpful to the teaching of modern warfare. After all, the government worried, how could Britain stand up to its rivals if its sailors were being trained on antiquated vessels with obsolete guns, and were sent to serve on ships that were not new enough to fulfill the needs of modern defense?[6] Berths needed to be opened for more state-of-the-art ships.

But Britain in the 1890s was a place ripe for nostalgic patriotism, as the growing popularity of heritage sites and excursions to the supposedly unspoiled countryside called

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[5] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates,* 4th ser., vol. 11 (1893), col. 437.
[6] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates,* 3rd ser., vol. 354 (1891), cols. 661-709.

the aesthetic and moral qualities of the present into question.[7] Despite the admiralty's well-founded call for modernization in the face of potentially devastating warfare, the public press could not resist the appeal of a newly-rediscovered historic monument. The admiralty lists of ships to be sold did not receive widespread attention themselves, but the letters of several concerned citizens devoted to the notion of heritage, written after the sale was finalized, caused the news to spread rapidly. The letter that captured public attention was written in September 1892 by Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb, the outspoken son of a Welsh philanthropist who was himself well known in the preservation world for his work in restoring ancient castles and churches. After appealing directly, and unsuccessfully, to the admiralty to reconsider selling the *Foudroyant* and other ships of similar age—after all, he thought, there were other training ships in worse states of decay that did not have such "glorious" connections with the age of Nelson, and could easily be sold instead—Cobb wrote an impassioned letter to the *Times.*[8]

He alerted readers that not only was the Admiralty selling one of the few surviving records from the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, but the nation was about to lose one of only two extant ships to have carried Lord Nelson's flag. The *Foudroyant* had been present at famous moments in British naval history, including the suppression of a revolutionary uprising in Naples (during which, "but for the presence of Nelson and the *Foudroyant*, Maria Caroline would have shared the fate of Marie Antoinette"), and was more commonly remembered as the ship that pursued and captured

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[7] Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
[8] *Times*, January 7, 1892, and September 2, 1892.

the *Guillaume Tell* after the celebrated Battle of the Nile.[9] The ship's potential to be preserved as the "most eloquent of all monuments of our greatest hero" was enough to make the sale a "national misfortune," but worse was the manner of the sale. Reportedly for £1,000 pounds, which Cobb and other letter-writers considered to be a paltry sum (and was in fact about half of the real number), the Admiralty had sold the *Foudroyant* to a German ship breaking firm. Even if the intention was to clear berths and procure cash to build the most advanced and awe-inspiring modern ships, the public perception was that Britain had sold a reminder of its past naval glories to its most dangerous naval rival, "to be broken up and used . . . to light German fires." Cobb wrote this fantastic statement in his initial letter in September, and subsequent writers quickly picked up the same rhetoric, assuming that this incendiary fate was in fact the one that had been intended when the sale was transacted.[10]

A few days later G. R. Dunell, a scholar of naval architecture, replied in the *Times,* asserting that there was not enough time to ask the government for official monetary aid, since "before the money could be secured, the last of the *Foudroyant* would have smouldered out on a German hearth."[11] Like many others who wrote letters at the same time, however, he believed that aid could be found through public subscription; one optimistic yachtsman declared that it "would not take many days to collect one shilling from 150,000 Englishmen" and British schoolboys, and to buy the ship back from Germany. This writer, a Mr. Northall-Laurie, was certain that public nostalgia was strong enough that anyone with a spare shilling would easily part with it to

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[9] *The Field*, May 16, 1896, reprinted in Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb, *Nelson's Foudroyant: A Defence* (Portsmouth: Charpentier & Co., Naval Printers, 1898), 39.
[10] *Times,* September 2, 1892.
[11] *Times*, September 5, 1892.

save one of the navy's "grand old wooden walls."[12] But Cobb, ever the pessimist, was certain that patriotism was so debased in Britain that some "enterprising" and "patriotic" individual would have to front the money to save the nation's glory himself. It was not hard to guess whom he believed that individual would, and should be.

Even if Cobb was worried that collective patriotism, at least in the form of putting one's money where one's patriotic mouth was, was lacking, he had no doubt that the *Foudroyant* would make "the most paying of exhibitions," with which to teach good British values.[13] He and other letter-writers noted that in the preceding years, Britain had "witnessed a remarkable revival of interest in naval affairs and naval history and antiquities, and especially in Nelson as the supreme embodiment of the genius which made and maintained the greatness and glory of Britain."[14] As the son of a preservationist, Cobb perhaps had a close-up understanding of this revival, in terms of the numerous preservation societies and state funds that increasingly maintained historic buildings and other sites as places for public visitation. He and others were genuinely shocked that if there was a Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings, and if "large sums are annually devoted to keeping up historic castles or other monuments of land battles," there was nothing similar for the preservation of famous line-of-battle ships.[15] But even in the absence of such a society, he and anyone else who had grown up with access to a seaport could not help but notice that a form of nostalgia for naval matters, mirroring that for ancient buildings, was on the rise as well.

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[12] Ibid.
[13] *Times,* September 2, 1892.
[14] Cobb, *Nelson's Foudroyant: A Defence*, 11.
[15] *Times,* January 2, 1892, and September 5, 1892.

Nostalgia in the Era of Navalism

When the *Foudroyant* was rediscovered in 1892, Britain was in the midst of a cultural transformation, in regards to the ways in which the navy was represented and commemorated. The 1890s were part of a "navalist" era, when Britain's long-held naval supremacy was threatened by the growth of other navies with imperial ambitions, most notably Russia and Germany. Facing this threat, the Royal Navy, Parliament, and the royal family itself sought to increase national pride in the navy through grand celebrations.[16] With Queen Victoria's Jubilee naval reviews in 1887 and 1897, spectacular launch celebrations for state-of-the-art ships, and an unprecedented naval exhibition at Chelsea in 1891, admiration for the navy's "glorious" history and modern technological prowess became an institutionalized affair. The admiralty was candid about its intent to use spectacle to boost patriotism—First Lord George Hamilton expressed certainty that the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition would be a "great success and [increase] the popularity of the Navy, and largely [add] to the funds of the excellent charities associated with the service."[17] The Prince of Wales, as the exhibition's patron, asserted that, "though our Navy is popular . . . anything to make it more popular is our bounden duty."[18] And, lest there be any risk that visitors would fail to take in the message, the exhibition's main entrance was inscribed with the words, "IT IS ON THE NAVY, UNDER THE GOOD PROVIDENCE OF GOD, THAT OUR WEALTH, PROSPERITY, AND PEACE DEPEND."[19]

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[16] Rüger, *The Great Naval Game.*
[17] *Times*, February 6, 1891.
[18] Ibid.
[19] *Royal Naval Exhibition 1891: The Illustrated Handbook and Souvenir* (London: Pall Mall Gazette, 1891), 4.

The 1891 exhibition was decidedly a success for the navalist agenda, and one that was often highlighted by *Foudroyant's* supporters as proof that naval heritage was an important facet of British culture, and "a living thing in this country."[20] It lasted from May to August, and drew thousands of visitors every week, for an estimated total of 2,351,683 people.[21] The exhibition featured numerous large galleries, art and artifacts from famous battles and exploration missions, models of naval architecture, modern gunnery displays, and maneuvers performed in miniature on water. Visitors could watch diving demonstrations in transparent tanks, see drills performed, and hear music from military bands.[22] But the most popular attraction, the news reported, was a full-scale replica of the HMS *Victory*. As the real article was being used as a school of telegraphy at the time, the exhibition ordered a replica to be built and outfitted to look as it might have on the day of Trafalgar. As impressive as the modern technology on display may have been, the British public in some ways preferred to look at the Navy's past. It did not matter if the history presented at the exhibition was even completely accurate—one newspaper reported that the Nelson galleries had enough furniture with supposed *Victory* provenance to outfit the admiral's cabin several times over—the memory of Nelson and past heroism, fabricated or otherwise, was a popular draw.[23]

While attempting to drum up support for the modern navy, the Royal Naval Exhibition played into a popular nostalgia for the sailing navy. In a time when the threat of war with Germany was ever-present, it was patriotic to love the modern navy, but at

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[20] *Times*, September 5, 1892
[21] *Times,* October 26, 1891.
[22] *Royal Naval Exhibition 1891; Royal Naval Exhibition 1891: Official Daily Program* (W.P Griffith & Sons, Monday, August 17, 1891), VHM 12, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK.
[23] *Times,* May 22, 1891.

the same time it was part of British "heritage" to speak fondly of the glory, the heroism, and the masculinity of bygone times. Naval officers of the past were often portrayed in biographies or literature as paragons of virtues that Victorians considered masculine: patriotism, duty, courage, devotion to one's family, and even faith in providence.[24] Images and stories depicting Nelson's navy claimed to show what greatness the navy had once known, and could know again if modern boys and men imitated their example. An 1894 painting by Thomas Davidson, titled *England's Pride and Glory,* demonstrates this sentiment. In Davidson's scene, a mother stands with her son, who is a naval cadet, in the Naval Gallery at Greenwich, admiring paintings of Lord Nelson and famous battles. The boy stares enraptured at a portrait of Nelson, while the mother speaks to him as if to say that Nelson was the role model whom he should seek to emulate.[25] Showcasing both past and present, navalist spectacles left visitors astounded, but feeling like something had been lost in the transition from sail to steam. What supposedly had been lost was not only aesthetic merit—a steamship certainly did not conjure the same sublime romanticism as a battle ship under sail—but the old masculinity of sailors, as well. While sailors had once been depicted as rowdy, vulgar "Jack Tars," Victorian people doubted that Britain's security and empire could have been won by such a group of unappealing characters, and instead depicted sailors as ideal examples of masculinity for the common man (officers remained the example for the upper levels of society). Nelson's sailors were depicted as "gallant," hardworking, honest, self-sacrificing, and of course patriotic. One magazine even suggested that they were reminiscent of a time when Britain was more content, and

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[24] C. I. Hamilton, "Naval Hagiography and the Victorian Hero," *The Historical Journal* vol. 23, no. 2 (June 1980): 381-98.
[25] Thomas Davidson, *England's Pride and Glory*, 1894, oil on canvas, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK.

men of all classes were happy to go into battle together: while Nelson is known to have called his officers his "band of brothers," in a Shakespearean turn of phrase *The Sketch* made Nelson look even more egalitarian, and spoke of "Nelson and his merrie men."[26]

Discussions of navalist spectacles fed into this discussion of sailors' olden-time masculinity: an article published in relation to the 1887 Jubilee fleet review conceded that warfare had been more brutal before modern technology, but admired Britain's "brave ancestors, whose manhood was abundantly proved in those fierce encounters" of warfare fought on wooden ships.[27] And as much as the technology at the 1891 exhibition may have left visitors feeling reassured that Britain could still win a sea fight, and could be victorious in any future war with Germany, there was still worry as to whether the sailors would be as gallant as they once were. Some asserted that it was not men's fault that sailors were not as visibly masculine as they supposedly were in Nelson's day—it was the modern world that had emasculated them. One reviewer saw the modern vessels on display, and then viewed the gallery of model ships, and concluded that "the two large and handsome models of the *Queen* and *Vanguard*, the latter under full sail, indicate clearly enough how the pride of the seaman in his skill at handling a ship has been abased."[28] Another, assuming the mind-set of a sailor "of the old school," lamented that modern sailors would never fully understand that such a form of masculinity was even possible: "What can the pleasure of holding a certificate in gunnery or torpedoes be . . . compared with that of yoking and controlling the winds on the stormy seas, where manly

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[26] *The Sketch: A Journal of Art and Actuality*, July 1, 1896, 397, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 207, Special Collections, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, UK.
[27] *The Illustrated London News,* July 30, 1887.
[28] *Times,* June 20, 1891.

qualities and not the recollection of formulae brought distinction."[29] The indication was never that the modern navy was inadequate to the task of fighting the German navy, or that the Royal Navy should revert to its historical naval architecture, but rather that some vocal Britons feared how their country would keep up the masculinity its navy had once known in a world that supposedly no longer allowed for it.

It was into this context that the *Foudroyant* appeared in 1892. In January of that year, attempting to ride the wave of naval interest generated by the recent exhibition, Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb wrote to the *Times* with the first suggestion of saving "Old Ships of War." Here was an opportunity, he said, to save not only the *Foudroyant* but other ships of similar age that were listed or at risk of being sold out of service, including the *Excellent*, *Canopus*, and *Implacable*. They were among Britain's "few remaining wooden walls," which had protected the nation from a French invasion and solidified British supremacy at sea.[30] The latter two ships had been prizes captured from the French fleet and transferred into service to fight against it, a firm reminder of what that naval supremacy could do. They would be spectacular monuments through which to teach visitors about past glories and past virtues. Cobb took a preservationist's approach, perhaps trying to echo his father's success with ancient buildings. Since there was no existing preservation society for any sort of sea-going vessel (the National Trust's Memorandum of Association would include the potential for acquiring and preserving "boats," but not until several years later, in 1895), Cobb hoped that an existing society

[29] Ibid.
[30] *Times,* January 7, 1892.

might be willing to expand its reach.[31] "A sailing three-decker is as much a relic of a past age as a mediaeval castle," he said, "and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings might do worse than extend its operations to ships such as the *Excellent* and *Foudroyant,* the *Impregnable* and *Royal Adelaide*, and endeavour to preserve them from wanton destruction." Although it is unclear whether Cobb ever appealed directly to the Society, he did go so far as to publically suggest another exhibition, a permanent floating museum where wooden war ships of many types would be brought together and join the *Victory* in Portsmouth harbor. Not only would such a museum be aesthetically interesting to maritime artists and "student[s] of naval archaeology," it would supposedly be inherently appealing to the character of British men. Cobb believed that there was not "a single Englishman or boy to whom it would not appeal irresistibly."[32]

Our Nelson's Ship

The January letter was not immediately successful, perhaps because the language was not as incendiary as later images of British glory burning out on German hearths, but it did set the stage for public outrage later that year. Once it became clear that the *Foudroyant* really had been sold, and had been already towed to Germany, newspapers and magazines exploded with letters, public subscription campaigns, history lessons, anecdotes and poetry related to the unfortunate ship. The history of the *Foudroyant* was generally spun as the most glorious time, illustrating the most glorious deeds in British history. It was implied that by contrast the present was not so glorious, but if Britons

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[31] Memorandum of Association, 1895, National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, BT/6077/43007, National Archives of the UK, London, UK.
[32] *Times,* January 7, 1892.

could come together to buy back the *Foudroyant* and preserve it, the nation might regain some of its virtue. In a section satirizing yet supporting the nineteenth-century preservation movement as a whole, *Punch* purported to receive letters from 100 years in the future, when British people were supposedly scrambling to save such mundane Victorian things as a "penny lift" steamboat that had once carried Parliament members to seemingly useless assemblies. The future-letter claimed to take inspiration from the *Foudroyant* affair; the joke was that future generations would be hard-pressed to find anything from the Victorian era worth saving, so it was all the more important to preserve relics of a more glorious time.[33]

Yachtsmen, naval officers, historians, private citizens, and poets chimed in. Most famously, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle lent his pen to the *Foudroyant*'s defense. Portraying the admiralty as hawkers and petty salesmen, he quipped that, "if coal and cotton fail at last/ We've something left to barter yet—our glorious past!" After listing numerous other sites that he thought may as well be sold if heritage were up for sale—King Alfred's tomb, Shakespeare's home, the Tower of London, among others—Conan Doyle set out how he believed a true Briton should feel:

You hucksters, have you still to learn
The things that money will not buy?
Can you not read that, cold and stern
As we may be, there still does lie
Deep in our hearts a hungry love
For what concerns our island story?
We sell our work—perchance our lives—
But not our glory.

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[33] *Punch*, October 8, 1892, 161.

Doyle's ideal British man was hardworking, patriotic, devoted and courageous. And so much did he believe that these things were represented by the *Foudroyant* itself, that he left readers with a rallying cry: "But when you touch the Nation's store, / Be broad your mind and tight your grip. / Take heed! And bring us back once more / Our Nelson's ship."[34]

The poem became a reference point for future letters and articles. In response, *Punch* published a stirring cartoon, and a new satirical poem along the lines of Conan Doyle's. In the cartoon, which evokes Turner's painting of the "fighting" *Temeraire* being towed away to destruction in 1838, a tug called the "Huckster" tows the "fighting" *Foudroyant* to Germany, while the setting sun, labeled "patriotism," sinks in the background. Britannia mourns in the foreground, having turned her trident into an ironic sign reading, "VICTORY. HERO. GLORY. FOR SALE." The poem echoes Doyle, telling readers not to say, "like the fish-hucksters, '*Memories* are cheap, sir, to-day!'" and asks that they demand the *Foudroyant'*s return. The issue is not just patriotism, however: the sale has made England look weak and unmanly. Morals and courage seemingly have failed, and "The Frenchman, the Don, / The Dutchman, all foes we have licked, may wax bold / When they hear that the brave old *Foudroyant* is—Sold!" Like the nostalgic viewers of the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition, who feared that the modern world had destroyed the manliness of sailors, the anonymous poet feared that greed had destroyed the imagined hardworking, honest man of Nelson's day. "We're no more like Nelson

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[34] *Illustrated London News,* September 17, 1892. The original poem, published in *The Daily Chronicle* on September 12, 1892, included a final stanza arguing that if the ship couldn't be preserved, it would be better to give it the *Foudroyant* a ceremonial burial at sea than to sell her, but as preservation was so popular, the *Times* omitted this.

than I to a merman," the poet proclaimed, and so it was to him disappointing but not surprising that England would sell a ship to Germans.[35]

Public sentiment in the press was generally enthusiastic, apart from a few letters worrying that the *Foudroyant* was too connected with the time when Nelson was beginning his famous affair with Lady Hamilton. Those letters too spoke to the issue of modern morality, complaining that an affair was not the behavior of a modern gentleman and that the nation would want to forget that period of Nelson's life.[36] Another complaint was that Nelson was too brutal in the execution of revolutionary conspirators in Naples while in command on the *Foudroyant,* thus for modern sensibilities that period should be forgotten as well.[37] In this, certain letter-writers (some of whom were admirals and naval historians) implicitly admitted that their construction of a hero was based on an altered narrative of how moral the past truly was, but did not let that get in the way of the notion that Nelson was a hero to be emulated in all other ways. Some suggested it would be better to just preserve the *Victory*, and not let the *Foudroyant* distract from *that* ship's glory. To this, Cobb replied again from a preservationist's standpoint, saying that one preserved relic does not distract from another: on that logic, one should "sell Westminster Hall as old material to the Germans because it disturbed the public sentiment surrounding the Abbey."[38]

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[35] *Punch,* September 24, 1892, 134-35.
[36] *Times,* September 29, 1892.
[37] *Times*, September 26, 1892.
[38] Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb to the editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, September 24, 1892, reprinted in *Defence,* 24.

Planning for Exhibition

The idea of saving the *Foudroyant* by public subscription was an attractive one in September 1892, but by October it was clear that not enough money could be raised in such a short time, and a private individual would need to front the cash. That job fell to Joseph Richard Cobb, the preservationist father of the letter-writing son. Joseph Richard was not as outspoken in the press, as he admitted that he was not as knowledgeable in naval matters as Geoffrey Wheatly, but others described him as an energetic person who dedicated himself thoroughly to any study or project he undertook.[39] Someone who clearly took great pride in getting historical details correct, he saw ownership of the *Foudroyant* as an opportunity to faithfully restore it to its original appearance and then present it "to a grateful nation," as was the standard procedure with historic buildings.[40] On the symbolically chosen October 21, Trafalgar Day, he signed a contract wherein for £5,700, he and his associate F. André would buy the *Foudroyant* back from William Kunstmann of Swinemünde, Germany.[41]

How André became involved in the process is unclear, as he and Joseph Richard Cobb were previously unacquainted. And although Cobb claimed that they were "amicable," the two men appear to have butted heads on nearly everything. Cobb struggled to understand how he was to become a joint owner. He and André were by the contract owners of one moiety each, but he feared that if he did not better solidify his ownership of the ship through more legal action, André (who was more versed in forming

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[39] "Death of J. R. Cobb, esq.," Newspaper Clipping, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Special Collections, Box 207, Teesside University.
[40] Joseph Richard Cobb to Mssrs. Blyth, Dutton and Co., November 22, 1892, HMS *Foudroyant*: Papers Re. Her Sale and Possible Exhibition, 1892, MS81/110, Caird Library.
[41] Memorandum of Agreement, HMS *Foudroyant*: Papers Re. Her Sale and Possible Exhibition, 1892, MS81/110, Caird Library.

a company) would get to decide everything without his consent. André's attempt to dominate the partnership is clear. The terms of landing and exhibiting the *Foudroyant* on the Thames appear to have been drawn up by him alone, with Cobb's name added in pen sometime after the terms were printed. In a private letter, Cobb also wrote how André had essentially told him that if he did not "have his way, I must buy him out, or he offers as soon as the company is formed to buy me out."[42] The argument hung on notions of what was a proper way to responsibly exhibit a historic relic like the *Foudroyant*. For Cobb, that meant enlisting the help of an organization like the Royal United Service Institution, or perhaps the Navy League, and faithfully restoring it to its original state, with the intention of educating British boys and the public at large. André appeared to be everything that Cobb feared, however: a showman, who wished to market the ship as a form of entertainment. As for accuracy, the original plans suggested only to repair the *Foudroyant* to create the "appearance" of a ship in action. That suggestion was crossed out and changed to say that the ship would be, as nearly as possible, restored to its "original state when on active service" when Cobb's name was added to the paperwork.[43]

Joseph Richard Cobb faced a dilemma. For preservation, he needed to form a company, and André seemingly had experience in forming them. However, André wanted to turn *Foudroyant* into a "restaurant and Barnum affair"—a sideshow.[44] Having seen show ships in their time, such as Brunel's famous *Great Eastern,* that was most

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[42] Joseph Richard Cobb to Mssrs. Blyth, Dutton and Co., November 22, 1892, HMS *Foudroyant*: Papers Re. Her Sale and Possible Exhibition, 1892, MS81/110, Caird Library.
[43] "The Centenary of Foudroyant," HMS *Foudroyant*: Papers Re. Her Sale and Possible Exhibition, 1892, MS81/110, Caird Library.
[44] Ibid.

specifically *not* the sort of atmosphere the Cobbs wished to create.[45] Given the *Foudroyant's* history, Joseph Richard Cobb did not want "to be one of two to bring the ship over here to make her a bawdy show."[46] Both men knew that the ship ought to make money through exhibition, but disagreed on the reasoning. Cobb needed a money-generating exhibition to pay for education and maintenance, while André wanted to create an attraction for profit.

The original plans for exhibition represent a compromise between the ideas of an educational museum and an entertaining one. The plan was to create a "Centennial" exhibition, explicitly imitating the style of 1891. Once a site was chosen on the Thames, and a company formed, Cobb, André, and their associates would apply for permits to have "refreshments on board, to have music dancing, and theatricals or variety entertainments." There were to be "amusements" including fireworks, performances, and ingenious hydraulic lifts to transport people between shore and the ship. All of this was not unheard of; certainly the 1891 exhibition was also meant to be entertaining as well as educational, and certain preserved stately homes promoted amusements on their grounds.[47] Visitors, after all, would be more numerous if people were sure to enjoy their excursion. However, it was not all that Cobb hoped the *Foudroyant* would stand for. More to his liking, the "Centenary of Foudroyant" exhibition would have an exhibition of relics between decks, showcasing the "science and art" of Nelson's era, and representing the "memorable feats of his command" along with the greater history of the Napoleonic

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[45] Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb to Joseph Richard Cobb, May 11, 1897, reprinted in *Defence,* 42.
[46] Joseph Richard Cobb to Mssrs. Blyth, Dutton and Co., November 22, 1892, HMS *Foudroyant*: Papers Re. Her Sale and Possible Exhibition, 1892, MS81/110, Caird Library.
[47] Aston Hall was a famous example of a heritage site that was saved by public efforts, and hosted "Olden Time Miscellany" and entertainment on the grounds. See Mandler, 98-100.

Wars. All of this was to be surrounded by the "warlike trappings" of the *Foudroyant*'s time on active service, as it was to be repainted, supplied with cannons, and hung with sailors' hammocks as it might have been in Nelson's day. To give the idea that this glory of the past could live on in the people and the navy of the present, the ship would have a crew of naval pensioners, ideally drawn from men who had trained or served on the *Foudroyant* before it was decommissioned. The modern navy was also invited to help with the exhibition. The plan hoped that restoration material including masts and rope would be drawn from British dockyards, along with flags and bunting that would be borrowed from the navy.[48]

The original plan was exceedingly optimistic about a proposed timeline, thinking that the exhibition could begin in April 1893.[49] The planners also hoped that their proposal would appear so elegant as to receive royal patronage, as in the case of the 1891 exhibition. This turned out to be overly ambitious, however, and due to years of legal battles the grand exhibition never came to fruition. In 1894, a company was formed for the purpose of restoration, refitting, and exhibiting the *Foudroyant* in a way that did away with all the trappings of a "Barnum affair." Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb directed the company, along with other gentlemen including several army and navy officers, and the imperial travel writer Sir Frederick Young. The company, Nelson's Battleship Foudroyant, Limited, intended to restore the ship "as nearly as possible to her original condition," and travel as a floating museum to Manchester, Liverpool, the Isle of Man, Glasgow, Newcastle, Hull, Cardiff Bristol, Belfast, Dublin, Cork, London, and "to the

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[48] "The Centenary of Foudroyant," HMS *Foudroyant*: papers re. her sale and possible exhibition, 1892, MS81/110, Caird Library.

[49] The *Foudroyant* would of course not be quite 100 years old yet in 1893, so the term centennial would be vague and apply to the entirety of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

various colonies." There was also a plan to sail to the United States. In this plan the company took on truly British, transatlantic, and imperial connotations, planning to bring the *Foudroyant*'s message to all of Britain's kingdoms, as well as its colonies, attempting to unite all of Britain's citizens and subjects under a common history, and bringing British values across the globe. Sir Frederick Young was intent on using the ship to inspire patriotism through the empire, hoping to create an imagined community wherein people who had never been to England, and whose colonial status was in fact a result of the Royal Navy's prowess, somehow felt that they were part of a single people. The *Foudroyant* would tell colonial subjects that they too shared in the "memories of [Britain's] great and glorious past," suggesting that they would be considered truly British, and not colonized subjects, if they emulated British manly values.[50]

The sailing tour was to kick off with a grand exhibition at Manchester, where attractions would include representations of famous naval battles, paintings and drawings, "working models of ships and guns, exercises in gun and sail drill, and illustrations of the naval life and warfare of a century ago." The company noted that in Manchester, the exhibition would be in "the midst of the working classes" and "within reach of upwards of seven and a half millions of people who have the keenest appreciation of everything appertaining to the Navy, both past and present." The choice of working class people as ideal visitors revealed the intended audience and message of the exhibition: the manly image of the hardworking, patriotic sailor was seemingly considered an ideal role model for common folk who supposedly loved to see the navy in action. The company reported that the Channel Fleet's visit to Liverpool that summer had drawn 60,000 visitors in three

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[50] *Times,* May 21, 1894.

days, and suspected that these industrious northerners would have "much greater enthusiasm" for a "real Nelson flagship."[51]

Nelson's Battleship Foudroyant, Limited, however, lasted less than a year, being wound up in the middle of 1895 after difficulties with the workers who were contracted to carry out repairs, and delays in the transfer of funds.[52] The work of finalizing the restoration fell to Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb. As he managed the *Foudroyant* in the final years of his father's life, Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb routinely complained in public papers that no other "patriotic person" came forward with a large sum of money to help, but his letters suggest that he was actually happy to undertake the project, and feared that no one would be as responsible with the task as he believed that he alone could be. Although he doubtlessly knew that companies or trusts were increasingly necessary to preservation schemes in the 1890s (by this point, the National Trust had been founded, out of the realization that private efforts simply were not sufficient) he was seemingly reluctant to try forming an association for the *Foudroyant* ever again. He rather hoped that some other person would come forth with a large donation, or that an existing charity would take on the job. Much less even-tempered than his father reportedly was, he routinely lampooned the Navy League for not volunteering to be that charity. He referred to all the League's written support for the *Foudroyant* "empty words," indifferent to the fact that the Navy League did not have the expertise or funds set aside for preservation.[53] Apparently disillusioned with everything that had gone wrong since 1892, he engaged in frequent arguments in the press with people who still worried that the *Foudroyant* would

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[51] *Times,* July 17, 1894.
[52] Winding Up Documents, Nelson's Foudroyant, Limited, 1895, J 13/1226, National Archives of the UK; *Times,* September 14, 1895.
[53] Cobb, *Defence,* 9

be only a show piece, and verbally eviscerated anyone who found the least fault with his restoration, stating that if they truly felt patriotically about the *Foudroyant,* their monetary donations would be forthcoming.[54]

The Capacity for Heroism

Seeming to believe that he and his father were the only guardians of patriotism left in Britain, Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb set out to truly make the *Foudroyant* a monument to lost skills and masculinity, still hoping to have a floating museum that would teach those values that Englishmen supposedly now lacked. By 1896, the work was finally complete, and the *Foudroyant* looked as Cobb believed it originally had, with masts and rigging that had formerly been used on other Royal Navy ships, the hull painted in the familiar yellow and black associated with Nelson, and the interior painted "blood red."[55] The interior was outfitted as it may have been in the 1790s, but also contained Cobb's personal collection of Nelson relics on display.

Cobb argued that while the *Victory* was at that time a much-altered school ship, Nelson would at once recognize his "dear *Foudroyant*."[56] Having completed this restoration so that men of the past would recognize it, were they to come forward in time, he set out to display it as a place that could inspire men and boys to be the kind of people that Nelson would also supposedly recognize as his countrymen. Forming a crew of naval veterans as well as boys, Cobb planned to take the *Foudroyant* on a tour around British ports to "remind Englishmen of what their fleet had done for them, and might be called

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[54] *Times,* April 14, 1896; *Western Morning News*, April 18, 1896; *The Builder*, July 25, 1896.
[55] *The Army and Navy Gazette,* April 18, 1896, reprinted in *Defence,* 38.
[56] *Times,* April 14, 1896.

on to do again."[57] Despite his argumentative letters, Cobb did have supporters who believed in the ship's teaching potential. One supporter was Sir Frederick Young, at one time a member of the company, who wrote that the *Foudroyant* would be a great moral teacher at a time "when, in order to maintain supremacy at sea, the supremely vital question of providing an adequate naval force is being so imperatively demanded." Boys could come aboard and learn about how "gallant sailors" and "illustrious commanders . . . fought and died for the honor of their country."[58] Through the *Foudroyant*, men of the past could serve as role models for men of the present. Perhaps it would inspire modern cadets to embody the spirit of Nelson, as in Davidson's 1894 painting, or encourage young men of the "right" character to "do their duty" and join the navy themselves. This sentiment could be portrayed by seeing the crew at work on board, or simply by viewing the ship on the water. An account of the HMS *Majestic* at sea in early August 1896 includes an anecdote wherein the crew of the *Majestic*, having just fired a Royal salute to the Channel Fleet near Spithead, saw the *Foudroyant* being towed toward Cowes "at no great distance." The writer declared that, "no greater contrast could be imagined, and perhaps never in the whole history of the British Navy will exactly the like of it be seen again. It points to its own moral, and I need not dwell on it further . . . It was as if the ghost of the past had risen to survey the present and acknowledge a majesty and splendour so different in appearance and yet so identical in reality with its own."[59] The writer did not disparage modern technology, but believed in the value of using the past to judge the present. The ghosts of the old navy were watching, he argued, at least in the

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[57] Cobb, *Defence,* 10.
[58] *Times,* May 21, 1894.
[59] *Times,* August 4, 1896.

form of British anxiety about its naval future, and even if the navy had changed in appearance, it could still achieve glory if it emulated the men of the past.

Although the *Foudroyant* never sailed abroad or to as many ports as originally intended, Cobb maintained that he was creating the "capacity for heroism" among British people. His main hope for a rebirth of manly virtue was in the teenage boys working on board. They were working alongside a crew of modern navy veterans, participating in drills, learning the skills of traditional sailing among "masts and yards of snowy canvas . . . a vision of the heroic past," and were scheduled to be uniformed in the clothing of Nelson's day to complete the historical link with their work. Cobb was so infatuated with the idea of the *Foudroyant*'s ability to present this patriotic, masculine spectacle to the British public that he spoke almost erotically of it. He could think of no better historic monument, or a "better lesson in the hero-worship that breeds heroism," than one where young citizens could "stand in that spacious battery where Nelson, Berry, Hardy and Sidney Smith had walked . . . touch the massive beams which had trembled to the discharge of the treble-shotted broadsides that battered into submission the last uncaptured ship of the French Nile Fleet . . . [and] hear the strains of 'Hearts of Oak' or 'Rule Britannia' played by [the ship's band of trainees] roll down its splendid length."[60] Hero-worship was the explicit end-goal for Cobb's exhibition; in his view it was a responsible way to use history to influence the present, and something he felt was uniquely his duty to the country.

Cobb may have felt that duty and patriotism were the most essential and admirable qualities an Englishman could possess, and thought that he and his crew were

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[60] Cobb, *Defence,* 12.

on a mission to save patriotism in Britain, but did worry whether some visitors were missing the point. Some did praise the quality of his restoration work, and one visitor reportedly remarked that he felt as though he were visiting a cathedral. Cobb might have taken this as a compliment, since he once had said that a wooden ship was as much as treasure as an ancient building, and perhaps that is how the visitor intended the comment, but Cobb seemed to think it also meant that the *Foudroyant* came off as somber and foreboding. Perhaps the visitors who came at first were already interested in antiquities, partaking in the nostalgic preservation moment and marveling in sublime silence at a "cathedral-like" atmosphere, but Cobb did not wish to create only a temple. The historically-mined were not the only people he hoped would visit; he hoped to appeal to those that he felt were not already patriotic enough, who needed to see relics of past glories to understand what their modern character should be. He dourly remarked that perhaps the average person couldn't be convinced to care, and would think the *Foudroyant* was just a "tedious shame" because he had not included the "drinking bars, and variety entertainments, and comic songs" that André had wanted in those years before.[61] He wondered also if the British public was just historically obtuse, complaining that some visitors could not comprehend that the *Foudroyant* was a ship connected with Nelson, seeing as he did not die on board."[62] When at Blackpool in 1897, he complained that the people in the resort town preferred the carnival attractions in town to a visiting ship that they "should" have been grateful for: "they go up in their ridiculous tower and round their idiotic wheel, and like them better."[63]

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[61] Cobb, *Defence,* 8.
[62] Cobb, *Defence*, 43.
[63] Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb to Joseph Richard Cobb, June 11, 1897, reprinted in *Defence,* 43.

However, Cobb did echo the sentiment of his earlier company, and seemed to think that hope rested in the common people, especially those that partook in the popular activity of visiting heritage sites on a day trip. When a group of Sunday "trippers" came aboard, he felt that this humble group of people were much better-behaved than their social betters, and eagerly took in everything there was to see, including the boys' training drills and band performances.[64] The local newspaper also felt there was hope in the common masses. Reportedly, on the morning the *Foudroyant* arrived in the harbor, a crowd gathered in awe to see what this new vessel was, even if they did not go on board. The crowd was said to be ecstatic to find that their town would host a ship "of the olden time . . . A man o'war! One of the vessels which have made England great! One of the 'wooden walls of old England!'"[65] Although the quotes were probably paraphrased to describe the tone of the day, if not what was actually said, the report suggested that the narrative of nostalgic pride was strong enough to elicit such excitement at just the sight of " a Nelson flagship."

Cobb's comments on the Blackpool visitors were among the last impressions he was able to gain about the ship's success or failure as an "object lesson" for the public. The restored *Foudroyant*'s tour around Britain was cut short in June of 1897, when a historically powerful gale struck the west coast of England. The *Foudroyant* was one of many vessels that the storm caused to break from their moorings and be driven ashore.[66] After years of restoring the ship a first time, and learning the costs of restoration, Cobb found it infeasible to restore it a second time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he wrote to the

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[64] Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb to Joseph Richard Cobb, June 13, 1897, reprinted in *Defence,* 43.
[65] Unidentified Newspaper Clipping, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Special Collections, Box 207, Teesside University.
[66] *Times,* June 17, 1897.

newspapers to lament that the problem stemmed from lack of monetary support in the beginning: perhaps if more people had contributed by shares, subscriptions or donations at any point in the *Foudroyant*'s recent history, the ship would have been better secured, or it might have been in a different port at the time of the gale, or it might never have needed to come to a town with such a dangerous harbor to make money in the first place. But despite these cathartic outbursts, the tragic end of the *Foudroyant* presented a final opportunity to evaluate the ways in which Cobb thought of masculinity in relation to the ship, and the ways that Blackpool itself conceived of masculinity and the sea.

As the storm had approached, Cobb had made the reckless decision to stay on board with his crew and the boy trainees. Partially, he seemed to confidently believe that the *Foudroyant* was supplied with enough chain to hold it fast during any storm, but also he likely craved the sense of danger and adventure that came with being aboard a wooden war ship in foul weather. As someone obsessed with re-creating the manly skill and glory associated with the *Foudroyant'*s original years, the real threat of going down with one of Lord Nelson's ships was likely a thrilling though terrifying prospect. Watching from the shore, an observer did remark that the "brave sailors aboard seemed quite happy in their strange position."[67] It was not a decision that earned him much favor among the lifeboat-men of Blackpool, though, as it required those men to go out in the midst of the gale to rescue everyone on board. When back on land, Cobb immediately made bitter remarks to the newspaper about how "now she is wrecked everybody will come up to look at her. If only the people had come before, we might have saved it." But he also launched into praise for the crew and the boys of the ship, whom he claimed behaved as gallantly as

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[67] *Blackpool Gazette*, June [?], 1897, clipping in HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 207, Special Collections, Teesside University.

they could have. By his (possibly embellished) account, the boys too wanted to stay with the ship to the end, and spontaneously sang "The Death of Nelson" together as the storm reached the point where they truly thought they would not survive. Cobb spoke of the boys as if they were professional sailors by now: he told the newspaper how he hoped he could find maritime work for them, since "the worst of sailors is that they are not much at home at work on the shore."[68]

Having learned historical skills on board the *Foudroyant,* and having stayed with it to the end, the boys appeared to have earned the honor of being described in the same terms as the reformed Jack Tars and Greenwich Pensioners of old. Echoing these old stereotypes, Cobb described the work that the *Foudroyant* boys had performed as essential to the national character, and at the same time upheld the notion that a sailor is so much a part of his own work that he is not at home anywhere but at sea. Looking back on the incident later, Cobb returned to his belief that the *Foudroyant* was an object-lesson in the "hero-worship that breeds heroism." Recounting how the boys "sang unprompted the 'Death of Nelson,' while spars were falling round them and great sea were breaking over them, and the decks were being slowly ripped up beneath their feet," he noted how everything came together in a melancholy perfection at that moment. The ship's motto, "Remember Nelson," could be seen in brass letters over their heads as they sang, and nearby in the cabin there was a facsimile of Nelson's handwriting saying, "All hands behaved as you would have wished." Cobb concluded that if that was "not heroism, it at least showed that the capacity for heroism was not wanting." Still holding to the thought

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[68] Ibid.

that he alone was responsible for upholding Britain's morals through naval patriotism, he proudly doubted that the Navy League could "point to as practical a result."[69]

While Cobb praised the virtue of his crew, the Blackpool press itself praised the masculinity of its local lifeboat-men. As the *Foudroyant* was being tossed about in the storm, a crowd had gathered on shore to await its fate. In awe, they watched not only the "brave sailors" on board, but also the crew of the new *Samuel Fletcher*—the boat that was rowing out to save them. Some men were "weather-beaten sea dogs," a decidedly old stereotype, but others were the prime of Victorian manhood. They were "big fellows who looked picturesque in their yellow or black overalls, with sou-westers pulled tight over their heads, and cork life-belts strapped round their chests." The crowd supposedly cheered for these "gallant oarsmen" and the "eminently skillful manner in which [the boat] was being handled."[70] Although they were not navy men, they were members of a traditional profession in this harbor town, and their strength, courage, and skill were deemed worthy of praise. In the context, their virtues stood up against those of the men whose memories the *Foudroyant* evoked.

The end of the *Foudroyant* demonstrated how ideas of masculinity, the navy, and history were in dialogue at the end of the nineteenth century. Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb never seemed to come to a solid conclusion as to whether manly virtues were alive or dead in Britain, but his indecision is indicative of the anxiety that prevailed at the time. Cobb believed that, at least among the boys who served on the *Foudroyant,* he was re-kindling a kind of naval patriotism that was "traditional" and the moral heritage of

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[69] Cobb, *Defence*, 13.
[70] *Blackpool Gazette*, June [?], 1897, clipping in HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 207, Special Collections, Teesside University.

Britain. He thought that his methods of revering the navy's past, through close contact with a historical relic, were pure, while celebrations like illuminations on Trafalgar Day, or exhibitions with too much "entertainment" were cheap and had no moral or intellectual substance to them. He did not realize, however, that public celebrations, grand spectacles, and the faithful restoration of relics were all part of the same dialogue—one in which Britain struggled to reconcile its romantic-looking and supposedly more glorious naval past with its cold and technological naval present. While Cobb despised forms of historical commemoration that looked to him like a "show" instead of "real" patriotism, he too was participating in a performance, describing a specific form of masculinity that he hoped to present to the public, through his supposedly faithful re-creation (a form of performance) of an eighteenth-century war ship.

The nostalgic naval patriotism of the navalist era, whether it appeared in responses to the 1891 Naval Exhibition, in the preservation of relics, or literature and art that created role models out of historical people, was above all a response to anxiety about how Britons would fare in a modern world, faced with the prospect of a form of naval warfare that would be nothing like their history had prepared them to imagine. The idea of masculinity in the navy was bound up in larger anxieties about technology, imperial security, and the fear that the industrialized and businesslike Victorian generations had not created anything as worth remembering as their forebears. It was comforting for those who held these anxieties, being unsure of the merits of the present but knowing that the past could not be practically repeated, to think that people could embody the spirit of a "better" age while living their fully modern life; the image of the *Foudroyant* surveying the *Majestic* exemplified this intertwining of past and present,

wherein modern men were assured that through emulation they could achieve the moral, if not aesthetic glory of the past. The *Foudroyant* was but a brief installment in a larger national discussion of Britain's naval heritage, but its several-year resurrection provided a useful backdrop against which Victorian Britons could discuss its anxieties, and use the past to imagine their nation's future.

Chapter 5

Sea Sense:

Displaying *Implacable* and *Trincomalee* in the Twentieth Century

If the *Foudroyant*'s rise coincided with the growth of navalism in Britain, its downfall coincided with another, equally national naval phenomenon. As the new century approached, the country looked towards 1905 as a cultural milestone: one hundred years since Trafalgar, a century of uninterrupted naval supremacy. Holger Hoock and others have examined the many ways in which the memory of Trafalgar became a "national preoccupation," rekindling the spirit of wartime "victory culture" in the public sphere. Ships and monuments were illuminated, theaters staged celebratory productions, towns and cities held public spectacles, and, of course, shops abounded with Trafalgar memorabilia.[1] But the Trafalgar Centennial was not simply a time of commemoration. It was a call to action: the press, with its usual enthusiasm for casting naval heroes as models for modern morality, extolled all the ways that the days of Nelson ought to be mirrored in contemporary society. C. I. Hamilton has shown how Victorian Britain had turned the name of Nelson into a symbol for ideals of Christianity, political level-headedness, courage, and patriotism,[2] but by the turn of the century it also came to embody particularly imperial and global themes. Although the notion that Britons were uniquely suited to seapower and empire had developed in the eighteenth century,[3] the

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[1] Holger Hoock, ed., *History, Commemoration and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805-2005* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[2] See Chapter 1. See also C. I. Hamilton, "Naval Hagiography and the Victorian Hero," *The Historical Journal* vol. 23, no. 2 (June 1980): 381-98.
[3] Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2006).

idea still flourished at the turn of the twentieth. Nelson had become a patron saint of an island race, a nation that was fiercely proud of its empire, and believed itself destined to spread its benevolence by sea.

More than a nation that would lead the world by its great example, Britain found itself once again, as in the days of Nelson, as a force that could maintain a balance of power—not only in Europe, this time, but across the globe. The rapid pace of imperial competition between European nations, and the international spread of navalist thought, made it clear that any modern naval war could develop into a worldwide affair. Preparing the nation for such a war, then, depended not only on a stable definition of the "appropriate" character of British men, but an understanding of how character and skill should be both demonstrated and perceived, at home and abroad.

In this climate of speculation about Britain's emerging role in the new century, and about how British character might still be defined by the character of its sailors, naval heritage remained an essential indicator of national character. As in the case of 1891, Britain looked forward to future displays of prowess by the modern navy, but based its pride in the achievements of the past. While not officially claimed as Trafalgar memorials, two ships rose from anonymity around the time of the centennial to succeed the *Foudroyant* as displays of naval heritage. Saved from the Admiralty's sale lists, the vessels *Trincomalee* and *Implacable* both began new lives as "relics," initially preserved with the same goals as the naval displays of the 1890s: the intention that the old navy could still be used as a model for understanding the new. Before the war, and especially around the Trafalgar centennial, Britain accepted wooden vessels as effective symbols of the modern navy, on the belief that although the modern fleet *looked* different from that

of Nelson's day, the very existence of a Royal Navy indicated that something of the old spirit remained. Such a goal may have been feasible, if tenuous, in the pre-war climate. But after the transformative experience of the Great War, the display of these ships provides a case study for how naval memory was forced to adapt to increasingly-apparent modern realities. Summarizing the impact of the war in Europe, Jay Winter has noted that in virtually any field of study, the Great War signaled the emergence of "'modernism,' however defined."[4] In the case of the navy, the war represented a clear turning point in the nature of warfare at sea. But at the same time, the early twentieth century witnessed a break between *perceptions* of the naval past and present, and a growing acknowledgement that old navy would have to be considered separately from the new.

The display of the *Foudroyant* in the 1890s had represented a cultural moment wherein naval history was considered an essential moral lesson for boys, predicated on the belief that past glories could inspire young generations and prepare them to serve their country in a time of war. In that decade, it had appeared that a historic ship, put on display and training boys in historical maritime skills, could in some way prepare young men for entry into the modern service. But Britain had witnessed the naval battles of the Great War, and having seen the modern fleet in action, it became clear that the lessons of the past had little if any bearing on modern warfare.

Despite this perceived break in continuity, however, wooden ships of the old navy did not lose their appeal in the early twentieth century. The ships *Implacable* and *Trincomalee*, instead, received even *greater* attention than *Foudroyant* ever had at the end of its days. The history and romance of the old navy were still a source of national

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[4] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 18.

pride, but when placed on display this nostalgia was now turned to a somewhat different purpose. Still deemed indispensable for the youth of Britain, the display and use of these vessels as training ships drew a clear distinction between the past and present, but made the argument that if the lessons of the old navy did not reflect on the *martial* realities of the present, wooden ships still had invaluable *social* and *moral* lessons to teach. These lessons were not presented with any promise to prepare boys to become good sailors, but with a solid promise to make them better Britons and imperial citizens. Wooden ships became character lessons above all else, still shrouded in a glorious mythology of what it meant to be British, and filling in as a metaphor where the modern Navy seemed to fall short.

Foudroyant's Afterlife and the Place of Naval Heritage

In October 1905, *Punch* published a commemorative cartoon depicting Lord Nelson, in full regalia, surveying the British fleet from the vantage of a seaside cliff. The ships on view were the most modern vessels of the day, and while their dark and utilitarian shapes formed a clear contrast to the resplendent historical figure in the foreground, the caption imagined Nelson declaring, "My ships have passed away, but the spirit of my men remains."[5] The magazine, which had once published heartfelt tributes to the *Foudroyant*, and whose assistant editor Sir Owen Seaman was a long-time advocate for ships' preservation, perhaps felt bittersweet about the "passing away" of Nelson's fleet. The cartoon, while clearly praising the power of modern warships and the character of their sailors, outwardly suggested that none of the Napoleonic-era fleet was still extant. This was not strictly true, however: despite the loss of the *Foudroyant*, Britain still

[5] "1805-1905," *Punch* 129 (1905), 279-80.

possessed the *Victory* (albeit in an altered state), and at least two others with more tenuous but nonetheless exploitable connections to Nelson. The first of these was the third-rate ship of the line *Implacable,* ex-*Duguay-Trouin,* which had been among the French prizes taken at Trafalgar. The other, the frigate *Trincomalee*, was one of several frigates ordered by the Admiralty in 1812, and although it was only launched *after* the Treaty of Paris had brought the wars to an end, was built on the same lines as many vessels that had seen service against the French fleet. In 1905, the Admiralty was still several years away from placing the *Implacable* on the sale lists, but had sold *Trincomalee* in 1897—just at the right time to be noticed by the eager preservationist Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb.

Cobb had been eager ever since the loss of the *Foudroyant* to continue his work on historic vessels, feeling that he could not abandon the project that he had started. Based on the volume of letters, articles, and pamphlets he wrote on the subject, he strongly believed that the preservation of ships as monuments was his life's calling, and was likewise convinced that the crew and the boys he employed on *Foudroyant* had been so transformed into creatures of the sea, and he could not abandon them to find other work. He thus was quick to purchase the *Trincomalee,* and hoped to continue his training program on board, despite the frigate's stark difference from the two-deck *Foudroyant.* His resolve was likely encouraged by a not-insignificant level of spite, as he continued to argue that national neglect had been the cause of *Foudroyant*'s destruction, and his repeated claimed to be the "only Englishman" self-sacrificing enough to maintain the

effort.[6] So determined was he to continue his work uninterrupted that he almost gave *Trincomalee* a new and illustrious name. In a move that, while symbolic, would cause immediate and lasting confusion, he called his new vessel *Foudroyant*.[7]

Cobb was a man devoted to his preferred rhetoric, maintaining that he alone among Britons understood national values and cared about naval heritage. He even altered his self-image to do so, obscuring his Welsh heritage and instead calling himself an *Englishman*—which, in his dedication to preserving the "Wooden Walls of Old England," he seemed to find a more illustrious and centralized description for a subject of the United Kingdom. But had he been free from personal bias, he could easily have determined that he was far from alone in the belief that ships could make suitable national monuments. Throughout Cobb's life he maintained a dream of creating a floating museum, which would showcase extant vessels of all the "principal types" of Nelson's navy. He cited the rapid disappearance of historic ships as the urgent reasoning behind this desire, but the concept was neither of his own making nor even new. William Makepeace Thackeray, under the pseudonym of Michael Angelo Titmarsh, had suggested such a thing as early as 1839, after seeing Turner's *Fighting Temeraire* on display at the Royal Academy, and feeling the inherent melancholy of such a "brave old ship" being "dragged . . . by a little, spiteful, diabolical steamer" to its ultimate demise.[8] Even in that early year Thackeray considered Nelson's fleet to be little more than "skeletons," diminished from what they had been, but he suggested that the "Agamemnon and the

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[6] Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb, *A Trafalgar Ship for Sea Scouts: An Appeal* (c. 1921), 6, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, box 77, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, UK.
[7] For the purposes of clarity, I will refer to this vessel as *Trincomalee* throughout, except when quoted in a contemporary source.
[8] William Makepeace Thackeray, "A Second Lecture on the Fine Arts," *Fraser's Magazine*, June, 1839, 744.

Captain, the Vanguard, the Culloden, and the Victory, ought to be sacred relics, for Englishmen to worship almost." Some of these ships had already been wrecked or sold, but whatever remained ought to be kept as a "museum . . . which our children might visit, and think of the brave deeds which were done with them."[9] Although such an arrangement had never materialized in the intervening decades, and now *all but one* of Thackeray's listed ships had indeed "passed away,"[10] it was perhaps disappointment, rather than evidence, that led Cobb to believe that British people had become complacent.

The uproar surrounding the *Foudroyant*, and the popularity of historical naval displays (including the 1891 Exhibition and its model *Victory*) suggests well enough that the British public was not uninterested. Britons who had the time and money for leisure excursions certainly sought out naval curiosities, and those who could afford to own naval relics did so eagerly. The *Foudroyant* itself remained an object of interest even after 1897, serendipitously providing opportunities for Britons to bring naval history into their own households. Too famous to abandon entirely, the wrecked vessel had ended its days in the hands of a newly formed company, whose express purpose was to create furniture and other mementos from the salvaged timber and copper. The reuse of warship materials to create commemorative items was nothing new, but the production of such souvenirs on so large a scale played directly into notions of heritage, and tied neatly into Victorian patterns of consumption. Britain was eager to retain Nelson's flagship in whatever form it could, and consumers were eager to display pieces of naval heritage in their homes. The most accessible mementos were small medallions crafted from the ship's copper, which depicted Nelson's bust on one side and the ship (either full-rigged

[9] Ibid.
[10] The *Victory* remained at Portsmouth as a school ship.

or foundering in the gale, depending on the casting), on the reverse.[11] Wealthier consumers, however, could furnish virtually any room of their house with *Foudroyant* furniture, including everything from umbrella-stands to tables to bookshelves.

For Victorian households of means, antique furniture was a symbol not just of status but of "proper" engagement with the nation's heritage, and accordingly *Foudroyant* pieces were often crafted in a way so as to make their association with "a splendid past" obvious on multiple levels.[12] In time for the Trafalgar centennial, Waring and Gillow of London exhibited some of these pieces, declaring them to be "both souvenirs and object-lessons," that both "commemorate a ship and . . . illustrate a style." Not only formed of *Foudroyant* oak, the items on display were "constructed in many cases in exact imitation of pieces of furniture used by Nelson" or other famous naval officers, including chairs crafted after originals that had been owned by George Anson or John Byng, and a table from Nelson's cabin on *Victory*.[13] The press did not abandon its romanticization of the vessel even in its deconstructed fate. For those who wanted an even more personal connection to "those timbers which had so often been brought into personal contact with the great Nelson himself," Waring and Gillow offered designs for paneling the interiors of small sailing craft, suggesting that anyone who owned or traveled on such a vessel could "feel that they are not merely surrounded by the oak of

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[11] Several such medals are in the collections of the National Maritime Museum. See for example *Foudroyant* commemorative medal, copper, object number MEC 2147, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK.
[12] For the symbolic role of furnishings, including antiques, in Victorian homes, see Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
[13] *Illustrated London News*, October 28, 1905.

Old England . . . but are actually moving within the walls that have seen and taken part of the deeds of the most fascinating period of our naval history."[14]

Moving within the wooden walls of Old England was an appealing notion, whether it was a reconstructed ship that approximated the historical space of a ship-of-war (as in 1891), a restored historic vessel (as with *Foudroyant*), or a modern space that was surrounded by or contained historic materials. Such an experience appealed both to romantic notions of the picturesque, and to themes of naval patriotism. It was not, then, a lack of interest that made preserving actual historic vessels so difficult, but simply an issue of continuous funding. Cobb never let go of the belief that public subscription, donations and admission fees could save and maintain a ship if only people committed their money, but as the son of a preservationist he might have known that organizations such as the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings had come to be strictly because of the insufficiencies of such methods. Perhaps mistaking large-scale organization for large-scale interest, Cobb lamented that if ships "had been houses or churches of far less historic and artistic value, their demolition would have been prevented."[15] And yet, with *Trincomalee* as he had been with *Foudroyant*, he was ever reluctant to form a company or association, taking pride in the fact that his endeavor was a product of his own dedication and cost nothing from the English taxpayer.

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[14] Ibid.
[15] *A Trafalgar Ship for Sea Scouts*, 6, HMS *Trincomalee* Collections, box 77, Teesside University.

Trincomalee and the Trafalgar Centennial

Determined as he was to manage his second project alone, Cobb only sparsely released details of the first years of *Trincomalee*'s new life to the public. Several papers were vaguely aware that "Mr. Cobb, who owned the ill-fated *Foudroyant,*" had purchased the vessel, and that it was undergoing repairs at Cowes, but the restoration's progress and ship's intended purpose were ambiguous.[16] Lack of coverage led to some speculation about the service that the ship could provide: letters revealed various hopes for its specific use, but also signaled a general agreement that a historic ship like *Trincomalee* was destined to be eminently useful, both locally and nationally. As a relic of the past, it was bound to be "picturesque," a "useful and stately relic of bygone days"—everything that preservationist arguments of the nineteenth century had required.[17] For some, this was all that was needed to prove it worthy of notice. *Trincomalee*, one paper declared, was symbolic of the days when "England's wooden walls rode the seas in triumph the world over," and it was a specimen of the "fast disappearing . . . 30 gun frigates," perfectly suited for the sort of national collection that Cobb and others before him had dreamed of.[18] But the service that such a vessel could ideally provide for the youth of Britain was still central. Press coverage speculated on how the ship might succeed *Foudroyant* in "training lads for a seafaring life," either to prepare them for Naval service or to simply provide lessons in character. The moral possibilities seemed particularly poignant, as the vessel could use naval heritage to bring British ideals to young members of the working class, for whom the ship could represent

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[16] *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* June 4, 1898.
[17] *Falmouth Packet*, October 10, 1903.
[18] *Portsmouth Times and Hampshire County Journal*, May 28, 1898.

a romanticized ideal of industrious labor. The port town of Falmouth, where *Trincomalee* was to be docked once repairs were complete, was particularly hopeful that the vessel would be an opportunity for these "industrial boys."[19]

In Falmouth, *Trincomalee* represented an opportunity for Britain's naval glories to be displayed on a local level. Certainly the *Foudroyant* had been intended to carry naval history and the navalist spirit throughout the entire nation, during its intended tour between British ports, but Falmouth hoped to call *Trincomalee* its own. Falmouth already had tenuous connections to Nelson and Trafalgar, being the port where HMS *Pickle* had first arrived with news of the battle in November 1805. The town was therefore eager to capitalize on this connection, hoping that a "large industrial training ship" would revive its former prestige. When the vessel finally arrived from Cowes in September 1903, at least one newspaper correspondent became carried away by the notion, not only mistaking the vessel for the original *Foudroyant*, but also falsely reporting that it had been present at Trafalgar.[20] While such misconceptions were quickly laid to rest, Falmouth still declared that the ship would serve as "a friend in [a time of] need," and not only for its historical connections. The fact that *Trincomalee*, now renamed *Foudroyant,* was a constant reminder of "the days when . . . old England's wooden walls rode the seas in triumph the world over," was certainly a point of pride, but Falmouth also hoped that it would forge a line of continuity between those days and Falmouth's long-standing but now tenuous connection to the Navy. The port, the *Falmouth Packet* reported shortly before Trafalgar Day of 1903, had "so often been doomed to disappointment" since the Navy's training vessel *Ganges* had been moved to Harwich in 1899. Echoing Cobb's own

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[19] *Pembroke Dock Weekly Post,* May 11, 1905.
[20] *Falmouth Packet,* September 19, 1903.

former feelings when dealing with the original *Foudroyant*, the paper's correspondent felt that the Admiralty had been at odds with the public's desire to feel pride in the Navy: the Admiralty had frequently "excited [Falmouth's] hopes" as to the prospect of building a Naval base, but in the end had always "turned a blind . . . eye on this port."[21] If the modern Navy could not distinguish itself in Falmouth, the town could at least take pride in its maritime heritage through the presence of a historic vessel.

As the Trafalgar centennial approached, the *Trincomalee* served as a mirror for monuments and commemorations that took place elsewhere in the country. By tradition, sites including the *Victory* and London's Trafalgar Square had been illuminated and otherwise decorated for Trafalgar day annually, and accordingly the *Trincomalee* was "trimmed in rainbow fashion" along with other Falmouth vessels for the occasion. The ship's connection to Trafalgar itself had been purposely exaggerated, being outfitted with cannon from the original *Foudroyant,* and having a sign emblazoned with the words "Remember Nelson" displayed on deck.[22] Remembering Nelson was, of course, the intention of any Trafalgar Day, but in 1905 a national conversation focused on what that might mean in a new century. While *Punch,* of course, had maintained the Victorian argument that it was in the modern Navy that "the spirit of [Nelson's] men remains," other tributes suggested that such a spirit could be best demonstrated, and indeed *must* be demonstrated, in other fields. Sailing ships of war, it was clear, no longer served any martial purpose in a nation whose navy was currently building the first *Dreadnought* battleship, but centennial arguments suggested that the spirit of the Age of Sail could serve *social* purposes.

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[21] *Falmouth Packet*, October 10, 1903.
[22] *Pembroke Dock Weekly Post*, May 11, 1905.

The lessons highlighted at the centennial lend credit to David Cannadine's assertion that the nineteenth-century Britain had created "a Nelson to suit every taste."[23] So malleable was the hero-worship surrounding Nelson and his navy, that even the most tenuous connection could be turned to a case of moral instruction. A sermon entitled *Nelson A Flaming Fire,* for example, delivered at Saint Paul's on Trafalgar Day and subsequently circulated as a pamphlet, argued that the lesson to be learned from Nelson's navy was not merely one of armed strength and patriotism, but a more peaceful-sounding lesson of social benevolence at home and abroad. It was Britain's image as an empire, a world power, and a *civilizing* power that was at stake in 1905: while competitive imperialism and military rivalries drew European nations into increasingly-fraught relationships, Britain was *seen*, and hoped to be seen as a nation that looked to improve the lot of those under its power. The connection to Nelson was more ideological than historical, resting on vague references to his faith and—that most naval of characteristics—"zeal," but in a heavy-handed analogy the sermon suggested that Britain "as a people" ought to face social evils "with something of the spirit with which Nelson faced the fleet when it came before him."[24] Chief among these evils was poverty, to which the sermon suggested that it was not "opportunities of serving England in its poor that are wanting; it is the readiness to welcome and use them."[25]

The notion of zealous charity had implications both in Britain and in its empire: if Britain were truly to be the nation that set an example for the rest of the world, it must

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[23] David Cannadine, ed. *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1.
[24] [Cosmo Gordon Lang], *Nelson a Flaming Fire: A Sermon Preached by the Right Rev. The Lord Bishop of Stepney, at the Nelson Centennial Service* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co, 1905), 12.
[25] Ibid., 13.

attend to the welfare of all Britons, regardless of social class, and foster a Christian spirit at all levels, so that spirit might be carried abroad. "We are proud of our Empire!" the sermon reminded its audience, but the empire required a Navy, and the Navy required a charitable national character. The nation and the navy reflected back upon each other: what Britain needed "for the defence of our Empire is a Navy of seafaring men who remember that into every port they bring the honour of their country, and an example which either hurts or helps the life of *other races.*"[26] Thus, by following a Nelsonian example of civic duty, determination, and faith, the sermon suggested, Britain might truly become "a race fitted for empire by character, a race with the fire of zeal within it."[27]

Improbably shoring up all possible facets of Trafalgar commemoration, the publication of *Nelson a Flaming Fire* as a pamphlet drew direct connections between charity, national and imperial character, naval patriotism, and naval *preservation*. The two-pence proceeds from each pamphlet would be given to the Nelson Centenary Memorial Fund, which in turn supported the British and Foreign Sailors' Society. Further combining moral lessons with naval heritage, an addendum to the pamphlet announced that the Society had received oak and copper salvaged from recent repairs to HMS *Victory,* and intended to sell mementos from these materials as charitable souvenirs. The scheme was directed towards the "boys and girls of the Empire," and aimed to foster a sense of naval patriotism and even nostalgia among young people. Children were asked to collect between one and five shillings in return for a *Victory* medal or other memento,

[26] Ibid., 10-11.
[27] Ibid., 10.

reminding them implicitly that their charitable efforts were reminiscent of past naval glories.[28]

The Centenary Fund scheme reported that the recent repairs had served to keep the Trafalgar flagship as the "one National Floating Monument at Portsmouth."[29] The centennial year inspired some interest in the ship's continuing preservation, unsurprisingly, but *Victory* was still classified as a naval school ship, not in a position to be preserved as a museum or displayed in any similar way. As a privately-managed training ship, however, the *Trincomalee* was uniquely suited, it seemed, to demonstrate the social use of tangible naval history on a smaller scale. In providing an opportunity for "industrial boys" to learn "traditional" maritime skills, and to engage in representations of historically masculine character, the vessel could be seen as a charitable enterprise. It was an argument that Cobb, indeed, used frequently in later appeals: that boys who had spent several weeks aboard routinely left as "much better boys" than they had arrived.[30] The training program worked closely with church groups and naval charities, allowing working-class boys and the sons of sailors to come aboard, either for short visits or for more extended "camps." The "*Foudroyant* boys," and a ship's band comprised of longer-term trainees, also became ambassadors of sorts to naval charities, on several occasions attending the annual meetings of the Royal Cornwall Missions to Seamen.[31] It was never the expectation that all, or even many, of the boys who trained on *Trincomalee* would enter the Royal Navy themselves, but observers noted that the ship still served a patriotic purpose. As a charity that promoted symbolically naval ideals like zeal, duty, and hard

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[28] Ibid., frontispiece.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Cobb, *A Trafalgar Ship for Sea Scouts, 11.*
[31] *Falmouth Packet,* November 17, 1905; *Lake's Falmouth Packet,* June 22, 1928.

work, the ship could teach boys to serve their nation and their empire. At the very least, it could still encourage pride in Britain as an empire of the sea, using history to spread the navalist spirit and "instill[ing] into the minds of younger Britons the necessity for good sailors and a strong Navy."[32]

A Second Ship

While Cobb's first objective was to run the *Trincomalee* as a private enterprise, not a public museum or exhibition, he never gave up his vision of forging a national collection of historic ships. In 1908, when the Admiralty placed the *Implacable* on the sale lists, he sprang at the opportunity—a 74-gun second-rate ship of the line, to provide a comparison to the smaller frigate already in his possession. Taking no chances in this case, he made his appeal to the highest powers in the matter, with somewhat more flair than he did when writing to the Admiralty about the old *Foudroyant*. He sent his appeal directly to King Edward, who was himself a strong advocate for the Navy, and who (as the Prince of Wales) had been the Royal patron of the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition.

Perhaps having learned the dangers of strict public subscription, Cobb now networked with a group of influential men to join his appeal. Whatever his reservations about the mainstream preservation movement, he seems to have been willing to use ideas of the "picturesque" to his advantage, befriending several well-known maritime artists including Henry Scott Tuke and William Harold Wyllie.[33] The connection between art and naval preservation was a budding one: Wyllie's own Trafalgar panorama would

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[32] *Pembroke Dock Weekly Post,* May 11, 1905.
[33] B.D. Price, ed., *Tuke Reminisces* (Falmouth: Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, 1983), 8, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 69, Teesside University.

eventually be an integral factor in the opening of a dockyard museum in Portsmouth, and in the preservation of the HMS *Victory.* The connection served perfectly for *Implacable,* and in 1909 a group gathered at the Royal Academy of Arts to sign a petition, addressed to the Lords of the Admiralty, in support of Cobb's preservation movement. Certainly capitalizing on the possibilities of a picturesque or romantic past, the signers made their appeal in the form of a Round Robin—certainly an eye-catching format, but also one with nautical-historical connotations.[34]

As a form of address, in which signers add their names in a circle around a central message, the Round Robin had been the traditional form of mutineers, or sailors otherwise petitioning their officers through the Age of Sail. By the turn of the century, this may have been seen as a quaint reminder of the old navy, but for the signers it was certainly symbolic. By choosing a format associated with disaffected crews or mutineers, the signers indicated that they had come together to address a perceived shortcoming among those in charge. In failing to allow ships like the *Implacable* to be preserved at once, the Lords of the Admiralty were implied to have failed in their public duty, and it had now become the duty of the signers to ensure they changed their course. They phrased their message accordingly, playing on the traditional dynamic of a group of men appealing to their superiors: "We who sign around this line, meaning no offence, and asking pardon for the liberty we take, beg your lordships to spare the old 74 Implacable . . . which is now about to be broken up." The form of the Round Robin was meant to suggest that all signers were equal, with no clear ringleader, although in this case the person they deferred to was obvious as "Mr. Wheatly Cobb offers to take charge." It was

[34] Round robin signed at the Royal Academy banquet, May 1909, HSR/V/7, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK.

apparent by the signatures that the *Implacable* attracted widespread interest among men of influence: among them numerous artists, including Wyllie; statesmen, including future First Lord of the Admiralty Austin Chamberlain, and several politicians from the commonwealth; officers of the army and navy; the Dean of Westminster; and author Rudyard Kipling.[35]

Preservation of ships, it seemed, had become the preserve of wealthy philanthropists, statesmen and authors, but Cobb and his supporters still maintained that it was the nation, and the common people that benefited most. Through both the Round Robin appeal and Cobb's personal appeal to the King, the *Implacable* was removed from the sale list, although it took several years of bureaucratic maneuvering for Cobb to take possession. Technically, the ship was only on loan, with Cobb becoming its steward in 1912, on the basis that he would restore the vessel and bring it to Falmouth alongside *Trincomalee*. Some idea of Cobb's "national collection" seems to have been revived in the press, as even the *Times* believed that *Implacable* would become "a naval museum."[36] Cobb, however, replied as only he could, ignoring the support he had already received and suggesting that although a "series" of preserved ships had long been his vision, such a thing "unhappily . . . seems desirable to no one else."[37] Over the following eight years, however, while *Trincomalee* continued operating in Falmouth and *Implacable* underwent its transformation, word of the two ships did circulate, and it would be difficult for any other person to suggest that interest was lacking. *Implacable* and *Trincomalee* together began receiving interest from high-ranking individuals and organizations, who had clear

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[35] Ibid.
[36] *Times*, September 12, 1912.
[37] *Times*, September 19, 1912.

ideas of how to turn a "national collection," even if it were only two vessels, into something both picturesque *and* nationally useful, something more than a national monument.

Post-War Challenges

Coming into Cobb's possession in 1912, *Implacable* arrived on the preservation scene at a challenging time, and the ship faced a series of both practical and ideological challenges in the following years. In terms of repairs, "the war stopped everything," as money and labor were needed elsewhere.[38] The war occupied the efforts of the government, but also altered the nation's outlook on naval warfare. By 1918, the nation that had used naval history to explain the modern Navy for decades, had now seen the realities of naval warfare in the modern world, and had to make sense of how warfare in the industrial age measured up against expectations. Supporters of the *Trincomalee* and *Implacable* were forced to reconsider what use historic ships might play in that modern world, now that it had fully come into being. If the appeal of the original *Foudroyant*, and the excitement of the Trafalgar centennial, had rested on the hope that there was a Nelsonian spirit in the "wooden walls" that could still inspire men in ships with steel hulls, that illusion seemed to be largely shattered.

The subsequent struggle to fit wooden ships into a post-war understanding of the world fits the pattern of post-war struggles with memory as a whole. As Jay Winter has argued, it was not always the case that forms of war commemoration experienced an immediate shift in the interwar period; rather, European nations struggled to make new

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[38] Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb to Sir Doveton Sturdee, April 21, 1924, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, box 69, Teesside University.

narratives fit traditionally romanticized, "heroic" types of monuments and memory.[39] In the case of the Navy, Britain proved somewhat heavy-handed in its early attempts to shoehorn the Great War into a narrative of continuity with the days of Nelson. The museum at the Royal United Service Institution, for example, implemented a new scheme to force this narrative on visitors, which the *Times* announced under the headline, "Fighting Men of a Century Ago." The museum planned to hire two men to be stationed outside the exhibit entry, dressed as "a sailor under Nelson and a soldier under Wellington." But the scheme aimed to do more than glorify those past men: to evoke what the newspaper called the public's "natural desire to help" recent veterans, the chosen costumed men would both be former soldiers, each of whom had lost a leg in the service.[40] The image of disabled veterans in a historic context, reminiscent of tropes like the old-style Greenwich Pensioner, suggested that whatever had changed in the ways wars were fought, warfare always had been, and remained, a matter of male bodily sacrifice. It was not a comforting image, but one that perhaps intended to overwrite shocking modern images of war with something that looked more familiar, and could be framed as more heroic. Britain had long been conditioned to understand what made historic battles glorious, and the dash, zeal and courage was easily contained in the image of a nineteenth century sailor. But the battles of the Great War had not been those of romance, but of practicality, and of the most brutal kind.

Observers who had participated in the nineteenth century glorification of naval warfare struggled to make sense of the ingrained notions of heroism with which they had grown up. Even Rudyard Kipling, one of the signers of the *Implacable* round robin and a

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[39] See Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning.*
[40] *Times*, August 18, 1921.

seasoned author of works that glorified Britain's military might, appropriately captured the nation's dilemma. In a series of articles that later became the book *Sea Warfare,* he had attempted to maintain that the "very old and very wise" Royal Navy was essentially "the same fierce, hard-living, heavy-handed, very cunning service" as it always had been, and that essentially, the ancient principles of honorable sea warfare would hold "so far as the Navy has been allowed to put out her strength."[41] His descriptions blended ideas of seapower and naval heritage: while Kipling made jibes at modern vessels, it was never sailors themselves that he found lacking. Even in a very-necessarily-modern fleet, Kipling emphasized the plain-speaking men of humble origins that made the nation's sailors, just as the Jack Tars of a century past. As the war progressed, however, he appeared to have more difficulty maintaining the same image.

Notoriously changed by his own son's death in the war, Kipling's view on modern warfare turned dismal. In naval terms, he worried that the Admiralty was misusing its men and its ships, using a "gloved hand" rather than a "bare fist" when Britain could easily, as ever, "hold all the seas in the hollow of our hand."[42] Whereas he had earlier claimed to see the "Old Navy making ready to lead out the New under a grey sky and a falling glass,"[43] believing that the spirit and discipline of former generations had provided a sure form of guidance that could only lead to victory, his view of the Navy's leadership soon fit the mold of his overall view of the war: that men "died . . . because our fathers lied."[44] Discouraged by the mechanization of war in general, he mused on how Britain might now warn one of its sailors, still ostensibly a Jack Tar ("My

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[41] Rudyard Kipling, *Sea Warfare* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1916), 5.
[42] Ibid., 89.
[43] Ibid., 73.
[44] Rudyard Kipling, "The Years Between," in *The Years Between and Poems from History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 118.

Boy Jack"), with no glorious imagery to attend the eulogy: "'Oh dear, what comfort can I find?'/ *None this tide, / Nor any Tide, / Except he didn't shame his kind*."[45]

After the Battle of Jutland, the first great fleet action of the war, Kipling's disappointment, and the disappointment of the country as a whole, was complete. Anticipated as the new century's Trafalgar, the action in the North Sea resulted only in dubious victory: the German fleet had been contained, but most vessels escaped, at a tremendous cost of British life and materiel. The state-of-the-art British fleet, into which the government had poured its resources, which the navy itself had put on display at patriotic fleet reviews, and which the navalist celebrations and exhibitions had explicitly determined to embody the spirit of the old navy, failed to deliver a decisive, complete victory over its enemy. Too shocked by the action, feeding into the larger controversy in the British press, Kipling took a more self-aware stance on hero-worship: perhaps this was no new Trafalgar as expected, but perhaps that was because "we are too close," and glory must come with memory. Britain in 1916 could not make sense of its modern navy, or understand yet whether there were other types of glory than the one associated with the old navy, but perhaps, Kipling expected, "our children shall understand / When and how our fate was changed, and by whose hand."[46]

Whatever the children of Kipling's imagination came to "understand" as modern naval warfare, they would also be among the first to encounter Britain's changing understanding of *past* wars at sea. In previous years, Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb and his supporters had been at odds with the Admiralty, claiming that there would be an immediate benefit for the Navy itself if the service would dedicate funds to preserve the

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[45] Kipling, *Sea Warfare*, 147.
[46] Ibid., 204.

emblems of its past. Even though *Trincomalee* had never intended to train boys specifically *for* the navy, the training ship still touted patriotic and navalist possibilities, through the outlet of public service. But the martial realities of the era had provided all the evidence necessary to sway the argument in favor of the Admiralty: there was, simply, no *practical* purpose for naval men to be trained on a sailing ship of *Trincomalee* or *Implacable*'s age, instead of a more modern vessel. If the navy wanted to clear berths for new training ships, there was hardly a chance that the claim of *preservation* would alone be enough to out-argue their case.

Cobb, predictably, was irritated at this reality, and still sang the Romantic praises of the old navy, calling old ships "at once a person, a thing, and a place; an actor in great events, the weapon with which they were achieved, the home of heroes, and the scene of their exploits." But he did, however reluctantly, modify his arguments. He was quick to point out that some of the boys who trained on *Trincomalee* had served in the war, estimating that "just over 100 Foudroyant boys were to my knowledge engaged in the two services."[47] Although it was difficult to say whether these boys served because of their training, because of conscription, or any other reason, the implication was that *Trincomalee* had helped to foster their patriotism and prepared them to serve their country with "zeal." Whatever the disappointments of the war, as Kipling would have had it, these boys at the very least "did not shame [their] kind."[48] However, even Cobb knew that most of the "Foudroyant boys" would never serve, and that the specific skills taught on board his vessels were not of much use to the modern fleet. He began to argue,

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[47] Geoffrey Wheatley Cobb to the Lords of the Admiralty, February 14, 1927, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, box 77, Teesside University.
[48] Kipling, *Sea Warfare*, 147.

instead, that it was broadly nautical, not simply naval, values that would be of use to the nation in the post-war era. It was ideas of ingenuity, the handling of nature, and a toughness of spirit that made the sea a model for character.

Scouting and Sea-Sense in the Post-War World

In the years preceding the war, a new movement had developed in Britain that examined what it meant to be a young man in the new century. Founded by Robert Baden-Powell in 1907, exactly as the ordeal surrounding *Implacable* was mounting, the Scouting movement promoted ideas of toughness, duty, and preparedness among British boys. Echoing military discipline in civilian contexts, scouting aimed to foster the moral character of boys and prepare them to serve their nation, whether at home or in the empire, as a civilian or a member of the services. It was fitting, then, that Baden-Powell himself should take an interest in ships like the *Implacable.*

Scouting had only existed for two years when Baden-Powell first approached Cobb, asking if he could make a "short course of instruction" for 100 scouts aboard the *Trincomalee*. His hope was that it could serve as a training site for the newly-formed branch of scouting, the Sea Scouts, but found that the frigate was not large enough for the endeavor he hoped to make. The Round Robin appeal for the *Implacable*, however, had been made the same year, and the Chief Scout "at once saw the great advantages" that could be provided by the two-decker's restoration. Although the war had caused the work on *Implacable* to be delayed, Cobb and Baden-Powell still corresponded through the next

decade, and "agreed readily" when Cobb suggested that the *Implacable* take such a role in scouting that it become the Sea Scouts' "Headquarters and Training Centre."[49]

The connection proved integral to *Implacable*'s restoration: a large and well-recognized institution like the Scouts, whose ideology of preparedness and determination seemed particularly fitting for wartime and its aftermath, provided some of the awareness that Cobb had been unable to achieve without forming his own company. Announced in the *Times* on Trafalgar Day of 1920, Cobb launched an appeal asking for £10,000 for the repair of the vessel. This was again an attempt at public subscription, but Cobb indicated that he had more organized support now, and that his ideas of the ship's use were shared and promoted on a larger scale. The Admiralty would allow the *Implacable* to be restored in a Navy dockyard and moored at Falmouth, although for a price of £6180, and the rest of the money would be needed for ship's "boats, hammocks, mess utensils, and other fittings."[50] The "combined appeal of the ship and of the Boy Scouts," managed to attract generous offers of support, was based on new post-war ideas of how maritime heritage could serve the nation. The ship would be a site of production, a place where ideal British citizens were forged, and boys turned into men, and into hard-working laborers. Although Baden-Powell himself acknowledged that Scouting should "bring on a supply of smart and self-respecting young seamen for the service of the country," it would also "do a great good towards steadying a big leaven of the rising generation of workers."[51]

Whether boys who trained on *Implacable* or *Trincomalee* went on to join the Navy or any other profession was now immaterial. According to supporters, including

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[49] Cobb, *A Trafalgar Ship for Sea Scouts*, 9.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Robert Baden-Powell to Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb, December 9, 1920, printed in Cobb, *A Trafalgar Ship for Sea Scouts,* 12.

Lord Beatty, it was a generic "sea-sense," the "greatest and proudest heritage of our race," that would be helpful in maintaining British character.[52] "Sea sense" was both a physical and an ideological concept, and in training it reportedly "develope[d] the bodies, inform[ed] the minds and inspir[ed] the souls" of those who trained on board. The idea that the sea was, and ought to remain, in the blood of British citizens was integral, ingrained in the symbolism of wooden ships: "if there is one place which more than any other can claim to be the birthplace of the British Empire," explained an article in *Lloyd's List*, "it is surely the fighting deck of a line-of-battle ship."[53] If a Nelsonian vessel could not in any way prepare a British boy for the realities of modern war, it could at least prepare him to uphold the ideal of Britishness wherever he went. Britain was a "seafaring race," Cobb reminded readers in a pamphlet that accompanied his Scouting appeal, and ought to always remember what it was and how it was forged. He echoed William Cobbett's sentiment of over a century earlier, that while "No part of [Britain] is more than some eighty miles from the sea," it was still a nation where the "hearts of our adventurous boys" are supposedly stirred by the notion that not only was the "British Empire . . . made on the sea and lives by sea," but that theirs was a "nation that twice over in 120 years has saved its own freedom and that of the world by its sea power."[54] Ships like the *Implacable*, as a later observer would argue, had the power to transport the lessons of sea away from the coast, and throughout the rest of the national community, into "industrial areas where no sea-breezes penetrate, and where the Nelson Touch is

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[52] Lord Beatty to the *Times, Times*, July 21, 1926.
[53] "The Old Implacable: An Appeal for a Famous Ship of the Line," *Lloyd's List and Shipping Gazette,* May 6, 1924, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teesside University.
[54] Cobb, *A Trafalgar Ship for Sea Scouts*, 5.

unknown."[55] Britain's reliance on the sea formed an imagined community in the 1920s, as it did in the century before, but now the shared memory of that community included both the glories of the Age of Sail, and the honorable if less picturesque Great War. It also included the participation of non-naval seafarers, including yachtsmen and other "amateur seamen," who had been "compelled to spend their lives in trades or professions ashore, but who became "in the war . . . the crews of mine-sweepers, coastal motor boats, and other small craft."[56]

Cobb's argument, following on Baden-Powell's notions of preparedness, suggested that British boys may never know when nautical skills may be necessary, and thus they ought always to be equipped with a traditionally-British "sea-sense." Even if the modern navy and the old navy could no longer be easily said to share a spirit—the ships themselves, and the tactics of modern warfare, could not embody the glory of Nelson—there was still a place for both in the national imagination. While the Navy's past and present grew apart, and occupied separate spheres, it was still the old navy that supposedly provided the best moral guidance. Some suggested that the role of *Implacable* and *Foudroyant* was a somewhat feminine role, that of a mother who prepares boys for the masculine roles of their future. Author Leslie Cope Cornford said of *Trincomalee* that the ship "which fought and won the battles of their fathers' fathers, like kindly and an austere great lady . . . receives boys and gives to them the best life a boy can be given."[57] That life was based partially in an idea of adventure, the same idea that fed into the appeal of Scouting, and partially in the charitable ideas of providing boys with

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[55] *Implacable, Late Dougay-Trouin* (Portsmouth: December, 1949), HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teesside University.
[56] Cobb, *A Trafalgar Ship for Sea Scouts*, 5.
[57] Leslie Cope Cornford, "A Noble Enterprise," *Morning Post,* October 10, 1921.

knowledge that was expected to give them a better opportunity in life. *Trincomalee* had "left astern the grim discipline of the Old Navy," and no longer prepared boys explicitly for the new Navy, but as a symbolic mother the vessel still had a role in shaping her sons into ideal citizens.[58] Looking forward to the intended success of *Implacable* in a post-war role, Cobb declared that boys would "live in an atmosphere of history and romance . . . kindling their enthusiasm and desire for the qualities, moral, mental and physical, which made the great seamen of the past, and which were never needed more than they are to-day."[59] Writing in 1921, Cornford declared that old *Foudroyant* and the *Trincomalee* had already "made honest, competent, self-respecting Englishmen," which were "the real wealth of the nation."[60] The characteristics that had been needed in the old navy were recast as the characteristics most needed in *society*, while still being characteristics that only naval history could teach.

[58] Ibid.
[59] Cobb, *A Trafalgar Ship for Sea Scouts*, 11.
[60] Leslie Cope Cornford, "A Noble Enterprise," *Morning Post,* October 10, 1921.

Conclusion

Remember Nelson?

In 1947, twenty-five years after having placed the vessel under private trusteeship, the Admiralty made the decision that the *Implacable* was in no state to be maintained further. *Implacable* had served as Geoffrey Wheatly Cobb's training establishment until his death in 1931, after which it had passed into the custodianship of Harold Wyllie, who continued to operate it as a training ship at Portsmouth. Wyllie had tried tirelessly, along with his supporters, to turn *Implacable* into a national relic, attempting to find moorings for it at Greenwich, and reminding anyone who would listen that the vessel was the only one surviving in Britain, apart from the *Victory*, to have seen action at Trafalgar. Even despite its French origins, preservationists had hoped to turn *Implacable* into a second *Victory*—a vessel that could bring naval history to London children, who might not have a chance to visit Portsmouth.[1] In the aftermath of a second world war, Frank G. G. Carr, director of the newly-created National Maritime Museum, had enthusiastically supported Wyllie's efforts, believing that Britain must have a second Trafalgar ship, in preparation for the eventuality that a *third* world war might threaten the *Victory* itself.[2]

Before the second war, Wyllie had tried to expand the reach of the lessons from *Implacable* and *Trincomalee*, opening training programs to girls as well as boys. Wyllie,

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[1] Lt. Col. Harold Wyllie to "Hon. Sec.," September 20, 1947, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teesside University Special Collections, Middlesbrough, UK; Frank G. G. Carr, confidential memo, "Proposal for Preservation of Implacable at Greenwich," September 20, 1947, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teeside University.

[2] Frank G. G. Carr, confidential memo, "Proposal for Preservation of Implacable at Greenwich," September 20, 1947, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teeside University.

a veteran of both wars, later wrote that after his experience in the field that there was no one he would rather have at his side than a Scout—thus trying to verify the use of his ships in shaping boys' character for national service. The experiences of the twentieth century, however, had proved that men were not the only citizens vital to a war effort, and thus training had changed accordingly. The ships had come to accept Girl Guides as well as Scouts in the 1930s, and based on trainees' recollections, the lessons of the sailing navy had been just as symbolic for girls as they had been for boys through the nineteenth century. Girls recorded how they had been moved by the romance and adventure of sail, and one troop leader noted how their typical Girl Guides' camps now seemed to be lacking after visiting *Implacable*, with "no rowing, no sailing, and no Remember Nelson!"[3]

As sites that prepared citizens for times of national need, shipboard programs for girls were credited with the very same moral value as those for boys had traditionally been. "Love of ships and sailing enables you to convey . . . the tradition of the sea," wrote Miss L. McCall of the Sea Rangers, "and that combined with Guiding gives us a high ideal to strive for."[4] Several women recalled how training had prepared them specifically for the national crisis, in teaching girls about "obeying orders, which seem obscure at the moment, without question . . . [and with] common sense and self confidence."[5] Miss Harward wrote of how useful her experience had been to her new tasks of farming for the war effort, and Miss P. George noted that "training makes us feel of some use in ordinary

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[3] Miss Harward, Girl Guides, Shrewsbury to Harold Wyllie [extract], 1938, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teesside University.
[4] Miss L. McCall, Sea Rangers, Erith to Harold Wyllie [extract], HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teesside University. The Sea Rangers were the Girl Guides' equivalent of Sea Scouts.
[5] Miss Harward to Harold Wyllie [extract], 1941, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teesside University.

life and in emergencies, and makes us feel proud of being British and of belonging to a maritime nation."[6] By the middle of the century, then, naval heritage was no longer a purely masculine realm, but a topic appropriately geared towards any Briton who wished to serve their nation as a model citizen.

With the broadening scope of heritage training, it was no surprise that girls as well as boy joined in the national outcry when it became clear that *Implacable* was to be scuttled. Both *Trincomalee* and *Implacable* had been recalled by the navy during the war, and used as floating classrooms. Thereafter, it was clear that the state of the *Implacable* was irreconcilably poor, beyond the point of saving in the post-war economy. But the lessons of the nostalgic nineteenth century were not lost yet; echoing the earlier efforts of their parents' and grandparents' generations, children from across the nation sent letters to the Admiralty, expounding upon their personal perceptions of why naval heritage was important, offering their spare money and begging for something to be done to preserve the old ship. The Admiralty compiled two heavy volumes of these letters, interspersed with letters from veterans and naval enthusiasts, which reflected all the sense of urgency once attached to the *Foudroyant.* Having been raised on the notion that it was the individual citizen's duty to support the navy and its history, one child reported that his father was a shipbuilder, and could provide a berth for the *Implacable*, whatever its condition. Another student drew a sketch of two ships, labeling it "Spanish Armada," indicating their love for all things related to Britain's naval history. As a last resort,

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[6] Miss P. McGeorge, Sea Rangers, Gloucester to Harold Wyllie, 1939, HMS *Trincomalee* Collection, Box 77, Teesside University.

harkening back to another nineteenth century tradition, children often asked to at least be given opportunity to purchase some souvenir, or piece of the ship's material.[7]

The press was not above turning to romanticism, either, with articles personifying the *Implacable* as "a veteran in distress," and reminding Britain that it was a national duty to glorify the navy and help its veterans.[8] In this case, however, the Admiralty would not be swayed. The *Implacable* instead became more symbolic of modern circumstances than historical. In a ceremony symbolizing the modern friendship of the allies after two wars, French and British representatives presided over a joint ceremony to sink the *Implacable* in the English Channel off the Isle of Wight. The symbolism could not have been missed, in a staggering gesture to the break between past and present—a French sailing ship, captured at Trafalgar, given a funeral at sea in a display of Anglo-French friendship, in the very body of water that had once symbolized all that protected Britain from its European enemies. Especially poignant for the more romantically-inclined was the fact that the vessel took hours to sink entirely, despite the use of explosive charges: the last gasp, some mourned, of Britain's concern for its naval heritage.

Throughout the nineteenth century, naval heritage represented a set of national values, which could be conveniently adapted to the needs of the time. David Cannadine has written that Britain produced "a Nelson to suit every taste," but it was not only Nelson whose memory proved usefully malleable; naval nostalgia produced the image of an ideal Briton, in the form of the idealized historical sailor, to fit any contemporary

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[7] Correspondence with private individuals and firms, Disposal of H.M.S *Implacable*, ADM 116/5706, National Archives of the UK, London, UK.
[8] "A Veteran in Distress," *Times,* June 17, 1939.

concern.[9] The belief that an ancient national character, personified by a recognizable type of person in British history, could be molded to teach citizenship, patriotism, Christian values, imperial pride, masculinity, or even a sense of national duty that transcended the navy's gendered history. Such an "ancient character," however, relied on a sense of unhindered continuity with the past, in spite of modern realities. Victorian and Edwardian Britain proved adept at reconciling physical change with ideological continuity, and the nation managed to cling of the remnants of this mythmaking even in the aftermath of the First World War. The myth of the sailing vessel, and its daring men, as an effective symbol for the modern world, though, was not one that could hold after *two* world wars.

However critics may have felt about the sinking of the *Implacable*, thinking that the ship "died in shame," the effects of naval nostalgia did not completely "die" along with it.[10] The echoes of nineteenth-century nostalgia are still present in Britain today, in the naval collections still on display, and in the ships that are still preserved as museums. The *Implacable*'s stern decoration and figurehead are now on view in the main hall of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. The "Franklin relics" have recently been reassembled into a traveling exhibition, based out of Greenwich and, at the time of this study, on display in Mystic, Connecticut. The *Trincomalee* as well as the *Victory* are museum ships, whose original preservationists moved in the same circles as those of the *Implacable* and *Foudroyant*. While museums of the twenty-first century strive for different goals than those of the nineteenth and early twentieth, appealing to a more international and tourist-based audience, and seeking not to teach morals but rather to

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[9] David Cannadine, ed. *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1.
[10] Frank Carr, "The Mighty Ships that Died in Shame," *Times,* November 19, 1977.

inform and educate, naval collections are, like any archive, far from neutral. Britain does not possess the *Victory* merely because its age makes it an interesting rarity, or the *Trincomalee* only because its teak hull allowed it to survive for longer than other ships of its day. It does not display artifacts of the Franklin expedition, or of any other moment in naval history, simply because the men who lived alongside them are dead, and their possessions made available. Rather, modern displays of naval history, and the collections museums hold, are the direct result of nineteenth-century priorities, testaments to what Britain believed to be important in the age of sea power, industry and empire.

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